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## Fishing For Animal Rights In *The Cove*: A Holistic Approach to Animal Advocacy Documentaries

Carrie Packwood Freeman<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The Oscar-winning 2009 documentary *The Cove* serves as a thrilling and poignant advocacy tool promoting activism to save free-roaming dolphins off the coast of Japan from kidnapping, enslavement in marine parks, and slaughter for meat. This essay evaluates the ethical and social justice implications of *The Cove* not just for dolphins but for the animal rights movement as a whole, particularly in terms of how it could challenge the ethicality of humans killing any nonhuman animals for food. Strategic media recommendations are made for how animal protection advocates could better deconstruct the human/animal dualism that is at the root of speciesist exploitation and how they should avoid privileging one charismatic species at the expense of other animals.

**Keywords:** Animal rights, dolphin, meat, fish, humanism, speciesism, media.

Raising global awareness about the capture and slaughter of dolphins for meat and entertainment, *The Cove* (Stevens and Psihoyos, 2009) earns the honor of being the only nonhuman animal protection film to win an Academy Award for best documentary.<sup>1</sup> This professionally produced moral tale delivers drama, adventure, suspense, and even some laughs, serving as a strong advocacy tool for the rights of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) to maintain their lives and freedoms. Yet, while celebrating this important documentary as a panelist at an eco-film festival in Athens, Georgia, I began to question the extent to which *The Cove* served as a stepping-stone to promoting respect for the subject status of all sentient beings and for promoting animal rights more broadly. To examine this concern here, I discuss the documentary in terms of its deconstruction of the human/animal dualism, messages related to the ethicality of eating animals, appeals to human self-interest

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versus altruism for other animals, and implications for the animal rights movement and its strategies.

As a scholar of media and critical animal studies, as well as a vegan and animal rights activist, I use *The Cove* as a case study for promoting the broader idea that animal protection media are particularly beneficial when they seek ideological transformation in the speciesist human-animal relationship. Even when primarily advocating for a certain species, media-makers have the opportunity to help humans view all other animals, and the animal in themselves, more respectfully.

### What's Happening in *The Cove*?

*The Cove* records the quest of Earth Island Institute activist Ric O'Barry to stop fishermen's annual slaughter of over 20,000 dolphins in a cove in Taiji, Japan. In an "Oceans 11" high-tech spy adventure format, O'Barry and his team of American and European volunteers risk arrest setting up underwater cameras that end up successfully recording the slaughter so it can be exposed to the International Whaling Commission and the world for critique. A polemic, the documentary serves as an animal advocacy tool for a "Save Japan Dolphins" campaign. The film's ending includes this call to action: "The dolphin slaughter is scheduled to resume each September. Unless we stop it. Unless you stop it. Text dolphin to 44144 or go to [takepart.com/thecove](http://takepart.com/thecove)."

I share reviewer Laura Shield's (2010) admiration for the film's encouragement of grassroots activism on behalf of fellow animals; the film's perspective assumes viewers side with the animal activists (protagonists) and against the fishermen and Japanese government (antagonists) in opposing what is overtly portrayed as illegal and cruel killing. While nonfiction, documentaries are not journalism and can be partisan. So *The Cove's* subjectivity dispenses with journalistic attempts to neutrally portray both sides of the debate. I would argue that this advocacy orientation helps amend the commercial public sphere's deficit of respectful discourse toward nonhumans (Freeman, 2009; Freeman and Jarvis, 2012).

To clarify my ethical perspective, I believe animal *rights* in comparison to the more ubiquitous animal *welfare* viewpoint shares some similar goals, namely to reduce the suffering of nonhuman animals at the hands of humanity. But as a counter-hegemonic movement, animal rights also contains some key ideological distinctions from welfare, namely that nonhuman animals are not resources for human use, no matter how "humanely"

humans treat them (Francione, 1996). Similar to human rights, the basis for extending rights or liberties to nonhuman animals is their sentience and status as fellow subjects of a life (Regan, 1983). Peter Singer (1990) describes humanity's unjust discrimination of other species as *speciesism*, and post-humanist scholars have built upon this to indict *humanism*, more specifically, as the cause of animal exploitation (see Wolfe, 2003). I refer to humanism also as a "human superiority complex" – a socially constructed human privilege and moral exceptionalism that naturalizes and implicitly justifies institutionalized speciesism.

