

REVIEWS

The Review Section of E&A consists of three parts. The first is made up of brief reviews of books and articles (and perhaps films, etc.) that are concerned in some way with the rights and wrongs of human treatment of non-human animals. The second part of this Section is entitled 'Replies' and contains comments on or responses to reviews published in earlier issues of E&A. By letter the Editor invites the authors of works reviewed to respond, and by this proclamation in each issue invites all other interested readers to submit comments. The third part of the Reviews Section is a list of works of which reviews are invited. Any member who wishes to review any work in this continuing 'Reviews Needed' list should contact the Editor.

Stephen R. L. Clark, *The Nature of the Beast: Are Animals Moral?* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982, vii + 127 pp., £7.95

We are animals, of a sort, even though we may sometimes lose sight of this fact. The subtitle, therefore, should not lead us to suppose that the book is about the morality of nonhuman animals only. Dr. Clark philosophizes against an ethological background, endeavouring to relate the morality of both humans and nonhumans to our biological nature and evolutionary legacy. He adopts a revised but basically Aristotelian ethical stance, holding that morality is ultimately grounded in the sort of being one is with one's inherent ends. Yet, while ethology and sociobiology can shed considerable light on what sort of beings we are, they cannot provide a moral system or definitive moral conclusions. The fact that a given gene or form of behaviour has evolved does not mean that it is morally superior. The best we can hope for is "that the whole natural system has been made [by God] in such a way that evolutionary logic will lead to creatures of a moral kind" (p. 103).

Clark begins by criticizing the too atomistic and abstracted approach of much of modern science, advocating that we make wider use of an

Aristotelian approach. Instead of being concerned exclusively with abstract ideal models, which particularize things and artificially tear them from the surroundings of which they are necessarily a part, we must turn to observation of real things in their natural whole environment. Biological complexity is such that ideal models can tell us little about real beings. Moreover, he argues against the behaviourist dogma that we must never attempt to understand animals in terms of emotions and intentions. Sometimes this gives us the greatest overall understanding of what is going on. To be sure, there is the standing problem that an understanding in terms of emotions and intentions may be as misleading as other sorts of models. This is not a problem we can resolve by denying the reality from which it springs. We cannot adequately understand humans or beasts if we repudiate any understanding of their inner life.

The author goes on to consider such topics as intelligence and language, freedom and necessity, me and mine (focusing on self-awareness), altruism, sexuality, parenthood,

territory and dominance, ending with a discussion of moral issues and his conclusions. One of the conclusions reached is that beasts are *ethical* since "they respond to aspects of a situation and to features of their kindred, that a good man also would respect. But they are not *moral*: for they do not... moralize...or construct intellectual systems..." (p. 107). Certainly some animals sometimes act from motivations which are morally relevant and appropriate, though they do not construct or comprehend ethical systems. (While agreeing with Clark's conclusion, I would prefer to revise the terminology and say that beasts sometimes act as moral agents but are not aware of moral principle.) Lacking human levels of self-awareness, rationality, and freedom, nonhuman animals are not only unmoved by moral principle, they have a much narrower range of ethically significant options. With both humans and beasts, our ethical or moral motivations are only a part of our being and must be understood in terms of the whole individual.

It is argued that much of our thinking about beasts and animals is infected with terminological and conceptual muddles. Terms such as dominance and aggression, for instance, are used in ways which are neither colloquially satisfactory, nor conceptually precise (not even in a merely behaviouristic sense). One of the cardinal conceptual sins is confusing the function of a behaviour with its goal. The question of why a behavior was selected by evolution is distinct from the question of what the behaviour means to the being in question. For instance, "when a [male] hamadryas baboon adopts a young female the eventual result may be the creation of a 'harem', but we have no strong reason to think that the baboon intends more than the adoption of a child, the becoming of a 'mother'" (p. 84).

The above quote illustrates another

feature of the book: while thought provoking and refreshingly different, it often does not go into enough detail and depth to be quite convincing. In this instance there is an obvious question which cries in vain for an answer: why, if the adoption of a child is the sole motivation, does the male baboon adopt only *female* children? Perhaps there is a convincing answer, but Clark does not even acknowledge the question. Another example of this shortcoming is found in the discussion of the famous incest taboo: "The ban on incest ... does not rest on the supposedly bad effects of inbreeding: in fact, such bad effects are rather a consequence of the ban than its cause—for any harmful recessive genes would be eliminated from the gene pool in a very few generations of inbreeding" (p. 72). For one thing, this leaves out of account the possible advantages of heterozygosity, the pairing of *different* genes. This may be an advantage even when none of the genes in question is particularly harmful. It is regrettable that Clark's stimulating ideas and valuable insights are too often weakened by such lack of follow-through. It is not as if the book were already too long to admit of further development. While complaining, I should add that the footnotes refer us only to particular works, not to specific pages. I sometimes found this frustrating.

"The central problem of mammals", in Clark's analysis, "is—what to do with the males?" (p. 74). Various evolutionary attempts to solve this problem, or to gain benefit from it, have contributed heavily to the development of mammalian social systems and in particular to the development of human cultures. From studying beasts we can gain insights not only into how they organize their lives, but into the possibilities for us and the constraints upon us. Ultimately, Clark argues for a modernized

Aristotelian style social and political philosophy, placing the emphasis on small managable groups. These groups are to be small enough and managed in such a way as to allow us to live consistently with the demands of human nature. They are to be largely organized around women, the true centers of social life (a very un-Aristotelian element). Clark recognizes that such a scheme does not follow from purely biological consider-

ations. Biology only cannot generate ethical or political systems. Clark advocates his views as being consistent with biology on one hand and morality on the other.

In this book I found an array of interesting facts, thought-provoking arguments, and stimulating ideas. In spite of my stated reservations, I warmly recommend the book as well worth the reading.

Lawrence E. Johnson
The Flinders University of South Australia