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Animal Welfare 2007, 16(S): 109-115
ISSN 0962-7286

The value of animal life: how should we balance quality against quantity?

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Abstract

In many situations choices must be made that will have an impact on the welfare of companion animals. Often one of the options will be to euthanase the animal in question. The way in which one views this option will depend not only on one's assessment of the quality of the animal's life (or the lives of other affected parties), but also on how one values an animal life as such. Clearly, a companion animal may be valued by a human being or by another animal. A dog's death may affect its owner's quality of life (QoL), or it may affect the QoL of other animals in the household. But does the life of an animal have any value other than that? Is anything lost, for example, when a dog that lived with a sole owner, now deceased, is euthanased? Conversely, would anything be gained if the dog were re-homed (apart from the potentially positive contribution to the new owners' QoL)? More generally, in prolonging, or refraining from ending, the life of an animal, is it thereby ensured that something of value persists? There seem to be three main views on this matter. The first is that animal life has no value in itself. The second is that animal life has value to the extent that the life in question is worth living for the animal. The third view is that the life of an animal has a value that exceeds what is 'in it' for the animal in question. The view one accepts here will have a dramatic impact on one's attitude to many of the choices to be made about the treatment of companion animals — choices in which one must balance quality of life against, as it were, quantity of life. So the heart of the matter is not only quality of life. It is also value of life. Unfortunately it may prove much more difficult to agree about the value of animal life than it is to agree about the significance of animal welfare.

Keywords: *animal ethics, animal welfare, euthanasia, killing of animals, quality of life, value of life*

Introduction

In his introductory talk at the Symposium from which this paper originates, Kirkwood (2007, pp 3–7, this issue) makes the following statement:

> "… people can reach radically different conclusions when judging an animal's quality of life. Opinions *thus* often differ regarding the point at which it becomes kinder to euthanase an animal than not to do so, the point at which it becomes kinder not to undertake a potentially painful therapeutic intervention than to do so ..." (our italics)

The authors of this paper certainly do not want to disagree with the claim, made in the first sentence here, that people can and often will reach different conclusions when judging an animal's quality of life (QoL). People will indeed do this, and not only because they may have different views about what is the correct description of the animal's state, but also because they may subscribe to different and potentially conflicting definitions about what is a good animal life (Appleby & Sandøe 2002). By contrast, however, the inference drawn in the second sentence seems controversial. For it is far from clear that if only people would agree about the QoL of an animal, then they would no longer have any difficulty agreeing about difficult decisions concerning that animal's life and death, and specifically about when to have recourse to euthanasia.

The problem with this assumption is that in decisions about animal euthanasia it is not only the quality of the animal's continued life that is at stake, but also the moral loss involved in ending the life of the animal. Just think about the parallel discussion about euthanasia of terminally ill humans. According to a widespread view — and one that still appears to be reflected in the legislation of most countries — it is wrong, or at least highly morally questionable, to kill a human being even if the quality of the person's life is miserable, if there is no prospect for an improvement and if the person in question strongly wants to have her or his life brought to an end.

Of course, in many respects the moral status of animals differs from the moral status of humans. However, a number of controversies involving the killing of animals strongly indicate that, at the very least, it cannot be taken for granted that it is always acceptable to kill an animal as long as there is no negative effect on its, other animals' or humans' QoL. In this paper the assumption that when it comes to animals, quality of life is indeed the heart of the matter is challenged. It is argued that *quantity* of life is also part of the moral equation.

First, some of the ethical controversies over the balancing of quality and quantity of life are highlighted. Then, three leading views regarding the value of animal life are

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

presented and discussed. The upshot of the discussion is that each of these views has characteristic strengths and weaknesses. No view comes out as obviously more rational or well-founded than the others. So even though one may take a particular stand on the value of animal life, there is no reason to think that those who hold other views are irrational or ill-informed. And there is certainly no reason to expect that controversies concerning the killing of animals will always be easy to resolve.

Ethical controversies regarding balancing quality and 'quantity' of life

It was an important idea of the Symposium from which this paper originates to compare the assessment of animal QoL with the assessment of human QoL. Inspired by this, we begin this paper by looking at a method that has been used, in the context of decisions about life and death, to assess *human* QoL.

