

Animal Experimentation: A Guide to the Issues

Vaughan Monamy (2000). Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. Obtainable from the publishers, The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK. 110 pp. Paperback (ISBN 0 521 66786 0); price £9.95/US\$15.95. Hardback (ISBN 0 521 66093 9); price £26.95/US\$42.95.

This valuable little book is as important for what it represents as for its content. For it bespeaks the quiet undercutting of an ideology I sometimes, in dark moments, believed could never be removed from science: the belief that science was value-free in general, and ethics-free in particular. In part because of social scrutiny of science; in part because of cleverly designed regulatory vehicles such as the animal care and use committees discussed in this book; in part because of the influx into science of a new breed of science graduate students who have witnessed too much social controversy over science to swallow uncritically the notion that science is radically separate from ethics; in part because of the rise of courses in science and ethics in graduate and professional schools, today's emerging scientists are far more open to ethical deliberation and apperception than were earlier generations in the twentieth century.

The issue of the ethics of animal research is arguably one of the most difficult issues faced by nascent (and practicing) biomedical scientists. In this book, Vaughan Monamy, himself a working scientist, clearly lays out the anatomy of the issues comprising ethical debate about animal research. In under 100 highly readable pages, he provides succinct discussions of the general ethical issues in animal research; the history of animal research, and of opposition to it on moral grounds; theories of the moral status of animals; current regulation of animal research in various countries; and the concept of alternatives.

With such brevity and conciseness, however, inevitably comes the charge of superficiality, and the raising of hackles in those who have some expertise in the area. Indeed, what I might call the Pedantic Imperative became almost overwhelming as I read the book, all the while muttering "Oversimplification!" "Distortion!" "Failure to mention X or explore Y". Yet I was brought sharply back to reality in recalling Monamy's ultimate purpose — to expose students to the issues and to encourage them to think for themselves, and, I dare say, to encourage discussion among students. And surely this is a worthy goal.

Had I undertaken the task of writing this book project, it would have been quite different. And the same could be said of and by the scores of philosophers and scientists who have been intimately involved with the issues for a quarter of a century or more. Yet none of us in fact did undertake that task, and Monamy did. So we should applaud his efforts, and help augment them, and not nibble them to death.

In this spirit, I offer two brief suggestions, one theoretical and one practical, for his (and readers') reflections. In the first place, in discussing ethical bases for reform and questioning of animal research, Monamy sometimes seems to forget that although the writings of various philosophers stimulated reflection on both the moral status of animals in general and the issue of animals used in research, the social reaction must ultimately follow the ethic logically entailed by what I have elsewhere called the consensus social ethic. Although he sometimes, to his credit, acknowledges the relevance of this social ethic to change, he fails to acknowledge the powerful philosophical basis for that ethic, steering a middle ground between utilitarianism and rights theories, as it does regarding the moral status of people! Such a discussion would serve the issue far better than the space expended on the "reverence for life ethic" which, as far as I can tell, involves little more than apologizing to the animal before we do whatever we wish to it.

Second, in the course of his discussion of refinement (p 85), he refers the reader to guidelines produced by professional scientific societies. Unfortunately, in too many cases, these guidelines simply codify the status quo, which is often grievously wrong, as when one such set of guidelines advocated “thoracic compression” (chest-crushing) as an ethical method of euthanasia for some animals under field conditions. Even the American Veterinary Medical Association euthanasia guidelines are in some measure, as Larry Carbone has shown in his as yet unpublished work, a political compromise rather than a statement of unequivocally ideal practices.

In the end, such disagreements with the author — and the virtually endless possibility of further disagreements — should not obscure the significant value of this book for the thoughtful development of nascent biomedical professionals.

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Animals In Research: For and Against

Lesley Grayson (2000). The British Library, London. Obtainable from the British Library bookshop, St Pancras, London, or by post from Turpin Distribution Services, Blackhorse Road, Letchworth, Herts SG6 1HN, UK. 320 pp. Paperback (ISBN 0 7123 0858 X). Price £35.00.

The stated aim of this book is to “present as balanced a review of the many different issues in the animal research debate as possible”. It warns the reader not to expect easy answers, and claims not to be “a formal systematic review of evidence”, but I found it to be quite systematic and thorough in its movement through most of the evidence, and still very readable. It achieved its aims admirably, and will be a useful resource for educators, students, journalists, scientists, policy-makers, and the curious public. It would make an excellent text for courses in animal-use ethics or public policy. An attitude of fairness and inclusiveness pervades its review of information. It even candidly restates the criticisms of some animal rights organizations of the Boyd Group (a diverse UK committee of people from all parts of the spectrum of this issue), which appears to have suggested the idea for such a book to the British Library. The Foreword emphasizes that, beyond this conceptual contact, the book was independently written and produced by the British Library.

One of its great strengths is that individual references are cited throughout each chapter as endnotes to each section. These annotated endnotes give a description of the reference and a mini-summary of its main points. Related references, including counter-arguments, and even rejoinder articles and letters, are also frequently mentioned in the same endnote, so that a reader could easily follow the points and counterpoints of each argument through the original sources if desired. Unlike the usual more partisan works on this controversial subject, it does not present one view in a weak, superficial manner, only so that it can be easily refuted. This book is one of the rare ones in which the views of both sides are given honest and sympathetic coverage. A chapter at the end summarizes various organizations (mostly in the UK) connected with this field, and lists relevant internet resources.

The book travels through the philosophic influences, ancient and modern, on current attitudes toward research animals, presents the major debating points for and against animal research, and identifies their main proponents. It also summarizes the tactics and strategies of each of the players, and points out the vested interests within each party. A chapter on public perceptions reviews the results of several polls, showing that most of the general public hold