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Book Review

IN DEFENSE OF DOLPHINS: THE NEW MORAL FRONTIER. Thomas I. White. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Oxford, UK, 2007. ISBN 978-1-4051-5779-7, 229 pp.

Defending the "Non-Human Persons" of the Sea

This is a remarkable book; one that was calling out to be written, but perhaps could not have been written earlier because only now is the evidence adequately developed to properly open this debate. The author's PhD is in philosophy, and he is presently a professor of business ethics at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. He was not previously well-known in the cetacean conservation and science communities, but he will be henceforth because, with remarkable precision and impeccable logic, he has put the case for dolphin "rights."

The dolphins' case is carefully compared with our own "human rights": the right not to be bought or sold; the right to liberty; the right to freedom from torture and from murder. This book questions why humanity is so special that we qualify uniquely for such rights relative to other animals? Many people probably view the answer as obvious: We are simply qualitatively and quantifiably "superior" to other animals in terms of intelligence. However, intelligence is not easy to define or measure, so we have tended to focus on attributes like "self-awareness," empathy, and the possession of language. Nonetheless, studies in the last few decades have begun to shake our complacency about our specialness and our right to dominion over the other animal species as several of them have "stepped up" and passed the tests that we thought uniquely defined us.

Not surprisingly, we looked to the great apes, our nearest relatives, first, and, as a result of studies on their behaviour and intelligence, there has been a powerful call to afford some of them at least a bill of rights. For example, Jane Goodall and other luminaries have signed a declaration, urging that the chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orang-utans should be recognised as having rights to life, liberty, and freedom from torture. This has not gone unheard. On February 28, 2007, the parliament of the Balearic Islands, an autonomous region of Spain, passed a resolution granting rights to these same primates. The Spanish parliament in Madrid in now considering whether it will do likewise. Not that there is a consensus view yet on ape rights. For example, on January 17, 2008, the Austrian Supreme Court upheld an earlier ruling that the chimpanzee known as Matthew Pan could not be declared a person as part of an ongoing battle about his care.

The fact that chimpanzee's DNA is 96 to 98.4% similar to that of humans is clearly helpful to their case, as is the fact that we share many physical attributes with them which aids our interpretation of their behaviour. But, how then to interpret the behaviour and intelligence of animals that are distinctly unlike us physically because they are separated by some 90 million years of independent evolution? What of animals which resemble fish, which lack hands and have hardly any facial expression, and for which field studies lag decades behind those on primates (Mann et al., 2000)? This is where Thomas White steps in. For me, his painstaking examination of the evidence leaves little doubt that the rights of cetaceans should be recognised. His review is also highly readable and very entertaining in places as he details fascinating accounts of dolphin behaviour to support their case.

There will undoubtedly be criticisms levelled at White's work. Some will consider that he has drawn his evidence from too wide a range of species, although inevitably the great majority of it relates to bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops* spp.), the most studied of the cetaceans. Others have already complained that his work draws on captive studies. However, if he had ignored such sources, he could not have made the strong case that he has for better treatment of dolphins, including not keeping them in aquaria. Indeed, Thomas concludes as follows: "On the basis of 15 years of studying this issue, my conclusion is that all of the following are, in different degrees, ethically indefensible: fishing practices that injure dolphins; the use of captive dolphins in the entertainment industry; and the use of captive dolphins for scientific research, military purposes and therapeutic purposes." However, the impact of this book is in its well-argued, evidence-based approach, and it is very well worthwhile taking the time to read how the author came to his conclusion.

There are other recent reviews considering the intelligence of cetaceans (e.g., Mann et al., 2000; Simmonds, 2006), but no one else has brought the evidence together to make a case for dolphin

rights in the way that White has. This he has done skilfully and clearly. To my mind, this is the most important book ever written about the "non-human persons" that we call dolphins.

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