The method presses into service the notion of Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs). This notion, which has been used as a tool for making decisions about priorities in human health care, was developed by health economists in the 1980s to allow comparisons of medical interventions of very different kinds — eg heart transplants versus hip replacements (for a review, see Torrance 1986).

The underlying idea is that ill-health may affect a person in two ways: the patient's QoL may deteriorate, or she or he may die. In the QALY-method, these two things are really two dimensions of the same thing: life value. The value of a person's life is defined as the number of years that she or he lives multiplied by the QoL during these years.

Using QALYs, the value of any state of health can be measured by asking people how they rate a particular state compared with two other states, the value of which have been defined in advance: *being dead*; and *being in full health*. Death is assigned the value 0, and a year of full health is assigned the value 1. There are several ways in which people may be asked to rate the value of a health-state. Here is mentioned just one: the so-called 'time-trade-off' method.

According to this method, a person's preference for a certain health-state can be determined by asking what number of years of full health the person would trade for a number of years in the state of disease. For instance, a person might be indifferent between 5 years in perfect health and 10 years confined to a wheelchair. That would give one year confined to a wheelchair the value of 0.5. In principle the value of any health-state can be measured in this way.

In fact, this method has generally not been used to measure the QoL of individual persons. Rather, groups of persons are interviewed with the aim of finding average, or aggregate, values to be used in evaluations of healthcare programmes. In the late 1980s this was taken up by a Danish Minister of Health who gave a news interview about priorities in health care. As an example she argued that, in order to obtain best value (ie QoL) for money, serious consideration should be given to the question whether to invest in heart transplants or hip replacements. She mentioned that studies by health economists had revealed that several times more QALYs per invested monetary unit were gained by giving hip surgery priority over heart transplantation. The next day she was replaced as Minister of Health, and it would appear that her mistake was to favour a treatment that would enhance only the quality of the patients' lives over a treatment without which the patients in question would die. The problem was that she seemed willing to compare quality and quantity of human life. This clearly goes against cherished ideals about the sanctity of human life.

This example concerns the value of human life. Clearly, it can be argued that there are obvious differences in the ways in which the value of human life and the value of animal life are normally viewed. The killing of humans is only acceptable in extreme circumstances: for example, when someone is terminally ill, wants to die and has no hope for recovery (euthanasia); or in the course of a just war. Still, in both cases the killing of a human is a matter of controversy. On the other hand, the killing of animals seems acceptable under many circumstances. Thus it is uncontroversial for a veterinarian to kill an animal that is severely ill. Large-scale killing of animals seems to be widely accepted as part of pest control. In most countries the shooting of animals is an accepted sport. It is widely accepted to use animals in biomedical research and, at the end of the experiment, to kill the remaining animals; and obviously billions of young and healthy animals are slaughtered in farm animal production.

However, attitudes to the killing of animals develop and vary. Today these attitudes seem to differ significantly between persons and cultures. The practice of killing animals to meet human needs has been a focus of concern and public debate for several decades now. Heavy criticism of animal welfare in industrial farming practices, lead by people such as Harrison (1964) and Singer (1990), has led to the promotion of vegetarian and vegan lifestyles based on moral concern for the animals. The criticism has not only focussed on animal welfare, but also raised questions about our need, and right, to eat animals at all. Consequently, in countries such as the USA and the UK, the number of consumers avoiding products of animal origin has become large enough to influence the market, where various meat-alternatives are now offered. In other countries, such as Denmark, consumers appear less concerned about the killing of animals as such and more concerned about the quality of the animals' lives. As a result, the market in Denmark offers few products developed specifically for vegans and vegetarians but has instead a wide range of farming products meeting particular animal welfare standards.

The use of animals in biomedical research has also been forcefully criticised — both in respect of the use of animals for that purpose at all and in respect of the nature of the experiments carried out. In the late 1950s Russell and Burch introduced the principles of the Three Rs: Replacement, Reduction and Refinement (Russell & Burch 1959). According to these principles, whenever possible, animal experimentation should be replaced by alternative methods, the number of animals used should be kept to a minimum,

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and the research methods should cause as little harm as possible. Today, these principles are widely accepted and govern animal-based research in many countries. Most people accept the use of animals for biomedical research and appreciate the resulting medical progress; but for some people this use of animal lives is unacceptable, and reports of threats to researchers using animal experimentation are not uncommon.

