

SVME Newsletter

Newsletter of the Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics

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President's Message

Dear SVME Members,

I would like to give my best wishes for the New Year to all SVME members.

The past year has been a busy one for the executive committee members. The committee has been at work to increase the visibility of the Society by increasing the membership, creating a brochure, and distributing it and the newsletter at meetings, conferences and other venues. Following many complaints by members about problems accessing the newsletter on the society web site, it was decided to make the newsletter more accessible to members by mailing a hard copy to everyone. The committee also discussed continuation of student chapters. Plans were also discussed to increase the participation of members in the newsletter. In order to avoid conflicts resulting in the loss of members, it was decided that the VETETHIC list should be moderated. The committee, led by Dr. Earl Dixon, prepared the program of the ethics session for the AVMA 2004 meeting.

The committee has more work to do for this year. Among other things we need to welcome new members and increase the involvement of the society in meetings on veterinary medical ethics. We should also ask ourselves what should the society do in situations such as "mad cow disease"? I encourage you to send any comments or questions to myself or to any of the other executive committee members. This is your society and we need to know what is your view about it.

Continued pg.2...

President's Message

Continued...

Again this year, SVME is organizing the Ethics session at the AVMA meeting held July 25 in Philadelphia, PA. Dr. Earl Dixon and members of the Executive committee have put a great program together. Look for announcements about the program and make sure to mark your calendar to reserve that date to visit the ethics session. The society will also hold its annual business meeting on July 25, following the ethics session. This will be the opportunity for members to provide inputs on the direction that you would like our society to take in the future, what we should be doing as a society to reach our goals, and to increase our membership, visibility and recognition. I also encourage you to take this opportunity to discover or rediscover this great city! This will be my first visit to Philadelphia. I must admit that, as a teenager, Philadelphia meant something special to me because the Phillies, Philadelphia's baseball team, was my second favorite team (after the Montreal Expos of course!). But Philadelphia is much more than that, so I hope to see you there in great numbers next summer.

In the meantime, I encourage you to get the "word out" about veterinary medical ethics and SVME. We have much to contribute to the improvement and understanding of veterinary medical ethics.

With best wishes,

Sylvie Cloutier, Ph.D
President, SVME



Officers of the Society

<i>President</i>	<i>Sylvie Cloutier</i>
<i>President Elect</i>	<i>Earl Dixon</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>John Wright</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Carol Morgan</i>
<i>Parliamentarian</i>	<i>Bob Speth</i>
<i>Historian</i>	<i>Carol Morgan</i>
<i>Past-President</i>	<i>Brian Forsgren</i>

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer's and Membership Committee Report is a combined report this time because the SVME treasurer is chair of the membership committee. As of January 31, 2004, the checking account balance is \$867.29. The savings account balance as of Dec. 31, 2003 was \$22,374.33.

One of the primary accomplishments of the membership committee in 2003 was the design, and printing of a membership brochure that states the history, and objectives of SVME. A membership application form is included on the brochure. In the near future each of you will receive two of the brochures in the mail. Please give a brochure to a colleague who you think may be interested in joining the only organization devoted to promoting the discussion, and debate about ethical issues arising in and relevant to veterinary medical practice. More brochures are available to members on request.

Along with the brochures, each member will be sent a copy of the book, Veterinary Bioethics in the Twenty First Century. This book is the result of a conference on bioethics that took place at Tuskegee

University in 1999. The distribution of this book is made possible through the generosity of SVME President-Elect, Earl Dixon.

As always, the SVME membership committee, and board welcomes, and encourages constructive criticism, and suggestions that members think will help SVME serve your needs for the promotion of dialogue relative to ethics in veterinary medical practice.

*Respectfully submitted,
John S. Right, DVM*

Secretary's Report

The most daunting task for the SVME secretary is the coordination and editing of the SVME Newsletter. In this and in future issues, I would like to focus on specific topics. I am hoping that this concept will assist potential authors in concentrating on a particular topic and (hopefully) the Newsletter will receive more submissions! A focus for the May 2004 issue has not yet been determined – suggestions are welcome!

