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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

Morowitz's high regard for the national consensus qualities and usefulness of the National Academy of Sciences' 1988 Report on the Use of Laboratory Animals in Biomedical and Behavioral Research is not shared by others (*ABT*, Book Reviews, November/December 1989). In his review, he says that this report is a "truly centrist" and "broadly agreed upon" document on national policies on the use of laboratory animals. Such is not the case. The report was written by a 15-person committee (of whom Morowitz was one) weighted with establishment viewpoints and with only one representative of a humane organization. That member refused to sign the report. Of the 19 invited speakers at committee meetings, only one (philosopher Tom Regan) is identifiable as a critic of current U.S. national policies regarding animal experimentation. Thus, neither the composition of the committee, nor the viewpoints listened to, were representative of the nation as a whole.

When the NAS report was released, it met with strong condemnation from the humane movement and some indifference from the biomedical community. Major criticisms were that the report added no light on the issues, failed to address the well-documented problems of abuses to animals conducted in the name of science and made no recommendations to improve current policy or its enforce-

ment. Whatever viewpoint one takes on these issues, in no way can this report be considered a "centrist" document—it is heavily slanted toward maintaining a status quo or even turning the clock back. (Any recognition of a need for reform is regarded by the committee as damaging to the "cause" of animal experimentation and current modest regulations are described as burdensome).

Morowitz is also off the mark when he asserts that individual biology teachers should not be made to "defend locally" their use of animals in experiments because, nationally, some use of animals for scientific purposes receives public sanction. Just because SOME use of animals is justified (a view that I personally agree with) does not mean that ALL use of animals is justified and that teachers are thereby absolved from ever again having to justify what they do to animals. Albert Schweitzer, the eminent humanitarian, wisely stated that in each and every case, the infliction of pain on laboratory animals must be justified. Blanket public approval has never been given for animal experiments. Neither teachers nor anyone else is ever free from having to justify what they do to animals in the name of science.

Morowitz suggests that if biology teachers abide by the national policies for research described in this report then they "should be free from having to further justify their practices." This is far from the truth. In the first place, the policies described in this report

deal with the use of animals in research, not in education. The latter topic is not even addressed. To make no distinction between the two situations indicates a superficial appreciation of the issues involved. In research and education significant differences exist in the purpose of the experiment, the skills of the experimenter and, therefore, the potential for botched results that cause animal suffering, the public sanction for inflicting pain on sentient animals (it being greater for research purposes than for educational purposes) and the opportunities for substituting alternatives that reduce or eliminate animal pain or death (such alternatives are abundant for educational studies). For these reasons, policies for the use of animals in education call for far more stringent limits on inflicting pain and death on sentient animals than do policies for research use.

There are many practices in the use of animals in education that need attention. Reforms are needed and indeed are being made. The October 1989 policy statement of the National Association of Biology Teachers that states its "support for alternatives to dissection and vivisection" is a positive step and is convincing evidence that a "stand still" attitude is not in line with current thinking.

F. Barbara Orlans
Kennedy Institute of Ethics
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057