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THE EVOLUTION OF ANIMALS IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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PHILOSOPHY

In mainstream, Western moral philosophy, animals have passed through one stage, are currently in a second, and, if the animal liberation movement is successful, will be entering a third. In the first of these stages, animals were excluded from being direct objects of moral concern at all. In the second stage, animals have become objects of compassion and of the moral concerns that cluster about compassion. However, they remain resources to be exploited for human benefit. In the third stage, animals will become objects of our concern with fairness and the moral concepts which cluster about the idea of justice. I want to go over these stages with you, indicating how they originated and developed and detailing the differences among them.

Stage I: Natural Resources

The classical concepts of animals which have contributed to Western moral tradition can be divided into those emanating from the Biblical book of Genesis and those emanating from the Greek philosopher Aristotle. While Greek philosophy and Biblical teaching differ in many and significant ways, they share two ideas which have been crucial in shaping our traditional attitudes toward animals. The first of these is the belief that nature is ordered hierarchically, with human beings, or at least some human beings, at the apex of creation. The second of these shared ideas is the belief that purpose is a fundamental category in nature, with the lower orders of nature having been created for the purpose of fulfilling the needs of the higher orders.

In the story of creation contained in the first chapter of Genesis, it is said that people were created in the "image" of God and that we were given "dominion" over the rest of creation. Being the sole image of God in creation provides us a unique status in the universe, and being entrusted with dominion over God's creation is recognition of this special position. One might expect that the animals would have benefitted handsomely from these metaphors. After all, God is supposed to be a loving parent, who is solicitous of the well-being of those He has created. If humans are the image of God, then they, too, should be concerned to love and cherish, aid and protect what God has created. Furthermore, God has, according to

Genesis, made us His vice-regent on earth; He has put us here to rule and administer what He has created and called "good." You'd think that a subordinate given this awesome responsibility by the all-powerful Creator of the Universe would want to be very careful that he/she did nothing to harm or detract from God's province.

Unfortunately--for the animals--that is not the way this Biblical metaphor has been developed. While the relation between God and His special children, i.e., humans, was interpreted using the model of the loving parent, the relation between us and the rest of creation was interpreted using the model of the medieval, feudal despot. Christian theologians interpreted the granting of "dominion" not as a solemn responsibility to care for what God has created but as a license entitling us to treat nature as our domain, as having been created for our benefit, as a resource to use as we see fit to satisfy our needs and desires. As a result, the idea that humans might owe respect to or consideration for animals became as unthinkable in Christian moral tradition as the idea that a feudal king was obligated to respect his serfs.

In the centuries following the death of Christ, Christian theologians turned to Greek philosophy in order to interpret Christianity in a way which would make sense to the intellectual community of Europe. Especially in the later Middle Ages, it was the philosophy of Aristotle that was thus employed. Aristotle declared that all things were governed and understood by four factors: the material of which they were made, their form or organizing structure, their maker, and their purpose. Applying this approach to the study of nature gave rise to the famous dictum that "Nature does nothing in vain," that is, that everything in nature serves a purpose. Indeed, Aristotle organized all of nature--which, unlike the Christian view, included humans, i.e., "rational animals"--into a hierarchical order in which the lower orders were there for the purpose of serving the higher orders. Aristotle's hierarchy was one of complexity, with the least complicated things at the bottom, e.g., mud and rocks, and the most complicated, viz., intelligent Greek men, at the top. Aristotle's "scientific" ordering of nature thus reinforced the Christian belief that all of nature existed to serve human ends and left animals still

bereft of any sort of direct moral status or protection.

The best that the animals could do under this regime was enter the arena of moral concern under two indirect headings. First, under the standard moral and legal statutes concerning property, animals who were owned were protected against being harmed by anyone but their owners. Even some wild animals attained some protection in this way, since they were considered the property of the king, duke, or other local royalty. Second, all animals enjoyed the protection of being occasions for moral education. One of the most popular arguments for the humane treatment of animals was put forward by St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. According to Thomas, we could not have any moral obligations directly to animals, since they lack souls; nevertheless, we should be considerate of the needs of animals and not be indifferent to their suffering, because if we get in the habit of being insensitive to them, we may very well become insensitive to the needs and feelings of our fellow humans, which would be a morally pernicious development. Thus, although the animals were denied the full fruit of moral concern by the Christian-Aristotlean view of the world as a hierarchical, purposive, feudal order, animals were able to gather a few crumbs of respect and compassion as property and teaching devices.

