

Animal Rights as a New Environmental Cosmology

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The secularization and modernization of society have created opportunities for broad interpretations of fundamental questions of life. The Animal Rights Movement (ARM) challenges Judeo-Christian cosmology and offers an alternative. ARM redefines the distinctions between humans and animals and gives them a new meaning within the generalized environmental other. As an emerging cosmology, it functions to give believers a means of dealing with questions of order and chaos, suffering, good and evil, and justice. It also creates a community of people who seek redemption through saving animals. The Animal Rights Movement goes beyond moral protest and takes on the role of a religious cosmology.

Social scientists have broadened their conceptions of social interaction to include consciousness of the 'natural' world (Nash 1989, Fine 1991, Weigert 1991). Weigert (1991), for example, admonishes symbolic interactionists to examine the "generalized environmental other," because conceptions of environment and, by implication, animals are as much a part of the pragmatic meanings of social life as are diverse social actors. While a collective consciousness of nature and environment are integral parts of any culture, and have been studied by anthropologists (Leach 1969, Douglas 1970, Tapper 1988), how the non-human environment is understood and how that understanding becomes part of the pragmatics of social life remains largely unexplicated in the study of modern society.

Participants in the animal rights movement have distinctive, well articulated and sometimes impassioned beliefs about non-humans in their en-

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vironment. While there is a range of concerns and priorities in the movement, Jasper and Nelkin (1992) depict three distinct types of participants—the welfarists who are primarily concerned with improving the humane treatment of animals, the pragmatists who present a moral argument for balancing human and animal interests but accept some hierarchy in human and animal species, and the fundamentalists who espouse an extreme position which eliminates distinctions between humans and animals. What these types of participants have in common, according to Jasper and Nelkin, is that their cause is a moral crusade.

Animal rights is a moral crusade. Its adherents act upon explicit moral beliefs and values to pursue a social order consistent with their principles . . . Animals are the perfect cause for such a crusade: seen as innocent victims whose mistreatment demands immediate redress, they are an appealing lightning rod for moral concerns (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, 7-8).

While there are clearly moral dimensions to the movement, we suggest that animal rights beliefs and actions may be studied in order to learn more about the environmental other that postmodern society fosters in its members, and that the sense of environmental other found among participants in the movement goes beyond moral protest towards a religious cosmology conditioned by changes currently in force in society.

Animal welfare and rights activities date from the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe and The United States, and notable intellectuals such as Bertrand Russell have been associated with some of these positions. Recently, however, the animal rights movement (ARM) has become a major moral protest in society (Ryder 1989; Tester 1991; Serpell 1986; Jasper and Nelkin 1992). We suggest that the new forms of moral protest that animal rightists espouse, while still concerned with the plight of animals, seem to use animals as a call for fundamental changes in Western culture's view of nature.

In this paper, we draw on our knowledge of and contact with the movement to depict a belief system, which despite the range of beliefs and commitment to participation in the movement, we suggest functions as a more or less consistent cosmology. We offer an interpretation of that cosmology that places it in the context of transformations taking place in society.

LEARNING ABOUT ARM

We used an eclectic and opportunistic approach to this study. One of us had conducted research on Bulldogs (Nash 1989), and in the course of that project had run across animal rightists who objected to pedigree dog breeding. The other of us had contacted animal rightists as they pro-

tested alleged cruelty of animal experimentation in bio-medical research and the use of animals for medical education at a local state university. Together we developed two courses which we taught at Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota, one on the cultural context of the animal rights movement and the other looking at growth and impact of ARM globally. These classes provided us with the opportunities to collect a representative body of information of and about the movement.

