

# Gary Francione Interview on WTJS

Gary Francione appeared the Mike Slater Show on WTJS in Tennessee. This interview took place on July 30, 2008.

A big round of thanks go out to Susan Tapper for transcribing this interview from its original, audio format (see [part I](#) and [part II](#), 17 minutes total). If anybody out there is interested in volunteering to transcribe additional interviews, please [contact me](#).

**Mike Slater:** We've been talking about this interview and your book for the last couple of days. If you could give us some background on the Great Ape Project, also the latest developments on the situation in Spain and also where you stand on this development.

**Gary Francione:** Well, the [Great Ape Project](#) was a book that was developed in 1993 that involved a number of people – lawyers, philosophers, cognitive sociologists, etc. The purpose of the book was to say that apes are very, very similar to humans and so they ought to be given greater moral or legal consideration. That book resulted in a campaign to try to get greater legal and legal protection for the non-human great apes, which resulted in New Zealand and now Spain granting greater protection for apes.

Where I stand, basically is yes, I'm obviously in favor of that, but I don't really draw a distinction between a non-human great ape and a dog or a rat. In my judgement, with respect to all sentient beings, those of us who are opposed to violence, and I would imagine that that is most of the people in your audience, who endorse some sort of Judeo-Christian ethic, would have to agree that its wrong to inflict suffering and death on sentient beings. We ought not to do so. And so my view for purposes of that moral norm, the non-human great apes are no different from dogs or pigs or chickens or whatever.

**Mike:** Do find a distinction between great apes and humans?

**Gary:** Well, of course there is a distinction. There is a distinction between me and you. The question is whether or not the distinction is relevant. There are distinctions, sure.

**Mike:** How about in the court of law. Should there be legal distinctions between the rights of a human and the rights of apes in the court of law?

**Gary:** I know there are some people out there who talk about giving most of the legal rights that humans have to non-humans. I'm not sure I even understand what that means Mike, to be honest with you because there are so many interests that you and I have that are protected by rights that non-human animals don't have. And so, what do we mean? Are we talking about rights to vote? Rights to drive cars? Rights to free speech? That would be crazy.

I think its better conceptually to think of this less as a matter of rights and more as a matter of what are our moral obligations as moral beings in this universe. What are our obligations and how ought we to treat the other sentient beings with whom we share this planet.

**Mike:** And you believe that no animals should be used for the economic benefit of human beings?

**Gary:** Yeah, let me give you an example that I think illustrates the point. Last year there was quite a bit of controversy about Michael Vick the football player who was involved with dog fighting and people were condemning him. There was article after article and news program after news program condemning Michael Vick. And I wrote [an editorial](#) for the *Philadelphia Daily News* in which I said that I clearly and strongly disagree with what Michael Vick did in terms of the dog fighting business, but how is Michael Vick any different from the rest of us? Michael Vick likes to sit around watching dogs fight. And most of the rest of us like to sit around the barbeque pit roasting cows, pigs and chickens. And the bottom line is – his justification for what he does is no better than our justification for what we do.

We do not need to eat animals and indeed, it is 2008 – nobody maintains that we need to eat animal flesh or animal products to be healthy. Indeed, an increasing number of mainstream healthcare people are maintaining that it's detrimental to human health. Furthermore, animal agriculture is destroying the planet.

The best justification we have, Mike, for killing and inflicting suffering on 12 billion animals every year in this country alone for food, not including fish, is that they taste good. We enjoy, we get pleasure from it. How is that any different from what Michael Vick is doing when he sits around watching dogs fight? So my bottom line is – everybody in your listening audience, most people I would imagine, the overwhelming number of people would agree with the proposition that it's wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering or death on animals.

Now we could have an interesting philosophical discussion about the intricacies of what necessity means, but the bottom line is, if it means anything, it means we can't inflict suffering or death simply because it creates pleasure, amusement or convenience for us. Because, if we have that exception, the exception swallows the rule. But yet, the overwhelming amount of pain, suffering and death that we inflict on non-human animals in this world is simply a matter of our pleasure, our amusement, our convenience. It's really not a matter of rights. It's a question of what are our moral obligations? And wouldn't the world be a better place if we didn't tolerate that level of violence?

**Mike:** We are going to touch all those again, I want to leave a lot of those questions up to the Slater Raiders 423-0139 is the number. You can call in right now and talk with Professor Francione. So, no animals for economic benefit? What about working animals like police dogs? Do you support the use of police dogs? Bomb-sniffing dogs?

