

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.

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Animal Welfare

We are retired engineers, now sheep graziers, living in rural Victoria Australia. The October 11 issue of New Scientist drew our attention to your public consultation on animal experiments and we thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

1. We believe that all living things have the same moral status. Humans think that they are unique and that this in some way makes them superior to other living things. This view of superiority renders all else inferior. We apply this to each other as well as to other living things. Blue-eyed people believe brown-eyed people are inferior and treat them accordingly, sometimes with great physical cruelty. Sociopaths are first cruel to animals. If we do not respect animal life we do not respect life generally.

To take animals away from others of their kind, make them dependant on us, cause them suffering and then – if they survive - throw them back with their own kind without accepting that they have no idea how to relate to their own kind, is morally corrupt. We should be ashamed of ourselves.

Living things are priceless and most definitely of greater value than economic considerations, personal advancement, or human egotism. Our view does not change simply because of some real or supposed benefit experiments may have for humans including ourselves. Dealing with animals without respect and due care is a direct reflection on our lack of morals and a great shame to humanity generally. It is not a crime to humanise animals but to dehumanise everything which is not like ourselves.

We have powerful computers now - develop and use computer models.

2. Having observed animals for many years now it is crystal clear to us that animals feel pain, suffer from anxiety and grief, experience fear, are sad and unhappy, experience great joy, trust and feel betrayed. They perform better when they are with their own kind in an environment that is safe and relaxing. In our case we raise sheep for wool and meat. We make their lives here on the farm as stress free, in every sense, as possible. OK., life off the farm is stressful, but even the livestock transporters, sale yards staff and abattoir try to keep the stock as calm as possible. We do our best. Any stress they do suffer is short lived and the end is as swift and pain free as the abattoir can make it. This is 'best practice' for the bulk of responsible farmers world-wide.

Does experimentation cause pain to the animal? The answer should be obvious. Experimentation, by its very nature, inflicts both psychological and physical suffering.

Animals don't understand, can't ask why, can't beg a human to stop, have no benchmark of love and safety only one of loneliness and suffering, isolation and anxiety their only existence.

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3. Don't genetically modify animals. That goes for lab rats and pigs. And don't use the argument that farmers have been 'genetically modifying' their animals for millennia. Yes, we have been breeding for desirable traits but we have not artificially inserted what is ostensibly a foreign body into our animals to make them into something they would never have developed or had naturally. Genetic modification and cloning have been developed to satisfy human greed and ego, and are totally unacceptable to us.

We are not radical activist but we do feel strongly on these issues.

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Thanks for allowing us to add to our original response. We've taken so long to respond because there was suddenly a plethora of articles and news reports all relating to our treatment of animals. You may be aware of the public outrage at this country's live animal export trade and our governments disinterest in the issue because of its preoccupation with our balance of trade figures. Human ego and greed seem, once again, to be the all-consuming passion. Alright, it's not experimentation, but the same lack of ethics and morals apply equally.

Then there was the New Scientist report (1 November 2003, pages 6 and 7) about a team of scientists who have genetically engineered deadly new forms of mousepox and cowpox. In the same article a team wants to breed new strains of smallpox to infect monkeys. This research is totally unnecessary, dangerous to humanity generally, and the associated experimentation on animals cruel and pointless. The comments made by Ian Gilbert, Nicky Gordon and Grant Needham published in the letters to the editor (New Scientist, 29 November 2003 page 28), expressed our views beautifully.

In her final paragraph, Joyce D'Silva's article in New Scientist (15 November 2003 page 19) sums up our feelings on economics driven genetics/selective breeding and the cruel neglect meted out to far too many animals. We see animals starving far too often in this country and all because some fool farmers are so greedy that they over-stock and, to 'save' money when there is no pasture feed available they do not hand feed. Their stock are under-nourished, starving, 'do' poorly, invariably break down fences between properties to get food, and often die. We need stronger laws with very heavy penalties for this kind of thing – the same applies to scientist experimenting on animals. It is unacceptable and should be treated harshly.

In closing, we hope you will not mind some more 'down on the farm' observations. You might recall from our last correspondence that we are sheep graziers. We also have several dogs, two cats, geese and ducks. Our little Parson's Terrier giggles just like a small child when he's tickled around the neck. They all display REM sleep patterns, jealousy, and grizzle when they don't get what they want. Even our geese display all the hallmarks of post-natal depression when eggs fail to hatch.

Thank you once again for giving us this opportunity to voice our beliefs, we really appreciate it.