

## Book Reviews

### ***For Our Children: The Ethics of Animal Experimentation in the Age of Genetic Engineering***

A Nordgren (2010). Published by Rodopi, Tijnmuiden 7, 1046 AK Amsterdam, The Netherlands. 198 pp Paperback (ISBN 978-90-420-2804-3). Price €42.00.

Of the making of many books on the ethics of animal experimentation there appears to be no end. Can anything really new now be said on the subject, I wondered, as I began to read *For Our Children*. I was in for a pleasant surprise. Much of the philosophical and scientific material that Anders Nordgren examines in this book is not new, but his clear analyses and imaginative insights jolt some tired debates out of accustomed ruts and provoke thought at a deeper and more satisfying level.

Nordgren begins by analysing five familiar philosophical ‘ethical prototypes’ of animal experimentation: human dominion (Peter Carruthers); equal consideration of interests (Peter Singer); animal rights (Tom Regan); strong human priority (Carl Cohen); and weak human priority (Mary Midgley). Particularly illuminating here is his discussion not only about the types of ethical theory each represents (rights-based, consequentialist, contractualist, or mixed, and whether obligations should be lexically or contextually ordered), but also about their key metaphors — such as whether animals have ‘moral standing’, or ‘count’, or have ‘inherent’ (‘a container metaphor’) ‘value’ (‘an economic metaphor’). A basic distinction in ethics, Nordgren argues, is between “the metaphor of an imaginary observer and the metaphor of a partial participant. According to the former — which is the dominating one in philosophy — being ethical would imply taking an impartial stance. According to the latter, ethics is a matter of special obligations due to special relations in which we are involved”.

All of the prototypes, he suggests, opt for the former except Midgley, who has a mixed view. To some extent, she adopts the metaphor of an imaginary impartial observer (interspecies justice), but tries to combine this with the metaphor of a partial participant. In her opinion we have special relations to our children and other human beings, and to be ethical is to take this partiality seriously.

As the title of his book suggests, Nordgren, while not uncritical of Midgley, is in greater sympathy with her view than that of the other four prototypes. He argues that “The interests of our children should count more for us than those of others, because it is our parental moral responsibility to care more for them. And the interests of human beings should count more for human beings than those of animals, because it is our human moral responsibility to care more for them”.

This ‘argument from species care’ however “is not an argument for the ethical acceptability of all animal exper-

iments (strong human priority), but only for some (weak human priority). The reason is that species care (a partial obligation) needs to be balanced against interspecies justice (an impartial obligation). This sets a limit for the use of animals in experimentation: an animal experiment is not ethically acceptable if the expected human benefit of the experiment is very low and the expected animal harm is severe. This implies that the long-term goal should be to stop carrying out animal experiments, and that we need to do much more to find non-animal alternatives. At present and for the foreseeable future, however, it would be ethically irresponsible to stop carrying out animal experiments. The care for our children and other human beings requires that we continue doing at least some animal experimentation”.

This conclusion, of course, is not so very different from that espoused by others who try to find a middle way in relation to the use of animals in research, and significant aspects of the following chapter, on the ‘Scientific value of animal experimentation’ (countering the claims of Peter Singer and the Greeks for example), are based on the work of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics 2005 Report on the subject. But Nordgren also significantly moves the debate forward, both by his helpful concepts of ‘Moral imagination and imaginative casuistry’, and by how he tackles the always difficult issue of ‘Ethical balancing’.

Nordgren defines moral imagination as “the ability to envisage alternative perspectives and arguments, to empathize with those affected by our actions, and to use moral metaphors and extend them to non-prototypical cases with discretion”. And, more specifically, “Moral imagination is not the ability to feel what animals feel. It is the ability to recognize the ethical relevance of animal pain”.

Using moral imagination, imaginative casuistry “is not a view that provides clear-cut answers to difficult ethical questions. It is a view that takes seriously the complexity of ethical problems. In doing so it acknowledges a plurality of legitimate moral appeals, a plurality of values and norms... This distinguishes it from approaches that are single valued, that is, approaches that include only one single basic value or norm and derive secondary values or norms from this single value or norm”.

Nordgren’s elaboration of these concepts may be particularly helpful to those who tend to see ‘more than one side to the question’, but feel intellectually vulnerable when under fire from the inexorable logic of ‘single-valued’ philosophers, whether utilitarian or deontologist. What Nordgren writes about ‘ethical balancing’ may also be helpful to those who try to practice it, but fear their practice may be all-too-subjective.

