

The Freedom to Connect: Divine Rights vs. Conventional Wisdom
by John Williamson, Tim Stoffel and John Burkitt

PURPOSE:

To expose the significant erosion of our constitutional right to the pursuit of happiness as expressed through animal ownership. To establish the nature of happiness and its vital role in our lives and our nation. To show the methods by which our right to interact with animals is being compromised, and to warn the reader of what may lie ahead if those dangerous trends continue.

RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES:

The Preamble to the Declaration of Independence states that the three fundamental rights of man are neither won nor lost but are by divine will an inherent part of the human condition. "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men ... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." However the liberty needed to enjoy those rights can be won or lost, and it is never cheaply bought.

The pursuit of happiness led our forefathers through many dangers and hardships as they left their old life an ocean—and a world—behind them. They knew how vital the pursuit of happiness was to the emergence of a great society and strong nation of free men. They defended the liberty to claim that right against all threats, and it only survived through great efforts of faith, courage and sacrifice. The patriot Patrick Henry told the Continental Congress, "I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

Those who fought for liberty took great care to secure it in what **Abraham Lincoln** called "Government of the people, by the people, and for the people." *The Defense Department* reports that nearly 1.2 million members of our armed forces have died serving our country and another 1.4 million have been wounded since we declared our independence. Numbers alone cannot quantify the grief, sacrifices, and broken dreams of these warriors and their families, but we do treasure the gift of liberty they purchased with their suffering and loss.

Because the right to pursue happiness is an integral part of us, we cannot fully live unless we resist every challenge to its free exercise, whatever the reason. America's liberty to enjoy human rights is the very foundation of its social and political beliefs. Liberty built this country into a model state, inspired some of its greatest sacrifices, and made us a beacon of hope for the oppressed peoples of the world. The only serious threat to our freedom comes from within, and was best stated by **Mark Twain in 1866**. "No man's life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session."

President George W. Bush, in his Veteran's Day address to the nation, said, "America was founded on the principles of liberty, opportunity, and justice for all, and [today] we recognize the men and women of our Armed Forces who have valiantly defended these values throughout our

Nation's history. These remarkable individuals have helped to make our Nation secure and to advance the cause of freedom worldwide." Apparently, Mr. Bush still believes in the force and majesty of our Constitution unlike many members of our Congress. Keep in mind Mark Twain's warning about the legislature!

In *Reagan's War: the epic story of Ronald Reagan's forty-year struggle and final triumph over communism*, **Peter Schweizer** declared, "The 'one big thing' Reagan knew was the power and value of human freedom, which proved to be the defining principle of his worldview." Many Americans continue to hold to this view, as do the Russian people who value their new-found freedom enough to endure great hardships while their country readjusts.

THE NATURE OF HAPPINESS:

Ruut Veenhoven, Erasmus University, Rotterdam asserts that "Happiness is a highly valued matter. Though not everyone accepts the utilitarian axiom that happiness is ultimately the only value, the desirability of happiness as such is almost undisputed." He added: "Happiness was a major issue in early Greek philosophy and several later philosophical schools. Currently the subject gains attention in the social sciences, in particular in Social Indicators Research. [Erudite] papers on happiness fill many bookshelves."

In the *Journal of Happiness Studies*, **Dr. Ad Bergsma** uses Neurotechnology to lend scientific weight to notion that happiness not only feels good, but promotes better health and well being for the individual while advancing the spirituality and morality of civilization itself. The author concludes that the purest happiness comes not from isolated experiences, but from connecting with one's environment. "Technological progress seems to open ways for redesigning the human organism. This means that the affective system that is built into the brain by evolution can be redesigned with intent. [As a consequence, progress] won't be confined to enhancing the conditions of living, but will change the way we react to the world." Dr. Bergsma warns that this sort of genetically programmed utopia, called "transhumanism", loses the true meaning of happiness by treating it as isolated feeling. "The affective system in our brain needs strong ties with the on-going interaction of the individual with its environment. Making people happier without enhancing the grip on their life will be counterproductive."

