

## Hounded By Animal Rights Activists

Some animal rights activists are getting **hot and bothered** because some people sell coats made partly of dog fur – which is illegal in the United States.

Now, measures to prevent fraud (like selling fake fake fur under the guise of real fake fur) are one thing. But we think that people should be allowed to sell real dog and cat fur if they want to. Dogs were created by nature and human civilisation through natural and artificial selection. Dogs themselves can't generate new ideas, although people can train them to do stereotypical things like fetching sticks. So everything that might make a dog unique can be easily recreated by getting another dog of the same breed and treating it in a similar way.

If someone acquires a psychological attachment to a dog that they own – or for that matter to a picture that they own of a dog that never existed – then of course it should be a crime for someone else to destroy the dog or the picture. But for the same reason, if somebody chooses to kill their dog, that is an innocuous act. They can, for example, easily replace the dog with another that is just like it. If they also sell the dog's fur, everyone concerned is better off.

By contrast, human beings are capable of generating new ideas. So if somebody kills a human being they may have destroyed unique ideas that could make the world better. They cannot be replaced by simply treating another human in a similar way – even if that were a moral thing to do. Even if a person appears to have no good ideas, we may simply misunderstand the merits of his ideas. That is why we set up institutions, such as law and moral traditions, to ensure that choices between rival ideas can be made on the basis of reason, not violence. That is why **killing a human being is wrong**, except as a necessary consequence of defending another human being.

And that is why human beings have rights, while dogs and other animals do not.

Sun, 02/18/2007 - 16:03 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## Let me be the first

to tell you that you are wrong on a number of counts. You have set

up an argument based on apples and oranges. (Humans are human and Dogs are, well, only dogs. So your point is that dogs are not humans?)

Dogs are not humans but neither are they "owned" by humans like a house or car or some other inanimate object. The simple fact that dogs, or elephants for that matter can be dominated/domesticated by humans who have exploited their natural species tendencies does not make it o.k. to kill them if their "owner" decides to on some whim, unless somehow the dog or the elephant has become crazed and is dangerous to others. I don't really have any problem if you personally want to wear a dead dog coat or elephant skin shoes, that's your choice, but please make sure that that dead dog/elephant died of natural causes.

If on the other hand we create a market for dog carcasses or the fur of dog you can be sure that some wrong-ideaed human will figure out a way to make a profit from it and establish the dog fur trading and coat making industry. A fine end for man's best friend and he doesn't have very many. And as far as dogs and other animals not having rights, who said they asked for any?

Go on about how every human being has worth and rights partly because he can think and explore new and fascinating ideas and there is no problem with that. But leave the dogs, cats, and elephants alone when it comes to the human fashion industry.

Or maybe you think we should harvest ivory, make cat head amulets to ward off evil spirits, or make dog fighting a national sport. I could make a case for each of those possibilities philosophically but it wouldn't make any of it morally right.

Of course you aren't talking about killing real dogs, only theoretical ones. So for the sake of argument go on about how you think dog fur is a wonderful all-weather coat for us naked apes. I don't mind one whit.

by a reader on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 01:47 | [reply](#)

## **creating novel ideas or feeling pain?**

I'm not sure I agree that generating new ideas should be the criterion of whether causing harm to an entity is morally acceptable. The better criterion should be the ability to feel pain. If an animal, say a dog or a higher mammal, can feel pain due to its more evolved nervous system then causing pain, suffering or death to such animal should be considered morally wrong, unless it is demonstrably clear that it would prevent greater pain of suffering somewhere else.

by [AIS](#) on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 05:38 | [reply](#)

## **Pain**

Pain isn't the same thing as suffering. Nerves in a test tube can

send electrical impulses. It's only \*suffering\* if there is a \*mind\* there to care about it.

-- Elliot Temple  
curi@curi.us  
**Dialogs**

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 08:48 | [reply](#)

## Pain

AIS and Elliot:

Whether or not pain (in some sense) is relevant to morality in general, it is surely not relevant to the issue here, which is *killing* animals and wearing their fur. This can be done painlessly.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 13:15 | [reply](#)

## Pain

David,

I am curious as to your view of "how" relevant to morality is the issue of pain in killing animals. Assuming, for the sake of argument, that certain killing of dogs for fur is done in a way that involves a material amount of pain, would this then be relatively strong support for the view that such killing would be immoral?

by **Michael Bacon** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 18:25 | [reply](#)

## Re: Pain

Assuming, for the sake of argument, that certain killing of dogs for fur is done in a way that involves a material amount of pain, would this then be relatively strong support for the view that such killing would be immoral?

