

SVME Newsletter

Newsletter of the Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics Volume 11, Number 1 January 2005

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President's Message

Dear SVME Members,

The Board is entering 2005 with renewed vision and anticipation for the Society of Veterinary Medical Ethics (SVME). One of our major objectives is to increase our membership. We realize that increasing the number of members at the national level will give us the opportunity to have a significant impact on ethical dilemmas facing our society. In the next few weeks, one of our board members will circulate a correspondence seeking information that will allow us to identify individuals who teach or mentor ethics related subject matter in each veterinary program. From this information, we will be able to exchange ideas and solicit new members. Special emphasis will be placed on student membership because this population will be representative of our future leaders.

Our second objective is to promote and encourage student participation in the SVME. To facilitate this effort, the SVME will invite students to submit competitive essays to our Editorial Board in the spring of 2006. The winner of this competition will be awarded an all expenses-paid trip to present his/her manuscript at the annual AVMA meetings held in Hawaii. To further promote a dialog on veterinary ethical issues among students, several schools have already formed Student Chapters of the Society of Veterinary Medical Ethics. These Chapters hold regular meeting and sponsor seminars that are designed to address ethical issues of interest.

We continue to solicit original manuscripts and articles of interest for publication in our newsletter. This will allow us to expand our readership and keep us abreast of recent issues and concerns in the animal world.

Beginning this year at the AVMA meeting in Minneapolis, we will sponsor a Robert R. Shomer award in his honor as one of the founders and supporters of SVME. This award will be bestowed upon an individual who has made a significant contribution to the field of veterinary medical ethics.

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President's Message

Continued...

Please plan to attend the SVME sessions as well as business meeting and award ceremony during the AVMA convention. These sessions are scheduled for Sunday, July 17th, 2005 at a site to be announced in the AVMA program booklet. Due to large interest and participation at the 2004 AVMA meetings in Philadelphia, the AVMA has allowed us to expand our program. Please see the 2005 program that was listed in our October newsletter. I believe you will be pleased that you made the time to support our efforts.

Lastly, the general population and the veterinary community continue to avoid discussions involving ethical issues that impact our society. We must make a difference!! I invite your comments and recommendations.

*Respectfully submitted,
Earl Dixon, PhD
SVME President*

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's and Membership Committee Report is a combined report because the SVME treasurer is chair of the membership committee. As of Dec 31, 2004, the checking account balance was \$1,917.10. The savings account balance as of Dec. 31, 2004 was \$22,652.49

Membership numbers are gradually increasing, however more members are desirable for this important organization. We would like your help in promotion, and recruitment of new members. Feel free to contact me if you would like to have SVME

brochures with application forms sent to you at wrigh008@umn.edu, or:

John S. Wright, DVM,
Veterinary Clinical Sciences Dept.,
College of Veterinary Medicine,
University of Minnesota,
C339 Veterinary Medical Center,
1352 Boyd Avenue,
St. Paul, MN
55108.

As always, the SVME membership committee, and Executive Board welcomes, and encourages constructive criticism, and suggestions that members think will help the SVME serve your needs for the promotion of dialogue relative to ethics in veterinary medical practice, and other areas of veterinary medical endeavors. Let's keep the root word ethic alive in veterinary medicine!

*Respectfully submitted,
John S. Wright, DVM
SVME Treasurer and
Membership Committee Chair*

Fun Web Sites

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Ethics>

Ethical Matrix
<http://www.ethicalmatrix.net/>

TPM Online
The Philosophers' Magazine
<http://www.philosophersnet.com/>

BioethicsWeb
<http://bioethicsweb.ac.uk/index.html>

Professionalism: What is it?

What is professionalism? The question was at the forefront of discussion with a group of first year veterinary school students in the professional skills class at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine. These students were in the second week of their academic journey to become veterinarians. As a facilitator, I had hopes, but not necessarily expectations as to what would evolve from this interactive, experiential learning endeavor.

