

## ***CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: Point and Counterpoint***

One of the objectives of the Critical Perspective feature is to draw the *OJS* readership into reflective thought about current efforts in the natural and social sciences so that meaningful dialogue may ensue. That the essay "The Unnatural Nature of the Animal Rights/Liberation Philosophy" reached this objective is demonstrated by the following letter from Nate Cardarelli, professor emeritus from The University of Akron. We thought it would be beneficial to the *OJS* readership to publish Professor Cardarelli's letter and a response from Drs. Nicoll and Russell, the authors of the original Critical Perspective.

LEE A. MESERVE  
Editor, *OJS*

To the Editor:

The recent article by Nicoll and Russell (1993), "The Unnatural Nature of the Animal Rights/Liberation Philosophy," while its conclusions echo my own sentiments, arrives there through highly refutable statements and rather tortured logic. The animal rights activists have become increasingly obstructive to the pursuit of medical research, especially now that they have friends in high places and thus ready access to the coercive powers of the federal government. In refuting the ALARMists (using the authors' acronym) one ought not to base their arguments on anthropomorphic absurdities. The authors quote a number of beliefs arising from murky theological traditions and doctrines. They state: "As far as we can ascertain, only humans have language, the capacity to reason, and a conscious, and only *Homo sapiens* have developed moral codes. In addition, we are the only species that shows any concern about the welfare of foreign species." Beyond the fact that one can never prove a negative, there is an immense compendium of data, not only from the anecdotal literature, but in the published reports of numerous reputable men of science, that refutes all of the above statements (Krebs 1990).

My present research focuses on social bonding among dogs and between dog and man. Anyone who has worked with the canidae knows that they encode and decode acoustic signals from conspecifics and alter their behavior accordingly—which I believe is the basic thrust of the common meaning of language. (Canids, like humans, also communicate by body language and exchange olfactory pheromones. Hall and Sharp (1978) present substantial data in this respect. Communication is essential to survival in numerous species (Griffin 1981), a truism aptly explained some time ago by Darwin (1872) and Espinas (1878). Man's inability to decode the language of other species does not mean that conspecifics can't decode (Payne 1989, Stebbins 1983). Even skeptics tread warily in any universal negation of the presence of language in other species (Wade 1980). Nonhuman species cannot speak as we do because they lack the physiological apparatus (Lieberman 1984). Obviously there are humans who have not lost their humanity because they lacked the ability to speak and/or to hear. Certainly animals can decode human words, and apparently learn human sign language (Fouts and Budd 1979, Linden 1974). Many species, canids included, transmit in the infra- and ultrasound areas not detectable by the human ear (Stebbins

1983), and literally no research has been done in that area of communication.

Similarly the reasoning ability of nonhumans is hardly open to question. There is no way that man can define reason as only an attribute of man without tautology. Numerous species show comprehension of symbols (Davenport et al. 1975, Griffin 1992, Diamond 1991), demonstrate cognitive mapping (Tolman 1948), and show every aspect or quality of reasoning as defined by man.

Furthermore, at least the vertebrate social animals have culture, by any nontautological definition, and also transfer culture intergenerationally (Galef 1976; Griffin 1984, 1992; Haldane 1956; Mundinger 1980). Numerous species make and use tools as part of their culture (Beck 1980), thus one can't use "tools" as a distinction between humans and nonhumans.

There is considerable literature on the universality of consciousness, at least among the higher phyla. The recent works of Humphrey (1992) and Griffin (1992), and the article of Kihlstrom (1987) are recommended reading for nonbelievers. Whatever does it even mean to say that a living creature lacks consciousness—which, I presume, means an awareness of self? And how could you ever know? Suppose I deny that you have consciousness—let's see you prove otherwise—using some method or argument that would distinguish you from a dog.

It is also rather obvious that many species have some sort of a moral code. Among the social mammals and birds, one notes parental altruism towards the young, a general cannibalism taboo, and both kin and nonkin cooperation in the rearing of the young. Both male and female social canids protect the "sanctity" of the mating bond. Care of the sick and injured, and even altruistic euthanasia is observed with wolf, coyote, and other canines. One can infer a moral code in the wolf from the various rituals, protection of the copulatory tie, group feeding and defense, generalized reciprocal altruism, and the like (Fox 1969, Fiennes 1976, Harrington et al. 1982, Huxley 1897, Lopez 1978, Mech 1970).

Contrary to the claims of Nicoll and Russell, we observe cooperation, compassion, and morality operating across species boundaries. The naive altruism expressed daily by the domestic dog towards humans is rather well known. A dog that enters and rescues a strange infant from a burning house, or saves a stranger from drowning is hardly news.

