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Governing Animals: Animal Welfare and the Liberal State by Kimberly K. Smith

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Smith, Kimberly K. *Governing Animals: Animal Welfare and the Liberal State*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xxvi + 207 pages. Cloth, \$34.95.

Kimberly K. Smith, professor of political science and environmental studies at Carleton College in Northfield, Minn., explores the question of whether the government of a liberal society, like that of the United States, has a legitimate role in regulating human beings' treatment of animals. Her analysis is based primarily in political philosophy, such as John Locke's definitive defense of liberalism, individualism, and limited government. Smith courageously takes on a difficult task. Americans' consumption of dairy products and, even more significantly, meat has exploded in the past century. The resulting state of animal husbandry causes millions of animals to be raised, confined in abysmal conditions, and slaughtered each year to ensure an ample supply of such items as Big Macs to feed an insatiable American appetite for animal flesh. Smith fully recognizes the futility of any animal advocates' efforts to use government coercion to interrupt the operations of the meat industry. The inevitable failure of such a public policy would simply discredit the animal activists and the government. Sensibly, Smith argues against any such approach.

Smith is also well aware of another human habit: the development by many people of loving relationships with pets, primarily dogs and cats. Children become very sensitive to their pets' needs and desires and to the forms of communication of which pets are capable. Curiously, once the children have matured, many of them as adults lose the capacity to tune in to pet animals' thoughts and feelings. Smith explains: ". . . [A]nimals' 'inability' to communicate with us is not a natural fact; it is an artifact of our domination over them" (p. 124). Commonly, adults who have *retained* their childhood attachment to animals are often portrayed as eccentrics or deranged mystics. ". . . [A]nimal representatives [often say that they] need to emphasize their professionalism [and] their willingness to work within the system and to speak the common policy language of bureaucratic efficiency and scientific rationality" (p. 118). These politic individuals have certainly brought about incremental change in successfully advocating for animal-welfare laws. Many other animal-rights activists—feeling a desperate need to address such matters as the slaughter of animals to satisfy humans' desire for meat-based diets and the torture and destruction of animals in university and commercial research laboratories—contrarily resort to physical confrontations and vandalism, unwilling as they are to reconcile themselves to the harm inflicted on animals, to await the enlightenment of humans about the suffering that animals acutely experience, and to anticipate what Smith projects as the inevitable development of cloned meat products that will obviate the practice of raising and slaughtering farm animals.

Neither violent demonstrations nor government crackdowns will succeed, Smith explains pragmatically. Instead, she is convinced that the remedy will arise from the efforts of "professional, educational, religious, and advocacy organizations . . . [to] provide the creative energy needed to guide the evolution of human/animal relations" (p. 154). In the meantime, until human beings can overcome the conviction that our ability to subjugate animals proves our right to exploit and eat them, the animals, I suppose, will just have to be patient.

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