I was delighted when the students spewed forth their thoughts of the characteristics of a profession when confronted with that question. I busily scribed their replies on the white board:

- Service based on knowledge
- Advanced academic study
- Obligation to society
- Confidentiality
- Code of ethics
- Licenses and degrees

John Wright DVM
Adjunct faculty & visiting veterinarian
University of Minnesota
College of Veterinary Medicine

What a joy to have a group of students render this list with such spontaneity!

The next order of discussion involved the students' thoughts on professionalism (behavior and conduct that mark a professional). A list of hypothetical behaviors that students may encounter in veterinary college was provided to facilitate this discussion. The students were asked to rank listed behaviors as appalling, pretty unprofessional, not too bad, or not unprofessional at all. The situations ranged from the relatively benign (whispering in class, wearing trendy clothes) to the absurdly disruptive, unkind, and hurtful (shouting at the instructor, sending a heated email to an instructor, stealing from a classmate, shouting at administrators, cheating). As would be expected, there was a range of rankings for the more benign behaviors, with the most egregious receiving a consensus relative to the gravity of the insult.

Part three of our discussions involved problem solving, and plan formulation for the students' behavioral responses to several potentially uncomfortable hypothetical situations that may arise during veterinary school. Some scenarios could be "hot button" issues for some individuals. These scenarios were meant to stimulate thoughts on what the students' would do, and perhaps should do (ethical & professional considerations) under the various circumstances.

In an age of diverse people with diverse backgrounds combined with realities of impulsivity, and immediacy in actions, and communications (i.e. Email, internet, and fast everything), these exercises seemed a good starting point for enhancing the problem solving abilities of our future veterinary professionals. It is likely that this group of students will encounter similar discussions in their curriculum. Hopefully, discussions of the concepts of diversity, civility, and acting in an empathetic manner consistent with their future professional status will have benefits that will serve the students well through veterinary school and beyond.

News and Events

California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) criticizes AVMA on Animal Welfare:

The CVMA has endorsed 8 guidelines on animal welfare entitled "Eight principles of Animal Care and Use". The document includes statements such as "animals are sentient beings with wants and needs" and that they are "worthy of respect from individuals and society". Responding to AVMA comments that the document was already philosophically embraced in current AVMA welfare positions, CVMA president Jon Klingborg stated that the "AVMA has pages and pages of animal welfare information, but in the end, they don't take a stance".

AVMA disbands Animal Welfare Committee:

The AVMA, responding to internal and external criticism, has formed "The Division of Animal Welfare" whose charge is to "monitor the science of animal welfare and assist the AVMA in proactively addressing developing issues of animal welfare and rights groups". By replacing the long-standing Animal Welfare Committee, AVMA president Dr. Bonnie Beaver told AVMA delegates that "It's time to get our heads out of the sand." A public relations expert and research analyst are included in the staff positions of the new division.

California veterinary technicians want to spay and neuter:

The California Registered Veterinary Technician Committee has begun discussion on a proposal that would expand their licenses to allow them to perform minor surgeries such as ovariectomies and castrations. The technician organization hopes to better utilize veterinary technicians which in turn would improve their financial compensation.

First cloned cat sale:

Making legal and ethical history, a private genetics company, Genetic Savings and Clone, presented clone "Little Nicky" to 'Julie', the owner of a now deceased 17 year old cat "Nicky". As part of the "Nine Lives Extravaganza, clients paid Genetic Savings and Clone \$50,000 to have clones produced from the genetic material of their pet cats.

Animals in Research:

The British Medical Journal published a paper entitled *Where is the evidence that animal research benefits human health?* The authors examined 6 reviews of animal studies performed to evaluate the value of animal experimentation as it related to clinical research. The authors concluded that the research frequently failed to help guide or improve the human trials due to a variety of factors including poor correlation between the animal results and the clinical trial, poorly conceived experimental protocols and the undertaking of the animal study concurrent with the performance of clinical studies. British Medical Journal 2004; 328:514-517

Compassion in World Farming Trust.

International Conference: From Darwin to Dawkins: the science and implications of animal Sentience.