THREATS TO LIBERTY:

Since happiness-not prosperity or pleasure-is the key to a spiritual, healthy and moral life, why then are the liberties which allow us to pursue it under attack by our elected representatives? In 1776, we rejected at great cost one form of government that forced individuals to conform to narrowly defined norms and established in its place a body politic that respected the worth of individual thought, expression, and action. Animal Rights are beginning to harness the power of that government to gradually impose an even narrower norm with no room for any sort of relationship between man and animal. The animal rights movement uses propaganda and support of domestic terrorism groups like the Animal Liberation Front to alternately persuade and intimidate Americans into abandoning their liberty and

losing access to their rights as they apply to animals. They have made alarming progress so far, including the deceptively titled "Captive Wildlife Safety Act of 2003." Ironically they strip humans of their liberty under the guise of granting rights to animals. How to stop the general hemorrhaging of liberty in America is a broader question for others to solve. We speak only of the thwarting the overwhelming attack on private owners of animals living in a mutually beneficial state of happiness, comfort and security.

The three fundamental rights of man—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—are a tripod which stands only by the support of all three legs. Happiness cannot exist without life and liberty. Nor can life and liberty last for long without happiness. These divinely granted rights intertwine to form the foundation of human life. And since they are inherent to the human condition, that which suppresses liberty submerges rights and therefore to that degree submerges humanity. It is the profound promise of the Constitution to defend the liberty of all citizens to enjoy these rights—not to undermine individual liberty under duress. This undermining is the clear agenda of extremists of all types. In their warped ideology, they dare to claim a divine mandate to control our lives. To them, God is the jealous withholder of rights, not their gracious champion. The empowerment of animals with freedoms they cannot understand is fruitless, so they compensate by stripping humans of freedoms they cannot tolerate. Such extremists see liberty as a threat, and its free exercise as a sin, and they treat it accordingly. We must take this sort of extremism seriously in whatever form it appears and show it the same degree tolerance it extends to us—absolutely none.

Wendell Phillips said, "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." While we are fighting dangerous extremists at great cost around the world, we fail to stop them in our own back yard because we fail to recognize them for what they are. And so without relief, the mind numbing erosion of our liberties goes on and on. We regretfully and fearfully point out government's disregard of our loss of liberty and its direct impact on our well being. Let us reinforce that happiness is no longer a matter of philosophical debate, but an indisputable, quantifiable facet of our human condition documented by scientific inquiry, with undeniable and direct impact on our welfare.

THE DRIVE TO CONNECT:

The following selected notes are taken from a massive cross discipline study entitled "Hardwired to Connect" which explores the increasing alienation and dysfunction of our children and society. . Bear in mind that much of this research was done with animals. It is safe to say that many of these statements can be applied to large brained mammals other than humans, a point demonstrated daily by mutual bonding between species:

- Essentially, science is increasingly demonstrating that the human person is hardwired to connect.
- First, a great deal of evidence shows that we are hardwired for close attachments to other people, mothers, fathers, and extended families, and then moving out to the broader community.

- Second, a less definitive but still significant body of evidence suggests that we are hardwired for meaning, born with a built-in capacity and drive to search for purpose and reflect on life's ultimate ends.
- The old "nature versus nurture" debate - focusing on whether heredity or environment is the determinant of human conduct - is no longer relevant to serious discussions of child well-being and youth programming.
- The mechanisms by which we become and stay attached to others are biologically primed and increasingly discernible in the basic structure of the brain.
- Nurturing environments, or the lack of them, affect gene transcription and the development of brain circuitry.
- The beginning of morality is the biologically primed moralization of attachment.
- The human brain appears to be organized to ask ultimate questions and seek ultimate answers.

CONNECTION AND SPIRITUALITY:

When you connect the scattered dots of science, religion, philosophy, and most importantly the direct experience of diverse peoples throughout history, a clear pattern emerges of increasing human isolation and decreasing happiness. Many primitive cultures were and are far happier than we are, despite lacking all the conveniences and distractions of our society. It is a function of the degree to which they see themselves as part of nature rather than segregated from it. Their schedules, cultures, and spirituality were linked to the rhythms of the natural world. They never arranged their lives around such arbitrary guideposts as a favorite television show or a Monday morning staff meeting. Rather than advocating separation from all other animal life, they traced their totemic origins to wolves, bears, tigers and eagles centuries before Darwin suggested that man derived from another species. They see the efforts of some people to reject the natural order as anti-social and ungrateful. They wonder how any rational person could think separation from nature was truly religious rather than totally irreligious. "If all the animals died," warned Native American Chief Seattle, "mankind would die from loneliness."

