Editorial

On a recent television program devoted to discussing animal research, a young woman stands to assure the viewing audience that the animal rights movement is not composed entirely of "extremists." "There are moderates in the movement," she insists, "who are willing to work to minimize animal suffering in worthwhile research without interfering with that research."

On the other hand, a recent newsletter of an international animal rights society tells the tale of the society's call for unity on a particular animal rights issue and bemoans the unwillingness of other societies to accept its condition for unity: that all refuse to accept any compromise on the issue. The newsletter accuses the other societies of not really being devoted to "animal rights."

It would seem that some in "the animal rights movement" who prefer to see themselves as "moderates" continue to be embarrassed by those they consider "extremists." They also continue to feel that these extremists give the movement a bad name. It would also seem that those in the movement who consider themselves to be "real animal rightists" continue to be annoyed by those they consider to be "mere animal welfarists." They also continue to feel that the welfarists' willingness to compromise stands in the way of serious changes in our attitudes and laws concerning animal research.

Thus, the disputes between these two groups seem to be both philosophical and strategic. We would like to say a few words on both counts—and to say that the accounts should be kept separate.

There are sincere and decent animal welfarists within the research community itself. Prof. Arthur Caplan, of The Hastings Center and lately interviewed on the "Frontline" program on animal research, is an excellent example of this position. Philosophically, animal welfarists believe that animals should be treated as humanely as possible in research, to insure that their suffering is kept to a minimum, but we are justified in sacrificing healthy animals for human benefit in research which we would not consider moral to perform on humans.

In contrast to this position, animal rightists believe that animals can be used in research which is innocuous to or beneficial for the research subjects, animals must be given fair compensation for their participation in research, and animals should be protected against research abuse in the same way humans are.
Thus, philosophically an animal welfarist is not a "moderate" animal rightist. Philosophically, an animal welfarist is not an animal rightist at all. If the philosophical arguments fashioned by Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Bernard Rollin, and others are correct, animal welfarism is still an expression of species prejudice—a guilty, embarrassed, trying-to-do-better expression, but still an expression of prejudice. These arguments indicate that, philosophically, to be any sort of animal rightist at all, one must aim at applying to animals the same moral consideration being applied to humans.

Consequently, within the animal rights movement, "moderation" vs. "extremism" must refer to matters of strategy, not of philosophy. Strategic-moderates believe that the surest road to liberating research animals lies in gradual progress, "taking what we can get," when we can get it. Strategic-extremists believe that only by holding out for all or nothing do we stand a chance of getting all. Who knows who is right—prophecy is an arcane talent.

What we do know is that it does no good to confuse philosophical and strategic issues. Suggesting that there is a philosophical difference, when the difference is merely strategic, creates bitterness within the movement and suggests to those outside the movement that we are fundamentally divided, when that is not the case.

Descartes is assuredly not one of our heroes, but he was right in saying that we—which includes the animals we so deeply care about—can only benefit by making things clear and keeping them distinct. We can, philosophically, be real animal rightists while, strategically, being willing to take what we can get. Perhaps that is the best strategy, but let us argue that as a strategic issue, without the "holier than thou" pronouncements which are appropriate only at the philosophical level. Conversely, those who prefer the compromising strategy should make clear that they are compromising only at the strategic level, not at the philosophical level. Philosophically, we must (both logically and morally) remain united and make others aware that here we remain united.

A NOTE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Those arguing for animal rights should, whenever possible, not base their arguments on evidence which derives from research in which animals' rights were not respected. To base thinking on evidence obtained in ways which violate animals' rights tends strongly to condone such research. While using such evidence in the service of animal rights can at least put the deplorable suffering of the animals to some ethical use, it would be preferable to hold ourselves to the same standards which we propose for animal researchers. We say that researchers should develop compassionate research techniques and should not exploit animals; therefore, we, too, should try to find alternative evidence and methods of argument.

Contributors to Between the Species are encouraged to take these considerations into account in preparing manuscripts.