The courses were organized around target experiences and resource persons. We took field trips to a model poultry farm, to dairy farms, to swine research facilities, to the Minnesota zoo, a raptor rehabilitation center, and to observe an urban Canada goose flock. At each of these sites, we heard discussions of attitudes toward animals by the people involved in the respective businesses, research and management efforts. We invited the Animal Rights Coalition (ARC), and various other animal welfare groups to speak to our class about these issues. We attended public lectures given by animal rights advocates such as PCRM (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine). We also reviewed films on animal abuse, read literature from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), and other animal rights groups such as ARC. And, we conducted interviews with a leader of an anti-animal rights group—Putting People First.

In our classes and through informal interviews we queried directors of humane societies, practicing research scientists who participate in animal experimentation, wildlife management specialists, hunters, and a veterinarian specializing in pet reproduction. To provide a corpus of information for our teaching and research, we compiled a reading package. This package included articles by sociologist, anthropologists and advocates of various views on such wide ranging topics as horses, dogs, wildlife, hunting, environmental issues, fur, biological research, animal agriculture, PETA, ALF (Animal Liberation Front) and Earth First! as well as articles from a special issue of *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1990 on suffering.

Our students interviewed ARM activists, and produced transcriptions of their interviews, and we interviewed several veterinarian students who had taken strong stands against the use of animals in their education. We also interviewed scientists such as the Head of the Diagnostic Laboratory at the school of veterinary medicine, and the chair of IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee) at a local university. IACUC is a federally mandated committee to oversee the welfare of all laboratory animals.

The overall effect of all these avenues of information gathering was to immerse us in the subject of animal rights. We became aware of the history of the movement, its breath and the degree of activity and emotion associated with it, and with the attention and reaction it has drawn from animal agricultural, scientists, and medical professionals. Our classes be-

came focal points for information on the movement as we contacted the various groups in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota (a community with a very active and well organized coalition of movement groups).

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN COSMOLOGY

In the traditional cosmology of Western society, humans have the right to use animals for the benefit of humans: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the Earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Genesis 1:26). Even though within the conventions of Judeo-Christian religion, dominion may include a human obligation towards animals, animal rightists as a group generally reject the idea of human dominion as "speciesist." In fact, they reject the traditional Christian God and religion. One survey of ARM activists indicated that seventy percent are atheists or agnostics, a startling contrast to the eighty to ninety percent of the American population who express a belief in God (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, p. 38; General Social Survey 1990).

Animal rightists have issued a serious challenge to the prevailing cosmology which gives humans dominion over nature and animals (Singer 1971, Regan 1983). In addition to arguing against speciesism, we have found that many symbolically elevate animals to a higher moral position than humans (Nash and Sutherland 1991). In doing this, their movement calls into question the assumptions of instrumentality that allow us to use animals for scientific experiments, food, comfort, work and recreation, and offers to its participants a new kind of moral engagement and commitment in a secular society (Jasper and Nelkin 1992, p. 175). These features of the movement, we suggest, can be understood as part of a major transformation taking place in society that has created opportunities for cosmological understanding.

COSMOLOGIES IN SOCIETY

Cosmologies are typically fostered and legitimated by religious institutions, although in many cultures cosmologies interpenetrate all aspects of institutional life. Among other things cosmologies provide clear beliefs about differences between humans and animals. How people understand these differences reveals a great deal about the fundamental organization

of their cultures. Certainly, some cultures have relatively stable ways for their members to understand what is human and animal, and these beliefs function to legitimate their actions. For example, Tapper (1988) has argued that in societies where hunting and gathering is the economic base, different species of animals may be viewed as models for differences between human groups, such as in totemic systems. In pastoral societies, on the other hand, where herd animals are in ecological symbiosis with humans, animals may be both identified with humans at one level and differentiated at another (Tapper 1988). Whatever the relationship between animals and humans, in most cultures the differences are clearly defined by the culture, the economic system, and religious institutions.

