

Book News

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND HUMAN MORALITY, Bernard E. Rollin (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY, 1981, \$17.95, cloth; \$9.95, paper).

This is an excellent book. It should be read by all subscribers to this *Journal* and by thousands who (alas) will never see this review.

Those who believe that we humans need to clean up our act regarding non-human animals may be classified, on the grounds of tactics, as quietists, meliorists and revolutionaries. The quietists pursue their goal of helping animals by individual good works, perhaps prayer

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and meditation, and maybe frank answers if animal users or abusers happen to ask their opinions. Meliorists work to improve the treatment of animals without urging immediate and revolutionary change. The ultimate goals of some meliorists are in fact revolutionary, but this is not so for others. What makes meliorists meliorists is the willingness to work with, and to attempt to reform, the existing system of animal users. This the revolutionaries are unwilling to do. The entire system is profoundly evil, they believe, and it must be directly attacked and overthrown. Revolutionaries (Rollin calls them "kamikazes," underestimating, I believe, the military efficacy of the real kamikazes) disdain meliorists as dupes of the establishment, wittingly or unwittingly collaborating with murderers.

Professor Rollin is a meliorist, and his book may be denounced as a "sell-out" by some of the revolutionaries (grandly ignoring the fact that he was never with them to begin with). He takes it for granted that humans will continue to use ("exploit" if you prefer) nonhuman animals for a number of purposes, and inquires as to the rights and wrongs of the conditions of such use. Rollin is willing to accept "half-measures" in many circumstances, at least for the present. Some true believers, of course, will be deeply offended.

The basic structure of the book is well indicated by the titles of the four parts. Part One, "Moral Theory and Animals," (62 pp.) and Part Two, "Animal Rights and Legal Rights" (22 pp.), provide the theoretical basis for Parts Three, "The Use and Abuse of Animals in Research," (60 pp.) and Four, "Morality and Pet Animals" (26 pp.). As the titles indicate, the book concentrates - on the practical side - on research and pets, and has relatively very little to say about farming, hunting, or other animal uses.

While the structure is systematic, the book is strikingly anecdotal. Many points are illustrated from Professor Rollin's personal experience. And many of the most distinctive positions in the work stem from research of Rollin's that began without special reference to ani-

mals. In particular, his work on the distinction (or rather on the inadequacy of the putative distinction) between natural and conventional signs (see his earlier book *Natural and Conventional Meaning: An Examination of the Distinction*), and his reflections on the practical damage resulting from conceptual deficiencies of the dominant modern medical outlook have shaped the set of categories that distinguish his work on animal problems here and elsewhere. Central to that set of categories is the concept of a living thing's "*telos*" - its nature in one sense of that word. As the old song says, "Fish got to swim and birds got to fly ..." (Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern, "Can't Help Lovin' Oat Man"), and to confine an animal in such a way as to prevent its natural locomotion, or to force it to live on an "unnatural" diet, or surgically to mutilate its natural form is to prevent its fulfilling its *telos*. Hindering an animal from attaining its *telos* is always *prima facie* wrong. Thus, in the very many situations in which these interests of animals are violated without sufficient justification we humans do wrong- moral wrong. The way to reduce the incidence of such wrong, Rollin believes, is by leading humans to a "gestalt shift," after which they will perceive animals as moral patients in their own right. Such a gestalt shift may be induced in an individual by any of a very large number of experiences, but is best induced on a large scale by legal action. The assignment of *legal* rights (of appropriate sorts) to animals will lead, Rollin claims, to the gradual spread of the perception of animals as bearers of *moral* rights. To those who object that "you can't legislate morality," citing the failure of Prohibition in the United States, Rollin correctly responds that one sometimes can indeed "legislate morality," citing the massive and fundamental "gestalt shift" induced at least in part by civil rights legislation. The percentage of the white population that perceives racial segregation as inherently improper is now *much* larger than it was in 1954, most strikingly in the South.

One of Rollin's claims that will dis-

tress many is that "alternatives" are just not possible for many sorts of valuable research, at least not for the foreseeable future.

