

SERIOUS MORAL CONCERN IS NOT SPECIES-LIMITED (and other thoughts)

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For many years, I was involved, either principally or as a spectator, in activities in which nonhuman animals were harmed, killed or demeaned. This included eating animals or wearing parts of them, research, teaching, entertainment, fishing and 'pest' control. In the area of vision research, I received several large grants from the National Eye Institute and published numerous scientific papers. I believed that using nonhuman animals by human beings was permissible, albeit with the usual and trite caveat that they should be treated 'humanely.' I had not, however, carefully explored the ethical considerations of this value judgment. I did to other animals things I would never have considered doing to my fellow human beings. Nor would I have considered doing these things to nonhuman animals even of the same species I was routinely using and killing in the lab if these individuals were my companions, such as my dogs.

As I reflected on all this, I came to realize that all arguments in support of harming and killing nonhuman animals for human purposes, except in immediate life and death dilemmas, are fundamentally flawed, particularly from a moral perspective. It became clear to me that **human beings do not have a right to use other animals, if they are unwilling to apply the same treatment to fellow human beings**. Human animals, **particularly when they claim to be acting as moral agents**, do not have a moral right to use other animals in ways they would not permit themselves or, especially, human moral patients to be used. This is a crucial point to consider. This also is the *serious moral concern* to which I refer in the title. Most discussions on this subject start with the premise, usually assumed, that human concerns tower above those of others. Such discussions, therefore, provide a biased perspective on moral concern and fail to deal with the issue in a serious and fair manner.

The major defense put forth for our destructive use of nonhuman animals is that human beings, or other animals, derive benefits from this use. This notion, that the 'end justifies the means,' is something we reject when it comes to our interaction with each other.^b We do not condone harming or killing other human beings, even just a few,

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This is the front paper in a series on exploitation of nonhuman beings by human beings. Other papers in the series discuss the use of nonhuman animals in the areas of research, food and fiber production, product 'safety' testing, dissection, surgical training and trapping.

^bI realize that there are legitimate situations in which the end does justify the means. For example, in order to expedite the healing process in the case of a fractured femur or severe laceration, you may have to subject the patient to restraint, anesthesia and medications. A human child or dog so injured may be terrified at
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regardless of how beneficial it might be to the majority. When we do this to other animals, we need to ask ourselves if we are behaving in a manner consistent with our own code of conduct or consistent with the best we could be as a species, intellectually and spiritually.

Furthermore, when we try to justify this conduct by claiming that we are helping other animals, we need to be honest about how specious such a claim is. First, almost always the 'other animals' are those who will be providing human beings a benefit; if we are providing treatment to a cow, we are hardly looking out for her best interests given that she is going to be killed and eaten in the end.

Second, even if the animal is not going to be consumed, for example someone's companion dog, what we really are concerned about in almost all instances is the person to whom the dog is attached. Otherwise, how could we justify killing a dog in a surgical training laboratory for veterinary medical students or why would we be worried about doing something for the first time on a client's dog?

There is little question that the primary issue with respect to using nonhuman animals by human beings is one of morality. If it was not, then we would be compelled on a purely scientific or practical basis, to use human beings for all research aimed at understanding human diseases or tests of drugs for toxicity, for example, even if it meant harming or killing them. An appeal to utilitarian principles would demand this. It is irrefutable that this would provide human beings as a whole with far greater benefits and safety, and far more quickly, because there are too many species differences to rely upon extrapolation from one to another. So, when people say that we could not have done certain things without the use of nonhuman animals, or that we could not continue doing these things, that is not strictly true; anything we have done using nonhuman animals could also have been done using human beings. But, to subject human beings to most of the things to which nonhuman beings have been, **and continue to be**, subjected would be immoral. I do not advocate such treatment of human beings regardless whether we might derive benefits. It is precisely for the same reasons that such treatment must be considered immoral if applied to nonhuman beings.

When it comes to human beings, we do not accept the notion of a master race. We do not believe that there is an inferior race of people which could be practiced on for the benefit of others. Nor do we believe that having the strength or other ability to overpower someone gives us the right to exploit them. Nor do we allow the prospect of benefits to the human species as a whole, *no matter how monumental they may be*, to guide our conduct towards each other. We refrain from harming each other not just out of fear of retaliation. These restraints are part of our moral code. This is, of course, the

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such treatment and the postoperative recovery phase may be very unpleasant. The intent in situations such as this, however, is to help the individual *directly*. No one is being used as a means to another's ends.

ideal. I realize that not all people treat each other with respect nor hold to the highest moral principles. It would be inappropriate, however, to consider a moral principle invalid simply because not all adhere to it.

