An Introduction to Veterinary Medical Ethics
An Introduction to Veterinary Medical Ethics
Theory and Cases

Bernard E. Rollin, PhD
Bernard Rollin, a university distinguished professor of philosophy, biomedical sciences, animal sciences, and university bioethicist at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, where he developed the world’s first course in veterinary ethics and animal rights. He is the recipient of the prestigious Henry Spira Award from the Johns Hopkins Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing. In worldwide demand as a speaker, Rollin is widely published; his books include The Unheeded Cry: Animal Consciousness, Animal Pain, and Science, Farm Animal Welfare and Science and Ethics.

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To my wife Linda for all the years
  of constructive
criticism and
unqualified support
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Since the first edition of this book appeared in 1999, much has occurred that is relevant to veterinary ethics. In particular, public concern regarding farm animal welfare in confinement has increased dramatically, and with it, public expectation of veterinarian involvement in resolving the issues. Additionally, a social movement for increasing the economic value of companion animals has steadily gained momentum, as have the demands for augmented legal status of these animals. Further, veterinary specialization has continued to grow and is thriving, as has veterinarian experimentation with complementary and alternative medicine. Concern with animal pain and distress and their control has proliferated beyond what I ever dared hope for. All of these, of course, pose major ethical challenges for veterinary medicine.

The new edition reflects these concerns, and contains new material on farm animals, legal status and value of animals, alternative medicine, Aesculapian authority, ethics of critical care, and animal pain, distress, and happiness among other new discussions, which I hope will help the veterinary community engage these issues and, as Plato said, “Make a virtue of necessity.”

As always, since I first became involved with veterinary medicine almost thirty years ago, I appreciate and value how the veterinary community has embraced me and treated me as a colleague and as a friend. I am grateful to the thousands of veterinarians who have taken the trouble to write, call, or meet me in person to discuss ethical issues, and who have sent me large amounts of invaluable material I would otherwise have missed. I am also grateful to the veterinary students around the world who have demonstrated an unslakable thirst for discussions of ethics.

The veterinary community and all people concerned with veterinary ethics and animal welfare join me in mourning the passing of Dr. Frank Loew, a titanic figure in veterinary medicine and a beloved friend to many.

Finally, I wish to warmly acknowledge and thank Dr. Doug Hare of the Canadian Veterinary Journal for allowing me to write and reprint my columns, and Dr. Tim Blackwell for assembling the cases, and for unfailing counsel and friendship.
This book is the result of more than twenty years of reading, writing, teaching, thinking, lecturing, learning, and talking about veterinary medicine. Entering an area that, for a philosopher, was indeed uncharted territory, I encountered overwhelming kindness, interest, and support from veterinarians to whom philosophy was equally terra incognita. Illustrating a visionary truth enunciated by Dr. Edmund Pellegrino in reference to human medical ethics, my veterinary friends became developing philosophers while I (more slowly) emerged as a closet clinician.

I have been privileged to lecture at most of the veterinary schools in North America and indeed in the English-speaking world, and at many local, regional, national, and specialty associations. And everywhere I went I found the same encouragement, kindness, and enthusiasm for veterinary ethics that I did at Colorado State University. A full acknowledgment would thus constitute a small volume, as I would need to thank every veterinary school faculty member and student who ever asked me a question; every practitioner of companion animal medicine, food animal medicine, equine medicine, or laboratory animal medicine who has engaged me in dialogue; every association that gave me a forum; every editor of a veterinary journal who was willing to let me address the journal’s readers. No stranger in a strange land has ever been treated better.

I would like, however, to single out those veterinarians at CSU who have most directly shaped my work: the late and remarkable Dr. Harry Gorman, with whom I taught at CSU the first course ever designed in the world in veterinary ethics; Dr. Dennis McCurnin, who carried on with me after Dr. Gorman’s retirement; and Dr. Tony Knight, who has put up with me as a team teacher for longer than anyone else, and who is far more of a philosopher than I will ever be a veterinarian; Dr. Bill Tietz, the dean who gave me a chance; Dr. Robert Phemister, his successor, who nurtured my work; and Dr. Jim Voss, our current dean, who more than anyone else in the world gave me the opportunity to practice what I preach, and who was always there.

Virtually all of the enduring faculty at CSU have patiently taught me for twenty years—Dr. Frank Garry, Dr. Wayne McIlwraith, Dr. Ted Stashak, Dr. Gayle Trotter, Dr. Larue Johnson, Dr. John Cheney, the late Dr. Harold Breen, the late Dr. Bill Banks, Dr. Dick Bowen, Dr. Steve Roberts, Dr. Glenn Severin, Dr. Bob Mortimer, Dr. Ray Whalen,