

Are humans and animals equal? Animal rights advocates would say yes. Others would say that there are essential differences between the two. What is the Christian stand? Does the Bible say anything on the issue?

Christians, on the one hand, see the mystery and sanctity of all life, originating as it does from God. On the other hand, they are also conscious of the uniqueness of human life, made in the image of God. This difference between human and animal life needs to be underscored because animal-rights advocates believe that there is essentially no difference between the two. In an interview with *Harper's Magazine*, Ingrid Newkirk, a defender of animal rights, argued that animals also possess those attributes that supposedly set humans apart from animals (such as tool use and use of language): "None of this differentiates humans from other animals. You cannot find a relevant attribute in human beings that doesn't exist in animals as well."¹ In Newkirk's world, humans would have no more rights than animals. "They would be just another animal in the pack."²

Without the Bible, we too would probably arrive at a similar conclusion. So we turn to what the Scriptures say on the issue.

The use of "soul"

The Bible does use the word *soul* for both humans and animals. Some understand from this usage that the Bible recognizes no difference between humans and animals, but the problem disappears once we understand what the word *soul* means in the Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, the word commonly translated soul is *nephesh*. "One of the primary meanings of the word *nephesh*, 'soul,' is 'life,' as it is translated 119 times (Gen. 9:4, 5; Job 2:4, 6; etc.), or 'breath,' as it is rendered in Job 41:21.... In Gen. 1:20, 30 the brute creation is said to have a *nephesh*, 'life'."³

Another Hebrew word that deserves notice is *ruach*. Consider its usage in Ecclesiastes 3:19-21: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. . . Who knoweth the spirit of man

that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" The word *ruach* is translated as "breath" in verse 19 and as "the spirit" in verse 21. This passage is discussing the fact that both humans and animals have the same principle of life or breath, and that humans have no advantage over animals in terms of what happens at death—the breath departs. The one thing that humans have in common with animals is

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the principle of life and the principle of death: "It is specifically stated that both animals and men have the same 'breath,' *ruach*, and that at death the same thing happens to both of them."⁴

The New Testament translates the Greek *psuche* as "soul." "*Psuche* (plural, *psuchai*) is translated 40 times in the NT as 'life' or 'lives.'...It is rendered 58 times as 'soul' or 'souls.'"⁵

The word for soul (*psuche*) is thus used of animal life as well as of human life. In Revelation 8:9 *psuche* is translated "creatures," obviously referring to marine life. In Genesis 8:1 the Hebrew *nephesh* is similarly used of animals. So from the use of the word *soul* to both humans and animals, the only thing we can conclude is that they both have life. But we cannot conclude that there are no differences between the human and the animal.

Animals in Research? No!

Every year, tens of millions of animals die in U.S. laboratories. Experimenters force animals to ingest or absorb through the skin products such as nail polish and oven cleaner, torment them in devastating psychological experiments, infect them with "human" diseases, surgically impair them, addict them to alcohol or drugs, and shock, burn, drown, starve and mutilate them.

The U.S. government and private industry spend billions of dollars a year to fund such studies. Meanwhile, many people with cancer, heart disease, AIDS, substance addiction and other debilitating illnesses and injuries cannot get the treatment or assistance they need because of lack of funds.

Many makers of cosmetics and household products use cell and tissue cultures instead of animals, and many doctors and researchers rely on clinical and epidemiological studies, "skin" grafts, computer simulations, and mannequins to help them provide patients with the most up-to-date treatments.

Christine Jackson, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Washington, D.C.

The mode of creation

In fact, the Bible makes it clear that humans are definitely different from animals. When God made Adam, He "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). Picture the great Creator as He kneels down in the fresh dirt and molds and fashions the first human "in His own image," breathing into him the breath of life. Animals were not created that way: "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so" (Genesis 1:24).

Further, speaking about the creation of human beings, the psalmist says: "For thou hast made him [man] a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour" (Psalms 8:5). No such description can be found about animal creation.

Made in the image of God

Above all, the Bible affirms that human beings are made in God's image: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26). The description is not applied to any other creature. Ellen White suggests that a large part of this "image of God" refers to human mind: "Man was formed in the likeness of God. His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things."⁶

White identifies this difference as "a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do."⁷ Jack Provonsha elaborates on this distinguishing feature of humans over animals: "Objects—things—can only be acted upon. Living things...can also be acted upon, but they may...react.... Human beings share with both nonliving things and living plants and animals their being acted upon and reacting. But the truly human is unique in his or her ability to act in ways that are surprising and unpredictable."⁸

One feature of human activity that sets humans apart from animals is memory of the past and understanding of the future. Animals do not have this capacity. Our memory of history coupled with a concern for the future helps us to make decisions for today. We then modify our behavior based on the feedback we receive as a consequence of

our actions. Many animals can modify behavior based on feedback but this is only a short-term function and is not based on memory of the past or a sense of the future.