In the case of nonhuman animals, most human beings disregard this moral code. In the name of science, and other activities, we do to other animals things we would consider highly unethical and immoral if done to each other or to our companion animals even if they are of the same species we are exploiting. We do not even do these things to people who are guilty of vile transgressions against society, people who have perpetrated the most heinous of crimes and have forfeited their right to freedom, pursuit of their interests, sometimes even their lives. Yet, we are willing to do these things to other beings who are guilty only of being alive on this earth. No one, however, has ever put forth a rational, *non-self-serving* argument demonstrating that nonhuman animals are not deserving of the same degree of moral concern we have for members of our own species or those animals we consider our companions.

Our sense of morality in dealing with each other stems from our highest capacity for benevolent action, transcending the presumably largely amoral situation in nature. This is not simply because we call ourselves human beings. If I labeled a chair a 'human being' it wouldn't make the chair an object of moral concern. If I gratuitously cut off the leg of the chair, it simply would not matter to the chair. But, it would matter to a human being if I did the same thing, even if I used an anesthetic so that pain was not involved.

The reason it is wrong to harm another human being, therefore, is not simply because he or she is a human being per se. Nor is it only because pain might be caused. It is because of certain qualities a human being possesses which are important to consider and protect. The person is an individual who has a life which fares better or worse depending on what happens to her or him; no such claim can be made for inanimate objects. The person has value which is independent of her or his utility to another; the value of an inanimate object is negotiable. The person has interests whose pursuit is an important component of her or his life; such a notion does not appear to make sense in the case of inanimate objects. In part, these are the reasons for the so-called *inalienable rights* we give each other. Even people who have no concept of what is right or wrong and who have no obligations to others, so-called moral patients, are granted these minimal rights.

Nonhuman animals are just like human beings in these important ways. They have lives which fare better or worse depending on what happens to those lives. Their lives can be enriched or impoverished. What happens to them **does matter** to them. Like human beings, other animals have interests, although they may be difficult to define and may be different from those of human beings. Nonhuman animals can experience painful and pleasurable stimuli and most can probably suffer in the general way in which human beings do. When you examine the issue without prejudice **and with humility rather than arrogance**, there do not appear to be any *morally relevant* differences between human and other animals which justify denying other animals similar

consideration, respect or treatment, *based upon their interests* or whether what we propose to do *matters* to the individual. There are no morally compelling differences between human beings and other animals which justify treating other animals so markedly different from the manner in which we treat human beings or our companion animals.

Physical or intellectual equality is not mandatory in order to propose equal consideration. Human beings want inalienable rights not because all people are created equal. Quite the opposite, such rights are a means of protecting disadvantaged individuals from tyranny at the hands of those superior in certain traits. These differences between various people, for example intelligence or physical strength, as well as differences in gender or race, are *biological* and are irrelevant from a moral perspective. In the case of nonhuman animals, the major differences from human beings also are biological and usually a difference in degree, not in kind. But, more to the point, every characteristic stated to be important and uniquely human is shared to some degree with many other animals and does not even exist in some human beings. Language (in a broad sense, not just the artificially narrow human construct), thinking, intelligence and other characteristics which people try to use to separate human beings from others are present in many other animals.^c For example, experiments have shown that nonhuman animals can seriate and that they use at least some of the important information management processes exploited by human beings.^d Other arguments put forth by some, for example that other animals do not have political systems or do not compose symphonies, are nonsensical, vacuous or morally irrelevant and are rejected by those who view this issue in a rational and thoughtful manner.

On the basis that pain and suffering, which are important moral principles, can occur in all mammals, Ingrid Newkirk made the oft quoted statement that "...a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy." Those arguing against equal consideration for other animals frequently use this quote out of context in an attempt to portray those who argue for better treatment of animals as not valuing human life. This is absurd for many reasons, not the least of which is that they leave out the critical first part of the phrase, the one which puts it in the context of pain and suffering. To equate human beings and other animals in this context is scientifically correct and in no way demeans human beings. Rather, it serves to raise the status of other animals and emphasizes the biological, and moral, similarities between all mammalian species as a start. Even those who support

^cSome references on this include: Fiorito, Graziano and Scotto, Pietro: Observational learning in *Octopus vulgaris*. *Science* **256** (5056): 545-547, 1992 (24 April); Matsuzawa, T.: Form perception and visual acuity in a chimpanzee. *Folia Primatol.* **55**: 24-32, 1990; Mitani, John C.; Hasegawa, Toshikazu; Gros-Louis, Julie; Marler, Peter and Byrne, Richard: Dialects in wild chimpanzees? *Am. J. Primatol.* **27** (4):233-243, 1992; Natale, Francesco; Poti, Patrizia and Spinozzi, Giovanna: Development of tool use in a macaque and a gorilla. *Primates* **29** (3): 413-416, 1988 (July); Savage-Rumbaugh, Sue and Lewin, Roger: *Kanzi: The Ape At the Brink of the Human Mind*. John Wiley & Sons, 1994.

