

from In Search of Consistency:
Ethics & Animals

INTRODUCTION

Is moral concern something owed by human beings only to human beings? Certainly two thousand five hundred years of moral philosophy have tended to suggest that this is the case, surprisingly enough, not by systematic argument, but simply by taking it for granted. Yet this answer is by no means obvious, and it crumbles when exposed to the most childlike question of all, "Why." (Rollin 4)

Morality requires that our sentiments be balanced with relevant facts and reason. Philosophy is a "human product"; each individual philosophizes with more than just reason—we use our will, feelings, "flesh and blood," our "whole soul and . . . whole body" (Stern 6). We might wish moral philosophy to be a clean and neat process, predictable and dependable, with absolute answers to complex moral dilemmas, but nothing could be farther from the truth.

This is not to say that people do not have answers. Answers are provided by almost anyone confronted with delicate questions about complicated moral matters. From abortion and addiction to capital punishment and war, people often believe they know what is right for themselves and for those around them. However, neither personal preference nor majority opinion makes a *sound* moral decision, though these definitely can and do determine a *dominant* (popular or common) morality. In fact, the definition of morals conflicts with the idea that what the majority approves is "right" and what the majority disapproves is "wrong." While we are all familiar with the dominant morality of our time and place, the majority is much less aware of whether or not their common moral opinions are rooted in reason and empirical evidence.

Collectively, we participate in an outrageous moral inconsistency. We accept without question the discrepancy between our moral regard for human beings and our lack of moral regard for all other living entities. When returning by car from my parent's home last week, I came upon a medic unit and a police car. A man was sitting on the bumper of one of the medic cars, with skinned knees. Two medics were attending him. He had gone around a corner too fast and had tipped his motorcycle in the street. I drove on, and within half an hour I watched a truck slam into the hind end of a doe. She was

