



Beyond Positivism: Bernard Rollin's Legacy in Animal Welfare and Ethics

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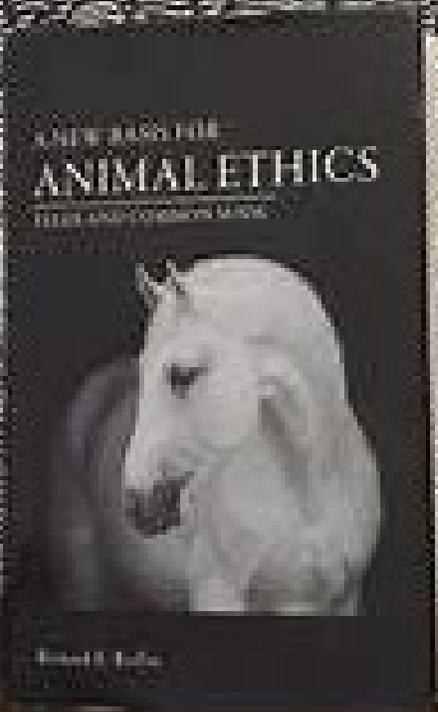
Bernard Rollin (1943–2021)

Distinguished Professor of
Philosophy at Colorado State
University

Father of Veterinary Ethics

Public Intellectual and
Advocate

Beloved Teacher and Friend





Held appointments at Colorado State University in Philosophy, Biomedical Sciences, and Animal Sciences (earned 3 PhDs)



Authored 500 papers



20 Books

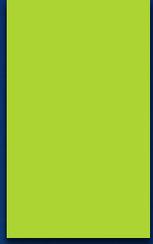


Helped write the Animal Welfare Act

What I hope you will take away from this discussion:

- ▶ Grasp Rollin's critique of positivism
- ▶ Understand the concept of *telos* and Rollin's use of it
- ▶ Learn about his impact on the fields of ethics, science, and policy
- ▶ Recognize his ongoing influence in animal welfare considerations





Rollin
challenged
Positivism

Philosophical Influences that figured into Rollin's Perspective

- ▶ Impressive background in the history of Western Philosophy
- ▶ His thesis at Columbia University with advisor Arthur Danto was published as: *Natural and Conventional Meaning: An Examination of the Distinction*
 - ▶ questioned ancient constructs that, for example, supported the metaphysical “chasm” between horses and humans
- ▶ Challenged academic bias that disapproved of applied philosophy
- ▶ Challenged Cartesian dualism and emphasis on language facility by humans to be a false justification for denying moral status to nonhuman animals
- ▶ Challenged baseless conjectures and imaginings of ancient and modern philosophy (Scottish Common Sense Realism)
- ▶ Joined David Hume, the indefatigable skeptic, who derided Descartes for failing to attribute to animals the capacity to think and feel

Common Sense Philosophy



Rollin and Hume use the term in the ordinary nontechnical meaning



Rollin's view echoes Hume's: common sense vanquishes skepticism concerning mentation in animals



Common sense beliefs held by most ordinary people that animals reveal conscious awareness and even a basic, yet sophisticated philosophy of mind when they interact with humans and with one another.



Positivist scientific and legal theories often subvert basic moral principles in our treatment of sentient creatures



Rollin accepts the Socratic approach toward moral imperatives – that when people are reminded of moral principles, they will assent to them