One of the major objections to the use of animals in farming and in biomedical research is that humans have no right to use and kill animals just to serve human needs or preferences. But other practices have become more controversial too, where the benefit for humans of killing an animal is less obvious. Here the point rather seems to be that the animal life in itself is of value. One example is the dilemma faced by an owner of a dog with cancer. On the one hand, it could be argued that the dog should be euthanased when its QoL deteriorates below a certain point. On the other hand, one could argue that the dog's life is of value *per se* even if it is a life associated with a certain amount of suffering. Of course some benefits for the owner could be added to the example, eg that the killing of the animal relieves the owner of possible burdens of an emotional, practical or financial nature. Or in contrast, it could be argued that the owner has a strong emotional attachment to the dog and perhaps a strong wish to keep it alive to postpone the saddening loss. To avoid such complicating owner-related factors, the next example concerns dogs and cats in shelters.

Thousands of dogs and cats are placed in shelters every year in the hope that they may be re-homed. However, the reality is that only some of these animals are in fact suitable for re-homing and then have the luck of actually being placed in a new home. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that animal shelters care for 6–8 million dogs and cats every year in the USA, and that 3–4 million of these are euthanased (HSUS 2007). In the UK the RSPCA re-homes around 70 000 animals every year, but the organisation does not state on its website how many animals are received at their shelters annually (RSPCA 2007).

It used to be common practice in shelters to kill animals that could not be re-homed. But today this practice is controversial in some places, and so-called 'no-kill' shelters have emerged. In the slogan of one such shelter, the Animal Ark (2007): "Animal Ark — a no-kill shelter, because pets are not disposable". Thus, even without involving complexities such as human needs for meat and medicine, or an owner's emotional or financial situation, there is clearly, for some people, a concern that goes beyond the animal's QoL — a concern centring on the value of the animal's life in itself.

In view of the examples just given, it should be clear that it cannot be safely assumed that only quality of animal life matters. Thus it does not seem to be enough to ensure that animals in our care enjoy life of a certain quality. Protecting and saving animal lives *per se* also seems to matter — but how and why? To tackle this question it is necessary to understand the various possible views that can be taken about the value of animal life.

Three views about the value of animal life

Decisions about the killing of animals are, as explained above, often controversial. They are controversial not only because there are disagreements about the consequences over the quality of the lives of the affected animals and other affected parties, but also because people seem to hold different views about the value of an animal life. Below, three views on the value of an animal life are described.

Actual views of real people are frequently complex and not very clearly defined. The views presented here are assumed to be at best what people would arrive at if they were to state their views about the killing of animals in a simple, clear and consistent way. Thus the following two claims can be made on behalf of the three views: first, that they represent key underlying elements in typical reactions to questions about the killing of animals; and second, that the views, as set out here, may serve as useful starting points for principled discussion of when it is acceptable to kill animals. The views are formulated in general terms. They are not the only views on the topic a person might hold; nor are they claimed to represent in exact detail what key groups in discussions concerning the value of animal life actually think.

All three views agree that it is important that animals, when alive, have a good QoL. What they differ about is whether more than life-quality matters. According to the first, only quality matters; the second view claims that the number of animals living good lives matters; and the third view claims that the fact that an animal is a living being — is alive — itself gives a strong reason for letting that animal go on living.

Only quality matters

The only obligation to animals in our care is to make sure that they live good lives (as long as they last). So, focus is on the QoL of those animals that actually exist as long as they exist. According to this view there are no moral reasons to make sure that animals are born, or to abstain from killing them, apart from those referring to the effect on QoL of other animals, or humans. For example, the only thing that may speak against euthanasing an ill and uncomfortable dog in a painless way would be concern about either other animals in the household or humans who are attached to the dog.

