

The response reproduced below was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the ethics of research involving animals during October-December 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

Anonymous # 2

I would like to make a couple of general comments on the scope of the consultation paper, in the hope that these will be of interest.

1. Depth of review

It is my view that too shallow a view has been taken of research and of human relationships with animals in setting the scene for consideration of use of animals in research. To better inform the community discussion we need a more detailed portrayal of the relationship of humans with animals over evolutionary history, and the current range of animal uses for sport, recreation, companionship, curiosity, food, education, conservation, ecological rehabilitation, acquisition of knowledge, design of future ecosystems, etc. From this perspective we can ask: "what is the range of human relationships with animals" "in historical terms, how have humans developed these relationships with animals" "what are the welfare consequences for animals of each type of relationship" "in view of the welfare outcomes of the various relationships, which ones need special ethical attention".

It is prejudicial to assume that use of animals in research is a special case requiring particular attention without the broader enquiry into human use of animals, just as it is an invalid assumption that other types of relationship may not be more needful of ethical appraisal than use of animals for research. What matters is the welfare outcomes for animals of their interactions with humans (by whatever cause, not only by proximate causes).

In the consultation paper, "research" is cast quite narrowly as use of animals in a laboratory or academic setting. This view of research portrays an impoverished appreciation of the use of rational enquiry to understand the world around us. If we accept as research any task that has a goal, a rational or logical approach to achieving that goal, some sort of recording of progress, analysis of results, comparison of results with desired outcome and from the analysis a new understanding of how to reach the goal then a much larger range of human activities are concordant with research as narrowly interpreted as a scientific activity in labs and academic environments. There is no special attribute of academic research to distinguish it from a host of other human endeavours (e.g. managing a business, establishing a strategy for getting to work on time). From this view almost all contemporary commercial livestock production is research and hence constitutes use of animals for research purposes. Are we justified then in having differing process for appraisal of ethical standards for use of animals laboratory research and production of food. Importantly, the narrow view adopted in the Consultation Paper diminishes the perceived role of research as a human cultural activity and undermines appreciation of rational enquiry as one of the defining human faculties and thereby helps foster the antiscience mentality that is so prevalent.

2. Ethical models

It would be helpful I think to explore some models that would accommodate pluralist ethical frameworks. The document seems to assume that a singular

outcome should be achieved, which contradicts current ethical frameworks and strengthens the hand of the ethical imperialists who might fight for their unitary view. What we need to aim for are consistent minimum standards for the welfare outcome for animals impacted by humankind's footprint on earth. Provided the baseline standard is achieved then individuals or groups can choose higher standards to satisfy their own desires. We already have multiple standards of slaughter of livestock for different religions, and multiple standards of husbandry of livestock (e.g. free range, organic, biodynamic, housed or pasture fed or fed lot fed cattle, etc) to provide consumer choice of the production system that suits their ethical standards. The existence of a baseline in a pluralist model also acknowledges that no human activity, or ethical choice (say adoption of a vegan diet for ethical reasons) is free of an opportunity cost to animals. All our choices cost some animal their lives, through lost habitat, disturbed food webs, vermin control around farmlands and grain stores, etc. A cost to animal lives is inevitable for our species to support ourselves in the plague numbers in which we inhabit the earth.