As literature on modernization (Turner 1990) suggests, the shift to increasingly differentiated production systems diminishes the close connection between culture and nature found in traditional societies and elevates abstract understandings of production and rationality. Furthermore, an individual's consciousness of social processes, his or her awareness of how society actually works, increases, and the self rather than membership in the group becomes the center of interpretations of the world. In this context, individuals must cast their relationships with animals in terms of the self. Hence, animals, their meanings and uses, are understood as part of the productive and rational structures of society. Modernistic understandings of animals would be instrumental—using them for research, food, sport, recreation, or simply being neutral or negative toward them.

As society continues to modernize, the organization of food production, the specialization of the work people do, all function to separate them from animals in their everyday lives. Finally in the postmodern or post industrial society, only a very small percentage of the activities people get paid for involve any contact at all with animals. According to General Social Survey data, 1990, less than two percent of the American labor force works with animals directly or indirectly. On the other hand, in America and other Western societies, people may go to great lengths to have animals living in their homes. In extreme cases, the animals become the constructed postmodern family, substituting for absent family members (Hickrod and Schmitt 1982).

These practices are best understood, we contend, in the relief of postmodernity where production shifts to process and rationality to impulse (cf. Wood and Zurcher, 1988). Postmodernity refers, in this sense, to what remains "after the modern" challenges to rationality and institutionalization. In a postmodern society, then, appearance replaces substance, process replaces production and the self shifts from a rational acknowledgement of institution to fragmented, delegitimated interpretations of particular relationships. In the postmodern context, individuals are free to act in ac-

cordance with their personal, emotional interpretations of the meaning structures of society (Swidler 1986, Wood and Zurcher 1988, Wexler 1990).

Animals, then, become less understandable in terms of their place in production and their meanings in institutional context and more understandable in specific interpretive schemes of the postmodern self. Hence, animals are kept less for their utilitarian and more for their emotional/symbolic value. In some postmodern views of animals people feel they can no longer justify killing an animal to produce food, and instead focus on the emotions surrounding the act of killing. Animals are companions, treated as family members, and they are reminders of the indirect emotional relationships postmodern people have with nature (Nash 1989).

Furthermore, as cultural knowledge changes rapidly in the direction of fragmentation and delegitimation, some of the functions of core institutions may be challenged, redefined and even taken over by new social movements. Hence, when we depict the actions of members of society, we must look beyond institutional meanings to the effects of social movements. It is the thesis of this paper that the belief system of ARM not only redefines the reality of animals in relation to humans, but creates a new religious world view and cosmology for many of its adherents. To appreciate this thesis, we must look at the features of religion and cosmology that animal rights movement participants are in the process of re-defining.

RELIGION AS COSMOLOGY

Geertz has defined religion as a system of sacred symbols which constitute a world view, or cosmology. A world view is that which gives people a picture of the ways things should be, a comprehensive idea of order (Geertz, 1973:89-91). In any religion there will be some congruence between the way things should be with the way they are. Religion provides both a model of reality (a way to conceptualize reality) and a model for reality (a guide to belief and behavior). A religious world view also carries with it an ethos, that is, a moral, emotional and aesthetic quality (Geertz, 1973:94-97). A religion must be emotionally convincing as well as providing a general order of existence. Religion includes explanations of phenomena such as order (the quest for meaning in life), suffering (not only how to avoid suffering but how to suffer), evil (how to recognize good and evil), and justice (how to make sound moral judgments) (Geertz, 1973:100-106).

Religious ethos is also conditioned by the larger transformations of society. In Western society, the consequences of the shifts from production to process, from institution to consumption, and from rationality to impulse

(Wood and Zurcher, 1988) have produced shifts in systems of beliefs and values. Wood and Zurcher (1988, 134) explain that,

The postmodern self can be seen as a charismatic movement in culture aimed at restoring substantive rationality at the phenomenological level . . . grounding self-concept and character in a valuational system which is "after modern," that is, which remains after religious valuational systems have been undermined by formal rationality and the scientific world-view; it is a value system grounded in the individual expression and experience of emotion, impulse and feeling.