This issue focused on the animal rights and animal liberation. I would like to thank all of the contributors to this issue of the Newsletter and particularly Dr. Bob Speth, who permitted me an opportunity to analyze his submission.

More and varied input is always appreciated. I would ask all members to consider submitting to the Newsletter and to encourage non-member submissions. Those employed in academic settings may wish to invite student submissions.

*Cheers
Carol Morgan, DVM*

Killing Healthy Birds to Prevent the Spread of Disease

Special Report: The Rights of Birds and the Public Versus the Poultry Industry

By Teri Barnato

The most common method of controlling the spread of a contagious avian disease is to kill millions of healthy birds who may or may not have the disease, including companion birds, and to do so under government-sponsored veterinary authorization and supervision at taxpayers' expense. An example is the task force operation that was set up in 2003 to stop the spread of Exotic Newcastle Disease (END) in Southern California. This operation, which resulted in the deaths of more than 3.16 million healthy birds, was conducted by a veterinary-appointed task force to protect California's \$3 billion poultry and egg industry. The cost to taxpayers for the joint effort by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Food and Agriculture veterinarians was more than \$239 million. A similar outbreak of Newcastle Disease in California, in the 1970s, led to the killing of 12 million birds at an estimated cost of \$56 million. Exotic Newcastle Disease, as the name indicates, does not occur naturally in the United States; rather, it is believed to have entered this country as a result of the illegal smuggling, from tropical and subtropical parts of the world, of parrots intended for the companion animal trade and chickens intended for cockfighting. Cockfighters smuggle birds up from Mexico and move them from state to state despite federal quarantines. Many of these people work on poultry and egg farms, tracking diseases into

the chicken houses. Because Exotic Newcastle Disease is an extremely contagious disease that causes immense suffering to birds by affecting their respiratory, nervous, and digestive systems, mortality is around 90 percent, depending on the degree of protection afforded to flocks by vaccination.

As directed by then-California Governor Gray Davis, an Emergency Order, in January 2003, called for the eradication of Exotic Newcastle Disease through the "expeditious disposal of poultry." To accomplish this aim, a task force headed by veterinarians was established to comb Southern California's neighborhoods looking for suspected carriers. Not only were millions of healthy birds killed in commercial poultry houses, task force operants went door to door frightening families and threatening their companion birds; some companion birds were killed in front of their caretakers. The state of California paid chicken farmers \$2 to \$5 per bird, depending on the bird's age, after the flock was eradicated. And although cockfighting has been illegal in California since 1905, the U.S. Department of Agriculture compensated cockfighters whose birds were destroyed as much as \$1,850 per bird. For egg producers, especially, the payoff was welcome, as the egg industry has been trying for years to find ways to reduce the size of their flocks and get more than 0-10 cents for each "spent" hen.

California Food and Agriculture Secretary Bill Lyons exulted over the situation, saying, "We are extremely proud of the tireless work of the Exotic Newcastle Disease Task Force. We relied on the expertise of the CDFA veterinarians and other staff, as well as veterinarians from USDA and Baja, California." And while some individuals

responsible for the task force's activities have since admitted that mistakes were made in the handling of certain cases in quarantined areas and in the tracking of the disease, the veterinarians who oversaw California's END eradication program insist that they were, and still are, legally entitled to enter a property with a reported case, and probably even a suspected case depending upon the situation, of Exotic Newcastle Disease and kill every bird on the premises, including birds showing no sign of illness.

The poultry and egg industries, supported by federal and state agencies, may applaud the outcome of the mass killings of healthy birds; however, many public citizens, joined by the animal protection community, remain opposed to the handling of this and other avian disease outbreaks. Taxpayers, including vegetarians, were forced to bail out the poultry industry, which did not take responsibility for encouraging the disease in the first place, through overcrowding and over-concentration of birds, lack of cleanliness, breaches of biosecurity, and inadequate vaccination programs. Task force workers trespassed on people's property, causing immeasurable suffering to individuals by forcing them to surrender their companion birds and watch them die.

