Although the Editorials section is usually reserved for the editors and the Comment section is devoted to the views of other contributors, there is a slightly different arrangement in this issue. An editorial by Michael W. Fox is followed by a reply from Jim Mason, author of the Comment article entitled “The Politics of Animal Rights: Making the Human Connection,” which appeared in our May/June 1981 issue. Because Mr. Mason’s piece is an invited response to Dr. Fox’s editorial, we felt that it would be most effective and true to the goal of the Journal to promote dialogue if we presented them together. — Ed.

**Animal Welfare, Rights and ‘Liberation’**

Michael W. Fox

A distinction which is more than mere semantics needs to be made between certain philosophical and political trends in the humane movement. The historical basis of the movement is founded upon the morality of promoting kindness toward all creatures: reverence for all life. This approach has been strengthened by the integration of ecological, or eco-ethical principles and by the emerging interdisciplinary science of animal welfare. Furthermore, the movement has been enriched by the scholarship of moral philosophy, including the limited but useful concept of animal ‘rights.’

This concept is useful because it focuses attention upon animals’ interests (social, emotional, behavioral and other needs) instead of upon perceived cruelty and the wrongdoer. This latter moralistic approach, which at best, helps to clarify our moral obligations toward animals, at worst appears as a judgment against those who exploit animals. This puts people—farmers, scientists and others—on the defensive and fails to establish the common ground vital to the process of reform. Addressing our moral obligation to treat animals humanely and to cater to their basic needs, shifts the focus to where it should be: upon the animal.

Animal rights philosophy, properly articulated, can also help in this regard, but not when it is presented in an absolute or idealistic way. For example, while we have a moral obligation to treat all creatures humanely, and while it may be argued that they have a natural right to humane treatment, it should be made quite clear that not all rights are absolute. If it were, and society accepted it as such, then animal shelters would be swarmed with surplus cats and dogs, and society could not afford to house and feed them for the rest of their lives. Similarly, the postulation of an absolute right not to be eaten is unrealistic and, at this time in history, counterproductive. Promoting vegetarianism on the sole basis that animals have a right not to be eaten will not aid communication with producers and others involved in the livestock industry, or with hunters and fishers. (Also, animal suffering is sometimes unavoidable, but morally justified, in at least a few research studies which are of over-riding, direct benefit to both humans and nonhumans.)

Vegetarianism has nothing directly to do with how farm livestock are treated: look at the plight of livestock in vegetarian India for example. In many parts of the world, raising livestock is an essential part of ecologically sound food production. Global vegetarianism could be ecologically disastrous. The case for farm animal welfare is weakened and clouded when vegetarianism is brought in. However, used selectively, the injunctions not to eat meat (or to reduce one’s intake considerably) may be an effective strategy with considerable economic and ecological validity, especially in the United States.

I see the animal liberation front, with its abolitionist posture and idealistic distortion of animal rights philosophy (e.g., animals have a right not to be eaten) as a potentially counterproductive element in the animal welfare movement. Actions of confrontation such as raids on research laboratories, letting confined farm animals loose and ‘eco-guerilla’ tactics to stop hunters, sealers and whalers are effective in gaining public awareness and sympathy, but public ridicule will follow if such activities are not followed up with dialogue between opposing factions and the setting of realistic goals. Confrontation alone is usually the result of political frustration, but by itself, it can be anarchy.

The animal liberation front is, in many respects, not unlike the Victorian antivivisection movement. It has a definite role in the overall dynamics of social change and consciousness raising. But animal liberationists may be tarred with the same brush of anarchy as other extreme factions that are polarizing Western society today, such as the neo-Fascists, the ‘moral majority,’ disappointed labor and staunch pro-lifers. However, this is not necessarily the only fate for the movement. Henry Spira has demonstrated that carefully orchestrated militant action combined with cooperative ventures with the more moderate animal welfare organizations will still maintain contact with the establishment power centers can be very effective.

It is unfortunate that animal ‘rights’ philosophy has become associated with the militant animal liberation forces because, as Mahatma Ghandi showed, the firm foundation provided by ethics and moral philosophy can give great strength to a social cause based on nonviolent civil disobedience. Also, the goals of the movement must be based in reality and should not concentrate on idealistic hopes that cannot be accomplished in a time frame reasonable for the human animal. Goals such as the abolition of the killing of animals or the use of animals in research are not attainable in the next decade although these ideals may some day come to fruition. There is a difference between unbridled idealism and practicality. The latter is more socially effective and hence, more expedient. The former often leads to militant enthusiasm, which is difficult to sustain without charismatic leaders and public demonstrations, and it may end in violence when enthusiasm is replaced with frustration caused by a more entrenched and less communicative opposition.

So let us keep our ‘isms,’ our personal beliefs and ideals, such as vegetarianism and antivivisectionism, in proper perspective, and get on with the business that concerns us all in the humane movement proper—namely, animal welfare and humane ethics.