Among the many strengths of this book, some of the most noteworthy are the discussions of the varieties of research (and "research"), the proposals for overhaul of animal use oversight committees, the sharp attack on much of the dogma of science education, the calls for pragmatic cooperation, and the challenge to the "purebred" establishment.

Rollin distinguishes six different sorts of activities carried on under the heading of "research":

1. Basic biological research
2. Applied basic biomedical research
3. Development and testing of drugs and other therapeutic agents
4. Testing of consumer products for safety
5. Educational uses: demonstration, student dissection, practice surgery, etc.
6. Producing products such as serum from horses, musk from civet cats, etc.

Of course, the boundaries between some of these groups are fuzzy. Still, this distinction is a very useful one. Groups 5 and 6 are not really research at all and are, with the exception of surgical training, excellent targets for the replacement of animals by models, videotapes and, in the case of serum production and so on, nonliving synthesis of the needed compounds. Group 4 is perhaps the most subject to criticism on grounds both of weak justification (do we really need a yogurt-flavored shampoo at the cost of *any* animal suffering?) and of unreliability (the thalidomide case is only the most striking of many failures of inference from nonhumans to humans). Groups 1, 2, and 3 raise often difficult and even more often ignored cases of multi-species cost/benefit analysis in conditions of great obscurity. Drawing these distinctions helps us all think more clearly, a prerequisite for acting more decently.

On the inculcation of spurious objectivity in (most, not all) science education Rollin is especially good. Part of the

job is done by a selective distortion of language. Animals do not cry out, they "vocalize." They are not killed, but rather "sacrificed." In fact, they aren't really animals at all, but rather "models" (or, and for some reason Rollin missed this one, "preparations"). This talk, of course, hardens and desensitizes the students

who hear it, preparing them to harden and desensitize *their* students, and so on.

Bad morals and bad science often go hand in hand, and Rollin calls both for more sophisticated research that will determine more, at less cost in suffering, and for the abolition of much pointless and unjustifiable "research" such as that of Skinnerian psychologists. The call for cooperation between those who care for animals and those who care for sound scientific inference is repeated throughout the book.

When he comes, in Part Four, to deal with pets, Rollin has some sharp words to say about the practices of cropping ears, docking tails, and so on, which are part of the "show animal" establishment. He also chronicles the deleterious genetic effects in many breeds of breeder concentration on appearance features. Does it follow that the whole "purebred" ideal is misguided? Rollin doesn't say. This is one of the several places in the book where the discussion is just too short. In fact, these episodes of excessive brevity are the main weaknesses of the work. One wants to know more of what Rollin thinks about a number of the topics on which he touches. Is the ideal of the "purebred" dog or cat or horse a good one? (I think Rollin may be ambivalent about this.) What about well-fed domestic cats manifesting their *telos* by preying on birds? (This is mentioned on p. 62 - I think Rollin would try to restrain such predation, but I'm not sure.) Is vegetarianism morally obligatory? (I think his answer would be "no.") Is vegetarianism morally desirable? (I don't know what his answer would be.) Similarly, I think his argument for distinguishing the *telos* of an animal from the *telos* of a machine is weak, and I'm sure it's too short.

These weaknesses of brevity are

probably inevitable in a book that covers so much ground in such brief compass. I have not mentioned most of the topics, e.g., rights to life, the status of plants, "drawing the line," philosophy of law (Rollin is a Dworkinian of sorts), the relations among reason, sentiment, immediacy and action, and so on.

Two last caveats (I'm not sufficiently confident of my own position to call them "weaknesses"). Professor Rollin has somewhat more confidence in the epistemological soundness of much research than have I. The difference here is one of degree, and I am rather more pessimistic. On the other hand, and this is the second caveat, I am rather more optimistic about some sorts of alternatives.

When all this has been said, it is time to return to the start of this review. I'm sure that, like me, almost all readers of this *Journal* will find things in *Animal Rights and Human Morality* with which they disagree. But I am equally sure that this is a first-rate piece of work. Get it and read it.

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