Comments

Psychology and Its Animal Subjects

Kenneth J. Shapiro

Kenneth J. Shapiro is President of Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, do Psychology Department, Bates College, Lewiston, ME 04240.

By way of introducing Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PsyET A) to readers of the *Journal,* I have been asked to make some comments about the organization and, from a personal point of view, to suggest some of my own positions and views.

Rationale and Inception

Dr. Emmanuel Bernstein of Saranac Lake, NY, and I began PsyETA 2 years ago. While the group is independent of the American Psychological Ass ciation (APA), all of its present 160 members are also members of APA. For a number of reasons, we felt andcontinue to feel the need for an independent group within our profession that will concern itself with psychology's treatment of animals.

At the time of PsyETA's inception, psychological research was being singled out for criticism on ethical grounds, beyond its proportionate share as but one of the areas of scientific research (e.g., P. Singer's *Animal Liberation).* For example, it was claimed that psychology had had more than its share of painful experiments (as discussed in J. Diner's *Physical and Mental Suffering of Experimental Animals).* Within the profession, there was little response or apparent recognition of this criticism, the actual facts of the matter, or the complex ethical issues that had begun to be raised in moral philosophy (e.g., T. Regan and P. Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations).* While organizing a symposium in 1980 to promote discussion of these issues ("The Ethics of Our Treatment of Animals," Bates College), I found few psychologists ready or able to give,.from my viewpoint, an adequate account of the interests of the animals utilized in psychological research.

Dr. Bernstein had been monitoring the response to animal protection issues within APA for a number of years. In that period the primary APA committee (CARE) charged with animal welfare concerns was also charged with protecting scientific research. The guidelines published by the committee ("Principles for the Care and Use of Animals," 1971; revised, 1979) were general, vague, brief, and rarely invoked. In his testimony during the congressional hearings on the "Use of Animals" (Subcommittee on Science, Research, and Technology, October 1981), Dr. Perrie Adams, then chairperson of CARE, stated that the committee had received only two allegations of abusive treatment in the past 5 years and that, in both instances, it did not find enough substantial evidence to merit investigation. It had failed to investigate the ethics of Dr. Lester Aronson's work at the Museum of Natural History in New York, a case that was widely aired in popular and scientific media (for example, in "Animal Rights: NIH Cat Sex Study Brings Grief to New York Museum," *Science,* 1976).

Unfortunately, events since the formation of PsyETA have dramatically borne out our concerns. The case and trials of Dr. Edward Taub *(Int J Stud Anim Prob 3* (3):219, 1983) have been a trial for psychology as well. Two Maryland courts have found Taub guilty under an anticruelty statute and NIH has permanently suspended a grant to Taub, but through its Psychology Defense Fund, APA has given Taub awards totaling $16,000 to help pay for his defense. Further, the APA's Ethics Committee exonerated Taub, and the CARE committee is currently preparing a brochure emphasizing the contributions of animal research.

In the light of the largely defensive character of these responses, PsyETA is now renewing its effort to establish an animal protection committee within APA. While this undoubtedly will be a slow process, we have had some encouragement, in that discussions between PsyETA and the extant committees within APA have begun .

Besides organizational reform, PsyETA is working as a force for education. Two examples are (1) a contest to support student theses and independent studies on ethical issues; and (2) a project to encourage authors of introductory texts to add discussions of the ethics of the use of animal subjects in research. Also, we intend to develop a research arm, which would attract funding for research on such pertinent issues as attitudes to animals and alternatives to the use of animals.

Sorting Through the Ethical Issues

In my view, the contribution of psychological research involving animals to our field has been, at best, a mixed one. While not denying the impact of animal studies on the directions the field has taken, given the early choice to employ nonhuman animal subjects for a major portion of research, I have to say that the evaluation of that impact is no simple matter. Of course, even if one were to accept unequivocally that that strategy has borne fruit in terms of increasing our understanding, it is still false to assume that the decision to use extensive animal research was the only or even the most effective path to have taken.

