

# **Karen Muskavitch's Commentary on "What is Your Drive? Science or Ethics?"**

Commentary On  
What is Your Drive? Science or Ethics?

This case raises a number of issues concerning the use of animals in biomedical research and the reactions of people who interact with these animals. In this commentary, I will consider the general issues related to the use of animals in research first and then turn to the more specific issues concerning Frank.

Whether or how animals should be used in research has been an issue of great debate for a number of years, a debate that shifts as our knowledge and understanding of animals grows. Many nineteenth century biomedical scientists viewed animals much as Descartes did, as similar to machines and incapable of feeling emotion or pain. "[T]hey interpreted the cries of an animal during vivisection as the mere creaking of the animal 'clockwork'" (Rudacille, 2000). Today, most researchers are concerned about the welfare of their animals and willingly comply with rules and regulations. They consider alternatives, the three R's of replacement, reduction and refinement (Russell and Burch, 1959) when preparing research proposals, but they also wish that IACUC review didn't take so long. The evolution in the way in which researchers view and treat their animal subjects has come as a result of our increasing knowledge about animals and their lives, as well as through interactions with what has come to be known as the animal rights movement (Orlans, 1993 and Rudacille, 2000). Our ways of thinking about the moral status of nonhuman animals have also changed over time and the lively debate currently includes, among others, those who would ascribe rights to nonhuman animals because they have inherent value since they are "subjects of a life," and others who argue that nonhuman animals do not have any rights *per se* and that more, rather than less, biomedical research using animals should be done because of its benefit to the human community (Orlans, 1993 and Orlans *et al.*, 1998).

This case, because it deals with chimpanzees, has an additional layer of complexity and controversy. There are currently no nonprimate animal models for AIDS

research, and there is a movement to include all great apes, human and nonhuman, in a community of equals. This movement is the Great Ape Project and is best described by its Declaration on Great Apes (Great Ape Project):

We demand the extension of the community of equals to include all great apes: human beings, chimpanzees, gorillas and orang-utans. The "community of equals" is the moral community within which we accept certain basic moral principles or rights as governing our relations with each other and enforceable by law. Among these principles or rights are the following: 1. The Right to Life . . . 2. The Protection of Individual Liberty . . . 3. The Prohibition of Torture.

At the same time that our more detailed knowledge of the life history and behavior of nonhuman great apes is leading some of the scientists who study them, such as Jane Goodall, to call for an end to their captivity and use in experiments, we also have the AIDS pandemic affecting millions of human beings. Chimpanzees are the only nonhuman animals that can be infected with HIV, and they will also eventually develop AIDS. While monkeys will become ill if infected with a simian version of HIV, it is not clear how analogous this disease is to HIV-caused AIDS. Thus, chimpanzees are considered the best candidates for a nonhuman animal model in which to learn more about disease progression and test potential AIDS vaccines.

Issues that are specific to Frank's situation are of two types: those that concern ethics, and those that concern his goals and feelings. Ethical concerns include the general issues discussed previously in this commentary and specific issues such as whether Vern's housing and medical care meet accepted standards. It is understandable that a chimpanzee infected with HIV has been isolated from other chimpanzees, but Frank might ask if steps have been taken to enrich Vern's environment and provide other social interactions, perhaps with suitably protected humans. Frank might also question if enough is being done to minimize Vern's pain and suffering. If these are concerns, Frank should raise these specific issues as well as the general ones concerning the use of chimpanzees in biomedical research. However, to be effective he needs to do so in a nonaccusatory, questioning manner, and he may need to seek out further information from other sources to educate himself on these issues. Respectful dialogue about the use of nonhuman animals in research should be part of the culture in a facility such as the one described in this case. If there are major problems with the way in which the chimpanzees are treated

at the facility and Frank cannot get his supervisors to take his concerns seriously, he may need to alert people higher in the organization. If he believes that the work done at the facility is immoral, although it is in compliance with current animal use regulations, he may need to quit his job, and possibly work to change others' opinions.

This case also raises concerns related to Frank's goals and feelings. He began work at this animal facility because he was interested in doing graduate work in immunobiology. By the end of the case, he is no longer interested in work in this field, presumably because he is uncomfortable with the costs of this research to the animals. This need not be an ethical issue, but can be one having to do with personal emotions and preferences. Many of us in academic research chose graduate school over medical school because we realized that we were not comfortable dealing with people who are sick and/or in pain. Similarly, I know several biologists who work in plant rather than animal systems because they are not comfortable dissecting or drawing blood from animals. These people are not morally opposed to animal research; they are not vegetarians, but this type of work is not for them. Choosing a field of research involves finding a niche where one is excited by the research questions and is also comfortable with the techniques employed. That is not usually an ethical issue, but one of personal interests and aptitudes.

With all the complexities involved in this case, its discussion would benefit from preparatory research by the discussion participants into such topics as views on the moral status of animals, current regulations concerning care of primates used in research, model systems used in AIDS research, and the actual case of the first chimpanzee to develop AIDS (Novembre *et al.*, 1997).

## References

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