The greatest happiness is nearly always achieved through forming spiritual connections, those operating within the framework of formal religion or those directly achieved through nature. Religion connects one to a group of like-minded individuals. This connection expands into ever larger communities that develop their own culture and nationality. It is human nature to seek connections, a process driven by the same social imperative seen within and between non-human species. Ultimately, life seeks life; there is a simple oneness about life that cannot be denied once experienced through an intense connection.

CONNECTION, NATURE AND ANIMALS:

Although formal religion claims its basis in revelation and contemplation, human spirituality arose largely from experiencing the wonders of nature. In the passage of time and seasons marked by the sun and stars, early humans saw a greater order and pattern to which they

belonged. In the following of winter's sleep with spring's rebirth, they saw the promise of life beyond death. The scattering of countless stars across the night sky was their first contact with infinity. Indeed, we humans crave connections because the experiences validate our deepest sense of self, that we are not an isolated fragment of life but an integral part of a greater life, a community in which everyone and everything has an inherent worth. We experience needing and being needed. That is the key to unlock the inner peace sought by so many.

We are not the only species able to share the benefits of this connection. Dr. Franklin Loehr, a Presbyterian minister and scientist, carefully designed an experiment to test the effects positive and negative mental energies have over living matter. He took three pans of various types of seeds. A control pan was set aside. A "positive energy" pan was exposed to regular meditation sessions where Dr. Loehr contemplated prosperity and life. A "negative energy" pan was exposed to the same amount of contemplation, but the topic was misery and death. Time after time, the results indicated that concentrated positive thought helped speed germination and produced more vigorous plants than those in the control pan, while concentrated negative thought suppressed growth in some plants and even halted germination in others. All of the plants were behind glass to prevent carbon dioxide from his breath from altering the growth environment. The connections among living things are very real and are measurable through tests that stand up to scientific scrutiny. So, what is this spiritual foundation upon which nature is built? We draw some quotes from Larry Gates' work circa 2000:

"Human beings have been cultivating a spiritual relationship with nature for thousands of years. In 1914 a cave was discovered in southern France. It has a long, low, narrow passageway that ends in a giant hall covered with pictures of animals that lived in Europe 12,000 years ago: there are mammoths, leaping bulls, stags, woolly ponies, and bison. This underground cathedral, now called Les Trois Freres, was used for thousands of years as a place of transformation and rebirth. Apparently rituals took place here which were analogous to the Christian Eucharist."

"Nowhere in history do we find a religion more oriented around nature than in ancient Egypt. In Egyptian art one finds remarkably precise observations flora and fauna. They are easily identified by contemporary biology. But Egyptian art also shows the way nature affects the soul, and reveals a spiritual light deep inside all natural phenomena. Lions were worshipped by the Egyptians for their great strength and courage. They were associated with the solar deities, Horus and Ra. The lion was believed to be a protector of the sun. In some temples a lion statue guarded the gate through which the sun rose each morning. Lion statues were often given heads of men. The Sphinx of Gizeh was a lion with a human head; she faced the rising sun and protected the sleeping dead. Rameses II and III kept lions as mascots. The cat was such a sacred animal to the Egyptians that some people were actually given death penalties for killing them. The cat was a personification of the sun."

In western Africa, there is an ancient monolith of a lion. This monolith dates back to the earliest times of civilized mankind. The people that built this monolith obviously had a great reverence-- not fear-- for this magnificent animal. Their reverence was in fact, so

great that they went to considerable trouble to construct this monolith. The fact that it is still with us today stands in testimony to the depth of the conviction of the beliefs these people held towards the lion. There are other monoliths of other animals all over the world, demonstrating how universal this reverence for animals is.

And a Buddhist Blessing: "Now may every living thing, young or old, weak or strong, living near or far, known or unknown, living or departed or yet unborn, may every living thing be full of bliss." Or from Thich Nhat Hanh: 'The Five Wonderful Precepts:' "I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals."

Charlene Spretnak wrote: "There are sacred moments in life when we experience in rational and very direct ways that separation, the boundary between ourselves and other people and between ourselves and Nature, is illusion. Oneness is reality. We can experience that stasis is illusory and that reality is continual flux and change on very subtle as well as on gross levels of perception."

In her book, 'Ecstasy,' Laski reports "research findings indicating that the most frequent trigger for mystical experiences is nature, with nature art being the second most frequent trigger. Another national survey found that almost half of all the people who have had mystical experiences consider the beauties of nature to be the primary inspiration."