Promoting both rights and welfare, *The Cove* critiques dolphin *use*, not just killing, as the documentary takes viewers on O'Barry's moral journey from dolphin trainer to dolphin activist/liberator. He explains why he now seeks to dismantle the lucrative dolphin and whale captivity industry that he helped to produce with his 1960s television series *Flipper*, starring Kathy a bottlenose dolphin he trained. After Kathy committed suicide by drowning herself in front of O'Barry, demonstrating her free will and agency, he could no longer promote the myth that dolphins were willing and happy participants in their own captivity. *The Cove* reveals that aquarium employees worldwide come to buy certain marketable individuals from the dolphin communities trapped in the Taiji cove. Afterwards, the unclaimed dolphins are speared to death for meat sold in the Japanese market.

*The Cove* does a convincing and inspirational job of promoting rights for cetaceans, particularly dolphins, gorgeously showcasing them as they should be – swimming freely in their family units. It exemplifies the animal rights premise that sentient individuals deserve to be free from exploitation: "it's all about respect now, not exploitation" O'Barry declares in the film. But animal rights is narrowly applied here to one category of animal species. While the film values marine mammals *inherently* as individuals, non-mammalian marine animals are valued *instrumentally* as a species/group. For example, the film highlights wild fish's utility as human food and as a key species maintaining the vitality of the ocean ecosystem, but they are not valued as sentient individuals. This narrative choice has significant implications for limiting public perceptions of animal rights because, to win support for a specific campaign, filmmakers privilege one culturally-beloved, intelligent species as more deserving of rights than other animals. This distinction creates a moral hierarchy that downgrades the value of other nonhuman animals by comparison.

## The Human/ Animal Dualism and *The Cove*

As a movement to end speciesist discrimination of sentient beings, animal rights can be compared to human rights movements that strive to end the legally-sanctioned discrimination, objectification, and exploitation of women and racial or ethnic minorities based on arbitrary and unjust hierarchies (Francione, 1996; Singer, 1990; Spiegel, 1997). Animal rights activists in *The Cove* are implicitly similar to human rights activists in their willingness to take risks breaking laws (nonviolently) in order to save victims suffering injustice.<sup>ii</sup> Rhetorician Kevin DeLuca (1999) suggests that activism on behalf of nonhuman life be put in historical and cultural context of civil rights, as it helps to legitimate this newer cause. This follows sociologists' advice that counter-hegemonic activists frame their unfamiliar ideas using historically-familiar frames for increased cultural resonance (Polletta, 2006; Ryan, 1991; Tarrow, 1998). Specifically, linking animal rights with human rights can be seen as frame extension, a frame alignment process that bridges one cause with another similar cause so adherents of one can identify with the other (Benford and Snow, 2000). But *The Cove* did not take the opportunity to make direct comparisons between animal activists who free enslaved *dolphins* and abolitionists, such as Harriet Tubman, who freed enslaved *humans*.<sup>iii</sup> One way the comparison could be made is by referring to the fishermen's capture of dolphins as "kidnapping." Other animal protection documentaries, such as *Earthlings* (White and Monson, 2005) & *Behind the Mask* (Keith, 2006), more directly link activism on behalf of nonhumans to activism on behalf of humans (Freeman and Tulloch, 2012).

From a utilitarian standpoint, *The Cove* producers might not have wanted to risk insulting a largely humanist audience by discussing humans on par with "animals," as the latter term has been used to denigrate groups of people as subhuman, thereby "justifying" their denial of human rights. But I argue that, in support of broader animal rights goals, *The Cove* should have more directly confronted the human superiority complex that is the root of the species-based discrimination against dolphins and all nonhuman animals. In contrast, Katherine Perlo (2007) critiques comparisons to human rights as counter-productively relying on appeals to human supremacism to gain credibility for nonhumans. Similarly, Kelly Oliver (2010: 269) claims "to insist, as animal rights and welfare advocates do, that our ethical obligations to animals are based on their similarities to us reinforces the type of humanism that leads to treating animals—and other people—as subordinates." I too want to avoid reinforcing humanism, yet I advocate these comparisons of human-nonhuman social justice

*movements* here because they are equitable in terms of liberating sentient beings unjustly held captive against their will. And equating these comparisons promotes animal rights in a broader, universal sense by deconstructing the human/animal dualism.