Cooperation across species is well documented and goes far beyond dog and man. There are a number of

anecdotal reports from the American west on wild canines, wolf and coyote, succoring man in need. Reciprocity between man and the honeyguide bird, *Indicator indicator* (Krebs 1990, Isack and Reyer 1989) is a well known illustration. Cooperative hunting, prey sharing, and play after dining, are known for such pairings as wolf and raven, coyote and badger, jackal and cheetah, and domestic dog and domestic cat. In a forthcoming book I will describe the continuing compassionate behavior of one of my experimental dogs towards play-traumatized frogs!

There are a number of other challengeable assertions made in the Nicoll and Russell article. The curious argument that "the concepts of rights is an invention of the human mind that can only be understood by rational, reasoning beings"—and is not applicable to those that don't have such a concept is rather fatuous. Am I to believe that such a concept therefore does not run to human infants and children, the mentally incapacitated, and so on? However, since at least the social canids show reasoning and rationality, have a putative moral code governing social behavior, and certainly recognize rights and responsibilities to the group; am I then to argue that we must accord them the same rights as due humans? The ALARMists would certainly agree to that! The authors, in discussing pain, assert that "it is not possible for us to know what animals perceive." Those suffering from the "Bambi syndrome," our ALARMist protagonists, would counter that one cannot know what their fellow human beings perceive in regard to pain—and they would be right. The only pain perceptions one can know are his own. Try explaining a headache to one who has never experienced it!

In closing, I want to repeat that while I wholeheartedly endorse the need for using animals in research, and the collateral need for justification of this need to the lay audience, the subject article seems to provide comfort to our protagonists. We need a rational argument for the necessity of using animals in research; that is not attained by dredging up ancient, logically fallacious and factually incorrect arguments in support of our position as scientists.

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To the Editor:

We do not agree with Professor Nate Cardarelli's assessment that our arguments against the philosophy of the ALARMists are based on "anthropomorphic absurdities" and are "fatuous." First, he misunderstood one of the terms that we used. We stated, in effect, that we are unaware of any evidence that any nonhuman animals have a *conscience* (i.e., a sense or understanding of the difference between right and wrong behavior). We did not state that only humans are *conscious* (i.e., aware of their existence, surroundings, sensations, etc.)

Professor Cardarelli also misunderstood the meaning of the sentence that he quoted and the paragraph from which it was extracted. We stated: "... humans are morally more 'relevant' than animals because of the sum of a number of attributes, rather than on the basis of one or a few." Some of these attributes include language *and* the capacity to reason *and* the possession of a conscience *and* the ability to develop moral codes *and* showing concern for the welfare of other species, etc.

Yes, most or all animals can communicate with others by one means or another (even plants and yeast cells release chemical signals), but no species of which we are aware has developed communication skills that remotely resemble those of humans, which are characterized by comparatively huge vocabularies and the development of grammar and syntax. For which other species is there evidence for an oral history, much less a written one?

Yes, some animals may have a limited capacity to reason, but we are not convinced by the evidence presented by Professor Cardarelli that nonhuman animals have codes of morality. The animal behavior that he cited can all be accounted for by instincts and learning that do not require an understanding of the differences between right and wrong. The examples of cross-species cooperation and sharing and of reciprocity say nothing about animals having developed moral codes or laws regarding the welfare and treatment of other species. These arguments are anthropomorphic.

Professor Cardarelli also misunderstood the meaning of the word "rights" as we have used it. The legal definition of that word is "that to which one has a just claim" (see Cohen 1986, Nicoll and Russell 1991). Human infants and the mentally handicapped do not in fact have all the rights that are accorded to fully competent adults. If the above definition of rights were applied in its strictest sense, then infants and the mentally incompetent would have no rights at all because they could not claim them. However, society gives these groups special consideration because of their special status, i.e. infants are developing humans and mentally retarded or brain-damaged humans have suffered a tragic loss. Applying special consideration to special human cases in no way requires that, to be consistent, we must extend rights to members of species which have no understanding of them. (Contrary to

Professor Cardarelli's assertion, there is no evidence to suggest that canids "recognize rights and responsibilities" in the same way that humans do.) Moreover, no mentally competent human has the right to abuse or neglect other humans, whether or not they are mentally competent themselves, just as no one has the right to abuse or neglect animals for no purpose. A fuller discussion of the meaning of rights can be found in the essay by Cohen (1986).

Finally, and most importantly, Professor Cardarelli has completely missed the major point of our essay, which was described in the last section, headed "Missing the Point." It does not matter to what extent any animals share some of the human attributes that we hold in high regard, such as communication skills, reasoning ability, or even "putative moral codes." Because we are like other animals, we must use whatever means we have to ensure our survival as individuals and as a species. If our adaptive advantages are curtailed, we will face early extinction. It is ludicrous to moralize about biological necessities. We recommend that Professor Cardarelli read the last section of our essay again.

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