**Gary:** Well, in many ways my primary issue is the use of animals for food, because that is the overwhelmingly prevalent form of exploitation in the world. But I'm not in favor of using any domestic animals at all for anything. My view is, if we took animals interests seriously, we would stop bringing domestic animals into existence altogether. Because we really don't have the right, the moral justification for doing that, and we wouldn't be using animals for that purpose. Obviously, that is a small number of animals and it is an extremely minor use in the grand scheme of things. So it's really a purely philosophical issue. But I would say, if you asked me and that's what you did, my view is no, we shouldn't be doing that.

However, the thing that I focus most on is the eating of animal flesh, the eating of dairy, the eating of eggs, things like that. That is the prevalent form of exploitation, and I think that's the thing we really need to be thinking about.

**Mike:** That makes sense and I want to talk about eating animals too, but I just want to get you down on this... so, no police dogs, no horses? So cowboys have to walk? Dolphins are used by the Navy...

**Gary:** Cowboys wouldn't need those horses if they weren't roundin' up those cows, Mike (*both laugh*).

**Mike:** That's a good point (*both laugh*).

**Gary:** So if the cows weren't eaten, the cowboys wouldn't be roundin' them up. So the cowboys wouldn't have to worry about it.

**Mike:** We've got to fight the cowboys and Indians now. And also working dogs for the blind and the hearing impaired? So none of those?

**Gary:** Again...

**Mike:** I know that's not your main concern.

**Gary:** It's not high on my list. No, I'm not in favor... Look – I have four rescued dogs. I had seven, but three died. We get these dogs from the shelter that are going to be killed, because they have health problems or behavioral problems. I love my dogs. You won't find anyone on the planet who loves dogs more than I do. But the bottom line is – if there were two dogs left in the world and it were up to me whether we continue to allow them to breed so that we could have pets, the answer would be no.

**Mike:** OK, 423-0139 is the number if you want to talk with Professor Francione. I want to talk about the nutrition aspect that you talk about because you are a vegan and you contend that people don't need to eat animals to be healthy.

**Gary:** I don't just contend that, as far as I know, nobody maintains that, including the United States government maintains that you need to eat flesh or animal products. The

only thing is that if you don't eat animal products you need to have B-12 in your diet. Whether one gets B-12 from meat or whether one gets B-12 from other sources, one has to get the B-12. I've been a vegan for 26 years Mike, and I can't remember the last time I had a cold.

**Mike:** Well you certainly don't need to eat meat to live, but if you want to live a perhaps more healthy life... how about this – the Olympics are in two weeks. Do you think any vegans are competing in the Olympics?

**Gary:** Yes, I know that there are vegans competing in the Olympics.

**Mike:** Really? Do you think that Michael Phelps who is going to win eight gold medals – you think he doesn't eat a chicken every once in a while?

**Gary:** I don't know about particular people. I do know that I read something that there were vegans who were involved in the Olympics and again, the statistics Mike speak for themselves. People who don't eat animal products are, as a general matter, healthier. Obviously you have to take care to eat a balanced diet, to eat the proper foods. You can't just eat soy ice cream or lettuce leaves or something like that. Vegans have lower rates of cancer, they have lower rates of hyper-tension, they have lower cholesterol. So, it's not clear to me at all, as a matter of fact what is clear to me is that a vegan diet is much, much healthier for you.

**Mike:** 423-0139 is the number. Right now we are talking with Professor Francione from Rutgers University, author of [\*Animals as Persons\*](#). 423-0139, 1390 TJ105 Cliff from Mylin, you're on the phone with Professor Francione. Go ahead sir.

**Cliff (caller):** I just got to question, he keeps using the term “moral obligations” that we have towards the sentient beings, and how there are imperatives that make it right. I'm curious as to where he gets these moral obligations from. Who sets these moral obligations? Mine are set by the Bible and by God, and certainly God thinks it's OK to eat these things.

**Gary:** Well you know Cliff, I'm not sure what in the Bible you are referring to. Because if you look at the first book of Genesis, when God creates the world, and gives the world to humans, and says “here, I give you the world, and I give you the herb and the seed to eat” It is only when there is a rupture in the covenant, when there is a breach in the covenant between God and man and man is ejected from the Garden of Eden, that man begins to kill. That killing becomes a reality.

So, I'm not a particularly religious person, but I think if you are a religious person you've got to take seriously what goes on in the Bible. And what goes on in the Bible is, in the beginning, in the situation where God and man are united in grace, before there is original sin – there is no killing, there is no death, there is no violence. If Jesus Christ means anything, the whole idea of the rejection of violence – Jesus was violently opposed to violence. So, again, I am not a religious person, Cliff, and I do not mean to in any way

insult your religious beliefs, I respect them. But I think it is important to not jump to the conclusion that God has created a world in which God puts a “stamp of approval” on massive violence. Right now, we live in a world, Cliff, where there are a lot of people who think that violence against other humans is something that God likes. And I suggest to you that if there is anything that’s clear in the New Testament it is that God does not like violence.

