

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

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World Day for Laboratory Animals

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The following speech was given in Berkeley on 1997's World Day for Laboratory Animals. Activists had been concerned for two decades with the fate of Langur monkeys at U. C. Berkeley. As of the date of this speech, the monkeys had been offered a home in a sanctuary, but it was unclear whether the University would accept the offer. Later in the year the offer was accepted.

For many of us, World Day for Laboratory Animals is a day for mourning. It is a time for remembering the pain and suffering of hundreds of thousands of animals in laboratories throughout the world. It is a time for acknowledging those animals who are locked inside the laboratories of this university, and whose lives and deaths count only as data to be recorded. And it is a time for calling people's attention to the plight of those creatures who have been brought into this world only to be sentenced to a life of suffering and imprisonment. But World Day for Laboratory Animals is not just a time for mourning, it is also a time for expressing our outrage at the pain and anguish that animals in laboratories endure as they are poisoned, cut, jabbed, injected, dissected and otherwise manipulated and abused. Most of all, it is a time for calling a halt to this senseless suffering and abuse.

Animal experimenters would like us to believe that the mistreatment that these animals endure is based upon sound principles of logic and reason. They would like to convince the world that we who care about the plight of animals are driven by ill-informed emotions which disregard the dictates of Reason. According to animal experimenters, it is the very capacity to reason that distinguishes humans from the other species of the world and gives them the prerogative to inflict pain and suffering on those they deem lack this trait.

The ideology of laboratory abuse of animals is premised on a variation of the Garden of Eden story. According to laboratory experimenters, a God named "Science" gave human beings all of the species on the planet to experiment with as they wished. And this God named "Science" sent animal experimenters to be our savior and to free the world of disease and to confer immortality on all of humanity. But according to animal experimenters, their God required sacrifices in order to attain eternal life, and since their God had given them all the non-human species on the planet, they turned to the non-human animals to be sacrificed in their place. This is the religious ideology that supports animal abuse. It is no coincidence that animal experimenters use the word "sacrifice" when they kill animals. Behind this notion lies the tragic belief that somehow if animals die, human beings will be allowed to live. In an earlier time, humans sacrificed animals in the name of religion. Today they sacrifice animals in the name of science.

Animal experimenters seek to convert us to their sacrificial religious science by fueling our fears—not of hell—but of death. Death, according to animal experimenters, is a medical failure that they can avert through the sacrifice of animal life. Animal experimenters would like us to believe that their actions are driven by pure reason, devoid of all emotion and religious beliefs. But in reality experimenters are driven by deep-seated fears and anxieties and religious beliefs—fears and anxieties about death and our animal existence, and religious beliefs about achieving immortality through sacrificial death. This is why animal experimentation continues in spite of the repeated data that demonstrate that zoological studies are not applicable to human beings. Animal experimentation is not about making genuine advances in human health. It is about profit, it is about careers, but it is also about human anxieties and fears and the mythical hope that they can be allayed through sacrificial death.

Animal experimenters would like us to believe that compassion is a finite commodity, that it is not

possible to care for both human and non-human animals. They seek to underscore this point with obscene scenarios, such as who would you save in a life-boat situation, your daughter or your dog? In my opinion, all life-boat scenarios should be thrown overboard. Life-boat scenarios are the worst form of ethics. They represent a massive failure of imagination. It is the failure to recognize that the pursuit of health need not entail harming other living beings. It is the inability to conceive that human well-being is never advanced at the expense of other living beings. Animal experimenters are so wedded to their sacrificial laboratory science that they have ignored the surrounding world in which human beings live. If they would examine the epidemiological studies that have been done of the human world, however, they would notice that the vast majority of modern diseases are caused by life style and environmental factors. If they were to acknowledge this fact, however, they would have to reverse their priorities and put the vast majority of the research dollar into preventing diseases, rather than seeking to cure them after they occur. But to do this, they would have to relinquish their sacrificial rites, and this is what they are afraid to do.

The final thing I would like to say concerns the Langur monkeys whose lives are at stake. Animal experimenters at U. C. Berkeley have an opportunity to show the University and the public at large that they are not devoid of all feelings of compassion. They have the God-like capacity to confer either life or death on these creatures who are in their charge. They have the power to allow these beings, who until now have been considered only tools for research, to live out their lives in peace and dignity in a sanctuary. The eyes of this community and of the world are upon them now. Let them show the first steps toward compassion for other forms of life. And one day, perhaps, the entire world will be a safe place for all living beings and the need for sanctuaries will have disappeared because we will live in a world of peace and compassion for all living beings.