

## [Review] A Transnational History of the Australian Animal Movement, 1970–2015

---

**Gonzalo Villanueva, *A Transnational History of the Australian Animal Movement, 1970–2015*. Springer, 2017, 284pp.**

**Christine Townend**  
**Animal Liberation**

This is a book that every student of politics would enjoy reading, and indeed *should* read, together with every person who wishes to become an activist (not necessarily an animal activist). This is because the book discusses, in a very interesting and exacting analysis, different strategies used to achieve a goal; in this case, the liberation of animals from the bonds of torture, deprivation and cruelty. Gonzalo Villanueva clearly has compassion for animals, but he is careful to keep an academic distance in this thoroughly researched, scholarly book, which is nevertheless easy to read. After each chapter of the book there are many pages of references which indicate that the author has been careful to check his facts.

I should declare at this point that my work for animals is heavily represented in this book, as I was perhaps the original Australian campaigner opposed to factory farming, after reading Peter Singer's book, *Animal Liberation*, and after making a thorough investigation of conditions in New South Wales. The NSW RSPCA, although existing at the time of the founding of Animal Liberation in 1976, did not oppose factory farming; neither did the NSW Animal Welfare League. When I founded Animal Liberation, I wanted the organisation to be based on facts, and so I visited various 'farms' and wrote a book, *In Defence of Living Things* (Wentworth Press, 1980), plus some articles published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which helped launch Animal Liberation, NSW. I am also indebted to Milo Dunphy who was director of the Total Environment Centre and who taught me how to campaign, and how to start a

movement. It was he who initially suggested I should start a group, and offered the facilities of the TEC as a meeting point. I therefore have been particularly interested in monitoring Villanueva's book in order to check it for accuracy of research, and I should add that it passes the test with flying colours.

Villanueva's book is largely a discussion of the development of the animal rights movement in Australia, together with its links to overseas organisations. It is also a compendium on how people concerned about the treatment of animals can take action. As Villanueva himself explains in the preface:

This book looks at the politicisation of the human-animal relationship, how human actors have tried to change the status and condition of animals in human society, such as through the laws of a state or the beliefs and behaviours of people. Animals were unable to self-advocate for their interests, but humans could be a voice for animals. (4)

There are chapters dedicated to the early years of Animal Liberation's formation, and a chapter which discusses how Peter Singer wrote *Animal Liberation*. Duck Rescue is also discussed in the context of strategies. However, Villanueva fails to mention that Animal Liberation (NSW) was initially responsible for highlighting the cruelty of an open duck season, which was banned by the NSW Premier, Mr. Neville Wran at least two decades previously. It is rumoured that, because Mrs. Jill Wran, the wife of the Premier, was so supportive of animal rights, she was able to influence her husband. Animal Liberation (NSW) brought back 12 rotting, dead and stinking ducks from endangered species and lay them on the footpath in front of Parliament House. This resulted in our car smelling forever more of dead, rotting ducks, but it made a good point and was successful in bringing the duck 'open season' to a halt in NSW. Laurie Levy, to whom Villanueva dedicates pages 122 to 128, was fighting to have the duck hunting season abolished in Victoria at the time which Animal Liberation began its campaign and at the time of writing is still fighting against this atrocity in which many wounded birds are left to slowly die in great pain.

Villanueva discusses *Duck Rescue* as an example of a strategy: is it preferable to have direct action (that is, breaking into battery egg production units and pig production units) or is it more satisfactory to use the strategy of the ‘Three R’s’ developed by Henry Spira: that is, reduction, refinement and replacement? (Balls et al.) This was a point frequently argued at the annual national meetings of Animal Liberation. In fact, I believe that both methods need to be used: that is, documentation of cruelty by hidden cameras and entrance into animal production and slaughter units, if necessary, to record cruelty, together with negotiations with stakeholders. It seems that Villanueva concurs with this point, although he is careful not to commit himself.