A sense of right and wrong

Another aspect that distinguishes us from animals is our sense of right and wrong. Except for humans whose brains have been irreparably damaged, most people have some sense of what is right or wrong. It may be a very twisted moral sense but nevertheless it is there, and it governs the way an individual acts and reacts. Even the most intelligent animals do not appear to have any moral principles. That is not to say animals have no control over their behavior. They do have controls, but these are instinctive rather than thought-out principles based on a moral code.

Some may suggest that the great apes and other mammals are as intelligent as humans, and that they can act in surprising and unpredictable ways. Despite repeated attempts to show such intelligence in animals, humans are light years ahead of all other animals in moral reasoning, thinking, and doing. Furthermore, humans have a spiritual dimension that animals lack. God commanded us to worship Him and even set apart one day each week for that purpose. Animals apparently are incapable of worship.

Some others would suggest that animals are even better than humans. Animals did not plan and carry out wars that have marred our civilization. This only shows how much we have fallen from our original exalted state.

Another area in which the Bible distinguishes the human from the animal is the former's stewardship of the latter. "And God said unto them,...have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living creature that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

The use of animals

The entry of sin brought in a sacrificial system, involving the lives of innocent animals. God instructed Adam and Eve on the meaning of sacrifice.⁹ In the concept that an animal was to die for human sin, we see that human life is different from animal life. But even in the sacrificial system, Satan introduced the idea that humans and animals were

no different, and instigated human sacrifice, putting human life on the same level as animal life.

In regard to animal sacrifice, God gave Moses detailed instructions on how these offerings should be carried out. No mention is made of avoiding animal sacrifice (see Leviticus 1-4). The Old Testament also has instruction on the use of animals as beasts of burden and as food, on the one hand, and on the care of animals in good surroundings and with gentleness.

Human worth and animal care

In the teachings of Jesus there emerges the clear idea that while we should care for animals, we should not forget that humans are of higher worth: "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matthew 12:11, 12).

On another occasion Jesus said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. . . ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29, 31). This passage teaches two things. First, God watches over everything He made, even the tiny sparrows. This means that we too have a responsibility for protecting animals. We should protect them from suffering and their habitat from destruction. If God is watching a baby loon on Moss Lake in the Adirondack Mountains, I should be, too. If God is concerned about the quality of the water and the death of fish in the Chesapeake Bay, I should be, too.

Jesus has given "special direction in regard to the performance of acts of mercy toward man and beast. . . While the law of God requires supreme love to God and impartial love to our neighbors, its far-reaching requirements also take in the dumb creatures that cannot express in words their wants or sufferings."¹⁰

Second, humans are, in a way that may be only partially definable, "above" or "better" than animals. If it comes to a choice between an animal and a human, we should always vote for the human. Ellen White seems to support what might be called an animal-use/animal-welfare view: "He who created man made the lower animals also, and 'his tender

mercies are over all his works.' [Psalms 145:9]. The animals were created to serve man, but he has no right to cause them pain by harsh treatment or cruel exaction."¹¹

Implications for the Christian

Any discussion of animal use and welfare must make us sensitive to a dichotomy: God has an orderly universe but we live in a fallen world. In God's perfect universe, nothing would die. Death in our sinful part of that universe was a result of sin. In our world death is a reality. Living in this sinful world, Christians attempt to apply principles of the coming kingdom. In practical terms, this implies that a follower of Jesus will be kind to animals while using them to benefit humanity. We should always foster animal welfare and good care. This is one of the reasons why many Adventists tend toward a vegetarian diet.

As we noted above, God gave us stewardship of animals. This implies, among other things, that we will have to make decisions about animals—in some cases, which ones live and which ones die. For example, a person may get malaria, caused by a microscopic protozoa. A human makes the decision to kill the protozoa and thus save the person's life. Rats carry fleas which in turn carry causative agents of plague. We make the decision to destroy the rats and save people's lives.

But when you throw out the Bible, the principle of stewardship goes with it. Then there is no control. If all life is equal, no one is in charge and chaos reigns.

