



# Evolution, Animal 'Rights', and the Environment

*Reichmann*

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Among the more significant developments of the twentieth century, the widespread attention given to 'rights issues' must surely justify ranking it somewhere near the top. Never before has the issue of rights attracted such a wide audience or stirred so much controversy. Until very recently 'rights' were traditionally recognized as attributable only to humans. Today, we increasingly are hearing a call to extend 'rights' to the nonhuman animal and, on occasion, to the environment.

In this book, James B. Reichmann, S.J., undertakes an investigation of the metaethical grounds of 'rights' theory, with special focus on the controversial issue of whether creatures other than humans can and should be considered true subjects of 'rights.' He contends that before assigning rights to this or that individual or group, whether human or not, we need to be very clear about *what* it is we are assigning, *to whom*, and *why*.

The book argues forcefully that the various recent efforts to build a case supporting animal and environmental 'rights' fail in their quest, and that any such effort resting on a Darwinian evolutionary base is likewise condemned to fail. In furtherance of this claim the author first investigates life phenomena, followed by a detailed comparative study of knowing, communicating and doing, as these are observed in the human and the nonhuman animal. This in turn is followed by an overview of diverse views advanced by contemporary environmental ethicists and animal 'rights' advocates, including Peter Singer, Tom Regan, J. Baird Callicott, Laura Westra, and Don E. Marietta, Jr.

Representative though doubtless provocative conclusions drawn from this study include the claims that: (1) Classic Darwinian theory provides no admissible premise from which to derive a theory of inherent, inalienable rights. (2) No satisfactory explanation of the origin of rights and obligation can derive save from within the context of natural law theory. (3) The human person alone unqualifiedly possesses rights. (4) The view that vegetarianism is an ethical mandate is neither compatible with the Christian world view, nor philosophically sound.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

James B. Reichmann, S.J., is professor emeritus of philosophy at Seattle University where he continues to

teach.

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