Even the movie, 'The Lion King' has as a central theme the connectedness of all living things, which it called, 'The Circle of Life.' This circle of life is not just an interesting philosophy but a concept deeply rooted in scientific fact.

THE HUNTERS OF SOULS:

The spiritual, or more precisely, the psychospiritual relationship we can have with animals is profound. Animals show us something our human companions usually won't or can't—unconditional love. Many studies have shown that when people spend time with an animal, there are positive physical and mental benefits to both the person and the animal. Animals are widely used for therapy in places such as nursing homes. Even such unlikely exotic animals as African servals are commonly used as therapy animals, as their simple trust and love can break through many emotional and physical problems. This therapy works where other modes of treatment have failed.

The strength of this relationship is most evident when death breaks it. Studies indicate that people often grieve more over the death of a pet than they do over the death of a human relative. This is not surprising, given the purity of the connection when man relates to animals. From our experiences in the exotic animal community, this effect is even more profound when the connection is with a large feline, and seems to be strongest with lions. We know of two recent cases where a person's big cat died, and in both the break in the relationship resulted in months of grief. This was accompanied by the classic physical symptoms of grief as well, such as loss of sleep, anxiety, fatigue, and loss of appetite. Both of these people described the death of their cat as being the exact same as losing a human child.

This bond can be looked at from the cat's perspective, as well. They see something in us that is redeeming (other than a good meal!) when the person is open to receiving the connection they can offer. In the case of some people, the cat will instantly pick up on the person as a 'cat lover' or an 'animal lover' and respond positively to the person at once. This can develop into a relationship where the cat will value the person's friendship to the point where they will attempt to attack anyone they would perceive to be a threat to their "person". In the most profound cases, the cat can go out of its way to directly save a human life in peril. We know of three instances where a lion intervened directly to save a human life. In one of these cases, the lion received burns from a fire while saving "his" human. This behavior has also been observed in tigers and other large-brained animals. Dolphins have been renowned since ancient times for rescuing people lost at sea. Cats show the classic outward signs of grief when separated from their human companion, and in some cases stop eating entirely and die.

Another good example of relationship is Elsa the lioness, of 'Born Free' fame. Even though this lioness had been completely integrated back into the wild, she maintained a relationship with George and Joy Adamson that was as strong as or stronger than the relationship with her pride mates. And, when Elsa was taken ill, she chose to come to George and die in his arms. (This has been frequently observed in other species of cats and other higher animals as well.) There are numerous cases of lions that have been separated from people they loved for many years. When by chance the lion and person were reunited, there was instant recognition, and it was as if there had never been a break in the relationship. Lions, like elephants, never forget!

Spend some quality time with a large feline, and you will see more than a large carnivorous animal. There is an aura, a spiritual connection as it were, unlike spending time with any other animal. Unlike us, they do not lean too heavily on the crutch of spoken language. Verbal over reliance has not dulled their physical senses and many feel their spiritual ones. We hesitate to call these spiritual senses "supernatural." If "natural" means "usual", it is the human chatterbox that stands out as unusual in a world of animals living well without nouns, verbs and adjectives. The cat can "read" you very readily, and as you broaden your ideas of communication, you begin to "read" the cat. While you must never forget that these animals are masterful predators, you must always remember they are masterful hunters of souls, searching for companionship. Once caught by the love of a great cat, there is no escape—you are changed forever.

Some critics wonder why we can't make these connections with mainstream animals like domestic dogs or house cats. That is like wondering why we can't fall in love with a particular person. Different species have different general temperaments, and within a species different individuals exhibit a wide range of diverse traits. And each individual has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, memories and preferences that makes them who—as well as what—they are. Any child instinctively understands this and feels outrage when a parent offers to replace a dead pet with "another one" as if all English setters or calico cats were interchangeable. Some people relate best to large cats and find their very presence a source of great spiritual strength

and peace. Our hearts choose whom we will love. It is not a process dictated by logic or swayed by practicality. Companionship with large carnivores becomes for us a lifestyle issue that cries out for tolerance and acceptance as surely as any other. The problem is that our lifestyle is not defended and promoted by its own well-funded and high-profile advocacy group. Should America provide tolerance, acceptance and freedom only to groups that can afford to buy them? Is that government of the people, by the people, and for the people?

Others argue why we can't simply make these connections with others of our own kind. That presupposes that we are socially flawed and use other species as pale human substitutes. That also presupposes that connections with others of our own kind obviate the need to reach out to other species. What an arrogant, narrow minded assessment of mankind's relationship to nature!