For example, it would have been possible to develop "learning theory" employing human volunteers rather than animal subjects. And isn't it likely that the importance of imagery in the treatments that are, at least arguably, derivative of learning theory would otherwise have been delimited much earlier, as Drewett and Kani suggest in their article in *Animals in Research* (D. Sperlinger, editor)? Or, wasn't the recent "discovery" of the importance of cognition in therapy greatly delayed by the too exclusive use of animals as subjects? Putting ethical questions aside for *a* moment, the decision in the late nineteenth century to wed experimental psychology to animal-lab research by adopting such strategies as the construction of animal models of human phenomena (as detailed by B. Kuker-Reines, in *Psychology Experiments on Animals)* was certainly not an inevitable one and was, in many ways, unfortunate.

If an evaluation of the contribution and complex impact of animal research in psychology is mixed (a position I can only suggest here) and if at least some nonhuman animals justly deserve moral status and consideration, a conclusion reached by the overwhelming weight of recent arguments in moral philosophy, it follows that the ethical restraints on our use of animals ought to be stringent indeed. To begin to practically and concretely effect those constraints, I wou ld like to see a committee within APA whose primary function and concern would be animal welfare. This standing committee would be charged with establishing and providing guidelines for animal care committees within local research institutions. Such committees would ideally include scientists, technicians, a

veterinarian, an ethicist, and a person from the animal welfare community. The guidelines would include the provision of a class of experiments that are expressly prohibited on grounds independent of consequentialist or utilitarian considerations. In the British psychologist Dr. Alice Heim's term, certain experimental procedures are "intrinsically objectionable." They belong to a category of investigations where ends do not justify the means, where the rights of an individual must trump those of any aggregate - human or otherwise. It would be the responsibility of the local animal care committees to decide what specific proposed research belongs in this category.

If an experimental procedure were deemed permissible on this first ground, it would then be scrutinized on more strictly scientific grounds. Is it "good science?" Does it measure what it purports to? Is any intended extrapolation to human phenomena compelling or reasonable?

Finally, the proposed research would be assessed on utilitarian grounds. Do its potential benefits outweigh its costs? Costs and benefits would include those incurred by nonhuman animals, particularly those involved in the experiment, and the burden to reduce those costs would fall on the scientist proposing the research. It is his or her responsibility to demonstrate that he has considered and explored all possible "alternatives." If he can first meet the criterion of justifying the particular use of animals that is involved, he must then also demonstrate that he is employing the least intrusive procedure that is likely to obtain the effect he proposes to study.

Implicit in these suggestions is an acceptance of the principle that any proposed experimental procedure is vulnerable to the competing claims of the animal subjects it requires, a principle long ago accepted with respect to the use of human subjects.

In the final analysis, the level of exploitation of animals that we will countenance is a social decision. However, I have been impressed with philosophy's role in bringing these particular issues to our attention and in offering further leads as to what our relation to other animals can and ought to be. To complete these remarks, I would like to point to some leads in this philosophical literature which I feel deserve further development.

It has been the tactic of much of this literature to delve into the nature of the boundary that we have set up between human and nonhuman animals-typically, either extending that boundary by critically challenging and then lowering the traditional criteria as to what kind of being is a fit object of moral concern, or by "discovering" that certain animals have had those traditional attributes all along that would let them pass, if not as persons, at least as individuals worthy of our moral consideration. In contrast to this focus, Hans Jonas (in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology,* 1966) implies that we might well shift the locus of our operations. In a brilliant chapter entitled "To Move and to Feel," Jonas directs us away from the defense or capitulation of any supposedly peculiarly human territory to the distinction between animal and plant, in his terms, between "the animate" and "the inanimate."

He finds that the point of departure of the "phenomenon of animality" from the "vegetative mode of life" resides in a concept of distance. Very briefly, on motility and perception is built the distance or gap between urge and attainment, between desire and satisfaction; and in this deferred fulfillment is the ground for purpose and emotion. Animality, then, is a state of being for which the temporal and spatial distance of objects constitute a "world," as distinguished from the plant's relation to an environment that is merely contiguous

with itself. "The suffering intrinsic in animal existence is thus primarily not that of pain ... but that of want and fear" (p. 105) as his or her purposes may be frustrated or threatened.

This ontology of animality implies an obligation on the part of scientists to study particular animal species in their natural habitats. Only in this way can we begin to grasp just what it is we deprive them of when we place them in a lab and make them the subjects of our experimentation. A less expl-oitative and more sensitive ethic must be built on such considerations.