Quantity matters — but animals are fully replaceable

According to this view, it is of value that an animal or a human being lives and leads a life that is worth living. The underlying idea is that the welfare experienced by individuals can be aggregated into a welfare total, and that a lived life, provided it has a positive quality, is of moral value because it contributes to this total. Thus, it is a good thing that an animal lives when, through its life, it adds to the sum of welfare. Since a lived life enjoys moral value by contributing to the sum of welfare, it follows that it may only be morally acceptable to end the life of a happy animal provided that the lost life is replaced by another life which makes as great a, or a greater, contribution to the welfare total.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Animals are not fully replaceable

According to this view, ending the life of an animal may be a bad thing, and this fact is not wholly explained by any loss of welfare (human or animal) involved. Animals are not (fully) replaceable. This means that the ending of the life of an animal may carry a moral cost, which is not accounted for in terms of loss of welfare. This cost may be explained in several ways — for example by saying that the animal has a right to life, or by saying, like the organisation quoted earlier, that pets are not disposable.

A simple case may serve to illustrate how it could make a big difference in practice which of the three views is accepted. Suppose a person who owns a young and healthy dog suddenly dies, leaving behind the dog. The person has no friends or family who care about the dog or care about the deceased person's wishes regarding the dog. What would be the right thing to do with the dog?

From the dog's point of view, the view taken of the killing of animals could have serious consequences in terms of both quality and quantity of life. If the euthanasia is performed correctly, ending the dog's life will not affect the dog's QoL other than by denying it QoL (good and bad) that it would have enjoyed had it not been put down. But being placed in a shelter for re-homing may be stressful for a dog (Hiby *et al* 2006). Of course, the dog may be placed in a new home and live happily for many years. But if it is not re-homed, it may end up being euthanased anyway (now with the added stress of the shelter experience), or it may be kept in the shelter long-term, which carries a risk of the development of behavioural changes (Wells *et al* 2002; Marston *et al* 2004).

According to the view that only quality matters, it would be permissible to euthanase the dog, and there seems to be no reason to place the dog in a shelter to be re-homed. In fact, it could be argued from this point of view that the dog should be spared the potentially reduced QoL. Thus it is likely that the dog will just be euthanased. However, if the quantity of the dog's life is of concern, attempting to re-home it seems a better option than killing it straight away, although it would be of equal value if, instead, a pup is born and is allowed to live. But, as mentioned earlier, shelters may have different views about the value of an animal's life. At a shelter where euthanasia is accepted, the dog's quantity of life is considered to be of value and attempts are made to avoid euthanasia, but if the dog shows signs of being unable to cope with the situation at the shelter, it will typically be killed. Finally, according to the view that animals are not replaceable it is important that *this dog* is allowed to go on living. In choosing a shelter with a 'no-kill' policy, the dog may be thought of as an irreplaceable individual with a right to live. Because of this, the dog will not be killed, but it may also not be re-homed, and if it is not, it may live for years in the shelter, potentially with poor QoL.

In the following sections, each of the three views about the acceptability of killing animals outlined above will be discussed in more detail.

Discussion of the view that only quality matters

In practice, many people seem to agree with the view that only quality matters — at least, when it comes to farm animals. These people care about the welfare of animals used for food production. They are concerned about farm animals living under stressful and barren conditions; and they think about the way farm animals are treated during transport and slaughter. But once they are persuaded that the animals have lived good lives, and have been treated well before they were slaughtered, they do not regard eating meat and other animal products as a problem. The only remaining concerns about the consumption of animal products based on welfare-friendly production methods may be about environmental effects or effects on human nutrition.

The statement that 'only quality matters' provides one way of interpreting the underlying ethical rationale of the view just described. Another interpretation will be presented below as part of the discussion of the view that quantity matters.

The principle that quality alone matters is so far a little under-specified. One obvious way to specify it in more detail is by saying that the only thing that really matters is that animals we happen to have in our care are not caused any pain or other suffering; and that therefore it is only acceptable when we keep animals to keep them under conditions in which their needs are looked after.

Specified this way, the principle may be seen as an example of a more general ethical theory normally labelled 'negative utilitarianism'. Karl Popper gave the classical formulation of this theory. He argued that the aim to produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number should be replaced by a similar, but inverted demand: aim to ensure the least amount of avoidable suffering for all. According to Popper, "it adds to the clarity of ethics if we formulate our demands negatively, ie if we demand the elimination of suffering rather than the promotion of happiness" (Popper 1966 p 285).