**A Reply to “Animal Welfare, Rights and ‘Liberation’” by M.W. Fox**

Jim Mason

Michael Fox’s editorial correctly points out some of the advantages and disadvantages (and confusion) associated with the recent emergence of the concepts of animal rights and liberation. I agree with him that the concept of rights is, in some respects, an improvement over the traditional welfare/cruelty perspective. I do not, however, share his pessimism about animal liberation and his opinions about the value of that trend in our movement. I feel that this latter development in perspectives and in tactics provides a simple but better grounded basis for a progressive world view and environmental ethic.
Though it is hardly mature, the rights approach already appears stale—merely the same old animal welfare approach in updated, trendy language. Indeed, most of our large animal welfare organizations have already adopted animal "rights" rhetoric, yet they have made no changes in outlook, policies, or programs. The present state of the rights concept lends itself to this chameleonic behavior. Philosophers are unlikely ever to settle the arguments about whether "rights" exist at all and if they do, why they do. In this conceptual trap animals quite probably will not have it much better than under the traditional welfare/mistreatment approach. Though it does, as Dr. Fox points out, offer some advantages, the rights concept is at bottom poorly understood at all levels of intellect and education; "rights" are soft, slippery and hard to define. When all is said and done, animals will achieve only those "rights" that we who own, use and manipulate them are willing to give.

That is why some of us press the radical, "idealistic" and, I suppose, somewhat frightening notion that animals should be "liberated" from the human economy. While the rest of society seems to be steadfast in its exploration of ways either to enslave or to exterminate animals, we demand (more and more vociferously) a sharp change in direction that would explore ways to relieve animals of and protect them from our scientific, technological and economic impact. Science and technology under the guidance of progressive morality rendered human slavery unjust and obso­lete. Why stop there? As long as human society's outlook toward and relation­ships with other animals carries the old residue of hierarchy, supremacy, mastery, servitude, property and economic "benefit," animals will be neither safe nor free (free to move, to respond, to interact, to follow instinctive or learned behavior, to reproduce, to evolve and ultimately to live at all); no amount or kind of "rights" can really improve their lot. Slaves had a few insignificant "rights," but none substantial enough to free them, nor to end the injustice and brutality inherent in the institution of slavery.

For the human animal, the path of animal liberation would offer benefits both cultural and spiritual (not to mention technological). We would no longer need to subjugate the beast, whether within or without. We could abandon the myths, ra­tionalizations and defenses constructed to ease the anxious conscience of an animal-dependent, animal-exploitative society. We would then be in a position to end our fear, hostility and alienation toward animals and the living world so that we could know and live with them as well as with the animal within ourselves. Under a liberationist restructuring of human/animal perspectives and relations, we would be forced to see the natural world as it truly is in the purest scientific sense, without human-centered bias. Of course, we would have to drastically change our outlook, habits...our ways, but this is exactly what many recent thinkers are saying we must do if we are to avoid some sort of global disaster, whether by nuclear, chemical, social or one of the many other means so ready and available these days.

How radical, idealistic or "far out" one's thoughts and actions are in this age depends on how bad one believes things to be and how strongly one yearns and struggles for a resolution in favor of an acceptable kind of survival. The general drift of events today tends to call for a radical response, even if that "polarizes" society. Somehow, the issue of survival must be made clear, and it must be acted upon.

News & Review

Farm Animal Welfare Poll in Australia

Australian National Farmpoll VIII reveals (in The National Farmer, January 22, 1981) that an overwhelming majority of those polled (87%) "recognized that cases of cruelty and mistreatment of ani­mals are still widespread in agriculture." Fifty-nine percent rated their farm or­ganizations' responses to welfare issues as poor, and 85% believed that the wel­fare movement has the capacity to dam­age the farmer's standing in the eyes of fellow Australians. Fifty-nine percent felt that a responsible counter-lobby should be set up while 30% felt that they should talk and negotiate with wel­fare advocates. Fifty-three percent rated a ban on battery cage rearing of hens as an average-to-good policy; 35% rated less restrictive rearing of hogs as an average­to-good policy; 65% opposed a proposed policy of giving anesthetics for such operations as dehorning, mulesing, and castration. A third of the farmers sur­veyed felt that animal welfare interests were considerably discounted for eco­nomic reasons.

Effects of Domestication on Cognition

Anyone who has seen sheepdog trials or watched the complicated dress­sage performed by various types of show horses, and then compared his or her impressions with those formed from observation of the consistent, relatively invariable and stereotypical behavior of a wild animal might well conclude that the domesticated animal, because of its ability to be trained, has superior ability to learn and hence greater intelligence. However, this view fails to make a dis­tinction between the mechanism for ac­quiring the proper response to a cue and the mechanism for learning to solve problems.

Harry Frank, in a paper entitled "Evolution of canine information processing" (Z Tierpsychol 53(4):389-399, 1980), examines this distinction in a compar­ative analysis of cognitive function­ing in wolves and domesticated dogs.

Domestication proceeds by artifi­cial selection, "artificial" in the sense that human beings as well as environmental conditions exert control over which be­havioral and anatomical features sur­vive through successive generations. One obviously desirable trait to foster in domesticated animals is tractability; according to Dr. Frank, tractability was probably inadvertently selected for in the midst of selection for other traits in dogs because animals whose behavior was difficult to control would have been eliminated from the breeding pool. Dr. Frank relates tractability to two proper­ties of the canine "information processing system": responsiveness to a broad spectrum of stimuli, such as that used in human communication, and enough plast­icity to allow behavior to be shaped and reinforced by the techniques of instru­mental conditioning that are used in training.

In contrast to dogs, wolves tend to learn through observation, as in the case of a female wolf in Dr. Frank's group that learned to open a door after watching a wolf-malamute hybrid perform the task just once. Although the hybrid used his muzzle to unlatch the door, the wolf used her paws. Observational learning implies recognition of means/ends rela­tionships; the observation of the substi­tution of a functionally equivalent be­havior (using paws instead of muzzle) adds support to the notion that the ani­mal..."understands the instrumental na­ture of the action he [in this case, she] observes."

From an evolutionary point of view, one can ask the question: Why should observational learning be favored under natural selection and superseded by the