There are wrong reasons to associate with large carnivores, but no more or less than the wrong reasons people marry or have children. A person who wants to be around big cats because it is "macho" or to garner notice misses out on the blessings revealed to those with an open heart and an attitude of trust. Every form of relationship is open to possible abuse—in general loving another involves a certain degree of vulnerability. The only way to have absolute safety and ultimate certainty is to exclude love from one's life, to exercise one's inalienable right to flee from happiness. Even the most responsible pet owner has the bittersweet realization that a dog, a cat, a lion or a wolf is ageing five times faster. Anyone who watches the light in an old tiger's eyes fade and die knows all about vulnerability. That some people allow themselves to be in that position, often repeatedly, is proof that there are worse things in life than being vulnerable. That is why well-meaning laws that seek to protect us from ourselves are irksome intrusions into our basic humanity, and are not to be tolerated by a freedom loving people.

Many zoos and sanctuaries have a "hands off" policy where human contact and interaction with the big cats is not allowed. The reasoning behind this policy is not one of safety, but of keeping the cats free of any connectedness that would make them not behave "wild". There are many other facilities though that allow and encourage contact and relationship-building with their cats. There is an amazing difference in the behavior of the cats in these two different cases that even the lay observer can spot. It's very easy to tell a cat that has no connections, or conversely one that has one or more quality relationships with people and/or others of their own kind.

Last, but not least, there are certain facets of spirituality people only experience through animals. One seeks pieces of the greatest puzzle—what the Creator is actually like—by studying all of creation rather than our species alone. Otherwise one is tempted to find God made in man's image rather than the other way around, a method that filled Greco-Roman mythology with sinful, jealous gods rife with human failings. Human spirituality cannot exist in a vacuum, and our race will wither and die if plucked from the fertile spiritual soil of its birth. We must not turn our backs on nature and fail to learn its lessons.

SELF-IMPOSED EXILE:

Some people have placed themselves in self-imposed exile, unable to forgive humanity for past mistakes. For them all of nature is an Eden from which we must be forever banished. Why exactly an elk in his herd is not a slave to a companion elk but an elk in a pasture can only be the slave of a companion human, they do not say. Some of the more extreme elements actively hate the human race—their own race—seeing the very existence of man as a threat to the environment. This new doctrine of segregation espoused by the animal rights extremists is not based on race but on species. And it is we as humans they expect to enter nature only by the back door and not actually interact with other species. In this system of thought, what is our sin, our fall from grace that banishes us from Eden? Quite simply the intelligence necessary to change the environment around us. The shameless acts of coming down from the trees, eating meat, and building shelters are our sins, and because we have become dependent on technology to live, we are incapable of redemption.

Self imposed exile would destroy the human race. In a review of *The Web of Life imperative*, Mardi Jones, Ph.D. allows that its author, Ecopsychologist, Michael J. Cohen, Ed.D. "shows that contemporary people, like all of humanity, are born as part of nature but, to our loss, we deny this legacy. This leads us to deny the destructive results of living almost entirely indoors, of 99% of our thinking being stressed, frustrated or injured by the disconnection of our psyche from its nurturing origins and support in natural systems. We deny that under the flags of progress, economic growth and normalcy we addictively bond our mentality to non-organic substitutes for nature, substitutes whose "side effects" injure us, other people and the environment."

"We have amputated ourselves from our inherent sensory origins in natural systems and their rewarding sensations, sensitivity and sensibility. This creates a hole in our thinking, a hurt, frustrated void that constantly demands sensory fulfillment; we feel we never have enough and constantly crave more. We try, but fail, to satisfy our void through senseless greed, empty relationships, excessive shopping, addictions, power and rage. Unable to make sense of our nature-disconnected lives, we think we can solve our problems with the same processes that cause them: nature-disconnected education, therapy, technologies, media, politics, science and psychology."

"Further," Cohen says, "truly nature-connected people rarely exhibit or cause the pollution, isolation, dependencies, abusiveness or mental infirmities that plague our nature-disconnected environment of mind."

From Dennis Prager's new book: *Happiness is a serious problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual*...Prager asserts, "Not only do we have a right to be happy, we have an obligation to be happy. Our happiness has an effect on the lives of everyone around us -- it provides them with a positive environment in which to be happy and thrive themselves."