When religious beliefs are modified and adjusted to the shifts in contemporary society, religious ethos takes on a process of individualization of emotion, impulse and feelings. When this happens, the charismatic appeal of social movements such as ARM can embody the essence of religion without its institutional form. The fragmented self is then free to construct specific narrative versions of the phenomena of everyday life (Wexler 1990, 171-72).

In its postmodern manifestation, religion may assume the form of a social movement accompanied by a great latitude of interpretations that reflect the structure of the postmodern society. The new social movement may take on the functions of a religious system of belief in what appears as a secular context, but which, in practice, deals with and reflects the fragmentation of the institutional systems themselves. Furthermore, stories of the self, the telling of accounts about themes of life that have traditionally been within a religious domain, may become eccentric, blurring fundamental boundaries of beliefs.

To examine the Animal Rights Movement's new cosmology in the current period of transition from modern to postmodern, we suggest that religious functions be conceptualized in terms of the level at which they have impact. At the individual level, for instance, religion manifests itself in attitudes, motives and feelings; at the social level, it defines organizational forms; and at the cultural level, it provides interpretative schemes or worldviews. Furthermore, each of the levels addresses the various questions about human experience which are within the universal purview of religion. These aspects of the functions of religion can be schematically represented (Table I). Table I does not try to cover all the functions of religion, rather it takes major issues or questions (first column) that religions address, and looks at how religion functions at three different levels in dealing with those questions.

The Animal Rights movement which has been building in the United States, Great Britain and Canada since the publication of *Animal Liberation* by Peter Singer in 1975, for some of its adherents, contains a powerful new world view and ethos. In some cases the cosmology it proposes is pow-

Table I. The Functions of Religion

Fundamental Questions	Individual: Ethos	Social: Organizational Forms	Cultural: World View
Bewilderment (Chaos/order)	Meaning of own life. Personal faith.	Meaning of relationship to institution.	How to interpret the meanings of the world around us (quest for lucidity)
Suffering	Dealing with failure, powerless, suffering, alienation	Ritualizes curing. Death. Provides physical comfort	The meaning of endurance, illness, and mourning. How to endure.
Evil	Deals with committing sin. Being forgiven.	Sacralizes norms and values.	Ethical criteria, normative guides to govern our actions.
Justice	Alienation from society. Personal morality.	Reinforces legitimacy and general sense of morality and responsibility	Conceptions of right and wrong. How to deal with injustice. The discrepancy between what is and what ought to be.
Social connectedness	Security, identity, sense of belonging	Buffer social dislocation and impact of social change. Reinforce sense of collective being.	Concrete acts of religious observance. Cultural performances. Ritual or religious action with other social groups.

erful enough to function as a religion in the absence of any attachment to any other organized religion. Animal rights philosophy, as espoused by Singer (1975) and Regan (1983) and others, provides a world view that can give meaning to personal lives, deal with the meaning of suffering and death, define evil and good, provide conceptions of right and wrong, justice and morality and give a sense of identity and belonging to its believers.

Bewilderment

A major concern in animal rights is, what meaning does life have for me if I participate in the suffering of animals? All 'sentient' beings are of

value in the animal rights philosophy, and I can only make sense of life if I include animals in my repertory of meanings. To put the treatment of animals in the context of wider moral issues, ARM literature often gives a quote by Gandhi, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated," (Rowan 1988; also in AR literature).

An example of the bewilderment that animal rights activists confront and resolve through animal rights philosophy is the question of euthanasia for dogs and cats which many activists consider to be members of their family. The American Veterinary Medicine Association national estimates are that 100 million dogs and cats die each year. Twenty million are euthanized by the American Humane Society. The rest are killed by disease, trauma, exposure or in veterinary hospitals. It is estimated that ten to twenty-five million are killed because of inadequate homes. This occurs in a society which has developed a veterinary medicine that can do anything for animals that we are capable of doing for humans. So why do we have this "problem"?

