

Animal Rights Africa



ONE STRUGGLE

HUMAN FREEDOM. ANIMAL RIGHTS.

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS.

ORGANISATIONAL LAUNCH

8 March 2008

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Launch: Animal Rights Africa

8 March 2008 witnessed the official launch of Animal Rights Africa (ARA). In an unprecedented and historic move, three of the most effective animal protection organisations in South Africa: Justice for Animals, Xwe African Wild Life and South Africans for the Abolition of Vivisection have joined forces to form Animal Rights Africa. ARA is the only organisation of its kind on the African continent, ushering in a brand new era of strengthened activism for animals.

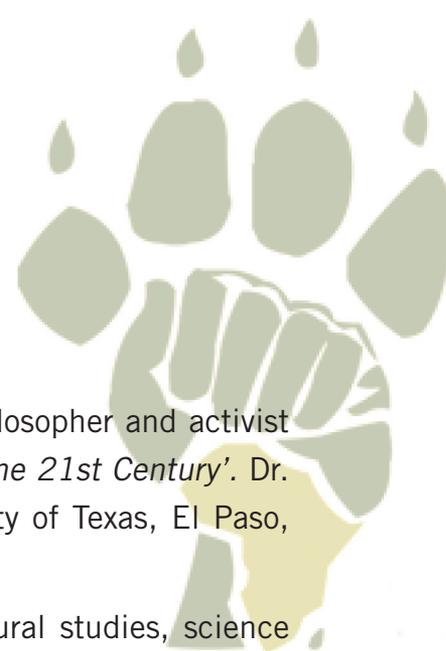
ARA is committed to the promotion of inclusive justice, showing compassion across species and building a better future through campaigns, research and analysis. ARA is self-consciously located in a post-TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) South Africa of renewal and reconciliation, where our experience of prejudice, discrimination and violence enables us to empathise with the suffering of other species.



Keynote Speaker

The keynote speaker was renowned international philosopher and activist Dr. Steve Best. He delivered a talk titled *'Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century'*. Dr. Best is Associate Professor of Humanities and Philosophy at the University of Texas, El Paso, USA. (see photograph p. 4)

Working in areas such as philosophy, social and political theory, cultural studies, science and technology studies, animal rights, environmentalism and biotechnology, he has written and edited 10 books and published over 100 articles and reviews. In addition to the books he has published on postmodern theory (many with Douglas Kellner), he co-edited (with Anthony J. Nocella II) *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Reflections on the Liberation of Animals* (Lantern Books, 2004) and *Igniting a Revolution: Voices in Defense of the Earth* (AK Press, 2006). Best is co-founder of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies (<http://www.criticalanimalstudies.org/>). He has been active in many political causes and has been interviewed by National Public Radio, the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, BBC News, the Guardian Independent, The Chronicle of Higher Education and various media in Brazil, Barcelona and France. Currently he is completing a new book, *'Animal Liberation and Moral Progress: The Struggle for Human Evolution'* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) and co-editing a volume on academic repression in post-9/11 US. Many of his writings are posted at his website: <http://www.drstevebest.org/>.



Keynote Speech



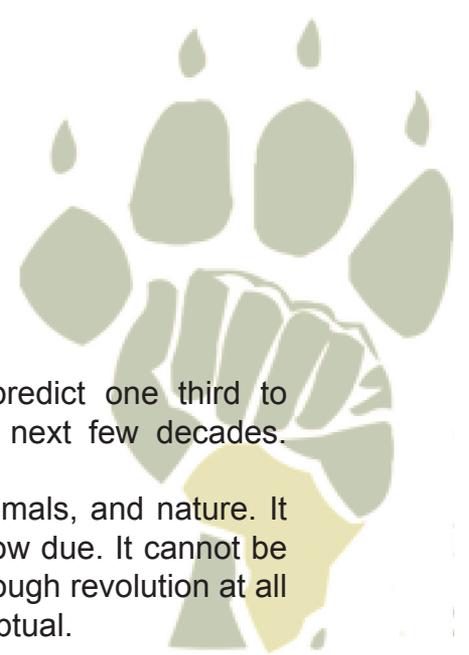
Total Revolution: Revolution for the 21st Century