March 17-18, 2005

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London

<http://www.bookmeaplace.com/ciwf/conference2005/>

Animal Welfare and Animal Rights: Some Key Political, Policy and Ethical Differences

Undoubtedly, most readers of this newsletter are familiar with the ethics-vocabulary, 'animal welfare' and 'animal rights'. These terms represent two main forms or movements of animal protection. Even so, many of us still remain perplexed and may use them erroneously, conflate the

Raymond Anthony, PhD
The Animal Welfare Program
University of British Columbia

two terms, and use them in overlapping ways. This state of affairs in turn contributes to complications in communication, and adds to political spin and fuels the war of words. The upshot is a barrier to clear thinking and effective action on behalf of animals.

It is useful to understand the basic entailments of these ethics-vocabularies for at least four reasons:

- a. They remain influential concepts in framing discussions and debates about the moral status and treatment of animals,
- b. It can promote effective communication of the moral basis for recommending certain actions and standards,
- c. Those who use these terms presume that their interlocutors have at least a fundamental grasp of these concepts, and
- d. Appreciation of the distinct philosophical underpinnings can occasion careful reflection of the ethical commitments one may have, as well as offer one tools to formulate, articulate and defend one's own views about the moral status of the use of animals in agriculture, research and education.

The purpose of this article is to offer some clarification regarding what it is to which the individuals and groups that use these terms "animal welfare" and 'animal rights,' respectively are committed. There are at least two ways in which we may sort out these two ethics-vocabularies. Adherents and activists of these two philosophical approaches vary with respect to their fundamental conceptual underpinnings and moral outlook and resulting different political agendas. While I attempt to disentangle the skein of confusion with respect to these terms, readers are reminded to remain vigilant, since attitudes and value framings about these terms and about how we conceive of the moral status of animals are constantly under on-going debate and discussion.

Animal Protection and Liberation Today

Today, animal protection and liberation movements encompass (at least) the following causes and concerns:

- a. Promotion of humane treatment of animals
- b. Endorsement of vegetarianism
- c. Reform or elimination of (confinement) animal agriculture, use of animals in science and medical research
- d. Broader protections or entitlements for companion animals or pets
- e. Elimination of sport hunting, and animals "showcased" in zoos and circuses

The commonplace ethics vernacular 'animal welfare' and 'animal rights' suggest

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substantive claims about the moral status of animals and what counts as legitimate and responsible use and care of animals. In the contemporary scene, these views have been colored in large part by the brush strokes of Peter Singer (since his review article (1973), "Animal Liberation," in *The New York Review of Books* and *Animal Liberation* (1975)) and Tom Regan (1983) *The Case for Animal Rights*. Singer's latest contribution, (2003), "Animal Liberation at 30," *The New York Review of Books* 50(8) offers a nice recapitulation of past advances in the area and ignites our imagination for future initiatives on behalf of animals.

While Singer is a strong proponent of animal protection and liberation, his writings reflect sparse use of the term "animal rights". Tom Regan and Bernard Rollin (1981) *Animal Rights and Human Morality*, advocate (or have advocated) "rights-talk," despite doing so incongruently. More on these influential thinkers below.

Divergence in Conceptual and Ethical Leanings

a. Animal Rights

Proponents of rights-talk like Tom Regan, by and large, see themselves as staking out moral protections for certain animals that are tangible, and which can be laid down against courses of action that might advocate sacrificing the interests of innocents or a minority for the greater good. More specifically, Ronald Dworkin (1977) has argued that moral rights are like "trump" cards that can be played against the benefit-harm optimization framework. Moral rights are typically understood as either non-interference or negative rights, where others have no business frustrating a rights-bearer's preference for (in the case that she does not harm someone else) or access to some set of

fundamental goods including freedom from bodily injury or unjustifiable incarceration; or as claim or entitlement rights, where someone's right to something X means that she has a valid claim against us (or we have a duty to her) to provide her with X.

In the case of animal rights, non-interference or claim rights can be made and enforced on behalf of animals. These rights may also enjoy legal status. For Regan, adult mammals, especially, are believed to be holders of rights. They fall within this moral category because they possess a unified biographical existence. Regan's term for this form of existence is "subject-of-a-life." Hence, moral agents like ourselves, according to Regan, have a responsibility to recognize this fact and to treat these animal individuals with respect, i.e., not to use them as mere resources or in order to promote the greater good. These animal individuals should be afforded the opportunity to live their own lives, and not killed for human benefit (Regan, 1983).