According to Dr. Patricia Olsen, a veterinarian who specializes in small animal reproduction, it is due to people who neglect animals. In her research on the major causes of relinquishing a pet to the humane society, she has found the following: the owner cannot control the pet, inconvenience to the owner, cost, and inappropriate defecation and urination. However, the problem is not only "irresponsible" owners. According to Al Robinson of the Anoka County Humane Society, 141 dogs and cats are born for every American child. Clearly we have a massive overpopulation of pets. Veterinarians have tried to promote sterilization of pets and to educate the public on the control of pet reproduction. But some veterinarians argue that even a 90% effective education program will not be enough. Humane Societies and veterinarians of small animals believe that what we have is a situation of chaos. The Animal Rights solution to this issue is to create a ban on the reproduction of dogs and cats. Their first landmark attempt is the passage of a law in San Mateo County making it an offense (\$500.00 fine) for a dog to have puppies. To get this law passed the San Mateo Humane Society showed a dog being euthanized on television, horrifying millions of viewers.

Thus for participants in the animal rights movement, euthanasia for animals is part of a larger moral dilemma about who lives and who dies, who reproduces and who does not, and how humans and animals should live together. There is a call for a new sense of order in which animals have rights to a place on earth without having to subordinate their interests to the interests of humans.

Suffering

The meaning of suffering has been a major focus of the animal rights movement since the 1824 founding of the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) in Great Britain (Ryder 1989: p.89). The issue of animal suffering in bio-medical research, hunting and trapping and in the production of meat and fur have been main targets of the movement. Currently the stockyards in Saint Paul, Minnesota are being targeted by a New York Animal Rights group to raise the issue of suffering of "downed" animals before their slaughter. Ironically, the long history of suffering of the slaughter house worker was not considered relevant to this Animal Rights group (Zimmerman, B.A. thesis, 1991).

The question of how to know what suffering means for animals is the subject of the entire issue of the *Journal of Behavioral and Brain Science* (1990). Measuring suffering in animals is more complicated than for humans because we cannot ask animals if they are suffering; we have to determine it by other means. Questions about suffering include the obvious ones of adequate food, water and a clean safe environment (covered in the Animal Welfare Act) to whether animals suffer if they are prevented from doing something they are "motivated" to do (e.g., do pigs need to make a nest? Do hens need to scratch?), to whether we should consider allowing animals activities that bring them "pleasure" (e.g., allowing pigs to play-fight or allowing farm animals freedom to roam).

Many of the assumptions about suffering in the animal rights movement are anthropomorphic, that is based on human notions of suffering and "ethnomorphic," that is, based on notions of suffering in our society as opposed to other societies. This is consistent with their belief that animals in the United States should be treated like people in the United States and not like people in other countries who may have less "rights" than animals already have in this country. For example, experiments have shown that pet food eaten by dogs and cats contained more riboflavin, niacin, vitamin A and iron than the same quantity of the typical rations that relief workers give refugees (*New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1992).

Thus on the issue of suffering, the new cosmology redefines the concept of suffering to include not just physical pain, but emotional and psychological suffering in animals. Just what constitutes emotional pain in an animal can be determined by how a human in our own culture would feel. Participants of the ARM "feel" the pain of animals because they can identify their "self" with the "self" of an animal. This gives animals a kind of self and identity that was previously only allocated to humans.

Good and Evil

A basic premise of the animal rights movement is that humans are the source of all evil (as opposed to the traditional Christian idea that Satan is the source of evil). In the new cosmology, animals are essentially and intrinsically good. Eschewing the explicit manifesto in Genesis when animals are delivered into the hands of man after the flood and the later Christian emphasis on the importance of the soul in humans, separating them from animals who have no souls, ARM participants elevate animals to a higher moral position over humans because animals are pure and innocent, unlike humans who commit evil acts (Nash and Sutherland 1991).

