

BOOK REVIEWS

Animals and Their Moral Standing

Stephen R L Clark (1997). Routledge: London. 208pp. Hardback and paperback. Obtainable from the publishers, 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE, UK (ISBN 0415135591 [hardback] and 0415135605). Price £37.50 (hardback) and £12.99.

There are those philosophers who seem to see the prose in which they express their ideas as analogous to the way in which New Yorkers view riding the subway – although it may be a necessary vehicle for reaching a destination, one cannot and ought not to expect that such a voyage be pleasant, aesthetically positive, or memorable. Such philosophers unfortunately dominate both the philosophical journals and the graduate education of nascent ‘professional philosophers’ (odious locution!), thereby assuring that reading philosophy, even if edifying, will certainly not be fun.

Fortunately there are other philosophers – albeit in numbers far too small – who are masters of *belles-lettres* as well as of ideas and their logical implications and interplay. Unquestionably one of the best of these essayists is Stephen Clark, whose papers are as much a pleasure to read as to understand. Blessed as Clark is with elegance of style, the erudition of a polymath, formidable critical powers, and a mind that marches to its own drummer, it is the reader who is blessed, for he or she becomes immediately drawn into Clark’s dialectic, not as passive observer, but as active participant.

One should not make the mistake of devouring this book at one sitting – although the essays are short (the longest is 18 pages and most are under 15) they are not fast food. Indeed, they are much more analogous to gourmet cooking, wherein one takes the time to savour flavours and textures, and how individual components are combined to create surprising wholes. The ingredients are impressive: extensive knowledge of the history of philosophy, biology, psychology, ethology, theology, classical literature and contemporary philosophical discussion. These are then shaped by Clark’s unique perspectives, including an unabashed theological and Aristotelian vision of humans, animals, nature and society. What emerges, are essays that not only nourish one’s intellect, but expand one’s sensibility, and ways of perceiving the moral universe.

As one who reviews many books, I have mastered a formula for reviewing the ‘subway books’ mentioned earlier – one distils the argument into a few paragraphs, then writes some critical pages, then draws an evaluative conclusion. But this template does not work with Clark, as it would fail with Wittgenstein, or Nietzsche or Plato. For, like these thinkers, Clark provokes the reader to ruminate on his themes, to deploy his or her ‘active talent’ to think through connections and transitions, to complete enthymemes, to appropriate the discussion in language and examples reflective of one’s own experiences and to extrapolate beyond the text. Though non-technical and jargon-free, few books are likelier to elicit livelier and more natural discussion among bright students or others concerned with animal issues, than this collection of essays.

This, however, poses a problem for the responsible reviewer, as one cannot simply give the reader a sense of the book’s richness by a summary or paraphrase. But one can at least list some of the range of issues engaged by Clark. These include: the vacuity of utilitarianism as a viable ethical theory, implicitly resting on other moral notions (eg Chapter 9, p100 – a conclusion dear to those of us tired of being castigated by utilitarians for the non-empirical bases of our ethics); a defence of pan-psychism, similar to that advanced by Lloyd Morgan (eg Chapter 4, p41); the suggestion that animal awareness is self-evident and is given in our experience (Chapters 4 and 5); the provocative idea that we have higher

duties to domestic animals because they are 'part of our household'; the attack on rights theory as leading only to trivial rights for animals (Chapter 9); the defence of moral objectivism against shallow subjectivist arguments (Chapter 6); the claim that concern for animals and for environmental despoliation is compatible with classical liberal thought (Chapter 7); the historical tendency for opposing ethical traditions to see animals, wrongly, as operating only according to pleasure and pain (Chapter 5); the notion that the biosphere is part of the 'households' in which we comport human life (Chapter 9); the spirited defences of common sense and folk psychology against scientism, eliminative materialism and neo-idealism (Chapter 10); the frank appeals to theism; the notion that understanding of animal consciousness depends on 'loving attention' (eg Chapter 12, p139); the attack on Wittgensteinian dogma (eg Chapter 12, p 145); the discussion of animal *Umwelt* and its knowability (Chapter 12); the comparison of Heideggerian terms of human and animal project (ie a coherent, meaningful life-plan). All these discussions will almost certainly provide new insights and arguments, even to those well-schooled in the writings on animal ethics.

There are many notions that I share in my writing with Clark (though I have expressed them quite differently): distrust of both materialism and idealism; his rootedness in common sense; his Aristotelian bent and concern for what I call animal *telos*; his emphasis on positive law as the locus of animal 'rights'; his unstylish respect for a von Uexküllian biology; his arguments for non-linguistic thought and his distaste for Wittgenstein's incoherent, inconsistent and incomprehensible remarks on animal mentation; and his grasp of the importance of what was once called 'moral psychology'. The convergent evolution of our ideas naturally disposes me to favour his. To be sure, I see numerous points we could debate vigorously. However, that would be, as we say in the American West, 'chicken shit' and overly pedantic in the face of my enthusiasm for his work. I value the work for its originality, its intelligence, its literary merit (a vanishing virtue in the age of illiterate e-mail), and its courage (*vidé* his appeal to God; the philosophical analogue today of driving a horse and buggy - and a comparison that, I suspect, would cause Clark not a moment of discomfort).

In the end, this collection of 12 essays is a major contribution to the literature on ethics and animals. It rises above the dialectical 'Pilpul' recognized by Talmudists (or the steps towards tenure) that much recent work in the field has become. Although these essays were written over two decades, they nonetheless articulate a unified vision that is certainly one of the more subtle, idiosyncratic, brilliant and non-formulary in the field.

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The Domestic Rabbit, 5th edition

J C Sandford (1996). Blackwell Science: Oxford. 296pp. Hardback. Obtainable from the publishers, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0EL, UK (ISBN 0632038942). Price £29.50.

The first edition of this book was published forty years ago, and this fifth edition is a testament to the author's lifetime passion and expertise in all areas of rabbit keeping. The book begins with a fascinating chapter on the history of rabbits and their relationship with man, from their first mention by the Phoenicians in Spain in about 2000 BC, through