Veterinarians authorized and conducted the mass killings of healthy birds, including healthy companion birds, to protect the poultry industry. The mass eradication shifted the cost of the industry's liabilities to taxpayers. Imagine if it had been a disease in cats or dogs. Would veterinarians have authorized or consented to the mass killing of cats and dogs through household search and seizure operations as a way to protect other people's pets and the pet industry? In fact, veterinarians are on record as saying that the killing of millions of cats and dogs as a method of overpopulation control

requires a more humane solution. And, when there is a potentially fatal disease of cats or dogs in an animal shelter, sick animals are quarantined and then treated. The Principles of Veterinary Ethics states: "Veterinarians should first consider the needs of the patient: to relieve disease, suffering, or disability while minimizing pain or fear." Why is this principle set aside where poultry industry interests are concerned? In the case of Exotic Newcastle Disease, as in similar cases that affect this industry, veterinarians failed to consider the ramifications to the human caregivers and failed to acknowledge that contagious disease in companion birds could be managed in a manner similar to contagious disease in other companion animals. Instead, they preferred indefensible solutions to humane alternatives and to considering the needs of the patients.

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What Animal Rights Means to Veterinary Medicine

By Bob Speth PhD

The leader of the increasingly infamous animal rights group PETA, Ingrid Newkirk, credits her inspiration to become an animal rightist to the book "Animal Liberation", written by Peter Singer in 1976. Ironically, Singer discounts the concept of rights for animals and the supposed beneficence he expresses towards animals could be more properly described as a calculated attempt to humanize them in his contrived equation for deriving the greatest amount happiness for the greatest number of living organisms. Singer's belief is that animals are happier in their natural environment than under conditions of domestication. Perhaps it is Singer's naivety about the plight of wild animals that has led him to idealize such lives. On the other hand it may have been a willful blindness. Singer has been able to learn about domestic animals. And to the extent that he has idealized the lives of wild animals, he has demonized the lives lived by domestic animals. He points to real and perceived abuse of animals, focusing his attacks on medical researchers and food processors, while ignoring the benefits animals gain from their domestication. Singer managed to touch a sensitive spot in society when he analogized domestication of animals with human slavery, coining a new term "speciesism" which he claimed to be synonymous with racism and sexism. How is it that such an extremely anthropomorphic postulate was so readily accepted by so many people? Possible explanations include the so-called Bambi syndrome (a testament to Walt Disney's phenomenal ability to humanize the creatures of the forest), our

fond affection for our pets, which leads us to anthropomorphize them (best exemplified by a pet store named "Pets are People Too"), or pangs of guilt for past societal transgressions against minorities and women who were at one time considered to be lesser beings. Singer equates happiness with autonomy and domestication with unhappiness in animal populations. His "data" was carefully chosen examples of animals in agricultural and research settings that on occasion did suffer pain and distress. However, his decision to ignore or discount the benefits enjoyed by agricultural and research animals relative to their wild counterparts reveals the fundamental flaw in Singer's approach. In essence, he cooked the books, to show only the bad in animal domestication and none of the good. Singer was taken to task for this deception in an article published in 1995 by Sharon Russell and Carl Nicoll in the journal *Proceedings of the Society for Experimental Biology* Volume 211, pp. 109-138. The article, entitled: A dissection of the chapter "Tools for Research" in Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, showed how Singer singled out isolated cases of alleged animal abuse while ignoring the benefits to humans and animals that have derived from animal research. Why does Singer fail to consider the reduced suffering of human and animal populations that arise from animal research in his utilitarian equation for happiness? But, the issue here is: What does animal liberation mean for Veterinarians? Few would disagree that the profession of Veterinary Medicine arose from the domestication of animals. While the term "horse doctor" has now been relegated to past history, it indicates how important animals domesticated for agricultural use were to the development of Veterinary Medicine. Today we have cat doctor and dog doctor as internet names of veterinarians, emphasizing how important

these domesticated companion animals have become to the continuation of the Profession.

