

PREFACE

This book is intended for students and members of the general public who wish to know what philosophers have been saying about the controversial issue of animal liberation. The aim is to do justice to the arguments of philosophers involved in the debate, while presenting those arguments in a way that makes them accessible to a wide audience.

Philosophers who have written on the matter can be divided broadly into two camps. On one side are those who believe that a fundamental reassessment of our traditional view of animals is in order, and that such a reassessment leads to the conclusion that we should make radical changes in our treatment of them. On the other side are those who, while likely to find cruelty to animals abhorrent, nevertheless find the notion of “liberating” them to be without merit. However, this is not to say that there are two neatly defined positions, with all those in favour of liberation employing a common set of principles and arguments, and all those against liberation employing another common set of principles and arguments. Indeed, it would be hard to find any two philosophers who agree completely with each other on the moral status of animals. The complexity of the debate will become apparent in the course of the following chapters.

In 1632 Galileo published *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, in which he set forth the respective arguments for the Ptolemaic, or earth-centred, view of the universe, and the Copernican, or sun-centred, view. Galileo’s sympathies, however, were too obviously with the Copernican view, and the Church in its turn took a very dim view of Galileo, convicting him of suspected heresy. *Animals and Ethics* also concerns a debate about two radically different ways of viewing the world. However, although I have my own opinions on many of the issues raised in the following chapters, I hope to present the various arguments involved in a reasonably impartial manner, even while commenting on

their strengths and weaknesses. In this way I mean to provide the reader with an understanding of the principal areas of contention in the debate, and with a good basis for evaluating competing claims about how we should treat animals.

As John Stuart Mill maintained in *On Liberty*, his famous defence of freedom of expression, familiarizing ourselves with other points of view is vital regardless of how firmly we hold that our beliefs are correct. Another view just may be correct after all, or at least it may hold part of the truth. And even if our own view is indeed the right one, it is only by understanding and evaluating the opinions of those who disagree with us that we can come to believe what we do on the basis of well-reasoned arguments, instead of holding our beliefs simply as dogma. For this purpose, Mill said, we should be exposed to opposing opinions in their strongest form, preferably in the words of those who believe them and can put the case for them most forcefully. With Mill's injunction in mind, readers of this volume are encouraged to seek out in their original form arguments that I summarize, not only those arguments they find congenial, but those that strike them as unsound or even bizarre.

In Chapter 1 animal liberation is defined and is situated with respect to the notion of the moral community. Along the way, we look at the question of whether animals can suffer. A brief overview is given of the main ethical approaches to the topic. The perspectives and implications of rights theory, utilitarianism, contractarianism, feminism, and virtue ethics are outlined and contrasted. Also introduced is an argument that plays a particularly prominent role in the ethical debate and that is encountered in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a historical introduction to the topic of the moral status of (non-human) animals. A number of prominent pre-twentieth-century thinkers are canvassed on the subject of animals, with particular attention being paid to Descartes' view that animals are machines without minds, to Kant's view that we have no duties to animals because they are not rational, and to Darwin's claim that humans are not fundamentally different from their non-human kin.

Whether animals should be ascribed moral rights is a controversial issue even among philosophers who support animal liberation. Chapter 3 addresses this issue, focusing primarily on the work widely acknowledged to be the most comprehensive and influential pro-rights argument: *The*

Case for Animal Rights, by Tom Regan. Regan's argument is explicated in some detail, and is examined in terms of the criticisms (explicit or implicit) made both by supporters and by opponents of animal liberation.

Chapter 4 addresses the issues of eating and of hunting animals. How much does the suffering of animals matter and can eating them be justified by minimizing their suffering? Among the arguments considered are those of Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, and of Singer's critics. Attention is also directed to what makes killing wrong, to whether being vegetarian really makes any difference, and to the intersection of feminism and vegetarianism. The chapter also looks at the issue of hunting. Is killing for sport to be condemned out of hand, or can a case be made for it? What about the traditional subsistence hunting done by Aboriginal people?

Animals are commonly subjected to suffering and death in scientific research. Whether such research can be justified is the subject of Chapter 5. Even philosophers who favour animal liberation often agree with their anti-liberation opponents that if it comes to a conflict of basic interests, the basic interests of normal humans should prevail over those of animals. Should we conclude that scientific research involving animals is almost always justified, even in cases where it would be immoral to experiment on humans, or would a consistent application of moral principles lead us to condemn much of the animal research undertaken these days? Chapter 5 includes a look at the related topic of the genetic engineering of animals and considers whether there are valid objections to this practice.

Though at first glance it might be assumed that animal liberation is an aspect of environmentalism, a great deal of heated debate has arisen over the question whether the individualistic orientation of liberationists is compatible with the holistic orientation of environmentalists. It has been charged that liberationists must be committed to protecting wild animals from harm, and that any such policy must have ruinous consequences for the environment. In Chapter 6 the diverse arguments on both sides of the liberation/environmentalism issue are explored, together with attempts at reconciliation.

Chapter 7 concludes the book with a brief look at the wider context of animal-liberation philosophy and activism.

The ways in which animals are used by humans are numerous, and

the book does not attempt to address every one of them. For example, it does not deal directly with the use of animals in circuses or in rodeos and touches only briefly on the issue of zoos and on the role of animals as companions (pets). Some works on zoos, companion animals, and circuses are included in the bibliography.

The bibliography is a feature of this book. Although there is no intention to list everything ever written on the moral status of animals, the bibliography is extensive, comprising publication data on nearly seven hundred books and articles. The bibliography forms an integral aspect of the text. During the course of the book frequent references are given to works listed in the bibliography, both to cite the source of ideas discussed and to point readers to pertinent material.

I have kept direct quotations to a minimum in the main body of text. Works mentioned in the following chapters, as well as relevant source materials, are cited in the text by author and year of publication — e.g., “Singer 2002”. These citations refer the reader to the bibliography at the end of the book.

For the sake of convenience I use the word “animal” in its everyday sense, to refer to non-human animals. However, human beings are also animals, even if we are animals of a unique kind. The perceived tension between our animal nature and our uniqueness informs much of the debate about animal liberation.

The first edition of this book was published in 1999 under the title *Magpies, Monkeys, and Morals*. A second edition, titled *Animals and Ethics*, appeared in 2003. For this third edition, new material has been added to the text and some existing material rearranged. Once again, the bibliography has been significantly enlarged. For the first time the book includes a number of sidebar quotations, ones that I hope are not only pithy but also provocative.