Is it too much of a stretch to believe that our constitution's founders truly understood the broader aspects and extension of individual freedom and pursuit of happiness? Is it too much to expect our present

leaders to understand, or even care, as our country's moral and ethical structure crumbles visibly, even as Cohen suggests?

THE ANIMAL RIGHTS INDUSTRY

Pressure to end private ownership of exotic animals comes from both animal rights organizations and the politicians that stand to benefit from their support. A pattern has emerged: Animal Rights groups relentlessly play on public misunderstanding and fear, then alternately court and pressure politicians to respond legislatively to appear as dedicated public "protectors." It's an old tactic to expel marginal groups without the funds to fight negative perceptions and restrictive measures.

A NEW PATH

Despite the early momentum of the Animal Rights Industry, there is a way to slow and eventually stop the personal and social losses and animal suffering it spreads. We must integrate recent scientific discoveries into the fabric of our existing legal structure to root out the myths Animal Rightists depend on. We call this strategy "The Path To Change" to emphasize that it's not a quick fix against self serving politics and raw power plays now arrayed against the private exotic animal ownership.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Who could better state the Animal Rights Industry's legal position than Gary L. Francione, one of its top legal and ethical experts. Here is his case for Animal Rights legislation:

1. Everyone thinks animals should be treated "humanely" and humans shouldn't cause them "unnecessary" pain. So why do animals enjoy so little legal protection?
2. Building on Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights*, Francione argues that the major obstacle to effective protection is the treatment of animals as property, denying them rights.

There is a reason why animals are regarded as property under federal and state law—property without rights. Animals are unable to participate fully in the responsibilities that accompany rights. Rights are not free, and animals are unable to comprehend the theory or shoulder the cost of our constitutionally protected freedoms. So why are lawmakers now turning a blind eye to this logic when they write Animal Rights "laws" even as Animal Rights organizations flout the legal system? How can the Animal Rights Industry behave lawlessly, violating its non-profit status, financially supporting eco-terrorists and violent animal liberationists, yet still exercise such profound influence on lawmakers?

Francione complains that in every choice between human desire and animal pain, humans—who grant only themselves legal rights—almost always win. It is always easy to make a case that animal suffering is "necessary", regardless of the triviality of the human's gain or the depth of the animal's loss. Francione argues his case well -- including a crucial point: he maintains that there isn't anything in

current "property" based animal law that has the effect of conferring rights on animals anyway. This point is more controversial than some readers may be aware; other writers on this subject (e.g. Gary Varner) have argued that other species do have de facto "rights" under U.S. law and have had them at least since the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

One crucial issue here is "standing." Animals, being "property", devoid of rights, do not have "standing" to bring lawsuits, and generally humans don't have "standing" to bring suits on animals' behalf.

Christopher Stone suggested in a 1972 paper, *Do Trees Have Standing?*, that even natural objects such as trees should have standing, so human organizations could represented their interests in court. So far there hasn't been a majority on the U.S. Supreme Court to agree with them. Stone himself has since backed off from his suggestion.

Francione (following Regan) bases the possession of rights on intrinsic worth. But neither one of them argues that nonhumans have the same intrinsic worth as humans, and neither has established intrinsic worth as sufficient grounds for rights. There might be creatures whose existence is intrinsically worthwhile but whose survival requirements conflicted so far with our own that they could not be said to have any "rights" with respect to human beings. And in that case, it's not clear why, or even whether, the intrinsic worth of other species imposes a moral obligation on us.

We believe we can actually help the expressed cause of the AR's here by establishing that animals, in their connected relationships with humans, most definitely have substantial value, something they have been loath to actually show in any rational way, except in commercial enterprise because they are truly trapped in the conundrums of their irrational ideology. Next, let's refer to the legal definition of damages and establish an anchor point.

Damages, in legalese, can refer either to the harm suffered by a plaintiff in a civil action, or to monetary compensation awarded for said harm. There are three major types of damages:

Special damages are those for which a specific dollar amount can be determined, such as medical costs or property replacement.

General damages are those for which only a subjective value may be attached, such as physical or emotional pain, loss of companionship, disfigurement, loss of reputation, loss or impairment of mental or physical capacity, or loss of enjoyment of life. (This last example is of particular importance to where we want to go).

Punitive damages are designed to punish the defendant for inflicting loss, and to deter similar losses from being inflicted in the future.

Punitive damages are awarded only in special cases, and great judicial restraint is expected to be exercised in their application.