Yet we have Singer professing that any type of domestication of animals is slavery. His disciple Ingrid Newkirk is on record as opposing all domestication of animals, including pet ownership. She has argued for the elimination of the domestication of dogs and cats as companion animals, dictating that they should be returned to their wild state, but only after their numbers are sufficiently reduced by preventing most of them from producing offspring. The issue then becomes: If there are no domestic animals, there will be no owners of animals. If there are no owners of animals, then who will bring the animals to Veterinarians for medical care? Indeed, what right would humans have to interfere with the lives of wild animals, even to provide medical care. The other issue would be economic. If there are no owners of animals with financial resources to pay for the animals' care, who will pay for the animals' care? It is eminently clear that without animal domestication there cannot be a veterinary profession. And without a Veterinary Profession there would be no medical care for animals. So the next time an animal rightist suggests that we should liberate domesticated animals, you might want to show that person how much animal suffering they would cause if their cause succeeded.

A Commentary on "What Animal Rights Means to Veterinary Medicine"

By Carol Morgan DVM

In responding to Dr. Speth's commentary on the negative consequences of animal liberation, I would like to initially outline

the argument as presented and address each premise separately. I will address only the argument relating to the proposed consequences of animal liberation and will not address other parts of the discussion regarding individual activists.

An Argument Against Animal Liberation

1. The profession of veterinary medicine arose due to animal domestication and has in part contributed to reducing suffering in the lives of domesticated animals.
2. If we want to reduce animal suffering, then we need veterinarians.
3. Animal liberationists advocate freeing all domesticated animals and disagree with domestication in general. If animal liberationists had their way, all animals would be un-owned.
4. If animals are un-owned, then there will be no one to facilitate their medical care, including paying veterinarians for medical care
5. Because no one will pay for medical care of animals the veterinary profession will cease to exist.
6. Because there would be no veterinarians, there would be no medical care for animals, and the suffering of animals would increase.
7. Thus, releasing animals from and disallowing domestication of animals as advocated by animal liberationists, would result in a net increase of animal suffering.

Premises 1 and 2

I have no argument with either premise.

Premise 3

The term 'animal liberation' is a rather generic one and encompassing many different philosophical stances and potential outcomes. 'Liberation' may mean freedom

from inflicted pain or the ability to behave in normal species-specific behaviors. Liberation of research dogs may involve placing these animals in homes so that they are treated in a similar manner to pet dogs. The point here is that 'liberation' does not necessarily mean freedom of movement and the "un-domestication" of animals.

This premise assumes that 1) animal liberationists are a homogenous group in their thoughts and 2) that all animal liberationists oppose any form of domestication and are staunch abolitionists. Although I suspect that both of these assumptions are incorrect and that this premise relates to a very small number of individuals, the remainder of the comments will assume that liberationists are a homogenous group bent on abolishing any form of domestication of animals including companion animals.

Premise 4

Un-owned animals are free and do not have any owners to care for them and, particularly, do not have any one to pay for their medical care. I believe this statement is empirically incorrect. Currently, wild animals, generally, fall under the jurisdiction of governmental authorities. Most areas have wildlife rehabilitation facilities committed to the care of injured and sick wild animals. These organizations are often privately funded but some enjoy governmental funding. Thus wild animals do benefit from medical care and both individuals and society are willing to pay for their care. In addition, a society willing to take the momentous step of "freeing animals from the bonds of domestication" is equally likely to organize and fund treatment centers for wild animals. Having said that, I will acknowledge that the level of medical care of wild animals when compared to the indulged pet is lacking.

Premise 5

Depending on the accuracy of that assumption that no one would pay (individual or societal), the premise is equivocal.

Premise 6

As noted above, even if a complex system of treatment centers and monitoring facilities were instigated, staffed with a legion of dedicated veterinarians and veterinary technicians, it is quite possible that the medical care of animals would deteriorate because the animals could not be reliably monitored. This is an empirical question that is contingent on the system developed to assist the animals, if any. However, the assumption that medical care is the only basis for positive life experiences or ‘happiness’ is narrow. Animal welfare or well-being is often defined as having three segments – functioning well (in which health is a portion), feeling well, and the ability to conduct normal behaviors (the “fishness” of being a fish). What may be lost in the absence of superlative medical care, may be gained in the sense of freedom and joy of acting as a wild animal.

My point is not to advocate an abolitionist position, but to consider the various steps of the argument. Often times there is more common ground than not.