The human/animal binary is culturally constructed and discursively maintained in many human cultures as a taken-for-granted “reality” that naturalizes speciesism (Freeman, 2010a). Binaries function as violent hierarchies, in Derridian (1976) terms, where one category is privileged by virtue of its opposition to the “lesser” category. Therefore, I contend this “us” and “them” dichotomy must, in large part, be actively deconstructed and blended in animal activist rhetoric. This should demonstrate the uncertainty of boundaries used to separate groups. This entails more than just convincing humanity that certain nonhuman animal species are cognitively like humans and possess subjective agency, but more importantly, that humans are like most animals in many positive respects. Yet in emphasizing the kinship of animality, activists should also foster respect for diversity (among and between species) to counteract a tendency to create hierarchies based on species who most resemble humans cognitively (Freeman, 2010a).

While *The Cove* doesn’t compare animal rights and human rights *movements*, the film does compare dolphins and humans in terms of their *cognition* in order to bolster audience respect for dolphins as sentient individuals. O’Barry says “it’s not about intelligence. It’s about consciousness. They are self-aware like humans are self-aware.” In addition to providing examples of dolphin consciousness, O’Barry and biologists explain how humans connect so easily with cetaceans because we are both so communicative. Whale song recordings sparked the “save the whale” campaign decades ago because it demonstrated whales’ sophisticated communication skills – a capability humans respect as it is one we value in ourselves as the source of our rationality. Several times the documentary claims that dolphins might be more intelligent than humans; therefore humanity needs to be humble enough to learn from them instead of teaching them tricks and human sign language.

Certainly, these examples of cetacean agency, rationality, and sentience offer useful moral rationales to extend a notion of rights toward nonhuman animal species. But in her review of *The Cove*, Shields (2010: 229) critiques this approach, saying “there is no need for the filmmakers to appeal to an anthropocentric worldview in which references to dolphins’ human-like behavior underwrite their right to liberation.” I agree that, by doing so, *The Cove* implies that cetaceans are special and *more* deserving of rights than other nonhuman animals who aren’t as humanlike.<sup>iv</sup>

Consider that when one of the documentary's villains, Morishita, Japan's delegate to the International Whaling Commission (IWC), says he has not ever heard a convincing reason why whales are so special, viewers are presumably supposed to view him as mean-spirited, profit-motivated, and culturally-backward. Many viewers would likely respond that whales are special because they feel and think on a par similar to humans and therefore should be privileged above less intelligent animals. The film leads viewers to this conclusion. However, I assert that Morishita, an animal exploiter, unwittingly expressed an animal rights sentiment by questioning why humanity privileges cetaceans over other animals. Morishita's challenge to species-based exceptionalism brings up a valid argument that could contest the legitimacy of *any* hierarchies among species; while this was not Morishita's likely intention, his comment could cause us to envision all animals as morally equal, ecologically-interdependent beings in a state of global environmental crisis. In this case, one could question the need for an International *Whaling* Commission instead of a more broadly construed International Commission on *Ocean Animals* (or fishing/hunting more generally).

Taken further, while Morishita's question about specialness was meant to exclude humans from the category of "animal," the documentarians could have used it as an opportunity to suggest that viewers be humble enough to question why we privilege our own species as more morally relevant than any other animal. For example, when the female IWC delegate from Antigua supports whale hunting on the basis that the species has replenished to the point where they are again fair game, we can rightly ask if it would be morally acceptable for her to discuss culling *human* animals based on such scientific, utilitarian calculations. The answer is surely not; and film viewers were not asked to see the humanist hypocrisy of a statement like hers. Instead, viewers presumably would critique her statement through a humanist lens, judging it as unethical primarily on the basis that it promotes economically-motivated cruelty to a special nonhuman animal that shares many "developed" traits of humankind.