Ill-conceived, hastily enacted ban laws rip asunder the life enhancing bonds of connectedness between human and animal. This clearly inflicts major pain, suffering, and loss upon an individual, and does so in the name of protecting the public from supposed danger and protecting animals from the "pain and suffering" of living in a human habitat

rather than facing the challenges of a wild habitat which is unforgiving and quickly falling before human encroachment.

In fact, our laws clearly recognize the value of the human-animal bond, and puts a substantial value on the happiness that arises from such relationships. Animals are even permitted in places where they are usually excluded when the therapeutic nature of the bond is certified by a physician. To further the matter, science strongly supports such values as well.

Driven by the relentless, often mysterious AR agenda to remove most all animals from private ownership, a monstrous wave of ban laws have been -- and continue to be -- enacted across the country. With false claims and distortions of their danger to the public and maltreatment of such animals, it has become a free-for-all in which unwitting politicians vie for political capital. The results are animals being put to death, or moved to suffer somewhere else, and owners who are forcibly separated from their vital connectedness and source of happiness. Sadly, humans and animals both lose a great deal of their well being on this endless treadmill of abuse driven by the AR industry.

Separating humans and their legally owned, mutually connected animals by unjustified banning is a breach of constitutional law. It is quite unlikely that the AR agenda and the politicians who serve it could survive close scrutiny in a court of law.

EPIGENETIC EVOLUTION

Much of the strategy used to convert animals into symbols of fear and loathing hinges on the assumption that all "wild" animals are inherently dangerous. This presupposes the very outdated notion that their genes evolved over millennia and aren't expected to change for another vast period of time just to adapt to sanctuary in a human world. A magnifying glass wielded by modern science now illuminates and dispels the myths of these self serving notions. Animals can indeed adapt to human proximity very quickly and pass this adaptation on to their progeny if the captive dynamics are recognized. They simply do not have to be burdened with the "intrinsic" dangerousness almost desperately proclaimed by the AR industry.

The process of adaptation and subsequent incorporation of those changes into their genetic line is a collection of processes that modify the expressions of the genome without modifying the genes themselves. It's called epigenetic evolution. The many recent discoveries in this field are even now reshaping society's basic views of evolution to expand the classical models of both Lamarck and Darwin - who are both right and wrong. Epigenetic evolution portends a major impact on many of our cherished institutions, including law, infant rearing, education, animal husbandry, social behavior, religion, politics and the like.

Some important and well understood epigenetic mechanisms include:

- DNA methylation - pathogenic loss of gene function by methylation of adjacent control sequences;
- changes in chromatin configuration - chromosomal rearrangements can up-regulate or silence expression of an intact gene;

- imprinting - gene expression is controlled by methylation patterns that differ according to the parental origin of the gene; and
- changes in protein conformation - such changes propagate through a population of protein molecules, converting them from a stable conformation into a new form with different properties.

OTHER INSIGHTS

Then there is brain neurochemistry, far more complex than simple protein modulation. Noted neuropsychologist James Prescott, Ph.D. tells us that the whole answer will not be found solely in brain neurochemistry, which is only a mediating mechanism for behavior where the "cause" is not to be found in any singular neurochemical but in the complex mosaic, pattern or gestalt of brain neurochemistry that is determined more by the environment than by the genome. Gene expression is thus controlled and regulated by the environment! The environment in this sense includes the physical realm, the nurturing emotional and psychological space, and significantly, the fetal space.

The myth that organisms are hardwired by their genes has been thoroughly exploded by scientific findings accumulating since the mid 1970s and especially so since genome sequences have been accumulating. Maternal effects on the development of offspring are well known. But they were thought to be due to nutritional and physiological factors affecting the fetus in the womb; and within the past few years, geneticists have discovered that diet and stress can profoundly change the pattern of gene expression in the offspring.

Caring mothers reduce stress response. For example, in the nest, the mother rat licks and grooms her pups, and while nursing, arches her back to groom and lick them. Some mothers (high caring) tend to do this more frequently than others (low caring). As adults, the offspring of high caring mothers are less fearful and show more modest responses to stress in the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) neuro-endocrine pathway.

Maternal behavior, therefore, alters the development of the HPA responses to stress. The magnitude of the HPA response is a function of the corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) secreted by the hypothalamus, which activates the pituitary-adrenal system. This is modulated by glucocorticoid, which feeds back to inhibit CRF synthesis and secretion, thus dampening the HPA responses to stress.