*On that assumption* (including the assumption that the pain is of the morally relevant kind - let me call it 'suffering'), the immoral thing would be inflicting that suffering, not killing the animal nor wearing its fur.

Suppose a certain amount of suffering was practically unavoidable in killing that type of animal. Then, strictly speaking, what was morally relevant would not actually be the suffering but the *difference* in suffering between that necessitated by the humane killing and that which would be experienced if the animal eventually died of natural causes.

Your assumption then leads to some conclusions that I don't think most animal rights supporters would like. For instance, not only would it be immoral to breed any such animals in the first place (because of the inevitable suffering that they would experience during their lives and deaths), but the only moral environmental policy would be to reduce the number of wild animals capable of

suffering to the absolute minimum needed for humans to thrive.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/19/2007 - 19:01 | [reply](#)

## "rights"

The premise of this post and its comments have all been wrong. Man's rights are not derived from his ability to feel pain, they are also not derived from his capability or - willingness - to create ideas that others find useful. Instead it is the source of his ability to create ideas that are the cause of man's rights.

Rights can only be held by beings who are capable of reasoning and choosing.

The whole "animal rights" movement is based on a single --invalid-- syllogism, namely: men feel pain and have rights; animals feel pain; therefore, animals have rights. This argument is entirely false, because man's rights do not depend on his ability to feel pain; they depend on his ability to think.

Rights are ethical principles applicable only to beings capable of reason and choice. There is only one fundamental right: a man's right to his own life. To live successfully, man must use his rational faculty--which is exercised by choice. The choice to think can be negated only by the use of physical force. To survive and prosper, men must be free from the initiation of force by other men--free to use their own minds in guidance of their choices and actions. Rights protect men against the use of force by other men.

None of this is relevant to animals. Animals do not survive by rational thought (nor by sign languages taught to them by psychologists). They survive through inborn reflexes and sensory-perceptual association. They cannot reason. They cannot learn a code of ethics. A lion is not immoral for eating a zebra (or even for attacking and killing a man). Predation is their natural and only means of survival; they do not have the capacity to learn any other.

Only man has the power to deal with other members of his own species by voluntary means: rational persuasion and a code of ethics rather than physical force. To claim that man's use of animals is immoral is to claim that we have no right to our own lives and that we must sacrifice our welfare for the sake of creatures who cannot think or grasp the concept of morality. It is to elevate amoral animals to a moral level higher than ourselves - a flagrant contradiction. Of course, it is proper not to cause animals gratuitous suffering. But this is not the same as inventing a bill of rights for them at our expense.

The granting of fictional rights to animals is not an innocent error. We do not have to speculate about the motive, because the animal "rights" advocates have revealed it quite openly. Again from PETA: "Mankind is the biggest blight on the face of the earth"; "I do not believe that a human being has a right to life"; "I would rather have

medical experiments done on our children than on animals." These

self-styled lovers of life do not love animals; rather, they hate men.

The animal "rights" terrorists are like the Unabomber and Oklahoma City bombers. They are not idealists seeking justice, but nihilists seeking destruction for the sake of destruction. They do not want to uplift mankind, to help him progress from the swamp to the stars. They want mankind's destruction; they want him not just to stay in the swamp but to disappear into its mud.

There is only one proper answer to such people: to declare proudly and defiantly, in the name of morality, a man's right to his life, and his liberty.

**Editor's note:** This comment appears to have been copied from [this](#) post by Edwin A. Locke at the Ayn Rand Institute.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

## Rand

Are you a big fan of Ayn Rand?

Also, why do you put your stance forward as disagreeing with the original post, when you largely agree? (It said an important thing was that people have ideas. It denied animal rights.)

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

## Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 08:30 | [reply](#)

## Pain & Rights

I think the issue is less who or what has rights and more the morality of man inflicting pain where doing so is unnecessary to achieve legitimate purposes. Notwithstanding that animal rights activists might not like the logical conclusions that could be drawn from such an analysis, I think David's statement that "what was morally relevant would not actually be the suffering but the difference in suffering between that necessitated by the humane killing and that which would be experienced if the animal eventually died of natural causes," is an appropriate way to look at these types of issues.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 14:38 | [reply](#)

## Live dog

If you read today's news you will be enlightened to see that a dog, a laborador retriever, was credited by three mountain climbers on Mount Hood for saving their live while they waited for technology devices to locate them. If they had instead depended on animal fur, such as hair of the dog, they likely would have perished.