My friends, we are winning many battles in the fight for freedom, rights, democracy, compassionate ethics, peace, interspecies justice, and ecology. But we are losing the war. The war against greed, violence, plunder, profits, and domination. The war against transnational corporations, world banks, the US Empire, and Western military machines. The war against metastasizing systems of economic growth, technological development, overproduction, and overconsumption.

Despite recent decades of intense social and environmental struggles, we are nevertheless losing ground in the battles for democracy and ecology.

In the last two decades, neoliberalism and globalization have destroyed social democracies, widened gaps between rich and poor, dispossessed farmers, and marketized the entire world. Alongside good-old fashioned imperialism and resource extraction, people now confront genetic engineering, biopiracy, the patenting of genes, and the control of the seed supply. McDonaldization swallows up diversity as agribusiness engulfs the world's farmers. Corporate power is growing as people power is shrinking.

Signs of ecological distress are everywhere, from shrinking forests and depleted fisheries to vanishing wilderness and rising sea levels. Throughout history, societies have devastated local environments, but only in the last two decades has humanity upset the planetary ecology to bring about global climate change. Moreover, we now live in the era of the sixth extinction crisis in the history of the planet, the last one occurring 65 million years ago in the age of the dinosaurs. Unlike the last five, this one is caused by human activity;



we are the meteor crashing into the earth. Conservation biologists predict one third to one half of the world's plant and animal species might vanish in the next few decades.

The global capitalist world system is inherently destructive to people, animals, and nature. It is unsustainable and the bills for three centuries of industrialization are now due. It cannot be humanized, civilized, or green-friendly, but rather must be transcended through revolution at all levels—economic, political, legal, cultural, technological, moral, and conceptual.

In the last three decades, there has been growing awareness that environmentalism cannot succeed without social justice and social justice cannot be realized without environmentalism. This is clear in the environmental justice movement in the US, in Earth First! alliances with timber workers, the platform of the Zapatistas platform, and the 1999 Battle of Seattle against the WTO where turtles joined with teamsters.

But something is missing, the equation is not balanced, the strategy cannot work. The interests of one species are represented as millions of others go unrecognized except as resources to be preserved for human use. But in the last three decades a new social movement has emerged -- animal liberation. Its power and potential has yet to be recognized, but it deserves equal representation in the politics of the 21st century.

Progressives fighting for peace, justice, democracy, and ecology must recognize the validity of and need for the animal liberation movement for two reasons. First, on a moral level, the



brutalization, exploitation, and suffering of animals is so great, so massive in degree and scope, that it demands a profound moral and political response from anyone with pretence to values of compassion, justice, rights, and nonviolence. Every year alone humans butcher 70 billion land and marine animals for food; millions more die in experimental laboratories, fur farm, hunting preserves, and countless other killing zones. Second, on a strategic level, the animal liberation movement is essential for the human and earth liberation movements. In numerous key ways, the domination of humans over animals underlies the domination of human over human and propels the environmental crisis. Moreover, the animal liberation movement is the most dynamic and fastest growing social movement of the day and other liberation movements ignore, mock, or trivialize it at their own peril.

It is becoming increasingly clear that human, animal, and earth liberation movements are inseparably linked, such that none can be free until all are free. This is not a new insight, but rather a lost wisdom and truth. Recall the words of Pythagoras, the first Western philosopher, who 2500 years ago proclaimed: “For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seed of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.”

While I speak of the “liberation” and “freedom” of Earth metaphorically, I mean it quite literally for animals, for they are the oldest, largest, most exploited, and most neglected of all exploited groups and slave classes. Animals are sentient, conscious, feeling, and thinking beings; they have complex needs and relations; they have a will to live and a desire for a free and pleasurable existence; and they play key roles in ecological systems necessary for our own existence.



