

Opinion



John Stockwell
The Schweitzer Center

It may well be possible to develop animals, or provide situations for animals, which are pain-free, and to yet have it be the case that such development and the making of such situations are immoral acts and the implicated animals exploited.

In his critical notice of R. G. Frey's Rights, Killing and Suffering: Moral Vegetarianism and Applied Ethics, in these pages, James Nelson cites Frey's use in his book of James Rachels' distinction between "being alive" and "having a life." Nelson comments that Frey's use of this distinction brings to mind Regan's notion of a "subject of a life." According to Nelson, Frey in his book favors the "concerned individual" approach to issues of factory farming over the "moral vegetarian" approach. Concerned individuals, Frey holds, work to improve conditions on factory farms, lessening the suffering of farm animals by diverting resources "into the development of new and relatively painless methods of breeding, feeding, and killing animals. of new pain-preventing and pain-killing drugs, of new types of tranquilizers and sedatives, etc." and "seek further appropriate breakthroughs in genetic engineering."

Two considerations in Peter Singer's Animal Liberation bothered me. The first was his drawing of the line for equal consideration of species' interests just "above" the mollusc. The other, and it is this point that is brought freshly to mind by Nelson's review, was his decision to give less consideration to the question of killing animals than to that of their suffering. It seemed to me that this tactic clearly related to his insistence that moral change is to be effected first by rational argument in preference to any affective approach. Those who may have read my "Opinion" piece in BTS #2 will perhaps remember my remarks about Ivan Il-

lich's contention that animals experience pain but do not suffer. But dead animals, those being killed humanely (theoretically), and those killed a moment ago and therefore not existing as live animals do not experience pain and do not suffer, at least in this world of which we have some knowledge. But, for me, it has always been evident that being killed is the most intense form of pain or suffering even though death itself is not felt. To expose an animal to suffering or cruelty and then to kill it is to doubly compound the moral malfeasance. I am no spiritualist, but my imagination has long automatically insisted that the full quantum of death's pain-equivalence is somehow immediately manifest just the other side of the boundary between life and death. The crime of killing is great, though no voice be heard.

Is it conceivable that to cause pain or suffering is morally wrong but that to kill is not? Perhaps it is also morally wrong to kill humans, morally considerable beings, but only wrong to cause animals to suffer cruelly?

It seems to me that part of the difficulty many have in assigning moral wrong to killing animals must rest in the difficulty of conceiving of any experience at all in life which has just in the moment ceased to be living. That which does not exist cannot either suffer or hurt and cannot be the object of moral action. By killing, in the case of animals, actions are substantially freed of moral relevance. Certainly the idea of humane slaughter rests at least in part upon a difference in the value placed upon pain-free life in comparison with non-existence. I find myself wanting to speak of the "pain of non-existence."

Can it be that some of the contemporary resistance to holding that killing animals is morally wrong originates in the anti-religious? Being that the injunction not to kill, which can be extended to refer also to animals, is taken to be a moral/religious injunction vouched for by Moses' reputed experience of God?

Whatever may be the true relationship of these matters, we should continue, I think, to be very wary of moral systems which do not also prohibit the killing of animals. The killing of animals is in itself a moral wrong. In addition, schemes to get around

the immorality of the act by providing animals with pain-free lives to the point of death must be resisted. "Pain-free unto death" gives the sense of it. When animals are deprived of the ordinary pains of their natural lives, that is a cruelty. Furthermore, the destruction of an animal's capacity to feel pain and/or the suppression of the behaviors that in animals express pain, so that the animal, it may be claimed, is not in pain when in reality it is experiencing intense pain, are not moral, no matter what the calculus applied to whatever pain/pleasure quotient is manifest only in the circumscribed moment.

I have been surprised by Evelyn Pluhar's suggestion in "On the Genetic Manipulation of Animals" (BTS, vol. 1, no. 3) that the chance that the new biotechnological techniques will be abused is "exceedingly slim." I think Pluhar is too sanguine in this opinion. Ivan Illich, in Medical Nemesis, documents extensive abuse through practices so taken for granted that their employment does not even depend upon any clear point of moral choice such that discussions by philosophers would likely arise or have much impact upon any course being followed.

The capacity of society and its medicine to suppress the expressions (Darwin) of pain and to suppress pain itself is already far advanced. If there is no felt pain, but the tissue or physiological functioning of the animal is damaged nevertheless, then if by means of the suppression of pain or suppression of pain's expression the animal is able to be held in a way which overcomes any moral objection based on cruelty, but is thereby led to death, that is an immoral act. This is why we need not only moral philosophy but moral philosophy and science to work out the exchanges (as Susan Isen puts it in "Beyond Abolition: Ethical Exchanges with Animals in Agriculture," BTS, vol. 1., no. 4) in a world governed by an ethic that asserts that it is wrong to kill animals. Such a world is envisioned by George Abbe in Negavit.

