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Animal Rights: What Everyone Needs to Know

Paul Waldau
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According to the 2009/2010 National Pet Owners Survey, 62 percent of US households own a pet, representing over 71 million households. Many pet owners treat the domesticated animals in their households as members of the family. It may therefore surprise these pet owners to learn that not everyone agrees animals should have rights.

Paul Waldau explains that the term “animal rights” has come to mean “moral rights and social values in favor of compassion and against cruelty,” but in contemporary life, it also refers to “the possibility of legal rights” for animals. The extent to which societies create legal rights and protections for animals is the subject of current and active debate.

This is the intriguing issue Waldau raises in his remarkably comprehensive book, *Animal Rights.* Writing in clear, simple language and with considerable authority, Waldau begins with a discussion of “The Animals Themselves,” a thorough examination of animal classifications, followed by the philosophical arguments, historical and cultural issues, political realities, social realities, and other key issues related to animal rights. Waldau also addresses what students are taught about animals in schools, how the field of “animal studies” has evolved, and the role of natural and social sciences in contributing to people’s understanding of animals.

In each of the book’s sections, Waldau uses the technique of asking and answering important questions. This makes it easy for the reader to pinpoint certain areas of specific interest, and conveniently navigate through a great deal of information.

Perhaps the most interesting sections of the book are the last two: “Major Figures and Organizations in the Animal Rights Movement” and “The Future of Animal Rights.” Here the reader will learn about some of the leading animal rights advocates from around the world, and gain insight into how animal rights are being shaped by citizens, nonprofit organizations, corporations, and government agencies. At the end of the book, the author includes a chronology of important events, a glossary, and suggestions for further reading.

Paul Waldau is the former director of Tufts University’s Center for Animals and Public Policy and has served numerous times as the Bob Barker Lecturer on Animal Law at Harvard Law School.

Animal Rights is a superbly written, well-researched work that objectively looks at the subject matter, explores all sides of the issue, and makes good on its promise to provide the information “everyone needs to know” about animal rights. Waldau’s book will very likely become the animal rights bible and be an indispensable source for any serious discussion of the topic.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (January / February 2011)

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