

## Animal-Based Research

Displaying the increased sophistication of the animal rights movement, activist lawyers are crafting arguments to gain legal status for animals. From redefining pet ownership as “guardianship” to granting legal “personhood” to animal species, these efforts are but the first steps in a campaign to grant animals legal standing to sue, seek damages and, in general, to petition the courts on their behalf. Cloaked in the rhetoric of providing protection for animals, the motivations of proponents are ambitious and the intended consequences of their efforts, dire.

My concern is not about further overloading the nation’s courtrooms. Rather, as a research scientist whose lab was invaded by animal-rights extremists in 1990, I see these initial forays into the courts as means ultimately to prohibit animal-based research.

While it is true that certain animals share qualities of consciousness that were earlier believed to be uniquely human, it does not follow that all members of the animal kingdom are essentially the same. Further, limited similarities of consciousness are not sufficient grounds to make the quantum leap of granting legal personhood to animals, nor do they provide

Humanity's first obligation is to ensure humanity's survival. Not to use our own highly developed minds to protect ourselves would be an affront to evolution. A scientist's work in this regard is no different from or less supportable than a mother eagle's dismembering prey to feed her fledglings.

- 3. Animals are not little persons.** Scientists who compared chimp and human genomes note that the genetic differences between the species are largely in the brain. The human brain is much larger than the chimp brain, and genes controlling brain-cell activity are very different between the species. Researchers speculate that the rate of evolution of human brain genes has been five times faster than that of the chimp's brain genes. (Pennisi, 2002)

An editorial in the *New Scientist* provides an excellent perspective on this subject: "Unfortunately, it has become fashionable to stress that chimpanzees and humans must have staggeringly similar psychologies because they share 98.4 per cent of their DNA. But this misses the point: *genomes are not cake recipes*. A few tiny changes in a handful of genes controlling the development of the [cerebral] cortex could easily have a disproportionate impact. A creature that shares 98.4 per cent of its DNA with humans is not 98.4 per cent human, any more than a fish that shares, say, 40 per cent of its DNA with us is 40 per cent human (Editorial, 1999)." The gap between probing termite mounds with a twig and constructing the space shuttle or making several painfully learned signs to communicate wants and declaiming the Gettysburg Address is the dif-

ference between 100% and 98.4%. Some would say the soul is in there too.

- 4. We have a great obligation to the animals under our control.** Of all species on the Earth, only humans are responsible for caring for other species. This responsibility makes us special, and reflects our appreciation for other species and their place in this world. We have assumed a moral obligation to treat animals well, and scientists who use animals in research are obligated to perform their experiments as skillfully and humanely as possible. One's personal dignity depends upon proper treatment of those under one's control, which animals most assuredly are, individually and as part of the web of life.

These principles and scientific facts stand in sharp contrast to arguments proffered for animal rights and the end of animal-based research. Ethical arguments toward animal rights are perhaps most clearly articulated by Singer, who said "... we cannot justifiably give more protection to the life of a human being than we give to a non-human animal, if the human being clearly ranks lower on any possible scale of relevant characteristics than the animal (Singer, 1994)."

Like many other people, I'm a pet owner and am extremely fond of my cat Buster. I talk to him all the time, as if he understood me. With my children grown and now raising their own families, Buster is like a child to me. And yet for years, I conducted research with members of his species. I could do this because there is no ethically acceptable, alternative way to understand how biological processes affect the living organism. Every medical breakthrough of the past century has come through animal-based

research, and for the foreseeable future, animals will remain essential to medical research.

To conduct responsible research, a scientist must determine that there is no substitute for animals in the particular research being conducted. With the expense of research animals and the costs associated with animal care, the public can rest assured that a researcher will use non-animal research tools wherever possible. Further, scientists have every reason to treat animals humanely because good science depends on healthy animals. This ethos is buttressed by a system of laws, regulations, and policies requiring that animals in research receive humane care.

Despite a burgeoning animal rights movement and continued violent acts by followers, polls show that most Americans sense that their duty to fellow humans supersedes those to other species. Those who try to draw other species into the human fold by emphasizing intellectual abilities that are but shadows of our own, demean those species, in my opinion. Animals cannot come close to us intellectually. Let's appreciate them in their own right: as wonderful creations of nature.

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