# Comments

## Vivisection and Misanthropy

George P. Cave

Part of the aftermath of the Edward Taub monkey case has been a spate of articles accusing the antivivisection movement of misanthropy. The latest example is Walter Goodman's essay, "Of Mice, Monkeys and Men" (*Newsweek*, August 9, 1982). While drawing essentially the same conclusion as his predecessors, Goodman opts for a milder version of the charge. Unlike William Raspberry ("Saving Monkeys, Ignoring People," *Washington Post*, October 14, 1981), who believes that antivivisectionists care *more* about animals than people, and Timothy Noah ("Monkey Business," *The New Republic*, June 2, 1982), who believes that they don't care about people *at all*, Goodman thinks they care about them more or less e*qually*, and this, in his view, is "inhuman." He rounds off his essay with the statement:

> *Proscribing experiments on animals may mean prescribing them for people. But, then, carrying humane impulses to an inhuman end is one of the talents that distinguishes us from other species.*

To arrive at this conclusion, Goodman has even taken the trouble to go directly to a text which is widely regarded, within the animal rights movement, as one of the primary sources of animal rights ideology — Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*.

Goodman recognizes that it is reasonable to question whether all experiments performed on animals really contribute to human welfare, and he even concedes that the use of animals in laboratories "could no doubt be reduced further without harm to humankind." On the other hand, it is quite clear that he is completely unaware of the sheer quantity of absolutely worthless experiments currently being conducted, and that he subscribes to the popular misconception, deliberately perpetrated by the research establishment, that animal experimentation is coextensive with biomedical research, thereby contributing directly to human welfare through the conquering of disease. Furthermore, Goodman seems to be largely ignorant of the extent to which nonanimal alternatives are *already* available to the researcher, a fact that those with a vested economic interest in perpetuating animal experimentation naturally play down.

Goodman is also aware that resolving the debate as to whether animal experimentation really benefits humans is not the end of the matter, ethically speaking. Unlike most critics of the antivivisection movement, who content themselves with the dogmatic assertion that experimentation helps humans and therefore (by traditional homocentric valuations), is *necessary*, he is at least willing to entertain the question as to whether "the prospective benefit to humans is sufficient justification." He is unsatisfied, however, with what he takes to be the antivisection movement's answer to this question, namely, that an experiment is not justified unless it is done "for the benefit of the animal involved." Goodman assumes that this statement, made by William A. Cave, President of the American Anti-Vivisection Society, summarizes the unanimous opinion of

*George P. Cave is President of Trans-Species Unlimited, P.O. Box 1351, State College, PA 16801.*

the entire antivivisection movement. In point of fact, things are not that simple: there is considerable divergence of opinion within the antivivisection movement as to what experiments, if any, are justifiable. Not all antivivisectionists would agree with William A. Cave's position.

It is clear, however, that Goodman's rejection of this position rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of Peter Singer's argument. In *Animal Liberation,* Singer does *not* claim that human and nonhuman animals are equal, in the sense that they are morally entitled, in all cases, to *identical* treatment, nor that their lives are of equal value. What he claims is that they are entitled to *equal consideration of their interests.* Where there are relevant differences between humans and animals, different treatment is justified. A difference is relevant only if, by virtue of that difference, the animal will suffer no evil, or at least less evil, if treated differently. For example, a relevant difference between sheep and humans with respect to the question of voting is that sheep lack the capacity to understand the significance of voting, and hence suffer no evil if denied the right to vote. In this case unequal treatment is morally justified.

With respect to the question of physical, and in many cases, psychological pain, however, there are no relevant differences between humans and the vast majority of nonhuman animals. Pain is pain no matter who suffers it. To treat an animal differently in this respect simply because it is not human is speciesism, a form of prejudice that is precisely parallel to racism and sexism. Goodman thinks this parallel is insulting to blacks and women because he mistakenly attributes to Singer the view that all animals' lives are of equal value, something which Singer explicitly denies. Goodman states:

> *In thus equating animals with people, Singer exemplifies an ambiguous attitude toward human welfare that imbues much of the anti-experiment campaign.*

The question as to whether human life is of greater value than animal life is, however, here completely irrelevant. A chimpanzee does not suffer any less intensely from electric shock than a woman because his life has less value. Hence, if it is wrong to inflict pain on human beings to relieve greater suffering of other human beings, then it must be equally wrong to inflict it on nonhuman animals who are just as capable of suffering. There is no rational reason for regarding a human's physical pain as inherently worse than a chimpanzee's.

In cases where the experiment would result in the death of the subject, however, the value of the life *is* a relevant consideration. If one were forced to choose between experimenting on a chimpanzee or on a normal human being, the morally appropriate choice would be the chimpanzee, since the human life in this instance is presumably of greater value. We are not, however, forced to experiment on *anyone,* and this example only shows that in the case of terminal experiments it would usually be *less* wrong to experiment on chimpanzees. This does *not* mean that such experiments are ethically defensible. It is in order to make this argument clear that Singer cites the case of the retarded infant orphan. But no matter what standards one uses, it is obvious that the life of a healthy chimpanzee must be granted a greater value than the life of a human who is a hopelessly retarded infant orphan. In such a case, there can be no moral justification for choosing the chimpanzee over the orphan to serve in the experiment. If one does so, it can only be because of the orphan's membership in the species Homo sapiens — a morally irrelevant consideration. If, on the other hand, one is for some reason

unwilling to sacrifice the infant's life for the benefit of humanity, then one should be equally unwilling to do so with the chimpanzee.

In short, one may well agree with Goodman that there are significant "critical differences of mind or soul" between (normal) humans and other animals, without concluding that infliction of pain or death on these animals is justified for human benefit. The basis for William A. Cave's conclusions — that experiments on animals are justified only if they benefit the animals themselves — is not that human and animal life are identical in value, but that it is morally wrong to sacrifice the interests of the inferior for the interests of the superior. "Proscribing experiments on animals" does *not* mean "prescribing them for people," as Goodman asserts. It means doing without them. This is not misanthropy; this is *justice*.