

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.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews

This document has been discussed with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and it has been agreed that I should respond on their behalf as follows:

Judaism has a long tradition of concern for animal welfare. For example, among the basic Biblical laws, we are told to allow our animals to rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; 23:12); we are obliged to feed animals (Deuteronomy 11:15); and to come to the assistance of a fallen animal (Deuteronomy 22:4). A core Talmudic precept (Tractate Baba Metzia, 32a/33a) is to avoid trouble or injury to living creatures. This avoidance is itself one of the so-called "Noachite" laws, i.e. those laws that Jews should encourage others to observe.

At the same time Judaism holds that human life is of the utmost concern. Therefore Judaism recognises that suitably designed animal experiments, carried out with all the necessary safeguards, and mindful of the need to relieve suffering and illness, have played – and do play – an important role in our society.

Hence the Judaic tradition is indeed consistent with the timely recent Nuffield Council for Bioethics consultation paper on the ethics of research involving animals. Although we believe that it would not be appropriate to make a collective response to the details of the document, we have no doubt that the members of the Jewish community will, of course, play their role in widening understanding and appreciation of the general principles encompassed in that paper.

Prof David R Katz