Villanueva also devotes a chapter to Lyn White’s (Animals Australia) campaign against live exports. Without her exposé of the suffering of Australian sheep crammed together on ships sailing through the tropics, thrown into the boots of cars (being cooked alive in the heat), and slaughtered with a knife-cut to the throat without pre-stunning, people would not understand the terrible suffering that animals exported live are suffering. Villanueva points out that ‘Intellectuals like Singer are central to social movements. Intellectuals are those professionally engaged “in the production of ideas” (22). It is correct that without Animal Studies there would be little backing for the claims of animal protectionists. Verification from scientists is needed upon which to base arguments. For example, studies of poultry at Macquarie University have illustrated the intelligence of these birds (Newby), thus adding to the sum total of knowledge, which stipulates that such sentient creatures should not be kept in sterile cages with severed beaks to stop them pecking each other out of boredom and frustration.

Villanueva writes that ‘the 1960’s ... signalled the beginnings of a revival (in animal rights issues)’ (25). Ruth Harrison, in her book *Animal Machines* (1964), examined ‘factory farming’ and ‘shocked Britain’, igniting public debate. Villanueva, in connecting the current animal rights debate with its historical beginnings, shows the unravelling of this movement, together with the publication of Peter Singer’s ‘bible’ of the modern animal rights movement; *Animal Liberation* (1975). In the first chapter of *Animal Liberation*, Singer sets out his philosophical arguments for the moral status of animals, explains Villanueva: “The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment”, argues Singer, “it requires equal consideration.”

Singer contends that the capacity for suffering and enjoyment is ‘a prerequisite for having interests at all’(30).

In Villanueva’s concluding chapter he states that:

Almost forty years after Christine Townend called the founding meeting of Animal Liberation in Sydney, a new era dawned for the Australian animal movement. On Friday morning, 17 April 2015, the Animal Justice Party (AJP) and its candidate Mark Pearson – a former psychiatric nurse and Executive Director of Sydney’s Animal Liberation – secured the final, tightly contested seat in the New South Wales upper house. In doing so, AJP became the first political party dedicated to animal rights... From Peter Singer’s 1975 book *Animal Liberation*, to the humble organisations that emerged, the animal movement had grown. In the late 1970’s there were approximately 50 animal groups operating in Australia. Presently there are over 300 registered animal charities in Australia.(243)

Villanueva states that the animal movement (in itself) was ‘imbued with different morals, ideas, methods and challenges’(244). It is interesting to read his analysis of global animal activism; he claims that the modern animal movement has ‘failed to dramatically or seriously challenge the powerful industries and cultural institutions that used animals’(245). Yet despite this, ‘since the 1970’s the animal movement has contributed to altering the human-animal relationship, by gradually influencing and shifting social attitudes related to the use of animals... Concern for the rights and wellbeing of animals has been at the heart of an increasing number of people’s decisions to embrace vegetarianism and veganism’(247).

Reading this book has been inspiring for me, because it has enabled me to see a vision of the growth of a movement which can only move forward and gain more power and more influence as time progresses. Individual organisations will rise and fall, dependent upon their leaders and their funding, but the animal movement will succeed in growing stronger and more powerful as people come to understand that pigs and chickens are just as intelligent and sentient

as is the family dog. To use Tom Reagan's words, 'Every animal is the experiencing subject of a life and as such is worthy of respect' (144). Villanueva has shown how a movement can grow from small beginnings, and in so doing, leaves open the possibility for its continued growth.

## Works Cited

Balls, Michael, et al. *The Three Rs: The Way Forward*.

[http://animalstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=acwp\\_arte](http://animalstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=acwp_arte) Accessed 27 March 2018.

Newby, Jonica. 'Cheating Chickens.' *Catalyst*. ABC, 10 June 2010.

<http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/2922948.htm>

Regan, Tom. *The Case for Animal Rights*. University of California Press, 1983,