The problem with this view — a problem originally pointed out by Smart (1958) — is that, given certain plausible empirical assumptions, it may be morally right to kill off everybody to prevent them from suffering. When it comes to animals — which, incidentally, are mentioned by Smart — there will certainly be a very high risk that an animal in our care will at some stage of its life encounter unpleasant or painful experiences. And if, following negative utilitarianism, your only moral concern is that animals in your care should avoid suffering, it will then be morally right to euthanase all animals in your care. Or at least, it will be right, other things being equal — there may, of course, be additional concerns about other animals or humans.

According to its critics, negative utilitarianism lacks sensitivity to the positive contribution made by an animal living a life that is, on balance, worth living. Many people may think that strong efforts should be made to prevent animals in our care from suffering, but these people would probably not accept the idea that it is right to euthanase animals

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

because this is the only way to prevent their lives from containing merely *some* suffering. Rather, they would say that what matters is that there are enough of the good things in the lives of the animals to compensate for the suffering. This leads on to the next view, which allows the killing of animals, but only when it contributes to, or at least is not detrimental to, animal welfare.

Discussion of the view that quantity matters

This view differs from the previous one in a crucial way: animals in our care should be treated well, not only because this prevents them from suffering, but also because they are thereby enabled to live lives that are worth living. Allowing an animal to live a life that is worth living makes a positive moral contribution to the world — the more such lives are lived, the longer they last, and the higher their quality, the better.

According to this view, killing a young and healthy animal will, other things being equal, make a negative moral contribution. However, other things are not always equal. Sometimes killing one animal may allow another one to live. For example, if one keeps sheep, it will be impossible to have more than one ram (two rams will not tolerate each other). If the old ram is killed, a young ram will be given the opportunity to live a life that would not have been possible had the old ram not been killed.

A prominent adherent of this view, Peter Singer, has argued that it may even be possible to allow the slaughter of animals. Singer is a famous proponent of moral vegetarianism. However, in at least some of Singer's writings the vegetarian outlook is based only on a concern that the consumption of meat and other products from commercially reared animals leads to animal suffering. Assuming that farm animals live good lives for as long as they are allowed to live, it may, according to Singer, be morally acceptable to slaughter animals:

> "As long as a sentient being is conscious, it has an interest in experiencing as much pleasure and as little pain as possible. Sentience suffices to place a being within the sphere of equal consideration of interests; but it does not mean that the being has a personal interest in continuing to live. For a non-self-conscious being, death is the cessation of experiences, in much the same way that birth is the beginning of experiences. Death cannot be contrary to a preference for continued life, any more than birth could be in accordance with a preference for commencing life ... Given that an animal belongs to a species incapable of self-consciousness, it follows that it is not wrong to rear and kill it for food, provided that it lives a pleasant life and, after being killed, will be replaced by another animal which will lead a similarly pleasant life and would not have existed if the first animal had not been killed. This means that vegetarianism is not obligatory for those who can obtain meat from animals that they know to have been reared in this manner…
>
> I am sure that some will claim that in taking this view on the killing of some non-human animals I am myself guilty of 'speciesism' — that is, discrimination against beings because they are not members of our own species. My position is not speciesist, because it does not permit the killing of non-human beings on the ground that they are not members of our species, but on the ground that they lack the capacity to desire to go on living. The position applies equally to members of our own species who lack the relevant capacity." (Singer 1979 pp 152–153)

Singer here allows that animals may be killed for meat as long as they have a good (pleasant) life, are replaced, and are killed painlessly. This view seems to be broadly shared by many of those engaged in animal welfare science. Indeed it would be difficult to work in animal research on improving the QoL of animals in livestock production if one believed that the slaughtering of healthy animals constituted a serious ethical wrong.