According to Ingrid Newkirk, the founder of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), "humans have grown like a cancer. We're the biggest blight on the face of the earth." (*Reader's Digest*, June 1990). A prevailing belief is that animals are not only good, they are better than humans. According to the British philosopher Patrick Corbett, "Animals are in many respects superior to ourselves" (*The Intellectual Activist*, September 14, 1983).

This belief is not restricted to the United States. A recent article in the *New York Times* titled, "French Animal Love: Has it Gone Too Far" bemoans the fact that in Paris dogs are often given preference over humans. A French anthropologist, Jean-Pierre Digart, has written, "It is a serious problem . . . when we get to the point where we place some animals above men" (*New York Times*, February 2, 1990).

It appears that some animal rights adherents are using the category "species" to determine membership in our moral community. If all species are included in the same moral community with humans, then bio-medical research will be viewed as an atrocity. A leaflet recently put out to protest research at the University of Minnesota contains the following, "Everyday of the year, at the hands of white-robed individuals bent on getting recognition, or a degree, or at least a lucrative job, millions of animals are slowly blinded by acids, poisoned, disemboweled, submitted to repeated shocks, frozen to be revived and refrozen, starved or left to die of thirst, in many cases after various glands have been extirpated or the spinal cord has been cut." The language of this text is reminiscent of horror tales of Nazi atrocities, and it clearly represents humans as evil, and animals as innocent victims. It is followed by a prayer:

I am
The voice of the voiceless
through me the dumb shall speak
'till the deaf world's ear
be made to hear
the wrongs of the wordless weak

And I am
My brother's Keeper
And I will fight his fight
and Speak the word
for beast and bird
til world shall set things right . . .

The only humans worthy of redemption are those who speak for the "voiceless," and act as protectors of animals until a new world order is established.

Part of the reason for this belief in the total innocence of animals is related to the change from rural to urban population. People nowadays are ignorant of animal behavior due to an almost complete lack of contact with animals and nature other than the domestic companion animals. Furthermore, the inclusion of companion animals in family life reflects the myriad of changes in the structure of families and communities in post-modern times. Also the development of an individual identity, a self, with the self of an animal is part of the post-modern process.

Justice

The question of right and wrong and justice for animals is the basis of most animal welfare issues which focus on how to deal with cruelty to animals. More and more reports of prosecutions for cruelty to dogs are reaching the newspapers. The media in Saint Paul, Minnesota popularized the case of Kona, an abused dog, in a series of articles that ended with the prosecution of Kona's owner. Kona became a logo of the Animal Rights Coalition in Saint Paul. The use of words such as cruelty, torture and suffering have very specific meanings to animal rights groups, meanings that are not shared by the general population. The Animal Right Coalition (ARC), as many other animal rights groups, believes that any experiment with animals is cruel by definition, even when animals are killed humanely to be used for research. This is because animals should be treated as humans in every way. According to Ingrid Newkirk, "you cannot find a relevant attribute in human beings that doesn't exist in animals as well . . . if you ground any concept of human rights in a particular attribute, then animals have to be included. Animals have rights" (*Harpers*, 1988, August, page 47). If animals have equal rights to humans, including the ability to decide on issues of justice and morality, then any use of animals in experiments without their consent is immoral and unjust.

For those in the animal rights movement, the principle of equality between animals and humans and justice for all is a clear issue of right and wrong. They have focused their activities around questions of how to

deal with injustice to animals and the discrepancy between what is occurring now and what ought to be. They feel personally alienated from a society that is "cruel" to animals and they work towards a sense of morality and responsibility toward all "sentient" beings.

Social Connectedness

Part of the cosmological importance of the animal rights movement is that it brings together a community of people who have lost a sense of identity and belonging to the wider society but who come together to save animals from a cruel and unjust world. Profiles of animal rights movement participants (Jamison and Lunch 1990) indicate that they are young (average age 30), educated (40% with at least a B.A. degree), white (93%), middle class (44% identified themselves as professionals), female (68%), and urban (52% live in towns of over 100,000 population and 43% grew up in such urban places).