This creates problems even for animal-rights advocates. I recently saw a video that advocated absolutely no use of animals by humans. It showed an animal farm where animals that have been rescued from slaughter are being allowed to live their lives in peace and harmony. The only problem is, What do you feed them? Of course the cows, sheep, and pigs can eat plant food. (So far I haven't heard of any plant rights groups.) But what about the dogs they rescue from "cruel" research laboratories? Dogs are carnivores—meat eaters. Are you going to convince them to eat plants? No doubt there are people who feed their dogs only a vegetarian diet, but that's not what dogs (or lions) eat naturally. Animal-

Animals in Research? Yes!

Do we have the right to healthy lives? Do future generations? Those questions command attention now. A few radicals are threatening us all by trashing laboratories and seducing the media. Human good requires experimentation on lower animals in a humane environment. The extension of human life expectancy from 42 years (1900) to 80+ today results largely from animal research. Heart disease, cancer, cystic fibrosis, polio—treatments for these and many other diseases have come from animal-based biomedical research. Without animals, a cure for AIDS will have little hope.

Animal-rights activists demand more computer simulation and tissue culture studies. These methods are already used extensively but we still need animals—an AIDS vaccine cannot be tested on a computer.

The convoluted thinking of these radicals assigns the same moral worth to rodents and humans. If their own survival were at stake, would they defer to the rodent? Because of their campaign, millions of dollars must be devoted to laboratory security. The time has come for every one of us to protect our rights to good health.

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rights advocates try to make nature sound peaceful and happy, but any biologist knows that is a false picture.

We do live in a sinful world, one where an animal's "freedom" may impinge on my health or survival. Ellen White advocated the killing of pests. "God has given no man the message, Kill not ant or flea or moth. Troublesome and harmful insects and reptiles we must guard against and destroy, to preserve ourselves and our possessions from harm."¹²

Behind human-animal equivalency

We have seen that the Bible places humans above animals. What, then, is the origin of the concept that all life is equal? The answer goes back to the father of all lies.

Think for a moment of the idea of organic evolution—that life originated as a result of unknown processes taking place in a "soup" of chemicals. The first living cell supposedly gave rise to other cells, which, over much time and many cell generations, eventually developed into all other forms of life on this planet. Humans, then, represent nothing more than the latest step in a long evolutionary development from the first living cell. Therefore, if you accept the organic evolutionary theory of the origin of living things, you will accept that all life is basically the same. The evolutionist sees only a quantitative difference—not a qualitative difference—between humans and other animals. Followed to its logical conclusion, this leads one to believe that a human life is no more valuable than a mosquito's.

Of course, one may not be ready to go that far. Animal-rights advocates don't usually try to stop people from killing mosquitoes. But it is important to

see where these ideas lead. Animal-rights advocates want all human use of animals stopped—whether in medical research, as pets (unless they are treated exactly as members of the family), as food, or for pleasure (as in circuses).

The question, then, is: On what do we base value? On intelligence? On performance? Or on contribution to society? For the Christian, the answer is clear: on the basis of our creation in the image of God and our re-creation through Jesus Christ. No animal was made in God's image, and no animal can ever experience the spiritual new birth.

Practical applications

Elsewhere I have discussed animal use in research and guidelines that ought to govern such use.¹³ But can doing research on animals ever be considered compatible with the Christian duty to treat all life with respect? Our discussion thus far leads me to say yes—if the research is potentially beneficial to humanity and is done with the highest regard for life.

Christine Jackson (see box, p.6) suggests that money should be spent on disease treatment rather than on research. This is like offering a Band-Aid™ to a child who is playing with a knife. Treatment is a temporary "solution" when we are dealing with a fatal disease like AIDS. Research has potential to find a cure or a vaccine. As Ronald G. Calhoun points out (see box, p.7), tremendous strides have been made against many human diseases by animal research. If researchers in years past had taken the Band-Aid™ approach, our life expectancy today would be about 40 years.

Where does all this leave us, as Christians? On the solid biblical ground that humans and animals are not the

same. They are significantly different in worth, dignity, and destiny. While we are given dominion and authority over the animal kingdom, our stewardship should enable us to treat animals with kindness and care, even as we use them in legitimate ways. □

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Notes and References

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5. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 379.
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8. Jack A. Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1993) p. 127.
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13. See "Should We Use Animals in Adventist Schools?" *Journal of Adventist Education*, 56:5 (Summer 1994), pp. 26-32.



Pontius Puddle