Animals and humanity must find common cause. The means whereby humanity confines and restricts its own members are developed and perfected in research into the confinement of non-human species. Parallel psychological and propaganda techniques injure the human person to his/her restricted situation at work and in an increasing assortment of life situations, including the house and yard

in which the occupant is contained more and more indoors, more and more in the absence of soil, vegetation and animal life, more and more connected to a high-tech "life support system" whose plug at some point may be pulled by the programmers of politics or economics. It is insane to justify explorations which likely will be, and are being, used against human freedom. And it is immoral to advance the confinement, or adjustment to confinement, of animals. This connection is a principal reason why the destinies of animals and human persons are now so substantially intertwined.

IS THE MERELY PAIN-FREE LIFE (MORALLY CONSIDERABLE, NEVERTHELESS)



Jim Barter, Animals, 14-19
Copyright-Free Illustrations.
New York: Dover, 1977

A LIFE WORTH LIVING?

When the integrity of animals' natural ways of living remain intact, then those animals "have a life." They are the "subject of a life." They are "life-that-wills-to-live in the midst of life-that-wills-to-live" (Schweitzer), a formulation not easily improved upon. This does not mean that finally a morally relevant distinction can successfully be drawn between "being alive" and "having a life." If confined and pain-suppressed animals, whose natural ways are not intact, no longer "have a life" but are alive, nevertheless, then their killing remains immoral, perhaps even particularly so, since one evil is compounded (not brought to an end) by another.

These considerations are not to be understood in a way that aligns them with any religious, social scientific, legal, or psy-

chiatric insistence upon the preservation/extension of life at all costs (particularly to the public treasury and clients?). Death is more acceptable than that. Death is neither to be hurried on its way nor grotesquely forestalled. But the acceptability of death is not either to be understood in a way that conspires with some new technology of dying and grief or aligns acceptance of death with indifference toward one's own having of a life or toward the lives of others.

Herding native peoples onto reservations or "homelands," cattle into feedlots, trees and shrubbery into "landscaped" plazas are all actions that clear the terrain. Into the clearings spread houses, streets, cafes, gasoline stations, silicon chip factories, video arcades, and other structures all containing a growing human population. The process goes on also at the expense of cropland, already a displacement leading to restricted woodland and other natural habitat. Fairly far along, some national parks, open space, a bit of farmland, some reservations will remain. At that point, and we are sufficiently close to that point now to discern the trends, these uses and this "setting aside" which is also a ruling out, will be seen even more clearly than at present to have accomplished an enclosure, an entrapment of humanity. At the individual level or at the level of the family, this entrapment is already far along: people cut off from countryside, fresh air, and clean water, kids and companion animals contained by dangerous city streets, the outside now so impoverished that the environment has become very substantially inside. Accompanying the self-entrapment of humanity is the extinction of species, except for genetically engineered life forms adjusted to the restricted space and possibility of living--and even these only in the interim before space completely disappears.

Just as those New Age spiritual and humanistic psychological methods of the 60's and 70's that were designed to free and make whole the human person have been significantly co-opted by consultants to corporations and employed in an attempt to enhance the capacity of managerial groups to control the workplace, so will and does the development of means of growth facilitation, disease control, and painlessness for the lives of animals in confined spaces auger the application of some of these and other similar methods to humanity itself. Do not do unto others that which you would not have be done

to yourself. No matter that the ostensible goal of new developments in animal husbandry is, through food, to provide for the well-being of humanity, the arts of confinement come to have wider application. This is not to say anything against what has since Kohr and Schumacher become known as human scale in living or as voluntary simplicity, for these are genuine and ecological ideals. But the technology of the restriction of the organism has nothing in common with such true ideals. Nor, really, does the answer to the classic Buddhist question concerning how the fish in the bottle is to be freed: "There, it is free," suggesting that freedom is wholly inner in nature. We know that while there is meaning in the idea of inner freedom, and know that it is possible to have an inflated notion of what is required to be free, such meaning as there is in the idea of inner freedom does not make it good to have imprisoned Gandhi, Aurobindo, or Thoreau. Similarly, there is no virtue at all in the confinement of animals. Nothing good has or will come of it, though the consequences in the lives of animals and human persons be "painless."

ANIMALS. Do they matter?

An exciting new awareness is unfolding about our relationship with animals and the rest of the natural world. Read about it in THE ANIMALS' AGENDA.

THE ANIMALS' AGENDA gives you news, views and articles about animal rights, welfare and protection, and about the people who are making animal rights one of the major issues of the '80's. A WHOLE MOVEMENT IN ONE MAGAZINE.



- YES, Sign me up for THE ANIMALS' AGENDA
- 1 yr. \$15.00
 - 2 yrs. \$27.50
 - 3 yrs. \$37.50

Here's \$2 - Send me a sample copy and more information

NAME _____

STREET _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

THE ANIMALS' AGENDA
P.O. Box 5234, Westport, CT 06881