

Environmental Ethics: An Introduction with Readings

J Benson (2000). Published by Routledge, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE, UK. Distributed by ITPS, Cheriton Way, North Way, Andover, Hampshire SP10 5BE, UK. 295 pp. Paperback (ISBN 0 415 21236 7). Price £12.99.

This book addresses two main issues: the kind of value that should be attributed to the non-human entities, living and non-living, with whom we share the planet; and how we should think of our relationship to the rest of nature.

To many readers of this journal, casting animal welfare as a subset of environmental ethics might seem to blur the focus of their concerns. But this approach does have the important merit of enriching the meaning of the term 'welfare'. For, as the author notes, while standard views of ethics focus on "humans as subjects and objects of doings", the recent tendency in applied ethics has been to extend the range of concern, first to non-human animals, then to living beings generally, and then to populations, plant communities and ecosystems. Even so, animals do not feature prominently in the book, and when they do their treatment is somewhat oblique.

Yet the book's unusual perspective deserves recognition because traditional concerns over animal welfare often reflect a subconscious anthropocentrism, in which human exploitation of animals is a 'given' and welfare is perceived in purely utilitarian terms. The limitations of such an approach, which focuses on consequences rather than motives, is perhaps highlighted by an observation of the leading nineteenth century utilitarian philosopher, John Stuart Mill, (cited in the book): "In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's everyday performances." Placing emphasis on the *welfare* of animals can thus lead to a situation in which both their moral status, and our duties towards them, remain largely unexamined.

A key question is whether non-human beings can be said to have value in their own right, or whether they only have value insofar as they are valued by humans, either for their own sake or for the benefits that humans derive from them. With respect to animals, much depends on the meaning and significance of terms such as 'intrinsic value', 'inherent worth' and 'a good of its own'.

The author examines such issues with rigour and clarity but, given that animal ethics are explicitly included in the book's remit, it is perhaps surprising that no mention is made of recent legislative changes in the EU relating to ethical obligations to farm animals. For example, the 1997 Protocol on Animal Welfare (an amendment to the Treaty of Rome) recognises farm animals as sentient beings rather than as merely agricultural products; the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam now requires that account be taken of both animal sentience and animal welfare in the implementation of EU legislation. Some governments have gone even further: for example, the Swiss Federal Constitution relating to the genetic modification of animals (and, indeed, of plants and other organisms) has been amended to take into account "the dignity and integrity of living beings". It is true that Benson's emphasis is philosophical rather than political, yet he does find room for consideration of political developments concerning the global environment, such as those emanating from Rio and Kyoto.

The book is clearly, though not explicitly, designed for use as a course text in environmental ethics at university undergraduate level. Consequently, each chapter begins with a set of bulleted 'objectives', and contains 'exercises', which include directed reading of excerpts from important texts and self-assessment questions. For this reason, the book might have limited appeal to the general reader, even though the cover text claims, rather optimistically, that it "presupposes no prior knowledge of philosophy".

Unusually for a text at this level, the author declares his opinion (“modest position”) on the “intrinsic versus anthropocentric” nature of environmental values, claiming that “a sufficiently rich account of what is valuable to human beings is an adequate foundation for an ethics of respect for nature” — in other words, there is no requirement for a concept of value or quality independent of human judgements, tastes and interests. But this is by no means allowed to influence the objectivity of the discussion, as readers are encouraged to consider critically the relative merits of competing theories.

Readers who seek a deeper understanding of the relationship between ethics and animal welfare in the context of overall environmental concerns will find much of value in the arguments advanced and in the clarity with which they are presented. Those with a more focused interest in animal ethics might well consider that such concerns deserve a fuller treatment than the book provides.

B Mepham

Centre for Applied Bioethics, University of Nottingham

Traceability of Animals and Animal Products

Office Internationale des Épizooties (2001). Scientific and Technical Review, Volume 20 Number 2. Coordinated by H A MacDaniel and M K Sheridan. Published by the World Organisation for Animal Health, 12 rue de Prony, 75017 Paris, France; e-mail: oie@oie.int. 312 pp. Paperback (ISSN 0253 1933; ISBN 92 9044 524 6). Price 40 Euros.

Traceability is a word that has been incorporated into the language to describe man’s use of animals over recent years — particularly in the food industry, where the public, and therefore the public’s food suppliers, have taken a greater interest in the origins of our food. This interest has been fuelled, as this review constantly reminds us, by issues such as BSE and other well known ‘food scares’ such as those caused by *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and dioxin contamination. The review concentrates on food animals, although there are also chapters relating to companion and competition animals.

Traceability cannot be an end in itself because it is only useful when something is ‘attached’ to it such as human health, animal health or the prevention of fraud within a subsidy system. Simple traces back to the country of origin can provide a great deal of confidence if the country has systems in place such as robust legislation that is effectively enforced, national assurance schemes for the eradication of disease, and provisions for good animal welfare. Most of the authors in the review recognise this clearly and constantly emphasise the need to trace only to achieve the desired result, in order not to make systems over-complicated and unnecessarily expensive. Examples are given, such as the case in which a group of animals is reared from birth to death under the same system of housing, feeding and stockmanship; it is not required that these animals are traced as individuals in order to ascertain that animal proteins have not been fed as part of their diet. However, if each member of a group of animals is required for selection of their potential to improve breed characteristics, individual tracing would be an absolute necessity.

There are other issues of public concern less well emphasised in the text that also require exacting systems of traceability in order to verify that these particular areas of interest are being taken care of. The review is equally relevant for these areas, which include animal welfare, care of the environment, social responsibility and food quality.

The detailed nature of the text, inevitable when describing such a large and complicated subject, is at times in danger of losing and possibly confusing those readers coming to the