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### ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN ANIMAL USAGE

I shall present to you some statements concerning my own beliefs about ethical matters, mention some problems where people differ in their opinions, consider some specific examples of the treatment of animals by man, and give some definitions. This means that I shall not be dealing with what is my main area of activity, which is how to assess poor welfare, and hence find solutions to welfare problems.

#### Man's moral obligations to animals

Man has moral obligations towards the living organisms with which he interacts. These can be summarised in three statements:

- a) Man has an obligation to conserve species and habitats.
- b) Man has obligations where, because of human action, an individual dies.
- c) Man has obligations to prevent poor welfare in individual animals.

The first two statements refer to all living things: the third refers only to animals.

#### Human attitudes to animals

Human usage of living things occurs in almost all aspects of life and some form of usage is considered acceptable by everyone. Critical questions concern the nature and extent of the usage.

As we have seen in previous papers, most early philosophical and religious writings on the usage of animals were very human-centred. However, there have been considerable and accelerating changes recently, particularly with regard to the belief that we are morally obliged to try to understand more about the living organisms which we use. One of the substantial changes which has occurred in recent years is that we do know more about these organisms. When deciding whether an action is morally justified or not, we have a better understanding of the effects on the animal or plant itself. A consequence of increased knowledge has been, therefore, an increase in respect for living things.

The Judaeo-Christian approach to species other than man has long been one of exploitation. Little consideration has been shown to animals despite various ideas about some

kind of co-existence in heaven and a number of other statements in the Bible and other religious writings.

Over the past two hundred years, there has been a great and increasing change - for example in the meaning given to the term "dominion". In the Bible man as a species is described as having "dominion" over animals. This was interpreted as meaning that animals could be exploited almost totally. But, as the Bishop of Salisbury pointed out in a speech a few years ago, there is also reference in Isaiah to the future Messiah having dominion over man and other animals. He is not seen as bringing exploitation and destruction but respect for all species in their proper place in the world.

Such an interpretation has two implications:

- a) that respect for all living things is necessary.
- b) that we need to know about and take account of the functioning and requirements of the living organism.

We have to know something about the organism in order to decide upon its "proper place", so giving it proper respect and care.

In these comments I have been referring deliberately to "organisms". How far do animals differ from plants?

In fact, in most aspects of fundamental biological functioning they are very similar and when consideration is given to conservation, people do not differentiate very much at all between them. The same often applies when people discuss whether an organism should be killed. When considering live animals and plants, however, most people assume that animals have a different quality of life.

A development in recent years is that we now have a different idea about the cognitive ability of animals and the complexity of their behaviour. When we are talking about welfare we now take into account the fact that animals respond to the world in a way which shows how much they are aware of it. They have an ability to learn; they can establish complex relationships; they have an ability to suffer. This last point will be discussed later.

Studies of the behaviour and physiology of animals in recent times have revealed the great complexity of mammals and birds and, to a lesser extent, other vertebrates and the more complex invertebrates such as the octopus and the squid. When we come to insects and worms, the evidence of their cognitive ability suggests that this is small. Even so, all of these organisms have some such ability, and divisions between species on this basis would be merely a matter of degree.

### Mechanisms for dealing with adversity: the measurement of welfare

All animals have an array of systems which they use to cope with difficulties. These include:

- a) the brain/adrenal system, which includes the hypophysis in the brain and the adrenal gland. This helps to provide more energy and is brought into play when animals need it.
- b) the endorphin/enkephalin system, which involves the production of analgesic peptides. These have a pain-killing effect and enable the animal to deal with unpleasant situations, so that it can cope with them by self-narcosis.
- c) behavioural responses which alter the state of the individual.

We can now provide a definition of welfare which relates to these systems:

The WELFARE of an individual is its state with regard to its attempts to cope with its environment (Broom, 1986).

Thus the welfare of the animal is not something which we give to it: it is a condition of the animal itself. There are three kinds of consequences of trying to cope with difficulties:

- (a) The individual may cope easily, in which case there is little or no welfare problem, or
- (b) It may live in conditions which are difficult for it, developing methods of coping. It survives, grows and reproduces but it has difficulty in doing so and its welfare is therefore poor.
- (c) The third possibility is that the animal uses its systems to try to cope, but fails to do so. It either dies or it cannot grow or reproduce. Its welfare is, again, poor: its control systems are overtaxed, and the term "stress" should be used.

What concerns us is where the welfare of the animal is poor, and we can identify this by some measurement. We may measure poor welfare by demonstrating that the animal shows abnormal behaviour patterns, bringing in analgesic peptides in order to cope. The more it does this, the worse its welfare. (see Broom (1988) and Fraser and Broom (1989) for details of welfare assessment).

We can make objective measurements, showing how good or poor welfare is, along a continuum. This measurement is nothing to do with moral considerations. It tells us something about the state of the animal. We are then faced with having to make moral decisions. How poor, for

instance, must the welfare be for someone to say that this situation is intolerable?

One other thing that can be measured to a limited extent is pain. Pain is a sensory mechanism which animals use to cope with difficulty. The pain receptor can send a signal to the brain which means "do something about this". The animal will then avoid the situation if it can.

PAIN is a sensation which is itself very aversive. Other things may be aversive, not so much of themselves but because of their associations.

Questions of whether or not to kill are also separate from those of welfare, although the question of whether or not to kill should never be taken lightly. A further question then could be: is the sudden and painless death of an animal any different from the death of a plant? My feeling is that it is not.

