

IWM'S VIEWS ON

Fundamentalism: A Fundamentally Unethical Approach to Humane Alternatives in Science

All human beings who are a part of western civilization today owe their lives to modern medicine, the development of aseptic surgical care, and the pharmaceutical industry. The loss of continuing scientific knowledge due to the cessation of scientific research would be a tragedy of immense proportion. This is the dominant view of the majority of people in the modern world. The cultural preference today is that people's lives should be given a higher priority than the lives of laboratory animals, although the treatment of animals used in medical and pharmaceutical exploration, should be as humane as possible, and those lives should not be wasted in redundant trials that would accomplish nothing. This is the ideal model of behavior towards such animals. Today, this model is labeled "ethical" by the medical community and by ordinary people who benefit from this system.

A tiny minority objects to any use of animals in any medical or other scientific research for human (or even animal) benefit. They market their abolitionist value system, however, with the use of a much different framework. Animal rights activists promote their agenda through claims that all laboratory animals are treated cruelly, in useless experiments that benefit no one. Because they demean the value of science, their campaigns attempt to put an end to animal testing for any reason. Sometimes, this attempt is backed with human death threats, as in the case of the activist campaign in Great Britain against the Huntingdon Laboratories. SHAC ("Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty") is a radical animal rights group that has posed such a severe threat to employees of this pharmaceutical firm that many fear for their lives.

Besides the crude and terrorist approach, animal rights fundamentalists also intend to adversely affect the stock value of firms that use animals, especially dogs, cats, and primates, in medical research. They have had some success in encouraging some investors to put their money into "socially ethical" (read that "politically correct, safe") firms that claim to never involve animals in the development of their products. According to Jon Entine, writer for Ethical Corporation Magazine, such investment firms are trading worthless ground; he notes that the IPS Millennium Fund ranks in the bottom 1 percentile for performance over the past three years. The head of this fund recently remarked that he didn't care if a research institution should find a cure for cancer - if they used animals in that quest, he would not invest in them. Obviously, it is not particularly good business to restrict investment to firms only involved in "socially/politically correct" research. Animal rights fundamentalists even object to the use of animals in veterinary medicine drug trials and in the surgical training of future veterinarians.



Entine points out that originally, animal rights groups did have a beneficial effect on the behavior of those who use animals in medical research. Legislation since the 1980s has vastly improved animal welfare conditions throughout the scientific community. Since that time, however, terrorist threats to people and to the economic welfare of research firms have fallen flat. They are strategies with no beneficial or even significant impact.

We are left with the definite conclusion that animal rights fundamentalism, which is a model for "abolition with no compromise" is a failed strategy because it offends the value system of the wider society, and is obviously not accepted by more than a tiny, antisocial, anti-intellectual, minority. Animal rights fundamentalism is not accepted as the ethical path for mankind.

IWMC supports all ethical scientific research conducted for human and animal benefit. We deserve the best weapons available in our efforts to defeat disease and disability, and to elevate the condition of humanity. We believe that this can and is being accomplished in an ethical way with the necessary and humane use of animals.