CHAPTER 7: PETS / COMPANION ANIMALS; ZOOS, HUNTING, RACING, AND OTHER USES OF ANIMALS

Overview

This chapter we will discuss the moral responsibilities involved in keeping pets or companion animals and related moral issues concerning shelters, adoption, and killing unwanted companion animals. We will also discuss the arguments for and against hunting, dog and horse racing, rodeos, zoos and related uses of animals: is using animals for any or all of these purposes morally permissible or not? Why or why not?

Readings

EMPTY CAGES – 8. Turning Animals into Performers

ANIMALS LIKE US – Ch. 7. Zoos

EMPTY CAGES – 9. Turning Animals into Competitors

ANIMALS LIKE US – Ch. 8. Hunting
ANIMALS LIKE US – Ch. 9. Pets

Gruen: 5. Dilemmas of captivity and 6. Animals in the wild (optional)


Further Reading:

- Association of Zoos and Aquariums: http://www.aza.org/
- Ringling Brothers’ circus: http://www.ringling.com/animals/
“Pets” & Pet “Ownership” vs. Companion Animals & Animal Guardians

Keeping animals as companions raises unique responsibilities. Unlike many other ethical issues involving animals where our moral obligations are arguably largely “negative” – to not harm them, to leave them alone, etc. – we arguably have “positive” obligations towards any companion animals we might bring into our homes, e.g., to provide them with food, shelter, medical care, and companionship. This, of course, takes time, effort and money, sometimes a lot of money.

These financial demands can be a burden and give rise to hard questions about the extent of our obligations to animals. After all, there is no health insurance for animals, and animals’ healthcare costs could create great financial strain. What should be done in these common situations? Go into debt to pay for the medical bills? Find someone else to take the animal who can pay? Have the animal killed? Something else? The answers might not be morally or financially easy.

Many critics of animal advocates often say things like, “Animal rights advocates oppose having pets.” This claim seems to be a result either of ignorance or intentional manipulation. First, many animal advocates, including philosophers, have companion animals and often mention these animals in their writings. So it is ignorant to claim that animals advocates oppose having animals as companions.

Many animal advocates, however, do oppose companion animal ownership and, perhaps, the use of the word “pet” if it implies ownership. This is because if you own something, then that something is your property. And (generally, with some exceptions), if something is your property, then (generally, with some exceptions) you can do whatever you want with it, including destroy (or kill) it for whatever reason you would like, or no reason at all. Thus, the objection is that in thinking of companion animals as pets and thereby owned property, that nearly implies that animals’ interests deserve no consideration in their own right and so on. Animal advocates, of course, reject that. And they argue that breeding companion animals is wrong because for every
“new” animal produced another already existing animal in a shelter will not be adopted and thus killed. But they also believe that animals, such as cats and dogs, can be kept as companions, provided they are well cared for.

These are some common views about companion animals held by many animal advocates. Given that this is what they believe, why do critics of animal advocacy so often say that animal advocates oppose keeping companion animals?

**Ends and Means**

Like many uses of animals, using animals in rodeos, circuses, zoos, racing, in hunting, etc. are often justified by appealing to various “ends” or “products” of the use. For these kinds of arguments (for both these issues, as well as when this kind of argument is used to defend eating animals, or experimenting on them, and so on), here are some questions to ask:

- Is this a morally justified end, i.e., some worthy goal?
  - E.g., zoos might be justified by the claim that they are supposed to result in greater respect for animals, arguably a laudable goal. Rodeos might be justified by the claim that they produce entertainment for people, surely a more controversial goal. Some hunters might claim that the goal of hunting is to bring about the human pleasures resulting from killing animals, arguably a goal that could not be morally justified.

- Is this use of animals an effective, or the most effective, means toward that goal?
  - E.g., with zoos, scientific research might show that zoo attendance results in no greater respect for animals, and perhaps increased disrespect for animals. Thus, perhaps zoos are not an effective means toward that end. Regarding hunting, yes, killing animals is indeed the most effective means to getting the pleasures that people claim to get from killing animals (but perhaps video games could have similar results?)
• Or are there other, better, ways to achieve this goal?
  o E.g., regarding zoos, surely there are better ways to teach respect for animals. Regarding rodeos, there are other ways to produce entertainment for humans and, arguably, ways that don’t produce harm for animals (or humans) surely are morally better than those that depend on harm.

• Finally, what exactly are the best reasons to think that using animals for such an end is morally justified, especially in cases where animals are harmed greatly (and we would never dream of using human beings for such a purpose)? Are these reasons any good, i.e., sound arguments for the conclusion that this activity is morally permissible? And what exactly are the best reasons to think that using animals for such an end is morally unjustified, especially in cases where animals are harmed greatly (and we would never dream of using human beings for such a purpose)?

These sorts of questions above are applicable to all questions about animal use.

Discussion Questions

1. For many ethical issues, a good place to start is to reflect on “common views” about the issues. Suppose you surveyed a range of people and asked them about the morality of the various uses of animals in this unit. What are some of the most common answers that would be given? What reasons would you often hear in favor of these answers? Are these reasons generally good reasons or not? Why?

2. While some critics of animal advocates claim that animal advocates oppose keeping “pets” or companion animals, they are clearly mistaken and ignorant of what animal advocates think. Nevertheless, what ethical issues and responsibilities are raised by keeping pets or companion animals? Are any issues genuinely challenging? Morally,
how should we respond to these issues?

3. Describe how animals are treated by the various industries discussed in this unit and used in these various ways: what happens to animals when used for these purposes? What are the facts? How do these industries and practitioners describe how they treat animals? Are they correct in their description of the facts?

4. Explain the strongest moral arguments in favor of using animals for entertainment, for zoos, for hunting, and/or any other uses from this section. Are these arguments sound or not? Explain and defend your views.

5. Explain the strongest moral arguments against using animals for entertainment, for zoos, for hunting, and/or any other uses from this section. Are these arguments sound or not? Explain and defend your views.

Of course, always feel free to raise any other questions, observations, criticisms and any other responses to the Chapter’s readings and issues.

**Paper option**

Write a 4-6-page argumentative essay that explains and addresses the ethical issues raised by at least one of the uses of animals discussed in the readings this Chapter, defend a moral conclusion about that issue, and respond to the strongest and/or most common objections to your arguments.