

Animal Rights Advocate Urges New Deal

The animal rights movement, which for long had as its major champions the proverbial "little old ladies in tennis shoes," has in recent years achieved a new level of intellectual sophistication and political effectiveness.

The movement has its own philosophers and theorists. One is an English-born veterinarian, psychologist, and author named Michael Fox, who for the past 18 months has been director of the Humane Society's new Institute for the Study of Animal Problems in Washington, D.C.

The institute is the research arm of the society. "My being here is a symptom of a new direction in the humane movement," says Fox. "Sentiment is not enough" as an argument for humane treatment of animals. "We can't use the argument that animal suffering is reason to be humane," for that after all is our own subjective judgment. It also implies that there is a cutoff point somewhere—that baby seals, for example, deserve more respect than lizards. That is a form of "speciesism" which Fox deplores. "We have to be ethically responsible because they exist—not because they are sentient."

The institute, which has four research associates, is engaged in gathering good hard Western-minded scientific evidence to undergird the ethic it embraces, which is more in tune with the spiritual doctrines of the East.

A major concern is the use of animals in laboratories and schools. Although the Animal Welfare Act of 1970 promulgates standards for the care of lab animals, it says nothing about their behavioral and social well-being. Yet, Fox says, humane treatment is better science because you cannot get good results with emotionally deprived animals. For example, he says, the LD₅₀ (dose at which half a population dies) for rats kept in separate cages is different from that for animals kept in their own social group. Although Fox is mainly concerned with primates, dogs, cats, and rodents, he says that even with fish there are data showing that social deprivation limits growth of nerve cell dendrites.

Fox's group also contends that a great deal of unnecessary research is being done on animals—testing cosmetics on rabbits' eyes, for example, or shaving cats' faces to test skin lotion. In many of these instances the animal testing is irrelevant to humans, and there are alternatives—testing substances on tissue cultures or using human volunteers—that are both more reliable and more humane. "The research establishment is beginning to face up to the issue quite squarely," says Fox, "provided we don't scream abolitionist or antivivisectionist nonsense." The institute will be doing more work on alternatives to animal subjects when its newest staff member, Andrew Rowan, arrives from England. Rowan, an Oxford graduate and former Rhodes scholar, has been working in London for the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments.

Another area where people are behaving very badly, says Fox, involves high school science fairs. Children are doing stupid and ill-supervised experiments, such as dosing rats with lead or scalding them, or putting saltwater fish in fresh water. One child's project consisted of evaluating the

effects of his mother's Valium and Thorazine on a hamster. "They are still giving dogs strychnine at some schools to see how it works," adds Fox. Science fairs have been a long-standing source of outrage among the animal rights types, but according to Fox only one state—California—effectively regulates these practices.

But the most large-scale outrage—and Fox is glad he is almost through with this project because it takes its toll emotionally—has to do with the treatment of animals raised for food. Animals are beginning to get some legal rights, namely through the Animal Welfare Act and the Endangered Species Act, but farm animals "are a totally neglected area."

Fox has traveled the country inspecting animals on "factory farms" and is now completing a book, tentatively entitled "Animal Farm Revisited." His basic case is that massive animal rearing operations are not only inhumane, but by no means as efficient as their advanced technology and economies of scale might indicate. Half the country's antibiotics are fed to farm animals, he says, and much of this is unnecessary as they are administered to counter diseases that would not occur if the animals were not subjected to overcrowding and stress. Special diets and genetic selection to enhance meat quality or augment production also serve to weaken animals' natural coping mechanisms. Calves raised for veal, for example, suffer anemia and weakness from

their low-iron diet; also, because they are fed no roughage, they resort to licking off their own hair.

Behavioral problems are legion as a result of overcrowding and lack of normal opportunities for socialization. Pigs chew each other's tails off. Chicks have their beaks cut off so they will not peck each other. Pigs and chickens even resort to cannibalism. Animals kept tethered in solitary pens become unbalanced from boredom, chew on themselves, molt excessively, and develop nervous tics and stereotyped behaviors; hogs and bulls, which are used for artificial insemination, often become sterile because of lack of social contact; this is treated by more hormones.

Fox says the mortality rate is as high as 20 percent on some farms, and many more deaths occur in the course of transporting animals for fattening and slaughtering. He says that the ventilation and temperature control on the trucks are haphazard, and losses in transportation alone amount to \$1 billion a year—equivalent to a 4-mile-long freight train filled with carcasses.

Fox says many of the inhumanities could be altered by simple means—supplying places for nesting and roosting for hens, for example, or changing the concrete flooring that causes pigs to develop arthritis, or supplying shaded areas in beef feedlots.

Fox talks much of the need for "empathy" with animals. By this he does not mean anthropomorphism, but rather a replacement of "macho dominionism"—with its assumption that humans have a right to control and dominate the rest of nature—with the recognition that all life is valuable.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