Animals can and must be liberated from human exploitation in order to live become the free and complex beings they are and can be. [As humans are animals, animal liberation is human liberation too. Animal liberation is recognizing our commonalities as sentient beings.]

Given their symbiotic, holistic, and interlocking relationship, it is imperative that we no longer speak of human liberation, animal liberation, or earth liberation as if they were independent struggles; rather, we need to speak of total liberation. Theoretically, we must see these liberation movements in relation to one another and identify commonalities of oppression, that stem from hierarchy and capitalism. Politically, we need to form alliances against common oppressors, across class, racial, gender, and national boundaries, as we link democracy to ecology and social justice to animal rights.

So, I wish to assert the need for more expansive visions and politics on both sides of the human/animal liberation equation, and to call for new forms of dialogue, learning, and strategic alliances that are all-too rare. The kind of alliance politics one finds in South Africa remains weak and abstract so long as animal liberation and vegan interests are excluded. These can no longer be ignored, marginalized, mocked, and trivialized. Similarly, the animal liberation movement can no longer afford to be single-issue and isolationist, but must link to social justice and environmental movements. Each movement has much to learn from the other, and no movement can achieve its goals apart from the other. It is truly one struggle, one fight. The domination of humans, animals, and the earth stem from the same mindset and institutional forms that promote hierarchy, hostility to otherness, and the will to power. This can only be fully revealed and transformed by a multi-perspectival theory and alliance politics broader and deeper than anything yet created.

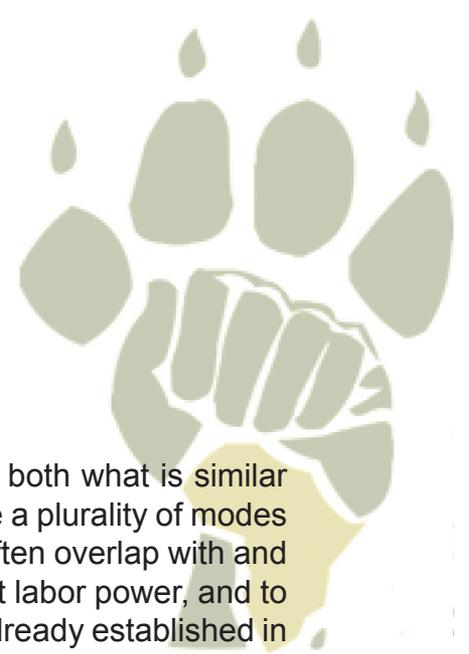


Multiperspectival Theory

A diverse and comprehensive theory of power and domination is necessary for politics of total liberation, for alliances cannot be formed without understanding how different modes of power overlap and converge. Power is diverse, complex, and interlocking, and it cannot be adequately illuminated from the standpoint of any single group or concern.

Note that the enemy is not simply class, for class is not the only manifestation of power, nor is it the font or earliest source; rather, class is a symptom, not a cause of a larger system of domination organized around hierarchy. Hierarchy is both an institution and mindset that organizes differences into a rank of superior and inferior, such that the latter has no value for the sake of the former. The mindset and institutions of hierarchical domination spring from numerous phenomena such as patriarchy, racism, the state, and social classes and private property.