Animal protection ethics are judged according to a humanitarian ethic where value is placed upon the life of each *individual*. But the Antigua delegate was using an ecological ethic where value is placed on the preservation of the *whole species*. Environmentalism is humanist in that it usually applies a humanitarian/individual ethic only to the human animal and an ecological/holistic ethic to all nonhuman species. In the latter case, individual nonhumans only become special when they are endangered, such as whales, in this case.<sup>v</sup>

## The Ethics of Eating Animals

*The Cove* brings marine mammals into the humanitarian/individualistic sphere of ethical concern, but it leaves all other sea animals under the holistic umbrella of environmental ethics. For example, filmmakers discuss cetacean lives in terms of their inherent value as sentient individuals and not as a food source, but they identify other sea-based animals as legitimate human food sources. The film segment on fishing does not discuss suffering, as the dolphin-killing segments do, and the fish are shown en masse as commodified bodies in the market warehouse or being graphically carved up. The film claims the issue is not that fish are killed but rather that the rate of fish-killing is unsustainable. Fish are discussed collectively in terms of being ecologically-valuable species rather than inherently-valuable individuals.

In contrast, the segments on dolphin-killing critique their individual loss of life and enslavement in marine parks. Consider this poignant moment when the female human free-diver, there as part of the rescue and surveillance team, weeps while describing the scene we witness where one wounded dolphin successfully struggles to get over the fishermen's barrier. The bloodied dolphin swims toward the activists, only to take a few last breaths before sinking to his/her death. For me personally, and many other viewers I suspect, it is the most heart-wrenching scene in the film because we make a personal connection with an individual, dying dolphin. The struggles of individual fish receive no such poignant profile.

Even though the film's focus is on supporting the right to life of dolphins, and the film understandably cannot take on all issues, the slaughter of other sentient sea animals, when discussed, deserves a similar rights-based critique. Instead, the film couches the issue of industrial fishing in ecological and public health terms. For example, overfishing is framed as a public health crisis for people globally since 70% of the human population reportedly depends on "seafood" as a major protein source. This killing is not framed as a problem or injustice for the fish themselves, as it is for the dolphins themselves. And when filmmakers promote eating "seafood," viewers understand it is not supposed to include dolphin or whale meat, although the reason for this exclusion is never morally justified. When filmmakers privilege human interests above nonhuman interests when framing fishing, and claim many humans need sea-based protein, then it opens the door to question whether people should sustainably eat cetaceans too in addition to fish.

If one wanted to argue that the documentary is more motivated by environmentalism than animal rights, then the solution would have been a holistic discussion of keeping the hunting of dolphins at ecologically-sustainable levels, not abolishing it. But it is primarily an animal protection film, not just an environmental film. So when it discusses an ecological crisis due to overfishing, viewers should be introduced to a vegetarian solution or a plea to decrease fish-eating, which would have supported animal rights not just dolphin rights.

The documentarians know that most people, including most Japanese, do not culturally-support eating dolphins, so they emphasize how dolphin meat is often mislabeled as other kinds of species, such as whale meat (more culturally-acceptable in Japan). This should presumably scare meat-eating viewers into worrying that they may inadvertently be purchasing dolphin flesh. Yet it also presents a missed opportunity to ask viewers whom it is they are consuming anytime they buy flesh wrapped in cellophane at the store. Even if meat-eaters know what *species* they are eating (whether dolphin, tuna, cow, chicken, etc.), they still often do not know whom they are eating in terms of which *individual* – someone with a family, with a story, and with a desire to live.

Humanity's practice of meat-eating, and the fact that the film fails to criticize or morally analyze it, poses a major source of tension in this animal protection film. For example, the hypocrisy of self-proclaimed "humane" cultures eating animals serves as comic fodder for the American satirical cartoon *South Park* (2009), which devotes an episode to the East versus West culture war over whale and dolphin hunting. The *South Park* episode critiques the irony of Americans denigrating the Japanese as angry murderers of dolphins and whales, yet viewing the Japanese as "normal" only when they switch to solely killing cows and pigs like Americans in the show's happy ending. Similarly, one news story on *The Cove* said the Japanese government culturally defends hunting and eating cetaceans because it is not any different from slaughtering pigs and cows, as practiced in the West (Kageyama, 2010).<sup>vi</sup> Despite the legitimacy of these cross-cultural critiques, *The Cove* does not condemn or discuss the human practice of farming or eating animals, which presents a missed opportunity to challenge animal enslavement and exploitation more broadly and to explain why cetaceans are deserving of special protection not afforded to other sea or land animals.