The idea of replacement as a means of maximising animal welfare is bound to seem especially plausible when farm animals are being considered. However, when it comes to companion animals this idea can appear quite hideous, as is brought out in the following remarks of Michael Lockwood:

> "Many families, especially ones with young children, find that dogs are an asset when they are still playful puppies (capable of keeping the children amused), but become an increasing liability as they grow into middle age, with an adult appetite but sans youthful allure. Moreover, there is always a problem of what to do with the animal when they go on holiday. It is often inconvenient or even impossible to take the dog with them, whereas friends tend to resent the imposition, and kennels are expensive and unreliable. Let us suppose that, inspired by Singer's article, people were to hit on the idea of having their pets painlessly put down at the start of each holiday (as some pet owners already do), acquiring new ones upon their return. Suppose, indeed, that a company grows up, 'Disposapup Ltd', which rears the animals, house-trains them, supplies them to any willing purchaser, takes them back, exterminates them and supplies replacements, on demand. It is clear, is it not, that there can, for Singer, be absolutely nothing directly wrong with such a practice. Every puppy has, we may assume, an extremely happy, albeit brief, life — and indeed, would not have existed at all but for the practice." (Lockwood 1979 p 168)

Lockwood himself in the same paper says that, although his example gives him pause, he "remains ultimately unconvinced" that the argument obliges one to give up the view that animals are replaceable. Others may think that arguments such as the one he indicates give good reason to think that animals are not replaceable.

A further problem for the view that quantity matters can be expressed in terms of what one might call the 'broiler argument'. Assume that certain farm animals live lives that are worth living, but barely more than that — eg broilers. Assume, furthermore, that any attempt to raise the quality of the lives of broilers significantly will lead to a drop in the number of birds living, because the production of welfare-friendly animal products will be much more costly, and consequently human consumption of the products in question

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

will drop significantly. If that were so, any attempt to improve the lot of broilers would presumably bring about a drop in total broiler welfare, which in turn suggests that it is a good thing to allow broilers to go on living as they do. However, that seems to be a repugnant conclusion (cf Parfit 1986).

The problem highlighted by the broiler argument is not that animals are replaceable, but rather that it can be morally desirable to have a very large number of animals living a less good life rather than a smaller number of animals living a much better life. To deal with this problem one need not give up the idea that animals are replaceable. One can also try to combine this idea with the belief that, from an ethical point of view, it may be better to have a smaller number of animals with high levels of QoL than a larger number of animals with low levels of QoL — even if the total sum of welfare will be greater in the latter case. (For further discussion of these issues, see Parfit 1986.)

In the light of these problems, a moral view in which animals are not regarded as replaceable should be examined.

Discussion of the view that animals are not fully replaceable

If one agrees that animals are not fully replaceable, one must say that ending the life of an animal may be a bad thing. Many people would probably say the latter, off the top of their heads — at least, when it comes to animals such as dogs and cats. But some of those who object to the idea that animals are replaceable probably do so because they are anticipating *indirect* consequences of the adoption of the replaceability view. That is, they believe that acquiescence to the opinion that animals are replaceable may lead to a kind of instrumentalist attitude that will, in turn, adversely affect the way animals are treated. In this reaction the main thought is that each and every animal should be treated with great care — a thought that need not lead one to deny that animals are replaceable.

An alternative reason for refusing to go along with replaceability focusses specifically on the human–animal bond. Thinking of companion animals as irreplaceable is part of the human–animal bond. Owners of companion animals have special relations with their animals — they perceive them as individuals and as friends or family, and over time they come to share a history.

This account of what encourages a view on animals as irreplaceable is reasonable — but only to some extent. It explains quite well why a pet-owner might think of his or her pet as non-replaceable. The account, however, has too narrow a scope. One may well wonder whether it generates any general moral push towards thinking of animals as irreplaceable.

If there is a bond of friendship between you and your animal, then, of course, *you* have a reason to protect the life of the animal. But why should that affect how people treat their animals when there is no such bond? Could not someone reasonably say: "If there is a bond between you and your guinea pig, *you* can spend £1000 on fixing its broken leg, but why should *I* feel obliged to act similarly in a similar situation? Why should my decision to have my guinea pig euthanased and replaced be frowned upon?" On the account based on the human–animal bond, then, the saving of animal lives looks more like a personal preference than a moral imperative.