Another philosopher, Bernard Rollin also takes a "rights" stance. In contrast to Regan, Rollin conceives of rights as emerging out of an implicit social contract among human beings that specifies the basis for appropriate treatment of animals (1981, 1995). Rollin argues that there are certain social expectations about what constitutes humane treatment of animals. In the case of farming, for example, this responsibility was once delegated to the realm of the private morality of farmers. Today, private morality is no longer sufficient to safeguard the interests of animals. Given the advent of modern technological innovation and the prominence of the market economy, farmers themselves may not even have the opportunity to exercise their care values. Hence, regulations and industry guidelines

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have emerged as public morality standards legislating appropriate conduct. In terms of duties to animals, Rollin argues that regulations and standards should accommodate the expression or fulfillment of evolutionarily imprinted natural behaviors or lives, respectively, and that technological fixes and management practices that attempt to squeeze “round pegs into square holes,” should be revisited if not abandoned. Rollin’s rights-based approach, while affording animals certain protections, also welcomes compromises, unlike that stronger approaches like Regan’s. It can serve as a bridge to the other approach discussed below that aims at optimistic solutions for all affected parties as well as to approaches that stress an ethic of care and the genuine need for more study of the impact of animal welfare on human welfare (and vice versa).

It should be noted that some objectors to animal rights contend that animals fall outside the scope or protection that rights afford human beings because they cannot assert these rights for themselves. A moment’s reflection will show that thinking in this way is spurious, since we routinely champion the rights of those who cannot assert or establish their own rights for themselves. Just like for children and the mentally impaired, we can also establish rights and the commensurate duties that are owed to animals.

b. Animal Welfare

In general, proponents of welfare-talk, on the other hand, seek to bring about conditions that promote the greater good. According to them, we have a responsibility to balance the burdens and benefits of all the individuals affected by a course of action. Where animals are involved, we have a responsibility to balance the harm against the benefits of any human use of animals.

Typically, those committed to a welfare approach in animal ethics focus on optimizing the subjective experiences of animals, their biological functioning, and fulfillment of their natural behavioral repertoire against human interests in the economic, technological and regulatory or policy planes.

This view of animal welfare described above is influenced by consequentialist or utilitarian approaches to ethics. What is aimed for here are actions or policies, which bring about the best possible consequences for all affected sides. Under this scheme, an action is assigned positive value (or has ethical value) just in case it increases aggregate happiness or overall benefits. It acquires negative value just in case it leads to a diminishment in aggregate happiness or if it produces more harm.

Peter Singer, a utilitarian, has argued that it is the cognitive experience of animals that should receive ethical emphasis, in particular their capacity for pain and pleasure. Hence, the welfare of animals must be included along with that of humans when evaluating human conduct so long as they have the capacity for happiness and unhappiness or preferences which can be increased or decreased by human influence. Singer calculates that the suffering of animals in concentrated animal feeding operations is far more significant than any economic or nutritional benefits that human beings receive, and hence, we should refrain from these production methods. This view is challenged by other utilitarians, most notably, Raymond Frey. Unlike Regan, Singer does not oppose, in principle, the use of animals for farming purposes. Systems like extensive ones may be ethically acceptable if it ensures human subsistence needs and if on balance the animals benefit as well (Singer, 1993). *continued pg8...*

There are two major concerns related to the utilitarian style optimization as an approach to animal ethics, however. They include the following:

- a. That it may just be inappropriate to assess every single action by this form of utility calculation since obtaining all the relevant information on consequences of the proposed courses of action or policies can become quite a daunting endeavor (if not nearly impossible) very quickly, and
- b. Under this trade-off mindset, it is permissible to harm innocents or minority groups so that others may benefit. Furthermore, welfare considerations may at best be only one of many factors that are relevant from the moral point of view.

