

Commentary

Researchers and PETA should seek compromise

In any argument, individuals on opposite sides of a mutually established fence tend to remain steadfast in the attitude that their position is correct, and the opponent is in the wrong. Such is the case, with a few exceptions, in the continuing debate between the University experimental scientists and the animal rights group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA).

On one side of the dispute we have the University research community stating that animal research is needed because it benefits humans. On the other side we have PETA declaring animal research should be banned because hurting or killing animals through research is morally wrong.

At face value, it may seem that the two sides of this argument are diametrically opposed, and consequently, there is no possibility for resolution or agreement on any points. I propose that this is in fact not the case and that both parties might benefit from working toward an understanding of each other's position rather than hurling barbs across the chasm.

To begin an objective analysis of the argument, we must try to understand and appreciate the contributions that have been given to us, in part, through animal research. We have won

the battle against contagious diseases by first testing vaccines and antibodies in live animals. We have worked toward eliminating harmful food additives, such as saccharine and red dye, from our foods by observing the carcinogenic results of those additives in test animals. We better understand our own human anatomy and physiological functioning through comparisons to the systems of many animal species. In fact, if we took a global perspective of the way animal research has influenced and changed our lives, it would be accurate to say that if there had been no animal research in the last eight and one-half decades, the face of the world would be drastically altered.

The ultimate motivation for animal research is to conserve and improve human life, and Prof. Richard Marrocco states this position plainly in the opening of his ODE commentary (Oct. 14) when he says: "I have a fundamental belief that science ought to work for the good of humanity."

As a psychology student interested in a humanistic/psychodynamic interpretation of the human person, and without having the benefit of substantial scientific background in my coursework, it would be foolish of me to at-

tempt to explain exactly how Dr. Marrocco's research works for the good of humanity.

I am sure that Dr. Marrocco, a respected professor in our university community, does research that legitimately supports his fundamental belief, and I appreciate his willingness to explain his use of the macaque monkeys in the animal lab.

But as a past employee of the University animal laboratory, I must take exception with some of the procedures which Dr. Marrocco has described.

In describing the surgical procedure which removes a portion of the skull, Dr. Marrocco says, "The scalp heals rapidly and the animals totally ignore the cap." What he means is that for some of the monkeys the scalp heals rapidly, but in reality, some of the monkeys experience continued periodic bleeding after each experimental procedure, and occasionally, a monkey's molded skull-cap is improperly implanted. This results in the cap coming away from the skull, exposing the brain to the air. These problems are immediately rectified by attempting to surgically replace the cap to salvage the subject, but in the two cases during my one year employment, both monkeys were terminated because of this complication.

He also states that "...the animals totally ignore the cap." I am sure that this is quite true for the unconscious monkeys that Dr. Marrocco works with, but in the daily life of the captive monkeys, I observed half of them who would sit for hours rubbing the caps with their hind legs. He also states that the animals can, in some cases, be "returned to the colony to live normally." All of the monkeys I worked with were terminated, and their brain tissue histologically examined.

These are a few examples of what the PETA organization is opposed to. PETA believes that animals should be protected from the pain and suffering which is imposed on them through experimental research. It is clear to me, as a past employee of the animal lab, that some of the animals did in fact experience discomfort and pain from the procedures. This truth is accurately observed by Cathy Braden in her letter (ODE, Oct. 14) when she states, "Many University research animals live out their lives suffering through cycles of fear, stress, social deprivation, physical deprivation, physical discomfort of repeated injections, and often violent reactions to drugs."

At the root of the argument is, on the one hand, that animal research is crucial to the preser-

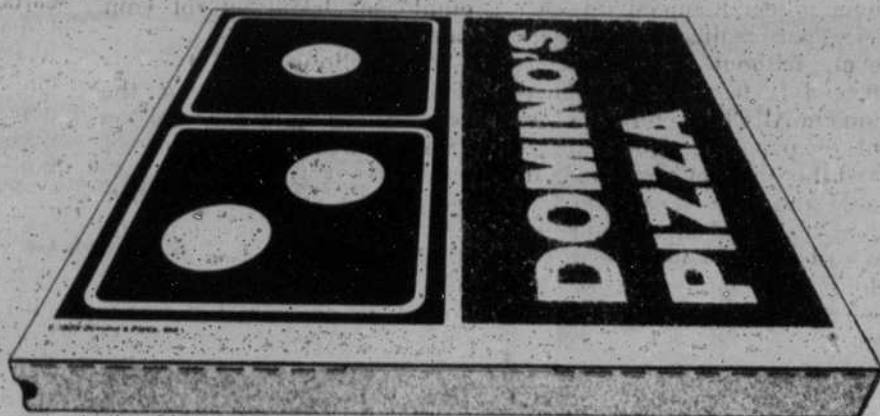
vation of human life. What PETA needs to recognize is that animal research does in fact improve our quality of life. What the scientific community needs to recognize is that animal rights groups such as PETA are lobbying for research that is meaningful in its outcome and which is not repeated one-hundred-fold across the country "just for research sake."

I sincerely hope that the PETA member recently elected to the University Animal Care and Use Committee by our University researchers is able to be an effective and contributing member of the committee. I laud the spirit of "detente" created by this election. What both sides need to do now is give this new coalition an opportunity to address the fundamental issues at hand in an atmosphere which is positive, not negative, and collaborative, not combative. With fair negotiations and an element of understanding, I think both parties will be able to compromise in a way that benefits both humans and our animal brethren.

By Carl F. Schlossman

Carl Schlossman is a University psychology student.

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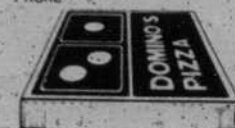
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