It is worth noting that Aristotle did not confine his purposive, hierarchical ordering of things to inter-species relations. He extended it, logically enough, into our intra-species relations, contending that the less intelligent races were intended to be slaves for the more intelligent--the Greeks being the most intelligent, of course. He also claimed that, for the same reason, women were intended to serve men. These claims again merely reinforced the sexism, anti-Semitism, and racism which have long infected Christianity, and did so emphatically during the Middle Ages. However, it was not these moral prejudices which led to the fall of the Christian-Aristotlean worldview in the early modern era. Rather, it was the rejection by modern scientists of the category of purpose in understanding nature. People like Newton, Galileo, and the other pioneers of modern science were able to devise ways of understanding and manipulating nature which did not involve presuming that anything in nature was created for a purpose. Rather, things

were just the results of undirected, causal forces, with the chain of causes stretching back ad infinitum.

Since the concept of purpose had proven so unfortunate for the animals, we might expect that its demise would mark the beginning of a golden age for the animals, but, unhappily, that is not the case. The new science contended that except for the human mind--and perhaps not even with that exception--everything could be understood as a complex of machinery, nothing but gears, levers, nuts, and bolts. When applied to animals, this world metaphor led to the conclusion, made famous by the seventeenth century, French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes, that animals, like clocks, could feel neither pleasure nor pain. They were merely "automata," said Descartes, God's ingenious robots. This conclusion removed animals even farther from the realm of moral concern than they had been under Aristotlean rule, since the function of morality is precisely to protect and further the interests of those capable of feeling pleasure and pain. It is surely not an accident that the practice of vivisectioning animals--nailing them to boards and then dissecting them while still alive--was begun by the followers of Descartes at Port Royal.

Reaction against vivisection immediately followed its inception. The French philosophers Montaigne and Voltaire were particularly strident in rejecting the idea that animals were merely unfeeling machines who could be dissected with as little moral concern as one might have in taking apart a clock. Nonetheless, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, intellectually dominated by the spectacular successes of the physical sciences, very likely represent the low point for animals in mainstream, Western philosophy. However, in good dialectical fashion, it is from this moral desert that the fortunes of the animals will arise and progress in the nineteenth century.

Stage II: "Be Kind to Animals"

Western moral thinking has been divided, roughly, into reflections about two families of ideas. The first of these we may call "the kindness family." It includes such ideas as benevolence, compassion, sympathy,

charity, happiness, welfare, and friendship. Moral philosophies which focus on this family of ideas tend to express moral concern in terms of seeking the good life, being altruistic or saintly, being a good friend or neighbor, pursuing the general welfare, and making the world a happier place in which to live. The moral philosophies of ancient Greece and nineteenth century Britain provide examples of such kindness-dominated morality. The other family of moral ideas we may call "the fairness family." It includes such ideas as justice, obligation, responsibility, rights, honesty, integrity, and commandments. Moral philosophies which focus on this family of ideas tend to express moral concern in terms of adhering to moral commandments and laws, doing one's duty, fulfilling one's promises and other responsibilities, seeing that justice is done, and maintaining a clear conscience. The Old Testament and Puritanism provide examples of such fairness-dominated moralities. It follows that to enter the arena of moral concern in our culture is to be covered by at least one of these two families of moral concepts.

In the nineteenth century, animals finally got their paws and hooves through the door of kindness. Although Cartesian scientists may have been able to convince themselves that dogs screaming on the dissecting table were in the same category with clocks whose gears gnashed and whined when out of order, most people who came into contact with animals were too wise, or simply too honest, for that. And remember that in this era, when animals were still a primary source of transportation and the cities were not so insulated from the country, most people did still come into frequent, daily contact with animals. Having been freed of the limitations of Christian dogma and the Aristotlean hierarchy, and rebelling against the vestiges of feudalism on many fronts, these people were free to acknowledge that feeling compassion for and being directly morally concerned about animals were neither heretical nor irrational. This breakthrough takes force with the founding of the first S.P.C.A.'s and other humane societies in nineteenth century England and the passage of the first significant humane legislation in the same era and locale.

The idea that animals are available for human service is, of course, not questioned here. The humane movement does not question

the propriety of using animals for human transportation, food, clothing, or even in science--although this is also the era in which the first anti-vivisection societies are formed. However, the feudal view that those in power need not concern themselves with the needs and feelings of their inferiors is now displaced by the idea that we ought to be compassionate rulers who spare the animals we use and sacrifice any pain or suffering not necessary for that use or sacrifice. The model of the medieval despot has been replaced with that of the good shepherd who tends his/her flock not only for his/her benefit but also for theirs.