While ‘welfare’ and rights’ represent different underlying philosophies, there is some overlap. Rights are sometimes assessed in terms of their influence on welfare so that rights that promote welfare should receive a thumbs up (perhaps from a policy or regulatory stand point), while rights that diminish welfare should receive a thumbs down from these stand points.

Resulting Divergence in Political Agendas and Social Responsibilities

Readers of this newsletter are strongly encouraged to peruse Thompson (1998) and Lubinski (2004). Both scholars have carefully teased out the divergent political underpinnings of animal welfare and rights, respectively. The adherents of the former movement favor moderate or piecemeal reforms of commercial institutions that use animals, while adherents of the latter movement prefer to see the elimination of certain institutions altogether. Where abolition of animal use is not possible,

sweeping reforms are encouraged. Lubinski notes that, welfarists advocate a form of enlightened human-centricism or “benevolent dominion over animals.” This amounts to “increased penalties for unjustifiable harsh treatment [of animals and acceptance of] the legal status of other species as property”. Welfarists hold that it is permissible to use these animals as resources just as long as they do not endure unnecessary suffering and can enjoy some benefits associated with the terms of their domestication.

On the other hand, the radical streak of some rights advocates is reflected in their initiative to alter the property code to bring about a fundamental legal change in the status of animals (Wise, 2000). They would like to see animals protected with the status of personhood or similar, since they believe that these animals possess inalienable rights that arise from “moral standing making” mental and/or social capabilities. This new status would most certainly reduce or eliminate many types of existing animal use, such as commercial animal agriculture and in medical and scientific research. Welfarists are content with voluntary initiatives to reform existing practices from within various institutions of animal use. They do agree that enforcement of existing regulations needs to be stepped up, however. Both animal welfare and animal rights adherents may advocate vegetarianism or veganism and boycott of certain other industries that treat animals inhumanely as part of private morality and as a form of social protest against contemporary practices.

Conclusion

While the above discussion tries to offer a systematic look at two prominent

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philosophies underpinning contemporary animal protection and liberation movements, it remains that the movements that lie behind these distinct ethics-vocabularies are complex and nevertheless overlap in attitudes and aims. It is still important, however, to be diligent in how we use and interpret these influential and value charged ethics-vocabularies. 'Animal rights' is often associated with radical reform of commercial uses of animals and with the initiative to alter the legal status of animals. 'Animal Welfare' is a less radical branch of the animal protection movement and is endorsed by some user groups and others working on behalf of animals. Adherent of this view like The Humane Society, and animal welfare scientists, for example, would like to enact piecemeal change (Fraser, 1999). Where 'animal rights' proponents express the need to enforce moral entitlements that animals possess, 'animal welfare' adherents advocate a trade-off mindset, one that optimizes or aggregates benefits and harms.

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Officers of the Society of Veterinary Medical Ethics

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Food for Thought

The Veterinarian's Oath is not without controversy. Below are three versions of the Oath. Which version do you prefer? Is it possible to formulate one Oath that represents all veterinarians? Get your colleagues and students involved and let me know what you think by sending an email to camorgan@shaw.ca.

Carol Morgan, SVME Secretary

Veterinarian's Oath 1

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health and the advancement of medical knowledge.

I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

Veterinarian's Oath 2

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly dedicate myself and the knowledge I possess to the benefit of society, to the conservation of our livestock resources and to the relief of suffering of animals.

I will practice my profession consciously with dignity. The health of my patients, the best interest of their owners, and the welfare of my fellow man, will be my primary consideration. I will, at all times, be humane and temper pain with anesthesia where indicated.

I will not use my knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity, nor in contravention to the ethical code of my profession.

I will uphold and strive to advance the honor and noble traditions of the veterinary profession. These pledges I make freely in the eyes of God and upon my honor."

Veterinarian's Oath 3

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills to protect the health and well-being of all nonhuman animals, to relieve pain and suffering in nonhuman animals, to strengthen the understanding of the inherent needs and interests of all nonhuman animals, and to promote the preservation of wildlife and their natural environment.

I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, compassion, and integrity.

I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

SVME

C/o Sylvie Cloutier
Dept. of VCAPP
205 Wegner Hall
Washington State University
Pullman, WA
99164-6520