

BOOK REVIEWS

Ethics, Humans and Other Animals: An Introduction with Readings

R Hursthouse (2000). Published by Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE, UK. Distributed by ITPS, Cheriton Way, North Way, Andover, Hampshire SP10 5BE, UK. 266 pp. Paperback (ISBN 0 415 21242 1). Price £12.99.

I opened this book with the anticipation of learning more about the subject and becoming more critical of the theories that deal with these issues. I was not disappointed; in fact, I was much taken with the author's approach and with the depth and way in which she analysed the various ethical lines of reasoning. The author is a teacher of philosophy at the Open University and the book is basically a textbook written for students of all disciplines embarking on ethics perhaps for the first time. The book sets out the objectives at the start of each of the six chapters; each chapter then contains readings, exercises (35 in all — and with answers!) and detailed discussions. The author deals with the three major approaches to our use of animals, namely utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics, and the texts are taken from the works of Singer, Regan, Midgley and Scruton. She analyses them in a way that enables the reader to comprehend and criticise each of the theories. What I appreciated, however, was the way in which she not only made them clear, but also applied them to real situations such as animal research, fox hunting, and meat eating. One interesting sideways look helped to explain why, historically, animals have not been on the agenda in the way they are now. In addition, the book gives valuable practical advice about how to analyse arguments and how to read philosophical texts efficiently and effectively. The book is well laid out, unusually I found no typographical errors, and the boxing of text has been performed appropriately and usefully.

So what is wrong with this book? Not a lot. In my opinion, it achieves its aim and I wish it had been published earlier when I first started to become involved with these issues. There is the inevitable frustration that it could have been deeper in parts, but further readings are supplied — or, more tantalisingly, the admission that this is the subject of much debate but that there is not sufficient room to cover the issues here! My own frustration was that 'alternatives', for example to fox hunting (drag hunting, shooting with expert marksmen, using set-aside for preserving the countryside) and animal research (many replacements and refinements could have been usefully referred to), did not seem to figure in the discussion. Nor did the importance of evaluating 'factual' claims in any debate; these are the tinder of many heated discussions that arise because of the emotion and misinformation engendered by this particular debate. Animal welfare science, too, deserved a mention. But I carp as one with a vested interest, not as one reading a more abstract academic text.

In my opinion, this book can help us understand the other person's viewpoint — something that Gordon Dunstan demanded of himself, and on which he was so right. It was also good to see Mary Midgley receive some credit, which she so richly deserves, for her contribution to the field in 1983 with her book *Why Animals Matter* (NB: Tom Regan published his seminal work in the same year). I think that Rosalind Hursthouse has underestimated the level at which the book aims, as it would serve the interests of more experienced persons as well as the naïve — for example, the self-taught in this field. And that is the point for me about this book: it is not just a primer, but literally a *revision* text for those involved in this debate in the wider context, such as those in the animal welfare movement. I would therefore recommend it both as an essential read and as a revision exercise for all those with an interest in society's use and exploitation of animals.

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