The origins of hierarchy are shrouded in prehistory, and naturally there are different interpretations and sharp controversies over when, where, and how hierarchy first emerged in society. For example, did the domination of nature lead to the domination of human beings, as Marxists argue, or did the domination of human beings lead to the domination of nature, as claimed by anarchist Murray Bookchin? Some theorists attempt to reduce all modes of oppression to one, such as gender, race, or class, which they privilege as the font of power from which all others spring. Most notoriously, classical Marxists subsumed all struggles to class. Other social concerns such as patriarchy and racism were reduced to “questions,” dismissed as divisive, and to be postponed to post-revolutionary society where allegedly they would be moot anyway. The resurfacing of bureaucracies, sexism, and racism in “existing socialist societies” refuted this Procrustean outlook. Similarly, radical feminists claim that patriarchy is the fundamental



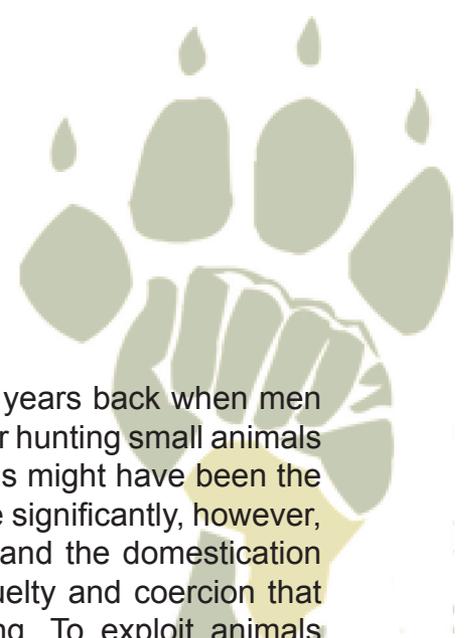
hierarchy in history.

The best approach is to advance a multiperspectival approach that seeks both what is similar among various modes of oppression and what is specific to each. There are a plurality of modes and mechanisms of power that have evolved throughout history, and that often overlap with and reinforce one another – as capitalism feeds off racism and sexism to exploit labor power, and to divide oppressed groups from one another. However, since hierarchy was already established in human society thousands of years before the emergence of private property, economic classes, and the state, these are certainly two very important power systems.

Animal Standpoint Theory

According to feminist standpoint theory, each oppressed group has an important perspective or insight into the nature of society. People of color, for instance, can illuminate colonialism and the pathology of racism, while women can reveal the logic of patriarchy that has buttressed so many different modes of social power throughout history.

While animals cannot speak about their sufferings in human language, it is only from the animal standpoint -- the standpoint of how humans relate to and exploit animals-- that we can grasp central aspects of the origins and development of hierarchy and related pathologies involving violence, warfare, militarism, class domination, slavery, genocide, colonialism, the Holocaust, and ecological devastation. From the animal standpoint theory, we can see that the oppression of human over human and the human exploitation of nature have deep roots in the oppression of humans over animals.



The male domination over women seems first to have emerged 80,000 years back when men began organized hunting large animals with spear technologies. No longer hunting small animals with women and elevating their role in culture through hunting rituals, this might have been the earliest form of hierarchy. The power of men over women did not advance significantly, however, until some 10,000 years ago, with the transition to agricultural society and the domestication of animals. “Domestication” is a euphemism that disguises extreme cruelty and coercion that involved confinement, castration, hobbling, branding, and ear cropping. To exploit animals for food, milk, clothing, plowing, and transportation, herders developed technologies such as whips, prods, chains, shackles, collars, and branding irons. All of these technologies of control and confinement were later used on human slaves, such as especially true throughout the international slave trade of the 15-19th centuries.

People often now say that animals are “the new slaves.” No, they were the first slaves. They’re the first beings human oppressors used to confine, torture, cage, chain down, auction, and sell for labor and profit. The domination of animals paved the way for the domination of humans. The sexual subjugation of women was modeled after the domestication of animals, such that men began to control women’s reproductive capacity, to enforce repressive sexual norms, and to rape them as they forced breeding in their animals. Slavery emerged in the same region of the Middle East that spawned agriculture, and, in fact, developed as an extension of animal domestication practices. In areas like Sumer, slaves were managed like livestock, and males were castrated and forced to work along with females. Whips, prods, chains, shackles, collars, branding irons and other brutal technologies of control and confinement used throughout the modern international slave trade were first perfected on animals.