

Ethics into Action by Peter Singer 1998

Background

I met Henry Spira on several occasions. On our first meeting, he attended the annual national meeting of the American Society of Animal Science. He brought his organic produce with him and he said he would sleep on a park bench. He lived a simple life in NY City in a rent-controlled apartment (inexpensive). He was an activist vegetarian searching for an Animal Scientist that was sympathetic to his interests in farm animal welfare. He told us he thought the greatest suffering in the world was in the billions of farm animals. He was willing to make incremental improvements in the plight of animals. This book, by his friend and colleague Peter Singer, chronicles Henry's life and the methods that he found effective at causing positive change in animal agriculture and in other animal issues.

Questions to answer before class

1. What philosophical view did Henry take? Were his views more utilitarian or rights based?
2. What is blackmail? Is it legal? Discuss how Henry used freedom of speech to affect change in food companies.
3. Which major 'campaigns' did Henry work on? Which were more successful?
4. What is the McLibel case? What was its outcome?
5. What can you find that is interesting on the web about Henry Spira?

Question for class time

1. What was Henry's approach to affecting change?
2. Was Henry a utilitarian?
3. What is the reason, do you speculate, behind the name of his organization: Animal Rights International?
4. Why did Henry's approach not work so well on commercial farms?
5. Food retailers (fast food, casual dining, and grocery stores) want to protect their brand and their image. How have they responded to campaigns against them?
6. What should food retailers do to address farm animal welfare?
7. Henry is quoted as saying: "If you see something that's wrong, you've got to do somethings about it" Do you agree? In all cases?