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Jacky Turner

ANIMAL RIGHTS

Two opposing philosophies have dominated contemporary discussions regarding the moral status of nonhuman animals: (1) animal welfare (welfarism) and (2) animal rights (the rights view).

Animal welfare holds that humans do nothing wrong when they use nonhuman animals in research, raise them to be sold as food, and hunt or trap them for sport or profit, if the overall benefits of engaging in these activities outweigh the harms these animals endure. Welfarists ask that

animals not be caused any unnecessary pain and that they be treated humanely.

The animal rights view holds that human utilization of nonhuman animals, whether in the laboratory, on the farm, or in the wild, is wrong in principle and should be abolished in practice. Questions about how much pain and death are necessary miss the central point. Because nonhuman animals should not be used in these ways in the first place, any amount of animal pain and death is unnecessary. Moreover, unlike welfarism, the rights view maintains that human benefits are altogether irrelevant for determining how animals should be treated. Whatever humans might gain from such utilization (in the form of money or convenience, gustatory delights, or the advancement of knowledge, for example) are and must be ill gotten.

While welfarism can be viewed as utilitarianism applied to animals, the rights view bears recognizable Kantian features. Immanuel Kant was totally hostile toward utilitarianism, not because of what it implies may be done to nonhuman animals, but because of its implications regarding the treatment of human beings. To the extent that one's utilitarianism is consistent, it must recognize that not only nonhuman animals may be harmed in the name of benefiting others; the same is no less true of human beings.

Kant abjured this way of thinking. In its place he offered an account of morality that places strict limits on how individuals may be treated in the name of benefiting others. Humans, he maintained, must always be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means. In particular, it is always wrong, given Kant's position, to deliberately harm someone so that others might reap some benefit, no matter how great the benefit might be.

The rights view takes Kant's position a step further than Kant himself. The rights view maintains that those animals raised to be eaten and used in laboratories, for example, should be treated as ends in themselves, never merely as means. Indeed, like humans, these animals have a basic moral right to be treated with respect, something we fail to do whenever we use our superior physical strength or general know-how to inflict harm on them in pursuit of benefits for ourselves.

Among the recurring challenges raised against the rights view, perhaps the two most common involve (1) questions about where to draw the line and (2) the absence of reciprocity. Concerning the latter, critics ask how it is possible for humans to have the duty to respect the rights of other animals when these animals do not have a duty to respect our rights. Supporters of the rights view respond by noting that a lack of such reciprocity is hardly unique to the present case; few will deny that we have a duty to respect the rights of young children, for example, even while recognizing that it is absurd to require that they reciprocate by respecting our rights.

Concerning line-drawing issues, the rights view maintains that basic rights are possessed by those animals who bring a unified psychological presence to the world—those animals, in other words, who share with humans a family of cognitive, attitudinal, sensory, and volitional capacities. These animals not only see and hear, not only feel pain and pleasure, they are also able to remember the past, anticipate the future, and act intentionally in order to secure what they want in the present. They have a biography, not merely a biology.

Where one draws the line that separates biographical animals from other animals is bound to be controversial.

Few will deny that mammals and birds qualify, since both common sense and our best science speak with one voice on this matter. Moreover, new evidence concerning fish cognition and behavior is leading some philosophers and scientists to recognize the psychological complexity of these animals.

Line-drawing issues to one side, the rights view can rationally defend the sweeping and, indeed, the radical social changes that recognition of the rights of animals involves—the end of animal model research and the dissolution of commercial animal agriculture, to cite just two examples.

See also Animal Liberation Ethics; Animal Welfare and Animal Rights, A Comparison

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Tom Regan

ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, NEW WELFARISM

Until the 1970s, the prevailing approach to animal ethics was represented by the animal welfare position. This position holds that it is acceptable to use animals for human purposes, but recognizes a moral and legal obligation to regulate our treatment of animals to ensure that it is humane and that we do not impose unnecessary suffering on them. The welfarist approach was challenged in the 1970s by the emergence of the animal rights position, which rejects welfarism on theoretical grounds (even humane animal use cannot be justified morally) as well as practical grounds (regulation simply does not work and fails to protect animal interests). The rights position

proposes that recognizing the moral significance of nonhuman animals requires that animal exploitation be abolished and not merely regulated.

New welfarism is a term that describes an approach to animal ethics that is characterized by a recognition of the limitations of traditional animal welfare but an unwillingness to embrace the rights/abolitionist approach, and the consequent promotion of some improved version or theory of welfare reform. There are several versions of new welfarism, including the following three.

Welfare as a Means to Abolition

Many new welfarists believe they seek the abolition of animal exploitation as a long-term goal but advocate the improved regulation of animal use in the short term as the means to achieve the abolition (or significant reduction) of animal use by gradually raising consciousness about the moral significance of nonhuman animals. Although this position has been promoted by many of the large animal organizations in North America, South America, and Europe, it has both theoretical and practical problems.

As a theoretical matter, if our use of animals is not morally justifiable, promoting more humane exploitation as a means to the end of abolition raises a serious issue. For example, if we believe that any form of pedophilia is morally wrong, we cannot, consistent with that position, campaign for humane pedophilia. In the struggle against human slavery in the United States, many of those who favored abolition refused to campaign for the reform of slavery because they considered reform as inconsistent with the basic moral principle that slavery was an inherently unjust institution. Similarly, the