Editorial

Our treatment of animals is the last moral frontier, the ultimate test of our humanity, the mirror by which we can see most deeply into our own souls.

BERNARD E. ROLLIN

On 19th of November 2021 Bernard E. Rollin (18 February 1943), a world icon for the promotion of a new social ethic for animals and co-editor of this journal, passed away. His loss leaves an immeasurable void, but also an immense legacy to the journal. His biography is emblematic of his commitment to animals and of the inspiration behind JAAER. A graduate in philosophy from the City College of New York, professor of philosophy, biomedical sciences, animal sciences and bioethicist at Colorado State University, USA, for over fifty years, he was definitely a thinker out of the chorus. Rollin belongs to the generation of philosophers, such as Tom Regan or Peter Singer, who, starting from the 1970s, contributed to raise an intellectual climate favourable to questioning our way of treating animals. But he did it in his own way, irreverent and iconic at the same time: always committed not only to theory but also to practice, he chose throughout his career to work directly with those who deal with animals professionally, starting with scientists, biologists, veterinarians and other professionals involved in research and management of animals. As he himself wrote, “in a sense, my entire working career can be seen as an attempt to clarify the legitimacy of the role of ethics in the work of scientists, both theoretically and practically. As an ‘animal advocate’, committed to reaching consensus on the issues surrounding the use of animals, I have had a unique opportunity to test theory in practice and to confront scientists on ethical issues on an almost daily basis”.

In trying to ‘clarify the legitimacy of the role of ethics in the work of scientists’ Rollin had to walk a long and difficult path. As he recalled in the Introduction to a paper he wrote in 1981, “when I began to work on animal ethics, I realised that there was a need for an ad hoc theory to guide changes
in the living conditions of animals. I decided that the ethics I would develop would bring about a change in society and would not simply be an elegant philosophical construct that was alien to the real world”.

Rollin devoted memorable pages of his writings to explaining how the new social ethics for animals works: ‘Fish gotta swim’, ‘birds gotta fly’, we have to respect ‘the pigness of the pig’ and so on. We have to respect their nature – their *telos* – and everything that makes a life worth living; “Hens are ‘designed’ to move freely on the ground, not to be kept in cages”. The new animal ethics calls for respect for what is essential to meet those basic needs that make a life worth living, whatever that may be.

Through his thinking and his work in the many committees and bodies he served on during his lifetime, including the 1985 amendments to the US Federal Research Animal Welfare Act, Rollin embodied the new animal ethics and the inspiration of this journal: “We will never stop using animals, but if we use them, let us do so with compassion and respect for their needs”.

Probably, as he loved to hope, he will now be on the rainbow bridge with the millions of animals he helped through his life's work and commitment. As many of those who loved and respected him have pointed out, on 19th of November animals lost one of their great champions. Perhaps not, however,
because Bernie Rollin has left an indelible mark on the minds and hearts of everyone who knew him and his work.

This special issue celebrates this indelible mark through the testimonies and reflections of some of those who knew and appreciated him. It is made up of two Letters to the Editor – from Temple Grandin, Bernie’s friend and colleague and global champion of animal welfare, and Denise Remy, Bernie’s close friend and Professor of surgery and ethics – and of a collection of reminiscences and contributions specifically conceived to celebrate him. As underlined in the Introduction, “Bernard Rollin (Bernie) was such a person and it is our pleasure to honour him as a person and for his important scholarly accomplishments over a long lifetime in a variety of fields in Philosophy, especially in Veterinary Ethics. It seemed fitting to bring together personal reminiscences from his students and contributions from academicians who share in this respect for Bernie, papers relating in some way to a theme or topic Bernie has written on”. And to summarize the main content of his long-life teaching activities, we can use the words of Temple Grandin who recalled that asking students “what was the most important thing they learned from Bernie they said, ‘Just because we are capable of being able to do something should we do it?’”.

In the end, as Denise Remy wrote in her Letter to the Editor, “Bernie Rollin will always be living amongst us, his words and actions having left their indelible mark upon this world.” Now, the task that Bernie Rollin has left to this Journal is to carry on what he believed in and worked for all his life: to clarify the legitimacy of the role of ethics in the work of scientists, both on a theoretical and practical level.

Barbara de Mori
Department of Comparative Biomedicine and Food Science,
University of Padua, 35020 Legnaro (PD), Italy
barbara.demori@unipd.it

M. Lynne Kesel
Department of Animal Science, Colorado State University, 1171 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1171, USA
lynne.kesel@colostate.edu

Richard F. Kitchener
College of Liberal Arts, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1701, USA
richard.kitchener@colostate.edu