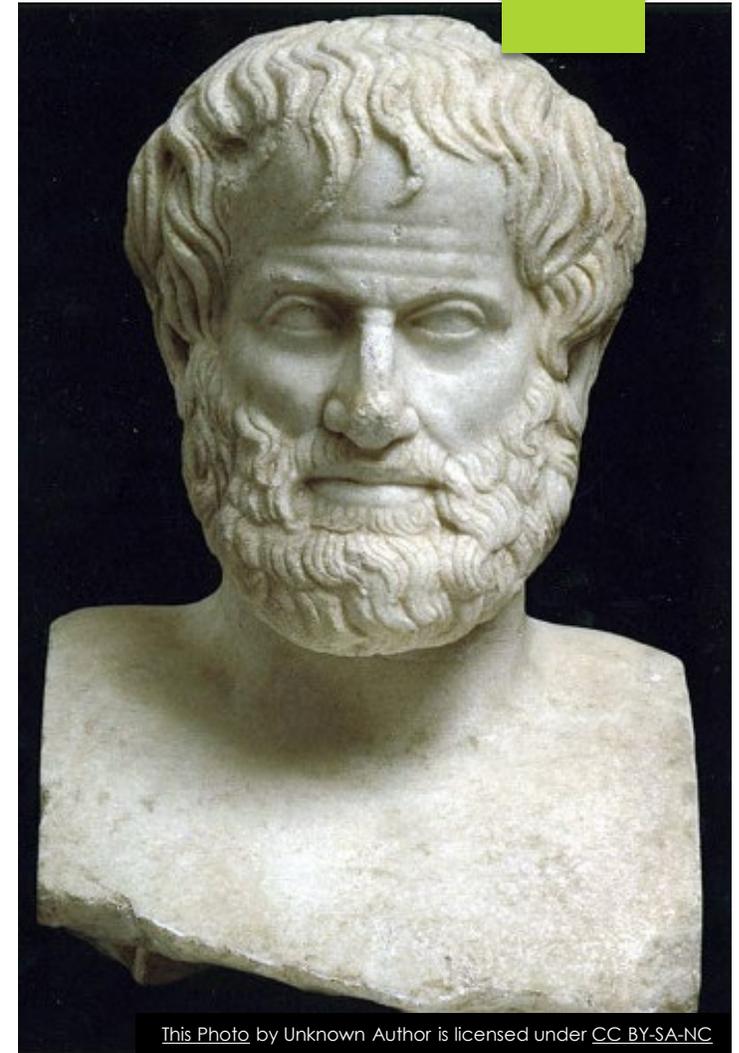
Jiu-Jitsu instead of sumo

Ideology of Science (Scientism)

- ▶ Can create monsters out of ordinary people by overriding common sense and common decency.
- ▶ Manifested plainly through the history of the twentieth century

Aristotelian Telos

- ▶ THE END, THE PURPOSE, THE GOAL, THAT INHERES IN ALL THINGS THAT EXIST



Telos and Teleonomy



- ▶ Rollin adapted this concept of *telos* to acknowledge the intrinsic nature of an organism that accounts for essential needs
- ▶ Teleonomy - adaptive behaviors in living organisms are purposive without recourse to supernatural or non-material processes.
- ▶ The pigness of a pig and the dogness of a dog

Veterinary Ethics

- ▶ Pioneered veterinary ethics by teaching the first course in Veterinary Ethics at Colorado State University
- ▶ Wrote the first textbook on Veterinary Ethics
- ▶ Trained veterinarians worldwide to view animals as moral patients



Animal Pain and Science

- ▶ Convinced veterinary surgeons to acknowledge animal pain
- ▶ Changed Research and Care Standards
- ▶ Normalized pain management
- ▶ Influenced laboratory standards, veterinary practices, and animal welfare laws
- ▶ Implications of the new ethos affects human medicine



Policy and Law



- ▶ He was an essential advisor on Animal Welfare Act reforms
- ▶ Consulted with industries on livestock welfare
- ▶ Philosophy shaped public policy

Bernard C. Rollin's Legacy

- ▶ Veterinary Education
- ▶ Animal Welfare Science
- ▶ Bioethics and human-animal studies
- ▶ Genetic Engineering of Animals
- ▶ A call for science to recognize an ethical imperative





Further Reading



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Rollin B. 2016. *A New Basis for Animal Ethics: Telos and Common Sense*. 2016. Columbia: University of Missouri Press