Dr. Speth’s Response

It is difficult to challenge Dr. Morgan’s rebuttal to my commentary on animal liberation. For one, we are in agreement in many respects. Moreover, her challenges to my sweeping generalizations, e.g., “no one will care for the animals” are valid. There will always be those who will have concern and compassion for wild animals that they will provide personal funds and spend their time working to promote their well-being.

However, I worry that the amount of care thus provided will be little more than a drop in the bucket.

Even with the best of intentions, the critical mass for Veterinary Medicine would be so diminished in a scenario of animal liberation as to raise doubts about its ability to adequately serve the populations of animals. Training of veterinarians, which requires considerable hands-on experience learning the anatomy and physiology of animals would be compromised by the diminished availability of animal resources for teaching purposes. It is unlikely that there would be sufficient financial incentive to sustain most veterinary schools, so very few would survive, leading to a drastic decline in the number of veterinarians.

Dr. Morgan suggests that there is a continuum of “animal liberationists”, many of who do not fully subscribe to the philosophical principle of animal liberation, that being an independent existence for animals, unfettered by human interference with their lives. This is indeed correct. Many who support the concept of liberation of animals from research laboratories would never consider pets to also be captive to “exploitative” owners. However, once the door is open to the concept that animals should not be subject to human ownership is established, there will be no going back. And, while the animals in agricultural and biomedical research facilities would be the first to gain liberation under such a principle, it will be equally applicable to animals that are held captive simply to provide companionship to humans.

With regard to animalship, e.g., existing under natural conditions, this is indeed an important component of the maintenance of the ecosystem in which we live. Opposing mandatory animal liberation does not mean opposing the existence of wild animals. But

we should make no mistake about the conditions under which animals survive in the wild. It is not the idyllic life so vividly portrayed in the Lion King, or in parts of Bambi. For every eagle that soars, hundreds of fish, rodents and other small animals were torn from their terrestrial existence by sharpened talons. For every robin that struts its red breast, thousands of worms have been pulled from the soil in which the subsist. For every mink that scampers into a stream,

the carcass of a sibling or two sustained its kithood.

While it is not possible to say with complete confidence whether wild or domestic animals are on average “happier”, my analysis of their lots, e.g., longevity statistics, suggests that the domestic animals are better off than their wild cousins. But, I would prefer to see both options continue for animals.

The Moral Reasoning of Believers in Animal Rights

By Gary Block MS, DVM

Ocean State Veterinary Specialists

Rhode Island, USA

The following is a very condensed version of a paper published in Society and Animals (Volume 11, No 2, 2003) and is being reprinted with permission. The discussion section has been removed so as to facilitate SVME discussion and due to space limitations.

Introduction

The moral reasoning of 54 individuals who believed in the concept of animal rights was evaluated using a research tool based on Lawrence Kohlberg’s cognitive theory of moral development. Subjects were recruited via an animal rights newsletter by asking for volunteers “who believed in the philosophical concept of animal rights”. In addition, subjects were asked to note their highest level of education for additional statistical analysis.

Materials and Methods

The Defining Issues Test (DIT) consists of 6 short stories followed by a series of multiple-choice questions. The stories themselves do not directly pertain to animals but rather create scenarios whereby the individual taking the test is presented with a moral dilemma in which a particular course of action was taken. The answers to these dilemmas represent various stages of moral reasoning based on Kohlberg’s theory. These answers are subsequently used to identify the type and level of moral reasoning being used by the individual.

The norm group used for comparison was a compilation of data from numerous studies that had been combined by the University of Minnesota Center for the Study of Ethical Development. This group consisted of over 3500 individuals. The college group in

The Moral Reasoning of Believers in Animal Rights, continued

this study had completed their undergraduate education whereas the graduate group in this population was made up students currently enrolled in graduate school but that had not yet received their degree. Statistical analysis was performed by the University of Minnesota's Center for the Study of Ethical Development using a computerized statistics program (SPSS®). The scoring for this test is completely objective as all scoring is via a computerized program. Additional statistical analyses (unpaired t-tests comparing study group to norm group) were performed by the author.

