RESPONSE TO RUSSOW

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While I do not wish to comment on the compliments that Lilly-Marlene Russow pays my book, I must admit that her criticisms are both fair and accurate. For example, despite my best efforts, there is still unnecessary jargon. Also, I did not pay sufficient attention to the philosophical aspects of the issue and doubt that I could have produced an adequate analysis, anyway. I did not try to draw the topics together by analyzing the similarities and differences between, say, psychological research and toxicological testing. Finally, the book grew out of the problems I had encountered and had tried to resolve through six years as a critical observer of animal research. As a result, the chapters reflect the issues that I have dealt with, and this explains most of the organizational problems that a reader might encounter.

Russow comments on a reference to "apparent philosophical sophistry" and notes that this tends to stereotype the theoretical aspects of the issue in a rather negative light and then further suggests that the book would have been improved with a better theoretical analysis of such concepts as "suffering" and "consciousness." I agree. I apologize for the cheap shot at philosophers, although I would argue that the adjective "apparent" should save me from being branded as another philistine! However, it is difficult for those of us who were trained in the empirical sciences to take philosophical theory as seriously as we should. One of the commonest comments I hear from my scientific colleagues is that moral philosophy is ultimately a matter of personal preference. It is often impossible to get beyond this notion no matter how much one tries to insist on theoretical coherence and internal consistency.

DISCUSSION

Russow raises an excellent point with her comments about suffering and consciousness. As I was writing Of Mice, Models and Men, I became aware of the lack of good arguments about the nature of animal suffering. In fact, the literature on human suffering is very thin, as well. As a result, I have been spending the past few years snatching what time I could to investigate the mental complexity of animals and humans and to explore the nature of suffering.

The biological literature is full of fascinating data. For example, any notion of pain and suffering has to contend with the fact that one can have pain without suffering. Patients with pre-frontal lobotomies, for example, have the same pain-detection thresholds as normal people, but the pain does not seem to "bother" them as much (if at all). When asked about this, these individuals say that they feel the pain (and they will jump if pricked unexpectedly with a pin) but the "agony" is no longer there. Interestingly, people with lobotomies also do not appear to have verbally-mediated anxieties--that is, anxieties associated with particular words. Perhaps language possession is, after all, a morally relevant characteristic.

Consciousness raises a whole host of other questions and is, to biology, as quantum theory is to physics. When investigating these phenomena, it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish between empirical data and metaphysical theories. Any analysis that claims to be thorough must deal with both empirical science and philosophical theory. Griffin's books on animal consciousness are an interesting example of this. Griffin provides us with a wealth of data and with some theory, but, although he will acknowledge when challenged that his arguments raise considerable moral questions, he does not address these questions at all in his books.

I have been particularly intrigued with the notion of deception. Many species attempt to deceive competitors and predators. In most cases, such deception is not intentional, but it can be very difficult indeed to decide what is and is not intentional deception. Chimpanzees appear to deceive others intentionally. There are also observations indicating that baboons may indulge in intentional deception. But what of the broken-wing display of the plover when it tries to lure potential predators away from its nest? My interest in this issue stems from the fact that it seems that intentional deception involves a series of thoughts that indicate that you are thinking that I am thinking that you intend some specific action. This circular reasoning appears to indicate that you are self-conscious; that is, you are capable of being the object of your own thoughts. Intentional deception can be studied empirically and distinguished (albeit with difficulty) from non-intentional deception. Of course, one then still has to indicate what moral relevance, if any, such a distinction has, but it seems to me that mental complexity (or mental capacity) is very important in developing a coherent theory of the moral status of different animals.

In conclusion, I hope to produce, in the not too distant future, something a little more concrete and satisfying on the nature of animal suffering and consciousness and its moral implications. One does not need a sophisticated moral theory to criticize some uses of research animals--such as in LD50 testing or in research that causes easily avoidable suffering or death. However, there are a lot of research projects that do not fall into such categories, and we are just beginning to search for a morally satisfactory and consistent public consensus on when animal research can be justified. Of Mice, Models and Men was intended to help define what some of the questions might be. It was my first book on this topic but, I hope, not my last.

(continued from p. 2)

Parental affection solely in an almost sacred light.

I do indeed grant that partial affections (not just parental) for those close to us are brute facts that must be dealt with whenever moral duties are under discussion. I suspect that on a hypothetical sinking ship, my partial affection would lead me to prefer saving my dog, that I personally know and love, to saving a human stranger. Why are the partial affections of a person for a non-human animal automatically dismissed by Nelson as obviously less "morally worthy" than those of a parent for his/her child? (I am speaking here of Professor Aiken's chimp.) Indeed, the love of a person for a pet animal may closely resemble parental love, without, however, the ego-supporting "chip off the old block" element.

Toward the end of the xenograft article, Nelson mentions his opinion that there is a morally relevant distinction between animals and "marginal" humans, in that "marginal" humans have suffered a so-called tragedy in "becoming the psychological equals of animals." A defective human is certainly not, as Nelson puts it, the psychological equal of a normal, healthy animal--this is a blatantly anthropocentric statement. Birth defects are a natural occurrence--a deformed or internally defective puppy is rejected by its mother and dies. This may be sad, but it is no tragedy. A human infant may be born with many mental and physical defects--why is this seen as a tragedy? If the appeal to the "tragedy" of so-called "marginal" humans automatically places such humans off limits for medical exploitation, why is not birth as an animal in this world considered equally tragic? Certainly being granted no moral value whatsoever ought to be tragic enough to warrant exemption from torture.

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