Obviously, a line of reasoning with a stronger moral push than the human–animal bond is called for to define a genuine ethical alternative to the idea that animals are replaceable. One such alternative invokes the idea of animal rights developed and defended by Tom Regan and others. According to Regan, animals should "be viewed as the experiencing subjects of a life, with inherent value of their own" (Regan 1989); and Regan takes it to follow from the claim that an animal has an inherent value of its own, and thus that killing an animal is a wrong that cannot be compensated for by giving other animals the opportunity to live. Animals have a 'right to life' similar to the one ascribed to humans.

This approach entails wholesale rejection of the view that animals are for us to use — be it as production animals or laboratory animals. This rejection is in keeping with more radical critiques of animal production in which the idea of 'humane' animal production comes in for stern criticism. One advocate of this kind of 'anti-animal-welfare' belief is Bob Torres. In an essay in the magazine *Satya*, Torres (2006) acknowledges the necessity of incrementalism, ie the making of progress by means of small steps in the way animals are treated. However, Torres says that rather than refining the types of animal product one consumes "... our incrementalism should be the reduction of meat, eggs, dairy, honey and other products of animal exploitation from our diets". He thinks that animal welfare standards "... don't advance veganism or nonhuman emancipation. They legitimize enslavement and slaughter".

Probably, the disconcerting factor in the thought experiment described earlier involving Disposapup Ltd is the fact that the animals involved are companion animals. It is likely that many people who would object to the killing of pups would happily endorse the killing of farm animals in humane animal production. However, the animal rights view will not allow one to discriminate between companion animals and other kinds of sentient animal. It obliges one to condemn *all* killing of animals, unless the killing is a genuine act of mercy or necessary to defend one's own life.

Moreover, Torres' vision of emancipation seems to cast doubt on the very idea of keeping domestic animals. Keeping animals as companions involves controlling the lives of the animals in a number of ways. For example, they will typically be kept in rather close confinement, their reproduction will be wholly managed, and in fact in most cases they will be completely barred from any kind of sexual life and from the opportunity to raise offspring. Although Regan and other proponents of animal rights often seem to have an positive attitude to companion animals such as family dogs, it is difficult to see how most of the ways we (currently) keep companion animals could be compatible with an animal rights view.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press

So although the animal rights view gives meaning, in a clear and consistent way, to the idea that animals are irreplaceable, for many people it is not a viable position. Essentially, the animal rights view is, in many ways, just too restrictive regarding what can be justified in the conduct towards animals.

Conclusion

Defining and properly assessing animal QoL are important in determining how to treat animals in our care. However, in some cases questions arise about more than just the quality of an animal's life: the length of the life may also become an important consideration. There are different views about the importance of an animal life, and when seeking to balance the quality and quantity of animal lives, the conclusions will clearly depend on views on the value of animal life. The views of how to value animal life examined here are in conflict, and each one can be contested.

The fact that a common view about the value of animal life cannot be taken for granted has implications for professionals and experts. Professionals, such as veterinarians, who are involved in giving advice to individual clients about whether or not to euthanase companion animals must remain aware that their own and their client's moral views can sensibly differ. And to avoid overruling the client's moral perspective, it is important, in the dialogue leading to any decision on the euthanasia of an animal, to acknowledge and give weight to alternative ethical considerations about the value of animal life.

Equally, professional organisations (eg veterinary associations) trying to define a policy on the euthanasia of animals need to make their own ethical assumptions about the value of animal life as transparent as possible. And it is important for such organisations to appreciate that they have no special expertise on the ethical or evaluative questions raised by the issue of euthanasia (although, naturally, they have privileged access, eg to relevant medical and scientific facts). Therefore any policy must be open to moral debate.

Finally, any group of experts offering advice on issues of animal life and death should likewise ensure that the ethical assumptions underpinning its advice are openly acknowledged. To some extent, experts in applied ethology and veterinary medicine can make authoritative judgements about the quality of the lives of animals about which they are being consulted. However, as has been argued in this paper, the heart of the matter is not only quality of life. It is also value of life.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Paul Robinson for useful comments and editorial assistance.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600031808 Published online by Cambridge University Press