This bias against *non*-marine mammals goes unquestioned by the filmmakers and, likely, the largely Western audience probably because most Western nations prohibit trade in marine mammal parts but legalize the mass killing of fish and domesticated land animals. These laws enable species-specific industries to profit, which in turn shape cultural dietary practices accordingly. The legal, political, and economic factors that support a nation's

discourse on “meat” therefore influence the cultural meaning of whom that society sees as food. Put simply, it’s easier to sell Americans on dolphin and whale protection because Americans don’t eat them.<sup>vii</sup>

### Appealing to Self-Interest Versus Altruism

In the section of the movie devoted to meat, protagonists bolster the anti-dolphin-slaughter moral arguments with a utilitarian or human self-interest argument that dolphin meat bio-accumulates toxic levels of mercury and is therefore poisonous to humans. The film’s appeal to public health risks characterizes the Japanese government and fishing industry as greedy and socially irresponsible, and it also ensures that if some audience members (presumably of Japanese descent) do not care about dolphin lives, maybe they will be interested in stopping the dolphin slaughter to save their own lives or families.

Not surprisingly, antagonists in *The Cove* also use appeals to human self-interest to bolster their pro-hunting arguments. For example, the IWC representative and Taiji fishermen both argue that cetaceans are depleting the human food supply of fish, describing dolphins and whales as competition or “pests” who threaten the economic interests of the fishing industry. Appealing to humanism, IWC representatives employ populist rhetoric claiming the fishing of whales is necessary to keep small fishing communities from starving.<sup>viii</sup> *The Cove* counters the fishermen’s argument by demonstrating that it is humans (especially the Japanese fishing industry), not cetaceans, who are the cause of decreases in fish populations.

To defend animal rights in this instance, it would be useful here for the film’s protagonists to emphasize an altruistic or justice-oriented appeal, stating that the human animal is morally obligated to share the earth’s resources with other species. But the film’s activists, like many animal activists, use anthropocentric appeals to human health and wellbeing<sup>ix</sup> – what Perlo (2007) and Crompton & Kasser (2009) critique as “extrinsic” appeals. Similarly, I contend that the legitimate utility of the extrinsic or self-interested appeals should not outweigh the authenticity of the altruistic or intrinsic appeals in priority, as animal rights should maintain its integrity as an other-directed moral movement for social justice (Freeman, 2010b). Perlo (2007: para 6) notes the aim of animal rights is a moral paradigm shift:

What is truly needed to free billions of animals is a *qualitative transformation* in people’s thinking. Without a *moral paradigm shift*, the public may never be

motivated to overcome either its own self-interest in using animals or governments' aggressive protection of animal-abusing industries.

To usher in this moral transformation in speciesist worldviews, *The Cove* could emphasize ethical principles of rights and avoidance of unnecessary harm. For example, even if humans were in competition with dolphins for fish to some extent, it could be noted that dolphins have the right to survive and have no choice but to eat fish, while many humans often have other, non-violent options for survival, such as plant-based proteins (making that the more ethical food choice). One could allude to Peter Singer (1990), noting that it is speciesist to privilege humans' minor or non-life-threatening interests over the major interests of other animals, in this case over sea animals' interest in surviving and having a food supply. Populist arguments on behalf of working-class human communities, where legitimate, become less speciesist and more ethically justifiable if certain humans must subsist on some animal flesh for their own survival, as must some other omnivorous (and carnivorous) animals.<sup>x</sup> Promoting this perspective would help to deconstruct culture/nature and human/animal dichotomies as is necessary for widespread ethical transformation.