When considering what needs to be balanced or ‘weighed’, Nordgren argues, three different animal welfare concerns should first be distinguished: biological functioning; subjective feelings and suffering; and natural living. These

‘incommensurable variables’ can be weighed or balanced only on a contextual, case-by-case basis, for which ‘imaginative casuistry’ provides a means. Nordgren’s analysis here is necessarily detailed, including a discussion of how weighing before and after an experiment may differ. Balancing, he argues, ‘should be understood in terms of trade-off instead of aggregation’ and by using a ‘transparent... matrix’ with ‘two basic dimensions: expected level of human benefit (low, medium, high) and expected level of animal harm (mild, moderate, severe)’.

While this may sound familiar to those with experience of ethical review in the UK, Nordgren adds a number of helpful definitions and illustrations and also an important qualification about how ‘to reduce subjectivity and arbitrariness in making the ethical trade-off.’ ‘For example, in determining the likelihood of future human benefit, optimists and pessimists might make different judgements. One method of counteracting this risk is analogical reasoning based on precedents. This is particularly crucial in animal ethics committees and agencies. The way an ethical trade-off has been made in a similar previous case should be taken into account in the ethical trade-off in the new case’.

A long final chapter examines how Nordgren’s arguments might be applied to the production and experimental use of genetically modified animals, and concludes with detailed analysis of four case studies in which the trade-off differs in different ways from case-to-case. Different readers will no doubt be in different degrees of agreement or disagreement with Nordgren’s judgements. But the conceptual analyses and ethical arguments he offers provide a constructive and productive framework for achieving ‘substantial soundness’ in ethical decision-making about the use of animals in research. The clarity as well as depth of Nordgren’s analyses also makes this book an excellent introduction to these issues for undergraduate and postgraduate students of ethical issues in the life sciences.

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### **Welfare of Production Animals: Assessment and Management of Risks**

Edited by FJM Smulders and B Algers (2009). Published by Wageningen Academic Publishers, PO Box 220, 6700 AE Wageningen, The Netherlands. 588 pp Hardback (ISBN 978-90-8686-122-4) Price €98.00, US\$147.00.

This is a significant animal welfare textbook. It is large, 588 pages with few figures and tables. It is not a light read for perusing on the beach or before sleep, in fact it is not light at all. It is published by Wageningen Academic and issued by the European College of Veterinary Public Health and the European Food Safety Agency. It is volume 5 of a series of books on food safety assurance and veterinary public health. The book has an introductory chapter by the editors and then 22 chapters in 4 sections. The four sections are titled ‘Animal welfare — theoretical basis’ (10 chapters),

‘The assessment of animal welfare risks’ (4 chapters), ‘Management of risks for the welfare of production animals’ (7 chapters), and ‘Reconciling animal welfare and food safety’ (1 chapter). Each chapter is by a different author or group of authors, most of them European (29) but with a few notables from Australia, Canada and the USA. As many chapters are written by people whose first language is not English there are some sentences which are difficult to understand and there are also a few typographical errors in the text. The book is European in focus and concerned with production animals and poultry but there is a chapter on hunting. At the start of each chapter is a summary and at the end a conclusion section which identifies what has been done, what has been neglected and what needs to be done. As many of these chapters are written by people with vested interests in research or regulation it is not difficult to imagine what they suggest needs to be done but of interest is the recognition of what has been done and how far the subject has come in the last 5 decades. The summary and the conclusions are valuable as many of these chapters may not be of great interest to some readers and they can get quickly an abbreviated idea of what the chapter is about. Each chapter is referenced but the depth of referencing varies considerably between them.

The first section is a series of review chapters on different aspects of animal welfare. Some of these are theoretical as suggested by the name of the section but many are descriptive reviews of the science behind different aspects of animal welfare. The first chapter by Lennart Nordenfelt, titled ‘The concept of animal welfare: a philosopher’s view’ concludes that positive subjective experiences are central to the concept of animal welfare. This conclusion presents a difficult premise from which to work for those involved in animal welfare risk assessment and introduces the reader to the difficulties in this field of endeavour. Ron Broglio’s review of animal welfare in science and society follows. It identifies the range of participants involved in the discussion on animal welfare and suggests that a neutral source of information is required for translating animal welfare science results for the general public. Again, this chapter suggests that there will be difficulties in getting agreement in animal welfare risk assessment. These two chapters together form a philosophy subunit within the first section and are followed by chapters written by internationally recognised animal welfare scientists on their areas of expertise. These descriptive review chapters deal succinctly and clearly with the European Welfare Quality® project, and the welfare issues relating to housing, nutrition, management, transport, stunning and slaughter and killing for disease control. These review chapters have to cover large subjects and to the credit of their authors and the editors, they are focused on the particular subject and are reasonably thorough. Most are about 15 to 20 pages long so they cannot cover the complete subject in depth but they are very readable and sufficiently referenced to be of value. Personally I enjoyed all of these chapters and will reread them. They are suited to anyone with an interest in animal welfare and though the focus is generally European as illus-