

WellBeing International

WBI Studies Repository

7-1991

Use Morality as Basis for Animal Treatment

Kenneth J. Shapiro

Animals and Society Institute

Follow this and additional works at: https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/acwp_arte



Part of the [Animal Experimentation and Research Commons](#), [Animal Studies Commons](#), and the [Bioethics and Medical Ethics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shapiro, Kenneth J., "Use Morality as Basis for Animal Treatment" (1991). *Experimentation Collection*. 76. https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/acwp_arte/76

This material is brought to you for free and open access by WellBeing International. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the WBI Studies Repository. For more information, please contact wbisr-info@wellbeingintl.org.



APA Monitor, 22, 7, 5, July 1991.

Use Morality as Basis for Animal Treatment, by Kenneth J. Shapiro

There now exists a spectrum of identifiable positions on the issue of psychologists' treatment of animals. While not wishing to further polarize these positions, in this forum I have organized my remarks into two sides. I refer to my own as the moderate, progressive animal-welfare position (PAW) and to the competing position as a *status quo* and *status quo ante* position (SQA). I will include a critique of the latter, since, unlike mine, it has already appeared in several American Psychological Association publications.

For PAW, animals matter; they are object of moral concern. Our moral obligation to them is compelling on the basis of their attributes: sentience, interests, purposive behavior, telos, rights and membership in a mixed human/animal community.

Originated by Richard Ryder, a psychologist, the concept of speciesism holds that we violate this moral obligation when we discriminate against or exploit individuals due to their membership in a non-human species. The concept helps us become aware of the pervasive attitudes and language that sustain our discrimination against animals. When we refer to an animal as "it" we reduce him or her from an individual to a set of species-specific behaviors; when we refer to an animal as a "preparation" or "organism," we further reduce him or her to a generic process. Through this emerging consciousness-raising, fewer of us can read about invasive research involving an animal without empathizing with his or her plight.

In practice, most animals suffer when caged and when subjected to invasive research procedures. Recent efforts to enrich the laboratory setting and an occasional suggestion to rehabilitate animals following their life in the lab can diminish that suffering and even promote well-being. However, other changes would engender more *truly* humane research and at the same time, enhance the scientific value of animal research, since subjects would be less stressed and their behavior less artificial. These include: conducting research in more naturalistic settings, designing less invasive research and developing and using non-animal models.

We can and should study non-human animals for their own sake and for the occasional light that a comparative psychology can shed on our own condition. But we can and should do so in the animals' own backyard-natural settings-where we can observe and respect the integrity of their social and natural lives; in backyard they share with us, for example, studying pets in their own living space and teaching students learning theory in a city park using resident pigeons; and in

backyards we construct for them that mimic their species-specific natural setting.

SQA promotes a philosophical position best described as permissive utilitarianism. In this view, any animal research is justified if the benefits to humans outweigh the cost to the animals. Beyond the well-known limitations of this consequentialist position (as distinguished from a deontological or "first-principles" theory of moral philosophy), no cost-benefits analysis is actually conducted. The "analysis" remains an empty metaphor. Yet Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PsyETA) and others have developed reliable scales of invasiveness (harm and injury).

Further, SQA proponents repeatedly provide lists of how research on animals benefits humans, but the claims are not supported by evidence. Citation analyses show that articles in applied journals devoted to treatment of the conditions allegedly benefitted by animal research do not cite that research. In addition, any cost-benefits analysis would have to take into account the roads not taken—benefits missed or delayed by undue faith in a particular animal model paradigm. An example of this is the delay in the development of interventions in cognitive therapy, such as the use of imagery.

Finally, it is not enough to assert that a certain animal research produced benefits that outweighed costs; the investigator must show that non-human animals were indispensable to conduct that research. Instead, SQA asserts that alternatives are, in principle, impossible. This does not square with PsyETA's annual *Humane Alternatives* publication, which consists of concrete descriptions of ways to reduce the number of animals used in research, refine procedures to reduce suffering, as well as replace animals altogether.

While only about 8 percent of psychologists use animals in their research, a few of these individuals wield enough power within APA to have systematically excluded the PAW perspective in APA publications and convention exhibit displays and to have controlled the relevant APA committee. PsyETA has looked systematically at research done by chairs of APA's Committee on Animal Research and Ethics and found that much of it is highly invasive. Examples include a study of a monkey living with profound behavioral and perceptual deficits following surgically induced brain damage, a cat undergoing drug-induced seizures and an "intruder" mouse receiving 100 bites from a "resident" mouse. We have also compared the committee chairs' work with other samples, such as studies cited in introductory textbooks and studies by their own colleagues in the same subfields, and found it more invasive. Unless APA is to continue misrepresenting psychology to the public and inappropriately representing animal research in its governance, it must constitute a committee exclusively charged with promoting animal welfare.

Given the progressiveness of APA in other areas, it is remarkable that it should continue to respond to animal welfare issues with a program

of retrenchment and denial through which it attempts to lull those not directly involved in the issue into believing changes are not needed or have already been instituted. As exemplified by recent PsyETA projects, a more constructive program would consist of a publication on alternatives, a journal on research in humane issues, development and application of a rating scale of invasiveness and a summer fellowship in animal welfare issues for graduate psychology students.

Kenneth J. Shapiro is executive director of Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.