

FIVE MINUTES: DEALING WITH ANTI-INCREMENTALISTS IN AR GROUPS By David Sztybel, Ph.D.

Sometimes people try to hijack animal rights groups, insisting they not support anti-cruelty laws, single-issue campaigns, and the like. How do you deal with these people? They can be disruptive, although they always tend to be in the minority, usually because common sense dictates that animals, like humans, have the right not to be tortured or treated cruelly, and anti-cruelty legislation makes progress with these rights.

I have a lot of experience debating these issues in professional writing, and also chairing animal rights group meetings. I am not suggesting that there is only one way of dealing with anti-incrementalists, but only offering some suggestions in case these prove to be of some use. If the antis demand that the animal rights group not support anti-cruelty legislation, you as chair or even just participant can propose, for example:

“Thank you very much for your interest in this group. I propose that we take a vote right now:

VOTE #1. Do most people here support anti-cruelty legislation, such as banning the cruelties in factory farming?

VOTE #2 Given that most support anti-cruelty legislation, let us have a vote on whether to discuss or debate these issues further at this group’s main meetings.”

Perhaps suggest to the anti-incrementalist(s) working *with* the group, so long as they do not try to disrupt its goals, emphasizing areas in common with the others, such as promoting veganism. Otherwise, wish them well. You *could* ask if anyone would be interested in forming a group that would meet separately from the main meetings of the group, devoted to whether we should be incrementalists or not. If the antis contest the vote, which you will almost certainly win, tell them that democracy has spoken. Try to ensure that the chair move on to the next order of business, even if discussing the incrementalist question was itself an item of business. The item has been dealt with democratically, and the group as a whole is ready to move on. Repeat bother later can be offset by forging a simple AR group constitution. Don’t take too long on this.

If the antis continue to be disruptive, and you want to reply to them with something to think about: (a) Humans have rights against cruel treatment and torture, and it would be speciesist to deny that animals have such rights too; and (b) All effective human rights progress in the U.S. has been incrementalist, and the vast majority of it consists of single-issue campaigns (drawn from source 3. listed next page). Replying is risky though, because it invites a whole debate, so I would only use these points if they try to discuss matters and you want to have something simple and final to say in return. Perhaps do not demand that they justify their own position in reference to your possible reply here, or you will embark on potentially days or more of discussing and debating, reading Gary Francione’s works, and so forth. Maybe just leave it with the vote not to discuss. You can offer the antis the form letters that accompany the present document, preferably **AFTER** the meeting. If they want to discuss further, there are places for that, unlike standard AR main meetings. You can refer them to Gary Francione’s web site, “The Abolitionist Approach,” that has a forum for ceaseless discussion of these issues with people who are sympathetic. (You can mention that by this referral you are not implying that you are not an abolitionist yourself.) They already are probably well aware of the site anyway, but it helps to be courteous. This referral is all that such a person needs to be supported in their beliefs. If they disrupt the meeting beyond this, then at any point you have the right to say, “We do not welcome disruptors of our meetings. Please leave.” You can vote on asking them to leave if need be.

I have experience with numerous animal rights groups dealing with anti-incrementalists. They have always been in the minority, have always demanded that groups conform to their goals, and insisted that only their way represents “true” animal rights. They have the potential to cause ongoing derailment, pointless discussions detracting from the mission of the group and to create bad feeling. They also mean to annihilate any obtaining of legislative relief against speciesist cruelty. In my experience they have not a single good reason in favour of the cruelty that they would in effect help to perpetuate. They are left with promoting cruelty for no good reason, in other words. You do not need to pretend to be *sympathetic* to their desire to prolong animal cruelty so far as the law-makers are concerned. You also should not be *neutral* about the issue of cruelty, which would be a betrayal of the animals. Of course, you are there primarily for the animals, and certainly not to further the machinations of cruelty, even indirectly. Still, antis should be treated with real respect, because they are not immoral *persons*: they are trying their best to do the right thing. That does not mean, however, that their actions, which would prolong cruelty, are morally right. Yet at the same time we must distinguish between judging the *person* and judging the *action*. Never insult them.

I will not pretend to summarize these issues here. If anyone is interested in further discussing minimizing harm to animals, you can, if you like, refer them as follows:

1. “Animal Rights Law” [an academic article defending anti-cruelty legislation; deals pretty thoroughly with objections] <http://szybel.tripod.com/arlaw.pdf>
2. “Animal Rights Law” [shortened version] <http://szybel.tripod.com/mirrorarlaw.pdf>
3. “Incrementalist Animal Law: Welcome to the Real World” [shows that **ALL** legislative rights progress for blacks, women, and children has been incrementalist, and that things could only be different for nonhuman animals if society values the nonhumans more than humans; also proves that most such politically successful laws, by far, were single-issue campaigns] <http://szybel.tripod.com/increm.pdf>
4. Pamphlet on the “anti-cruelty laws increase animal consumption” objection <http://szybel.tripod.com/pragmatism.pdf>
5. Blog, *On the Road to Liberation* [deals with many topics in the incrementalism versus anti-incrementalism debate] <http://davidszybel.blogspot.com>

This approach will allow the possibility of dealing with these people in about five minutes flat, unless (in rare cases) there happens to be a majority of them, in which case you may need to see that there are two separate groups. Do not expect to win them over, although this has happened. They can be quite dogmatic and sometimes very insulting. If they step up disruptive efforts in response to this strategy, the same procedures apply.

Please do not allow these people to disrupt the activities of the animal rights group if you can help it. It is important for the animals to give them what relief we can without waiting for some perfect animal rights law to come about some centuries from now. It is a part of animal rights activism, in my opinion, to resist these people and their speciesist disregard of animal suffering. For example, they will often claim that the insults of factory farming are “insignificant” anyway. Of course they would howl at being subjected to any single one of these torments. De-beaking a chicken is like ripping off a fingernail without anesthetics. I hope that you are able to deal with these potential disruptors quickly, courteously, and with a minimum of fuss so that the animal rights group can remain on track and prove to be very productive for the animals.