^dMcGonigle, Brendan Oliver: Non-verbal thinking by animals? *Nature* **325** (6100): 110-112, 1987 (8 January).

vivisection, for example, believe at least the physical aspect of this analogy. After all, they argue that rats are 'models' of boys when they justify experiments on the rats.

Those who defend the harming and killing of nonhuman animals in education, entertainment, research, zoos and a myriad of other situations, argue that the individuals are treated humanely. This is nonsense when the animals are deprived of a normal life or are purposefully harmed or killed. To be humane is to have sympathy for another, to have mercy, to be tender and kind. If you provide pain relief after you have done surgery on a dog or a rat as part of an experimental study, for example, in what way can this be considered humane? If it were not for you, there would have been no pain in the first place. Considering yourself to be acting humanely in this instance is a little like giving someone a sedative before raping them... or breaking someone's leg and then offering them a crutch to use. Even if you support the use of nonhuman animals in ways that are harmful to them or result in their destruction, the use of the word humane in this context is inappropriate if the individual is harmed or killed, even if painlessly. If you don't believe this, take any paragraph from a book, journal or whatever, that describes a use of nonhuman animals that is acceptable to you. Then, substitute the words "human child" everywhere the word "animal" occurs. Read it back to yourself and see if you still consider the situation to be humane treatment.

When you critically and honestly evaluate the situation, it becomes clear that we do to other animals what we do, not out of some moral imperative or because it is right. Instead, we do these things because we expect to benefit in some way *and because we have the power to dominate those animals*. We tacitly act on the morally repugnant principle that *might makes right*: we *can* do it, so it must be right. We even make statements to the effect that we are acting morally under these circumstances. But, if we consider ourselves to be acting morally, we shouldn't be basing our decisions on whether we might derive benefits from exploiting other animals. Nor should it be important if there are adequate alternatives to various uses of nonhuman animals. The questions which we should be asking ourselves are whether our domineering behavior is appropriate for such a highly developed, intelligent and potentially compassionate species such as ours... is our behavior consistent with the best we could be as a species... is it consistent with the reasons we care about each other? If we consider ourselves to be so much better than others, we behave in a most despicable, and self-degrading manner by subjugating and destroying those we consider to be below us. We set standards of behavior for ourselves, based on compassion, fairness and kindness... the best of human qualities... and then we systematically deny others the benefit of these standards because those 'others' appear to be 'different' from us or they are not those who we hold dear such as our nonhuman companions.

Before ending this paper, there are three related subjects which I believe need to be dealt with, the first two which also need to be dismissed here. These have to do with the use of violence to further one's cause, the comparative valuing of human and nonhuman life and dealing with mortality.

Apparently because they do not want to carry on an intellectual dialogue or debate the substantive issues involved in the use of nonhuman animals by humans, some proponents of such use resort to character assassinations or they attempt to divert attention to so-called terrorist acts. They paint the entire animal rights movement as one of human hatred and one which condones violence toward humans as a means to an end.

Let us assume that there are some who, while claiming to be part of the animal rights movement, espouse violence as acceptable means to achieve equality. To characterize the whole animal rights movement by the actions of these few, however, is as ridiculous as labeling all parents child molesters because of some who are. In all social movements, and human endeavors in general, it seems an unfortunate axiom that there always will be those who misguidedly believe that violence is an acceptable manner in which to achieve one's aims. Or, they fail to grasp the fundamental hypocrisy of their actions or, worse yet, their motives are couched in self-aggrandizement or sabotage.

Nevertheless, bear in mind that essentially all the illegal actions perpetrated upon exploiters of nonhuman animals were done by those who claimed anonymously to be part of the animal rights movement. It is fundamental to our justice system that one is considered innocent until proven guilty. Just because someone may claim credit for certain activities as representing a particular philosophy, because the acts are done under the cloak of anonymity, no one except the perpetrators can be sure who really is responsible.