If the death of the animal has an effect on other individuals of whatever species, that also needs to be taken into account. Strong emotional bonds can be formed with animals but are seldom formed with plants.

One last point at this stage: assessing the welfare of an animal is totally different to asserting its rights.

### Animal Usage

The important thing is the welfare of the animal during its life: given that, what sorts of use are reasonable?

- a) Is it reasonable to study an individual in order to benefit that individual itself?

For example, an animal could be studied to determine its particular needs and disease-state, so as to provide for or cure them. Most people would agree that this 'use' is quite reasonable.

- b) Is it reasonable to use one individual to help others of the same species?

For example, studying disease in one dog could lead to a cure for similar disease in other dogs. Most people would agree with this, but would also stipulate the limits of what could be done to the individual dog being studied.

- c) Is it reasonable to use one individual to help individuals of another species?

Should we study a disease in dogs to help cats, or study a disease in rabbits to help people, or use guide dogs to help blind people, or keep pets in order to comfort the

old or to educate the young? In each of these cases, the answer would generally be that it depends upon the welfare of the individual being used. There has to be a "reasonable" trade-off.

#### Factors which affect peoples' views on welfare

Given this range of situations, what factors affect peoples' views about, for instance, the level of poor welfare which is "acceptable"? Where, indeed, do the most important welfare problems lie? Three points should be made here.

- a) **Numbers.** The species which is kept in the largest numbers by man, the commonest bird in the world in fact, is the domestic fowl. A corollary of this fact is that if chickens are treated badly, very many individuals are so affected.

After the domestic fowl come other farm animals, then pets and, some way behind, laboratory animals, zoo animals and animals used for entertainment.

If pest-species were to be included here, apart from bacteria, the nematode worms and insects would top the list and pest-mammals would be high on it.

In thinking about any of these animals, think of individuals. Moral issues are about individuals.

- b) **Terminology.** The way in which people view animals is affected by the words which are used to describe them or operations which concern them.

If a word like "harvesting" is used for collecting and killing chickens, we de-humanise our attitude towards the activity. Similarly, some people talk about "cropping" plants and also about "cropping" animals, or describe killing all the hens as "clearing a hen-house" or as "depleting" it. Such impersonal words are easier to use than "killing" or "slaughtering" and do not take account of the fact that the animals may suffer in the process, whereas plants do not.

In a similar way, referring to abnormal behaviour, people say that animals have "vices" such as tail-biting, implying that the individual is largely to blame for these behavioural aberrations. The so-called vice is usually a direct consequence of the conditions imposed on animals, so the term is inappropriate.

My preference is not to use words which de-personalise the organisms referred to.

- c) **How viewed by man.** The way in which we think of an animal affects how we view its welfare. An animal

which is a source of revenue, like a pig, is thought of in a different way from an animal which is mainly a companion, like a dog, or one which is principally a pest, like a house-mouse.

In real terms, this differentiation is unreasonable, since questions relating to the welfare of each individual animal must deal with similar issues. All three species can suffer in very similar ways and yet we still tend to assess their welfare by different standards.

It doesn't matter to a rabbit whether it is being thought of as a potential meal, as the subject of an experiment, or as a pet. What counts for the rabbit is the quality of its life. In fact, the ones which fare worst are some of those which are kept as pets and, probably, the best looked after would also be pets.

#### Causes of Welfare Problems

These can be summarised as follows:

- a) Abuse and cruelty,
- b) Neglect (either calculated, accidental or due to lack of knowledge),
- c) Maintaining animals in an unsuitable system, which involves some specific deprivation (like a calf not having a teat or living in very boring conditions for a long time, or
- d) Pushing the animal hard because of the method of production.
- e) Disease, which is an important welfare problem in itself.

#### Problem areas - a Summary and Review

- a) Ill treatment, use in sport and neglect cause welfare problems for domestic animals in general.
- b) Pets, working animals, farm animals, zoo and circus animals, laboratory animals: welfare problems can arise through the system of housing and management adopted.
- c) Farm animals: problems arise in handling, transport, marketing, and at slaughter (see below).
- d) Laboratory animals: specific procedures used in testing, research and teaching can cause welfare problems.
- e) Wild animals: these may be ill-treated in various ways, and additionally, may be in pain from

the method of capture or disablement, e.g., lead shot, hooks, traps etc.

For farm animals in particular, important problem areas include: housing, handling, transport, procedures at slaughter, what happens at markets, various farm operations, type of provision for emergencies (e.g. a fire on the farm), etc. Another factor contributing to poor welfare is the quality of care provided by the people looking after the animals.

Questions to be asked include: Are the animals neglected? What is the quality of stockmanship? Are the animals diseased, given adequate food, being pushed too hard by the system in which they are kept?

Some of these problems are illustrated by looking at particular examples. Contrast, for instance, veal calves in crates, and those in the fields or in groups in straw-yards, and ask what life is like for them as individuals.

Similar issues can be raised by looking at sows in stalls and sows in fields (remembering that there are both advantages and disadvantages here) or sows in a group-housing situation, bedded on straw, with electronic sow feeders. The lives of the animals must be studied in detail and their welfare assessed individually.

If considering transport or farm operations or diseases which are welfare problems, it is necessary to measure the effects on the animals. Legislators take more note of scientific assessment than of emotional responses.

Overall, what needs to be done is gradually to change the attitudes which people have towards animal welfare, providing information and educating children in a balanced way. In order to obtain the information needed to bring about change we need to investigate the welfare of animals, considering every individual in a compassionate way.

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