**Mike:** Professor Francione, we have to take a hard break. Can you join us for one more segment?

**Gary:** I sure can.

**Mike:** I appreciate that sir. As soon as we started talking about the religious aspect, the phones just blew up. I’ve got an email here from Keith that says, “you quoted Judeo-Christian values, you might want to remember that the Lord gave us dominion over all the animals”... got a bunch of emails, got a bunch of phone calls, I appreciate your sticking around, sir.

**Gary:** ... domination, Mike.

**Mike:** We’ll see what the Slater Raiders have to say.

### ***STATION BREAK***

**Mike:** From Rutgers University and author of *Animals as Persons*, Professor thanks for talking with us today and sticking around.

**Gary:** Sure, my pleasure.

**Mike:** So we are talking about the rights of animals and if humans have the right to even eat animals or use them for any economic benefit at all.

**Gary:** At the break while you were listening to the Wall Street Report, I went and I got my Bible and I’m looking at [Genesis, chapter 1 verse 29](#), “and God said, see I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of the earth and every tree whose fruit yields seed to you it shall be for food.” So there’s no eating of animals in the Garden of Eden. It is only when there is a rupture between God and humans, and humans are driven from the Garden of Eden as a result of the fall from grace.

**Mike:** Slater Raiders 423-0139, we have one more line open. I know we’re going to take some calls on that comment. I appreciate that Professor, getting that real quick. OK, let’s go ahead and take Josh right now. 1390 TJ105, Josh, how are ya’ doin’ this morning?

**Josh (Caller):** I’m doing good.

**Mike:** You're on the phone with Professor Francione, go ahead sir.

**Gary:** Hi Josh.

**Josh:** Hi Professor, I was wondering how this philosophy would extend to mosquitoes, cockroaches and the pests that we spray for on the vegetables that we'd need to produce a lot more of on a fully vegetarian diet?

**Mike:** Thanks, Josh.

**Gary:** That's a good question. There's a question – the animals that we routinely exploit every day – the chickens, the pigs, the cows, the fish – those animals we know are sentient that is they are able to feel pain, they are perceptual awareness. There is a big question as to whether or not insects are sentient; some entomologists say yes, some say no. That's an open question, number one. Number two; there are many non-lethal ways that we can use to control insects that are eating plants. So obviously, we should try to do that. But let me say this to you – you are assuming Josh, that if we all ate plants, that would result in more plants being planted or more vegetables being planted. And the answer is, that's not true. Because right now, every time you eat a steak that weighs a pound, you are eating between 6-12 pounds of plant protein because of the conversion ratios. So we actually feed multiple times more plant food to animals that we are going to eat than plant food that we would consume directly. If we all consumed that plant food directly, we'd actually consume fewer plants than we are presently consuming in the form of meat.

**Mike:** Even if cows eat grass, can we eat the plants that cows are eating?

**Gary:** Very few cows are doing range grazing anymore. They are eating grains, Mike.

**Mike:** That we could be eating.

**Gary:** Yeah, sure.

**Mike:** Anthony called in during the break and wanted to know if there was enough plant food for us all to eat in the world.

**Gary:** Absolutely. We all assume that if we were all vegans, we'd be eating zillions of times more plants. The answer is if we were all vegans we'd be eating many pure plants. Let me give you numerical figure to keep in your head. It takes  $\frac{1}{4}$  acres to feed one omnivore for a year, whereas 1 acre can feed 20 vegans for a year. So just think about that ratio. It's also not just land, the question was about plants. But if you talk about the ecological impacts of an animal based agriculture, it takes like a thousand times more water to produce flesh than it does to produce wheat. The conversion ratio for resources is astronomical when you are talking about meat based agriculture.

**Mike:** Professor Francione, I am so sorry, we are hitting the top of the hour and we have to run. You are the author of, [\*Animals as Persons\*](#). Where can people pick up that book?

**Gary:** They can get it at Amazon, they can get it at their bookstores, and today is the last day of the sale on the Columbia University Press website. Their website is selling all of their animal books at 50%, so they can get a hard cover copy for \$20, and believe me Mike, that's a deal.

**Mike:** There you go – Professor Francione from Rutgers University. Thanks so much for talking with us sir. We appreciate it.

**Gary:** Thank you very much Mike.