### Effects of the Film for Audiences & Activists

In the last line of the film, O'Barry explains his motivation: "I am focusing on that one little body of water where that slaughter takes place. If we can't stop that, if we can't fix that, forget about the bigger issues. There's no hope." Yet, several years after the popular film's release and its Oscar award receipt, positive media coverage, and massive petition campaign, the dolphin killing still continues (see [www.savejapandolphins.org](http://www.savejapandolphins.org) for an update).<sup>xi</sup> Pragmatically, it makes sense as an activist to focus on one egregious practice you have a chance of stopping (Singer, 1998), in this case the globally-unpopular practice of brutally killing highly intelligent, sentient mammals beloved by most human cultures. So I agree with O'Barry's sentiment that if we cannot even save the nonhuman animals that people *say* they most respect and admire, there appears to be little hope for the environmental and animal rights movements' goals of saving other species that humans either dislike, profit from using, or don't care about.

That is precisely why I argue activist campaign goals need to be broader in terms of changing *worldviews* about ourselves as animals rather than just changing *behaviors* toward

certain animals.<sup>xii</sup> This is not to say that there cannot be targeted campaigns that focus on saving particular species, but the campaigns should be constructed so as to additionally cultivate a nonspeciesist ideology. In the case of *The Cove*, the documentarians' choice to privilege marine mammals as subjects while (or by) reinforcing prejudices about fish as objects, harms the animal rights movement as a whole. The *Cove's* focus on cetaceans reinforces a humanist bias, or what Bekoff (2007) calls cognitive speciesism, that positions humans (and mammals most like us) at the top of an imaginary evolutionary hierarchy of moral relevance. Granted, strategists may make a legitimate utilitarian argument that this reform-oriented path utilizing bridge species might eventually usher in widespread respect for all other animal species.<sup>xiii</sup> But this conclusion is uncertain and can also have its drawbacks. If the cause of the exploitation and objectification of nonhuman life is humanism, then this unjust bias must be overtly challenged just as colonialism, patriarchy, and white privilege have begun to be more openly challenged.

The question then becomes whether *The Cove* could have been as rhetorically persuasive and as acclaimed if it had, in addition to primarily defending dolphins, spent some time also challenging the human/animal dualism and questioning the unnecessary hunting and killing of any animals. It is true that mainstream audiences might shy away from a film that is more openly "animal rights." But how is the notion of rights for nonhuman animals to be embraced as a legitimate social justice issue if even animal protection films ignore or diminish it? It does not make strategic sense for this under-funded movement to address the myriad types of animal and habitat exploitation issues as separate, individual species-based campaigns when, instead, every animal or environmental campaign (whether reformist or abolitionist) could also cultivate an animal rights ethical perspective more holistically.

But the activism on this issue still has time to evolve in the direction I suggest. *The Cove* produced a spin-off nonfiction television series *Blood Dolphins* on the Discovery Channel's Animal Planet cable network, featuring O'Barry and his son saving dolphins and working with coastal cultures worldwide (see <http://animal.discovery.com/tv/blood-dolphins>). It is in the vein of Animal Planet's popular *Whale Wars* reality series that chronicles the exploits of the Sea Shepherd animal activists as they combat Japanese whaling ships. It is no coincidence that all of Animal Planet's reality series whose themes might be construed as animal rights or protection-based are geared towards species who are already privileged by mainstream American society, such as cetaceans and companion animals (see all the "Animal Cops" shows featuring the ASPCA officers). When Animal Planet or some more progressive media producers decide to respectfully chronicle animal activism on behalf of fish and free-

roaming land animals (including less beloved animals such as reptiles, rodents, and amphibians), and *all* animals exploited in industry (with themes on anti-vivisection, anti-farming, anti-hunting, and anti-captivity), then it will signal that the rights of *all* animals are being taken seriously as a moral issue and humanist worldviews are evolving.

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I would like to dedicate this article to the memory of ecofeminist scholar and activist Marti Kheel (1948 - 2011).

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> The Oscar-winning environmental/nature documentaries *March of the Penguins* (2005) and *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) could also possibly count as animal protection.

<sup>ii</sup> Although, in the film, nonviolent law-breaking to obtain evidence is used as a last resort after trying to apply pressure, through legal avenues, to no avail.

<sup>iii</sup> To be more culturally-inclusive, iconic Japanese freedom fighters could be referenced in addition to referencing American human rights heroes.