The most important measure obtained from the DIT test is the P score*. This P value reflects the subject's level of moral reasoning. P value means and standard deviations were calculated for the entire group and an independent t-test was used to compare subdivided test groups to the norm group. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results

Of the 75 surveys mailed out, 61 were returned for an overall response rate of 81%. All respondents were over the age of 18. Of the 61 returned tests, 7 (11%) were purged from statistical evaluation because their responses failed internal consistency checks. Of the 54 subjects used for statistical evaluation, 46 of them returned the level of education form. For these 46 subjects, level of education was noted as high school (n=4), college (n=11) and post-graduate (n=31). Not all of the subjects in the college and graduate groups had necessarily earned their degrees. Forty-three (80%) of the 54 subjects were women and 11(20%) were men.

The mean P value for the 54 subjects who passed all internal validity checks was 52.50 +/-10.45. Dividing this group by level of education resulted in a mean P value for the post-graduate group of 54 +/-9.5 and a P value for the college group of 51.0+/-9.6. Subjects who did not complete the level of education form were not included in these secondary calculations. Mean P value between the college and graduate groups was not significantly different ($p=0.38$). Mean P score between men and women was also not significantly different ($p=0.40$). The small number of subjects in the high school group precluded useful statistical comparisons.

Comparisons between the study group and norm group are noted in the table below.

P values for Study Group and Norm Comparison Group

	Study Group	Norm Group
College	51 +/- 9.6 (n=11)	42.3 +/- 13.2 (n=2,479)
Graduate	54 +/- 9.5 (n=31)	53.3 +/- 10.9 (n=183)
All adults	52.50 +/- 10.45 (n=46)	40.0 +/- 16.7 (n=3,811)

All results listed as P score +/- standard deviation

*The reader is cautioned to distinguish between the upper case P which is a measure of moral reasoning and the lower case p commonly used to represent probability in statistical calculations.

The Moral Reasoning of Believers in Animal Rights, continued

The P score for the college educated study participants was significantly higher than the norm group ($p=0.03$). The P value for post-graduate educated study participants was not significantly different when compared to the norm group ($p=0.74$). The P score for the entire study group was significantly higher than the adult comparison norm group ($p<0.001$).

Conclusion

Believers in animal rights are sometimes characterized as having retarded moral orientation and defective moral reasoning skills at the root of their beliefs in animal rights. To the contrary, believers in animal rights appear to demonstrate equivalent or higher level moral reasoning when compared to adult, education-matched members of the general public. The assumption that these individuals reserve their moral concern exclusively for animals is not supported by the results of this study. Concern for humans and concern for animals may not be mutually exclusive, as some critics of believers in animal rights have claimed. Further research is necessary to explore the moral reasoning of believers in animal rights when faced with moral dilemmas that entail conflicting rights between animals and humans.

Announcements-Programs-Meetings

***The AVMA Annual Convention
Philadelphia PA
Ethics Sessions. Sunday. July 25, 2004***

*Moderator- Dr. Earl Dixon
SVME President Elect*

8-9:30 AM Dr. James Wilson

\$250K in Emotional Distress Damages for the Loss of a Pet

10-11:30 AM Dr. Duane Flemming

Animal Ownership versus Animal Guardianship

1-2:30 PM Dr. David Fraser

Understanding Animal Welfare: Science in a Cultural Context

3-4:30 PM Dr. Tim Blackwell

Animal Welfare and Swine Production: Incentives for Change

SVME Membership

We appreciate your past support and look forward to a new and even better year for the Society. Yearly membership runs July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2003. The dues payment of \$25.00 (\$5.00 for students) is payable to:

Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics or SVME.

Send checks and the below form to:

SVME
c/o John Wright,
Dept of Small Animal Clinical Sciences
College of Veterinary Medicine
C339 Veterinary Teaching Hospital
1352 Boyd Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108

Payment Date: _____ Check Number: _____

Please return this section of this form with your dues payment (see amount above) to help us keep our records up to date.

NAME and ADDRESS CORRECTION IF NECESSARY:

NAME _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE NUMBER: (_____) _____

FAX NUMBER: (_____) _____

ELECTRONIC MAIL ADDRESS:

Check this box • if you are not on VETETHIC and would like to be. (Email address is required)

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