There have been apparently bona fide cases of those opposed to animal rights having acted as agent provocateurs in an effort to destroy the credibility of the movement. For example, John Newberry-Street, who is a hunter in the United Kingdom, has admitted to making hoax bomb threats in the name of animal rights activists and to having placed a homemade bomb under his car while blaming animal rights activists for the action.^e In another case, James Como, James Clough, John Wooley, Douglas White and Patrick Fish (*not* the environmental/animal rights activist of similar name residing in central New York) apparently broke into one or more laboratories at the State University of New York at Buffalo and committed burglary. Two of these men have admitted their involvement in the crime and that they tried to blame it on animal rights activists.^f

Another example demonstrates true terrorism openly perpetrated against those who support a kinder, gentler view of the world. This involved the July 1985 bombing of the ship *Rainbow Warrior* in New Zealand, just before it was to be part of a peaceful protest of nuclear testing. French Lieutenant Colonel Alain Mafart and an accomplice

^eClifton, Merritt: John Newberry-Street... *The Animals' Agenda* 11 (3): 28-29, 1991 (April).

^fClifton, Merritt: Court calendar. *The Animals' Agenda* 11 (6): 36-38, 1991 (July/August).

pled guilty for this action, done under the aegis of the French government, which also was responsible for the death of a photographer who was on board at the time.^g

Those of us who criticize the exploitation of nonhuman animals often are accused of having a hatred of human beings or that we place nonhuman life above human life. This is absurd. It is irrational, at best, to equate concern for the suffering and death of nonhuman animals with a hatred of humans. Disgust with the *actions* of particular people does not logically lead to a hatred or loss of empathy for those people. I know of no one in the animal rights movement who could be labeled as being truly misanthropic. In fact, most are married to people and even have human children. Many people, like myself, have a donor button on our driver's license in order to help improve the welfare of other people after we no longer are alive. Most of us are opposed to the death penalty. Furthermore, most people in the animal rights movement also are deeply involved in the recycling of resources for human use. I cannot imagine any substantive argument based upon misanthropy to explain such apparent concern for future human beings.

People often ask questions such as, "Who would you save in a situation where your mother and your dog were in mortal danger?" Such questions, although interesting, do not bear on the question of whether human or nonhuman life is more valuable. Rather, they bear on the question of which *individual* is more valuable to *another individual*. Suppose that the situation was a life or death scenario between two human beings in which a choice had to be made between saving your daughter or someone else's daughter. I believe that most people would choose their own child over another. This does not mean they are callous or that they do not value other human life. They simply have a closer, more familiar and more compelling relationship with their own child. Furthermore, such situations are exceptional and we do not base our standards of behavior on them.

The final issue has to do with our mortality. We, as a species, generally behave as if we have not accepted the fact that we all will die some day. This is most evident in the situation surrounding the use of nonhuman animals for research into human conditions.^h When we speak of 'saving' lives through this type of medical research, for example, what we really mean is *extending* lives. Although none of us can know how we will react when our life is in danger or when faced with a choice which may impact on our staying alive, I believe it is critical for each person to think deeply about this issue. Should you allow harm to another in order to advance yourself? Should, for example, a healthy pig be killed to supply a liver to a diseased human being dying of liver failure? Or, should tens of thousands of healthy mice be killed in an effort to develop a vaccine against the

^gClifton, Merritt: Lt. Col. Alain Mafart... *The Animals' Agenda* 11 (7): 34, 1991 (September).

^hIt effectively can be argued that this type of research may actually hinder progress or can be done more efficiently, and ethically, on human beings themselves, a subject of a different paper.

common 'cold'? In these cases you would be killing healthy individuals in an attempt to either extend a diseased individual's life or questionably improve the quality of life.

Appealing to the suffering of someone to justify your actions simply is not adequate from a moral perspective when you are proposing to kill or harm another. Why is one animal or group of animals more important than another? You may not consider human beings and dogs, for example, as moral equals. You cannot, however, rationally argue that there exist morally relevant differences between one dog and another. All the important ethical considerations which would apply in protecting a dog of one status, such as a dog who is a human companion, would apply equally to a dog in another situation, such as in a teaching lab. Any argument supporting the destruction of one group of dogs to 'save' or 'help' another would, therefore, necessarily be incoherent and morally bankrupt.

Is it the fault of the other animals being used, harmed and killed that we human beings also are subject to disease and death? Why do we believe that, because we suffer, innocent others must pay a price? In that context, the harming and killing of other animals in the name of science appears to be an expression of unconscionable selfishness on our part, something which goes against all the best qualities of human nature. This is compounded further when the use of animals is for entertainment or other arguably trivial situation.