

# You Can't Keep 'Em Down on the Farm

## IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

Edited by Peter Singer

Basil Blackwell Inc., 224 pages, \$16.95

## REVIEWED BY SHEILA KOREN

**F**rom an ethical point of view, we all stand on an equal footing — whether we stand on two feet, four or none at all." So says Peter Singer, professor of philosophy and director of the Center for Human Bioethics in Melbourne, Australia. Singer has been arguing such points since at least 1975 when he published "Animal Liberation," considered by many the bible of the animal rights movement. He has also written "Practical Ethics," "The Expanding Circle" and, most recently with attorney and journalist Jim Mason, a horrifying, well-documented account of farm brutality called "Animal Factories."

Singer's career has been one of making increasingly respectable, and even intellectual, a movement previously thought to be silly and sentimental. "In Defense of Animals" is a collection of provocative essays and articles, written by academics and activists alike, put together deftly by Singer to cover the gamut of animal welfare issues — from philosophical underpinnings to tactics for change, including gruesome exposes of worse-than-Auschwitz factory farms and animal research laboratories, irrefutable arguments against zoos, animal "sports" and meat consumption.

Not only is this collection sound philosophically, but the information it reports is staggering: The U.S. meat industry kills 4 billion farm animals each year, is second in size only to car manufacturing and is worth \$50 billion a year. Its political clout is significant enough to intimidate most government health agencies. Ninety percent of agricultural land in this country is used now for meat, dairy and egg operations, making it unavailable as human or wildlife habitat. Ninety percent of soil erosion, 80 percent of water consumption, 70 percent of deforestation is the result of livestock agriculture. It is also responsible for most of our water pollution.

Seventy million animals are used in laboratories each year for useless research, existing largely to create more tax-supported work for the scientists involved. Ethics aside, the use of animals for both food and research is costly and unhealthful.

Drugs like thalidomide were tested on animals. For every animal ostensibly saved from extinction by zoos, 10 are killed in the effort.

Vegetarianism, it is argued by most of the book's contributors, is a more direct and efficient source of nutrients than the consumption of animal products — as well as being the most effective boycotting tool for ameliorating the treatment of animals.

It is meat industry clout, writes Canadian activist Harriet Schleifer, that keeps

meat "universally related to wealth and meat's absence from the diet is regarded by many as privation . . . But, if everyone in the developed world became a vegetarian, it would be possible to give four tons of edible grain to every starving person."

More importantly, argues Jim Mason, "animals have been reduced to mere things for our use and all their complex life processes — growth, mating, birth, death — have been subjected to human design and control. We are simply unable to accept animals — especially food animals — as beings in their own right."

Although exhaustive in scope and fastidious in detail and description, "In Defense of Animals" fails to address adequately the frequently made arguments regarding human superiority to other species. Tom Regan brushes aside, for example, the question of "soul" raised by many religions.

Nevertheless, "In Defense of Animals" is a thorough work that not only criticizes but offers constructive suggestions for change. Singer is not ashamed to expose conflicts within the animal rights movement — mostly arguments of focus and concession to reform typical of any liberation struggle.

Animal rights, according to Singer, represents a "significant stage in the development of human ethics." If all great movements, as it is said, go through stages of ridicule, discussion and adoption, "In De-



fense of Animals" will contribute to the serious discussion of animal rights issues while moving humans somewhat closer to the adoption of a more respectful attitude toward other species. ■

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