

Ethics and Animals

The Rationale for Institutional Ethics Provision for Animal Research

Andrew Brennan
La Trobe University, Melbourne

Ethics

concerned with relations and commitments;
to **self** (duties of self-cultivation, support and development);
to **other people** we know (family, personal and professional standards, courtesy);
to society, nature, animals, **the world**.

Life

always lived in relation to ourselves, other people and things;
involves values, attachment, risk of loss;
values can be end values (intrinsic values, ends in themselves);
or they can be enabling, instrumental (what enable us to realise end values).

Value Scrutiny

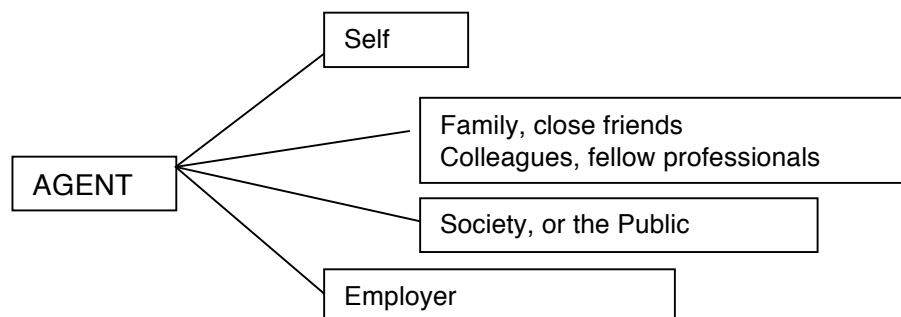
what end values matter in this situation;
what other values are relevant, and how should they be prioritised;
how will my own actions affect the values, commitments and relationships in the situation?
Without such value scrutiny, without planning actions in relation to them, it is hard to have personal happiness or professional success.

Action

often involves conflicts between means and ends;
ideally a person of good character acts consistently with their character, and the obligations they have to others, to bring about good consequences (or at least minimise or avoid bad ones) – but it is hard to avoid conflict among three different things – the *character* of the agent, the *rightness* of the act and the *goodness* of consequences
Ethical conflicts can arise when we are asked to do something that runs contrary to character (compromises integrity), or makes us break obligations, or leads to very bad consequences.

Action maps (obligrams)

Many tricky situations involve conflicts of obligations to different people or groups, which can be shown on an obligram



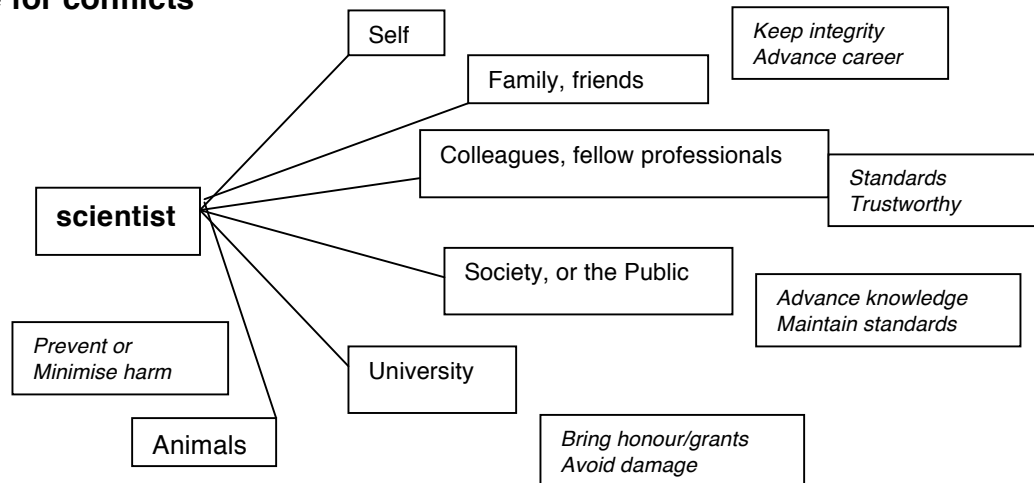
Multiple obligations

obligations and responsibilities form complex webs;
employees, for example, owe duties of care and loyalty to their employers; and employers have obligations to pay wages, provide safe working conditions, etc.;
professional people have special duties to care for their clients, ensure public safety, protect the environment, etc. but employers, including universities, also have duties toward the public.

Bringing the Animals into the Picture

even if animals did not merit any respect or special care, scientists would still have obligations regarding their treatment;
such obligations would be owed to their colleagues, the university, the public;
neglect or mistreatment of animals could lead to loss of funding, loss of approval for conducting experiments on live animals, loss of public confidence in science or the university, etc.;
but animals are subjects of lives, are deliberately harmed without their consent, and so are probably owed direct moral consideration too.

Scope for conflicts



Focus of the Australian Code

- 1) Is the science of good quality, and likely to lead to significant positive outcomes for human or animal health, for our understanding, or for educational purposes?
- (2) Has every effort been made to minimise harm to the animals involved in the research?

Answering these key questions

Too many conflicts at the individual level for researchers to give credible answers to these questions;

If a committee (the AEC) is to answer these questions it should have experienced animal using scientists, recourse to statistical and peer review (question 1);

It should contain members who will advocate for animal welfare (minimise day to day harm), and be sceptical of scientific uses of animals (minimising harm in general)(question 2);

AEC processes protect researchers, institutions and the public interest if they ensure that credible answers can be given to questions 1) and 2) above.