Their common idea of morality is reinforced by their protests and the work they do for the movement. For them, no other social or political cause justifies such zeal and emotion. The Animal Rights Coalition Hotline in Saint Paul is a phone message that announces daily several minutes worth of news about strategy meetings, writing campaigns, legal campaigns, pet store watches, speakers and regular protests and demonstrations. In any one day, the hotline provides enough activities for a person to become fully immersed in the movement. These concrete acts of individual and group action provide a meaningful way that people can be part of a community of concerned individuals. They provide a social connectedness in otherwise alienated lives.

Other cultural observances that promote social connectedness include pet grief therapy for people who need emotional support for the loss of their pet, rites at pet cemeteries to bury pets, dog shows and events, volunteer zoo activity, annual humane society blessings of the animals, fundraising projects, and a myriad of activities related to pets. These kinds of activities provide a link between animal right activists and welfarists concerned about animals.

Animal Rights Functions as a Religion

A strong belief system seems to provide support, consolation and reconciliation for its believers. This means that in the face of uncertainty, particularly in a rapidly changing society, a believer may not only find support among like-minded believers, but also may be reassured that the version

of the world he or she has is shared by others. Furthermore, failures in one's personal life, losses resulting from the experience of alienation in society, or even "sinful" acts can be forgiven within the context of religion, and participants may be reconciled in the knowledge that their beliefs not only justify their actions but can also make those actions understandable even if they fall outside the proscribed and desirable range of behaviors.

Religious beliefs also offer a new security and firmer identity to believers. Especially in times of challenges to religion by secular interpretations of experiences, it seems that belonging to a group of similar believers defines identity in an unambiguous fashion for the believer.

Believers' confrontation with the secular world, their everyday dealing with each other and non-believers reinforces and undergirds their sense of collective belonging, or of identity. Religion also provides a general sense of morality and responsibility (Jacobs, 1971), substitutes for primary ties of family, community and nation broken down by modernization, alleviates the effects of social dislocation, and buffers the impact of changes from rural to urban.

The Animal Rights movement functions similar to religion for many of its participants. Their sense of justice, their concepts of good and evil, order and chaos and suffering and their feeling of connectedness to the wider social order are all redefined according to how animals fit into the wider cosmology. From the perspective of their new cosmology, animals become symbols of the suffering that living in the post modern society inflicts. Society becomes the symbol of evil, and redemption takes the form of activism to save animals and to include them within the circle of believers.

CONCLUSION

For many people the animal rights movement makes sense because it provides answers to many of the fundamental cosmological questions which they believe are not addressed in a satisfying way by the core institutions of society. Only with the weakening of the rational, instrumental functions of institutions like religion and the emergence of impulse and self as core foci of social meaning can a movement such as animal rights begin to have an impact on individuals in society. In this postmodern context, animal rights beliefs provide hope for society through redefinition of animals as the center of the moral universe. Any hope for society, therefore, is inextricably linked to the salvation of animals. How people treat animals is, furthermore, a statement about the general moral worth of society at large. In terms of symbolic value, ARM elevates animals to a position of moral superiority because they are the sacrificial victims of society. The

religious significance of animals as symbols is perhaps encapsulated in a recent bumper sticker seen on the car of an ARC member, "Learn the Language of Animals; Hear the Voice of God."

While the formation of ARM into a formal religion seems unlikely since the religious ethos itself has been weakened and diluted in the post-modern society, the alternative cosmology it offers is already having an impact on core institutions such as research, food production, education and law. In this sense, ARM is a major force of social change in postmodern society.

The ARM cosmology provides its participants with conceptions of nature and animals which in turn become part of their means of interacting with each other, and participating in social institutions such as science and religion. ARM is, then, a world view or cosmology, which by redefining our relationships with nature and animals, therefore, redefines our relationships with each other.

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