They found highly significant differences in methylation, with low methylation in offspring from high caring mothers and high methylation in offspring from low caring mothers, corresponding to high and low expression respectively of the GR. Moreover, these epigenetic differences due to maternal behavior during the first week of life persisted into adulthood.

Amazingly, the pups of both high and low-caring mothers start out life genetically the same. Just before birth, the entire region of the GR promoter was unmethylated in both groups; and day one after birth, methylation is found in the region in both groups to the same extent.

The changes in methylation pattern then develops within the first week according to the behavior of the mother, and thereafter remain for the rest of their lives. This finding is consistent with earlier studies showing that the first week of postnatal life is a "critical period" for the effects of early experiences on hippocampus GR expression.

This is all grist to the mill, of course, of the fluid, adaptive, and adaptable genome that makes nonsense of the Central Dogma of immutable genetics and associated behavior.

A Tiger can become less dangerous in one generation by exposure to optimum environmental influences -- and pass this on to the next generation. On the other hand, by raising that offspring in a horrid environment, it can be made to develop into a mean and nasty animal. It also means that a sweet captive raised Tiger is far less likely to survive an introduction to the wild. Especially if there is no longer any easy prey with suicidal tendencies around... Politics anyone?

Having recently completed the sequencing of a number of genomes of scientific interest, including the human genome, it has become clear that the more complex an organism, the bigger its genome. However, it is also evident that increased bio-complexity is not reflected by an equivalent increase in the number of protein coding genes in each genome, with, for example, 15,000 in a fly compared with only 40,000 in a human.

This suggests that the DNA sequence itself is not the only source of heritable information, and that mechanisms other than DNA sequence information have been adopted during evolution. The discovery of epigenetic mechanisms that considerably extend the information potential of the genetic code mean that we and other creatures are more than the sum of unchanging genes.

LOVE AND CONNECTION

Not so surprising, some new findings have come along at a fortuitous time. Lowell Getz, research scientist, says love is found in the genes. Altering the expression of a single gene, for example, can switch mouse-like voles from a promiscuous to a monogamous lifestyle. Neuroscientists today are peering into the brain to understand the drive of romantic love, and they are finding evidence backing a 19th-century philosopher's observation: Love has a striking neural kinship with drug addiction.

As they probe love's neurochemistry, researchers are also finding that its neural substrates are conserved among species. "Human romantic love evolved from the same brain system that mediates attraction in animals," says Helen Fisher, a research professor of anthropology at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She is one of several scientists who say that animals experience love. Almost any caring animal owner would wholeheartedly agree.

IN CONCLUSION:

So in conclusion we can state that happiness is one of the great underlying rights our constitution seeks to protect. As such, the greatest forms of happiness result when a person is connected to something—another person, God, nature, or even a lion. People have a physical and spiritual need to connect, and no law should be established that interferes measurably with a person's basic need to connect with the entity of their choice. And, the choice of connection should be entirely up to the individual. Everyone is different, and everyone reaches their ultimate development with their own unique blend of connections. We already jealously protect our rights to connect to others of our own kind, and to God. Why not to animals? And, why not to higher animals such as the big cats?

When connections are formed, both entities involved in the connection should improve. So, if some people choose to connect to animals, why should the benefits of such a connection be denied them? Indeed, allowing people to bond with the 'selfless love' of an animal (even a big cat) results in a happier, more well-balanced person. And the animal benefits as well. So in the end, mankind is improved as a result of being able to connect with higher animals like big cats. And, the improvements are in those areas that we value most-- love, caring, patience, etc. And, as we have shown in this paper, this connectedness results in true happiness. The cats themselves also tend to develop better character as a result of being connected. Continued for a long enough time, we will see positive character development in the cats making these connections even deeper and more valid.

Therefore, we as a people should strive to see that anyone can responsibly own the animal or animals of their choice, even big cats or other large-brained (and often considered 'dangerous') animals. It wasn't too long ago in this country where most of us were around large-brained animals (on farms and at stables, for instance) and could experience this connectedness firsthand. We now have the job today of bringing people back to seeing this important thing we gave up to be able to live in our concrete-and-steel cities. Then and only then will we see the true value of all animals as critically important parts of our world, and will work to defend their existence (and coexistence with man) on all levels, be it captive or wild.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This work is copyright 2004 by Tigertouch, Inc. All rights are reserved. However, permission is granted to freely pass this document on to any interested party provided it is not altered in any way.