ALTERNATIVES TO ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION

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Dear reader,

in current times we are alternately confronted with euphoric hopes in but also the concrete possibilities of biomedicine. Despite all prognoses, it is often not possible to foretell what many of the current developments may achieve in the future. But one impact they certainly have is that they show us that old patterns of thought and ethical considerations are falling short and need to be reassessed. One such example from the area of animal experiments is the subject of the main article of biologist and philosopher Kirsten Schmidt entitled “Dignity or integrity – Does the genetic modification of animals require new concepts in animal ethics?” The debate on gene technology represents a gauge of animal ethics in general. Do we really only care about avoiding suffering, and is it enough to care only about suffering? If yes, genetic modifications of animals could even contribute to reducing their suffering; at least that is what some of the leading figures in gene technology suggest, who think they have elegantly solved the questions of animal protection by generating mice that are allegedly insensitive to pain. Or is that simply the culmination of the insufferable functionalisation of animals in gene technology? It seems we must fear it is the latter.

The idea that humans and animals share the same biological origins has recently regained popularity. In his main article “The metaphysical dimension of animal ethics” the philosopher Norbert Walz deduces that animals and humans also share a spiritual quality, a similarity that the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer also employs to argue against animal experiments. The topicality of Schopenhauer’s animal ethics is enunciated by philosopher Cecilia Muratori in her main article “Against pariahmoral. Schopenhauer on the ethics of vivisection.”

New and established theories and arguments regarding the treatment of animals can be found in the book reviews of our literature report. The relationship between humans and animals is continuously conquering new discussion platforms. This is good news, as it is a prerequisite for change. Our literature report also contains the book review of a harrowing experience report. The former state veterinary of Lower Saxony, Hermann Focke, documents the daily cruelties that characterise the treatment of animals. We look forward to a time when such books no longer need to be written.

The abyss between the legal stipulations of the law and the reality of animal experiments is still grotesquely wide. The revision of the Swiss animal protection law of the 1st of September 2008 aims to address this transnational problem. At last, the enforcement of the law shall also be improved. Read more about this development in the news section.

The establishment of a new chair for alternative methods in Geneva by the university’s medical faculty, the Egon-Naef Foundation and the Doerenkamp-Zbinden foundation represents another cornerstone for the animal protection of the future. Further details are in the news section. The EU has presented a new draft of a directive to protect 12 million experimental animals. The retrospective evaluation of proposals to perform animal experiments shall make the scientific results more transparent. More information can be found in the news section.

Animal experimentation for our food safety is the subject of Thomas Hartung’s “Food for thought…” column in this issue. Together with Herman Köeter he throws the spotlight on this area of animal experiments, which is hardly known to the public and is thus seldom the subject of public debate. Therefore, it offers surprising information, for example, the fact that almost ten percent of all toxicological animal experiments are performed for the safety assessment of herbicides and fungicides. The number of animal experiments performed for the safety of our food is thus almost as high as it used to be for testing industrial chemicals.

Gotthard M. Teutsch, a pioneer animal ethicist and animal protectionist, celebrated his ninetieth birthday on the 13th of December. Already in the times when animal protection had little formal footing, Teutsch was an advocate of a better treatment of animals. We convey our heartfelt congratulations with four essays.

ALTEX must continue to evolve; that is what the board and general assembly of the society ALTEX Edition decided. To enable a better recruitment of subscribers outside the German-speaking countries, four issues of ALTEX per year will be published in English, starting in 2009. A fifth issue, which will be published at the end of every year, entitled “ALTEXethik”, which will appear in German, will contain main articles dealing with all central aspects of the public discussion on the treatment of animals. A main feature will be the literature report: The book reports, which reflect the zeitgeist of the human-animal relationship, will be complemented by German summaries of all the scientific articles published during the year in the ALTEX issues 1-4. With ALTEXethik you can keep an eye on both the social and scientific developments in the field. As a philosopher, to whom the subject of animal ethics has been a central theme for many years, I am pleased to be assuming the office of editor of ALTEXethik. I wish you a good New Year and look forward to continuing to inform you of further developments and a more considerate treatment of animals in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Petra Mayr
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English summaries: http://altexweb.jsfph.edu
ALTEX is indexed in MEDLINE, Current Contents®, ScSearch® and ISI Document Solution® and EMBASE.
Cover picture: Giotto di Bondone (1266-1337): St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds,
Chiesa S. Francesco superiore, Florence, Italy.
ALTEX 25, 4/08

Aims and scope
ALTEX, edited by the Swiss Society ALTEX Edition is the official journal of EUSAAT, the
European Society for Alternatives to Animal Testing. ALTEX is devoted to the publication
of research on the development and promotion of alternatives to animal experiments according to
the 3R concept of Russell and Burch: Replace, Reduce, and Refine. ALTEX is publishing
original articles, short communications, reviews as well as news and comments, meeting reports
and book reviews in English and German. Animal experiments are defined by the editors as
every experimental procedures using animals which may cause pain, suffering, and emotional harm
to animals and which are conducted in testing, research and education or to obtain tissues,
organs, and other animal derived products.
Besides covering the biomedical aspects of animal experimentation, ALTEX is also devoted to the
bioethics of the complex relationship between man and animals. Articles published in
ALTEX should express a basic concern about the dignity of living creatures. ALTEX is not only
aimed at developing a new approach to recognize animals as partners but it also intends to
introduce a scientific insight in the discussions on animal experiments. Articles devoted to the social
and ethical aspects of this topic will, therefore, be judged according to stringent scientific
standards. Manuscripts submitted to ALTEX are evaluated by two reviewers. The evaluation
takes into account the scientific merit of a manuscript and the contribution to animal welfare
and the 3R-principle.

ALTEX 25, 4/08

Layout: H. P. Hoesli, Zurich, Switzerland
Print: Stuertz GmbH, Wuerzburg, Germany
Distribution: ALTEX, Schuetzenstr. 14, 78462 Konstanz, Postbox 100125, 78401 Konstanz, Germany,
Phone: +49-7531-16614, Mobile: +49-1726272224, Fax +49-7531-25833, e-mail: abo@altex.ch
Publisher: Spectrum Akademischer Verlag GmbH.
Spectrum Akademischer Verlag is a Unternehmen von Springer Science+Business Media.
Edition: 800
Circulation: 4 times per annum plus supplements
Subscription rates (starting from 2009):
Full Subscription (four English issues plus ALTEXethik):
Normal: 50 €
Library: 170 € (companies, institutes, libraries)
Student: 52 € (please fax proof of student status)
Animal Protection: 52 € (members of animal protection organisations)
E-Subscription (only the four English issues):
Normal: 80 €
Library: 160 € (companies, institutes, libraries)
Student: 42 € (please fax proof of student status)
Animal Protection: 42 € (members of animal protection organisations)
NEW: ALTEXethik subscription
ALTEXethik: 15 € (only the German issue ALTEXethik)

All prices include P&P for all European countries. Additional costs for shipment outside
of Europe: 20 € for 4 issues, 25 € for 5 issues.
The world is not a factory and animals are not products for our use (...) Not mercy, but justice is what we owe to the animals

Arthur Schopenhauer
(* 22. Februar 1788 in Danzig; † 21. September 1860 in Frankfurt/Main)