<sup>iv</sup> Evolutionary biologist Marc Bekoff (2007) argues against the cognitive speciesism inherent in referring to animals as higher or lower in relation to humans, as it mistakenly implies humans are the epitome of evolutionary progress. He contends that species evolve to meet survival needs unique to them; species don't all evolve on a single, linear trajectory where the human end of the spectrum represents an ultimate developmental end goal.

Yet I recognize the paradox that mainstream animal rights philosophy itself could be perceived as excluding some animals (such as some invertebrates) who don't appear to qualify as fully sentient or conscious subjects. All identity-based movements rely on boundaries and exclusions, even though they work on extending current boundaries to incorporate new groups, extending opportunities for equality. It's possible that a feminist ethic of care (Kheel, 2008) or phenomenological ethics (Oliver, 2010), both of which base ethical concern on inter-species relationships and emotional and empathetic experiences, can overcome some of the limitations which come with identity-based approaches.

<sup>v</sup> For ethical scholarship on animal rights and environmental protection philosophies (similarities and distinctions), see Kheel, 2008; Regan, 2002; Taylor, 1993; and Varner, 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> While I support cultural relativism for its goal of being open-minded, understanding of diversity, and aware of cultural bias, I defend the filmmakers' right to critique another culture's harmful practices. Most rights movements (for example, consider the UN as a supporter of human rights), are based on *universal* principles advocating that a marginalized subject, in any culture, be provided the fair opportunity to live free from unnecessary/unwarranted harm. Where any society crosses that line, unfairly discriminating against or exploiting a subject group, they open themselves up to legitimate critique from those who seek to protect the marginalized subjects (especially when those subjects cannot protect themselves).

Consider that in the last chapter of *Nature Ethics*, author Marti Kheel (2008) promotes veganism as an ethical ideal and is called to defend this ideal against claims of cultural relativism and cultural imperialism within her field of ecofeminism. She clarifies first that "not all cultural practices are morally defensible" and also that "advocating ideals is not the same as seeking to impose one's beliefs on other people and other cultures" (p.236). While acknowledging her privileged position in Western culture, she also notes that certain non-Western cultures (both dominant and counter-cultural) have promoted ethical vegetarianism throughout history, likely without being charged with cultural insensitivity.

I would add that because we humans exist in an ecologically-interdependent global web of life, and nonhuman animals are a fundamental part of that fragile web, we cannot limit our concern to national borders. But we can encourage all human cultures to find their own culturally-resonant ways to protect life and relate fairly with the nonhuman world.

<sup>vii</sup> However, Western society does allow the trading of *live* dolphins and whales for the captive entertainment industry (aquariums), a practice *The Cove* openly critiques.

<sup>viii</sup> The Canadian government and fishing industry use a similar populist and quasi-ecological argument to justify killing marine mammals (seals in their case). See <http://www.seashepherd.org/seals/seal-hunt-facts.html>

<sup>ix</sup> For example, Freeman's (2010b) study of vegan advocacy noted some reliance on anthropocentric appeals to economics, disease-prevention, sex-appeal, hunger relief, or a clean environment.

<sup>x</sup> In supporting veganism as an ideal, Kheel (2008) acknowledges the diet may be difficult for some cultures based on "environmental and climatic factors" (p. 236).

<sup>xi</sup> It is hard to definitively quantify "effects" of the film in terms of efficacy. I do not want to belittle its positive impact, as the hunt might stop in years to come, perhaps quietly after the hype dies down, or perhaps the negative attention will cause other fishing cultures to avoid killing cetaceans for fear of similar bad press.

<sup>xii</sup> See reports from the WWF's change strategist Tom Crompton. [http://www.wwf.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/campaigning/strategies\\_for\\_change/](http://www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/campaigning/strategies_for_change/) He and his co-researchers advocate that the environmental and animal protection movements should focus their campaigns on promoting core, respectful values and altruistic identity rather than extrinsic appeals to human self-interest or small, painless behavioral changes.

<sup>xiii</sup> This may be especially salient in the legal/judicial route to gaining personhood status for nonhuman animals, as it relies on expanding notions of human rights. See Wise, S. (2000), *Rattling the cage: Toward legal rights for animals*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.