The idea of being kind to animals has grown and spread over the last century and a half until it now seems safe to say that it is the dominant idea in contemporary, Western moral thinking about animals. Victorian moralists touted humane concern for animals as one of the marks of a civilized society, and the first humane laws to protect dray animals have been developed into expansive codes prohibiting cruelty to animals and myriad public and private agencies devoted to protecting animals from abuse, protecting endangered species, rescuing animals in distress, and otherwise helping to relieve their suffering and ameliorate their condition. We spend a considerable amount of time, money, and energy caring for animals today, and we can be justifiably proud of living in an animal loving society.

Nevertheless, animals remain on the fringes of our moral concern today, not only in the sense that cruelty to animals is considered a minor crime but also in the sense that animals remain, like poor relatives, barely inside the door, with hat in hand, hoping against hope for our charity. For while our culture is committed to being kind to animals, that kindness has to compete with others of our concerns, such as those for abundant, inexpensive animal food products, for the freedom to do what we please with our property, and for the best possible chance of having our ills cured and our lives extended. In this competition, our commitment to the humane treatment of animals often runs a poor second, third, fourth, or worse. For example, in order to spare farm animals the pain and stress caused them by modern, intensive farming techniques, we have not modified those techniques; rather, we cut the beaks off tightly caged chickens to stop them from

pecking each other in frustration, and we keep veal calves in dim light in the belief that a drowsy calf is a contented calf. Like other recipients of charity in our culture, but even more so, animals do benefit directly from our sympathy for their plight, but they must make do with what is left over once our other, more pressing concerns have been satisfied. Growing dissatisfaction--among humans--with this situation has led to the birth of "a new ethic for our treatment of animals."

Stage III: Animal Liberation

During the past fifteen years, our humane ethic has come under increasing, sharp criticism. "Kindness is not enough!" might be a slogan for this new group of animal activists. In terms of the analytical framework we have been using here, what is now being sought for animals is that they be covered not only by the kindness family of moral ideas but also by the fairness family. The situation today concerning animals is analogous to that two hundred years ago concerning slaves. While eighteenth century society felt comfortable with requiring only that slave owners treat their slaves compassionately, a small but growing group of people were demanding the abolition of slavery altogether. They contended that even if one was kind to his/her slaves, slavery was still an unjust institution in which the interests of one group were routinely sacrificed to fulfill the interests of another group. The slaves bore all the burdens, while the masters reaped all the benefits of slave labor, and that is the rankest sort of exploitation, no matter how benign the masters were to their slaves. And that is the way things remain with animals today.

Even where animal researchers adhere to and even exceed the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act to insure that their animals do not lack for veterinary care, anaesthesia, and painless death, these animals are still forced to live in cages, to suffer injuries, to acquire diseases, and to die for causes from which they will receive no benefit whatsoever. This is as intense an injustice as any humans have ever suffered, and given the magnitude of our exploitation of animals--with several billion a year being raised and killed annually in the United States alone--

this is a vastly more massive injustice than any humans have ever suffered.

Of course, most of our contemporaries still do not see our use of animals as being an injustice or as being covered by the fairness family of moral ideas at all. Although none of them would, in other areas, accept anything as long since discredited as Aristotelean science and feudalism, when it comes to animals, they feel quite comfortable, thank you, with a hierarchical worldview that places them at the top and only marginally inhibits how they use their inferiors to satisfy their desires. In response to this self-serving moral complacency, philosophers such as Peter Singer, Bernard Rollin, myself, and others have been emphasizing that just as our basic moral concepts are color blind and sex blind, so they are species blind. For example, there is nothing in the logic of the Golden Rule to treat others as we would like to be treated by them which restricts it to people. Similarly, the altruistic ideal of setting aside selfish interests in order to do that which will be best for all concerned logically extends beyond the human family to cover all beings with interests. Again, pain, frustration, and boredom are evils because of how they feel, not because of who feels them; so, our moral commitment to minimizing the misery of this world logically covers all those who can experience such evils, not merely those sufferers who happen to have Homo sapien genes. And so forth.

Opponents of animal liberation often try to portray it as a product of implausible Eastern religions, such as that of the Jains, or of mysterious, probably empty constructions, such as "natural rights" and "inherent value." But that is simply not true. The liberating of animals from human exploitation is merely the next logical step in the progress of our everyday, Western moral concepts. Aristotle was the first major philosopher to say that slavery was morally pernicious--but his vision was ethnically and sexually limited: he objected only to the enslaving of Greek men; the enslaving of Persians and Egyptians and of women of all races he considered natural. It has taken us over two thousand years, and overcoming all varieties of religious and racial, as well as ethnic and sexual, prejudices to bring Aristotle's insight to its present, humanistic

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1. Agenda 3/5 (Sept/Oct, 1983): 4.
2. New York: Hafner Press, 1948.
3. The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, eds. Torrey and Allen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906).
4. Peter Clark and James Q. Wilson, "Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organization," Administrative Science Quarterly VI (1961), p. 235.
5. James Q. Wilson, Political Organizations (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 46.
6. Ibid., pp. 46-7.
7. Harvard University Office of Government and Community Affairs, The Animal Rights Movement in the United States, report distributed by the International Society for Animal Rights (1982), p. 6.
8. Carl Bakal, Charity U.S.A. (New York: Time Books, 1979), p. 288.
9. Ibid., p. 287. The suit brought against ASPCA was settled out of court, with the Society agreeing to certain stipulations.
10. Ibid. In the settlement of the suit brought against API, Belton Mouras, API's staff head, was ordered to resign from the Board of Directors and to account for \$17,000 in unauthorized spending.
11. Response to questionnaire distributed by David Macauley, November, 1983.
12. Martin Stephens, Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Stephen R. Kellert, Policy Implications of a National Study of American Attitudes and Behavioral Relations to Animals (Washington, D.C.: Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1978), pp. 99-100.
15. James Turner, Reckoning with the Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 68.
16. Sally Gearhart, Op. cit.
17. See, for example, the social and theoretical manifestations of this link in Richard Hofstadter's important work on Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).
18. Turner, op. cit., explores a possibility similar to this one more fully on page 9.
19. "What Sort of Person Reads Agenda?" Agenda: News Magazine of the Animal Rights Network 3/3 (May-June, 1983), pp. 26-7. This news magazine was relied upon throughout the study, with more than fifteen of its thirty-page issues having been read and synthesized. Like so much of the voluminous data, it cannot be cited in every relevant situation; however, when it is appropriate to do so, it shall be referred to as Agenda and followed by the volume, number, and page.
20. Kellert, op. cit., p. 59.
21. Ibid., pp. 63, 73; Agenda 3/3, pp. 26-7.

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stage of development in the idea that no people should be slaves. Conceptually, the basic shift here has been made in the past two hundred years, with the shift, at least as regards relations among people, from the idea that there is a natural hierarchy, with one group destined to serve the interests of another, to the idea that we should all be given equal consideration and protection of our interests, that we should all be given an equal chance at a decent life and protection against being exploited by those stronger than ourselves. Liberating animals is nothing more than applying this same, thoroughly ordinary moral concern to those who differ from us not only in color, language, religion, and sex but in species.

Thus, liberating animals is not only the bringing of animals directly and fully into the arena of our moral concern, it is also the next logical step in our overcoming of our feudal heritage by substituting egalitarian for hierarchical presumptions. As this is accomplished, the same thing will happen

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upon. The deeper question, raised earlier, is never even asked: Is it ever morally acceptable for some beings to benefit from the harms they cause to other beings?

Would biomedical and behavioral research come to a halt if the above question were asked and the result were that animal experimentation ceased? Probably not, but this is much too large an issue to get into here. However, suppose it did cease. The human species would doubtless continue to exist, just as it did before animal experimentation began, with a diminished lifespan and quality of life, to be sure. Yet other institutions, from which humans individually and collectively have benefited--for example slavery--have been abandoned for moral reasons. And many more should be, for similar reasons, such as the oppression of women, children, the elderly, and marginal peoples, and the pursuit of "superiority" in nuclear weapons. I am not arguing here that animal experimentation should be stopped, only pointing out that the fact that stopping it would cause us much inconvenience and even misery is not the end of the matter.

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THE EYE OF THE WHALE

(dedicated to Paul Watson and the Sea Shepherd)

I looked into the eye of the whale
and saw the person looking back at me,
and she said to me,
"You are witness.
You cannot now turn away,"
Nor could I.
Cords of light--
cords of steel
bind me to her
for all time
and wherever I am
and wherever she is.
They are my burden
and my joy.

PAULETTE CALLEN

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SAPONTZIS

in moral philosophy that has already happened in biology: the evolution of our concept of animals will merge with the evolution of our concept of humanity, and we will come to recognize that together we all form one living, morally significant and worthy community of interests on this planet.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Randall L. Eaton
Zen and the Art of Hunting: A Personal Search for Environmental Values
Reno: Carnivore Press, 1986
73p, epilogue
\$10.00 paper

Randall L. Eaton
My Animals ... My Teachers
Reno: Carnivore Press, 1986
80p
\$10.00 paper

Jeremy Rifkin
Time Wars: The Primary Conflict in Human History
New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1987
210p, notes, selected bibliography, index
\$18.95