Live dogs are better than dead ones.

I agree on the rights point. It is ridiculous to speak of animal rights, but there we go again anthropomorphizing.

As to human morality, there is a strong case for fostering appreciation of the dog species. Dogs get it, reason or no reason. A good human is one to be loved. A dog has no silly ego which tells flawed thinking men that they have rights above others, the others being classified as lesser humans or lower animals. Dogs on the other hand treat all good humans as one and the same. Thinking or not, dogs would have never caused the holocaust, a thousand ugly wars, slavery, child abuse or a million incidents of race baiting.

Dogs would gladly give you the fur off their back but what thinking human needs it anyway. Goose down is a much more effective insulator and mink is preferred by 99 percent of women as a fur of choice. Dogs, live ones, just give warmth and service and return the love of a decent master. A dog will go with you anywhere, even to the top of Mount Hood in a blizzard. Who knows what stupid humans were doing up there in a blizzard, but the laborador willingly followed.

Meanwhile PETA and this board and other misguided humans were sitting on their thumbs debating animal rights.

In a blizzard give me a live dog any day.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 14:41 | [reply](#)

## Re: "rights" and Rand

In reply to the Randian reader: making choices (in the sense you intend - for instance, not the kind of choice that dogs or present-day computers can make) is itself an irreducibly creative act, as is using reason (in the sense you intend). So we are not in disagreement on that fundamental point.

Your comment appears to have been copied from [this](#) post by Edwin A. Locke at the Ayn Rand Institute. But to give credit where credit is due, we have inserted an attribution after your comment.

by [Editor](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 15:26 | [reply](#)

## Technology Devices

Certain trained dogs *\*are\** "technology devices" in the relevant sense -- a tool used by humans who have knowledge of how to use it, and who make it themselves (via dog training). Destroying them is destruction of valuable, private property. Which is perfectly legal if you are the owner, and rightly so: maybe you're making an even more valuable movie. Or maybe you are risking the death of that dog in a rescue, without its signed consent.

-- Elliot Temple  
curi@curi.us

## Dialogs

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 20:17 | [reply](#)

## Three dog night

To clarify, in the Mt. Hood case, the dog was warm-blooded and furry and hence warm. The three climbers huddled around the warm dog throughout the freezing night. The dog kept them warm enough to survive until technology devices which they were wearing were located the next day by the mountain rescue team.

I don't know if rescue dogs were involved. As for signed consent, a pawprint backed up by a wagging tail is sufficient.

by a reader on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 20:44 | [reply](#)

## Live Dogs

"Live dogs are better than dead ones."

Assume for the sake of argument that the climbers could only have saved themselves by killing the dog and there was no way to do this in a timely fashion other than by inflicting a great deal of pain. In that case a live dog isn't better than a dead one, and the infliction of pain to kill the dog would still have been a "moral" response.

by [Michael Bacon](#) on Tue, 02/20/2007 - 22:02 | [reply](#)

## Bravo The World

Dogs seem to fall on a scale between tools and comforters.

The dog that saves mountaineers from death is merely a sophisticated tool. Likewise a dog that provides hair is a tool (or a resource).

The dog owner who is neurotically attached to her animal is using it as a comforter. It would be cruel to kill it just as it would be cruel to steal a child's teddy bear.

(Hopefully nobody is suggesting that stuffed toys have rights.)

However if she'd understood that humanity doesn't depend on having emotions but upon having thoughts and ideas and choices then she might not have become attached in the first place. She might have been saved a great deal of inconvenience and veterinary bills.

At present, when people are exhorted to treat other people 'like human beings', they are really being asked to **treat people like dogs** (i.e. to have regard for their emotional states, but not necessarily to try to take them seriously.)

This has got to be one of the most **difficult** prejudices to **set right**.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 00:00 | [reply](#)

## What is a 'mind'?

OK I will call it suffering instead of pain. I do agree that you need a mind to feel the nerve signals etc. as suffering. Yet I do not understand how you can be so certain that dogs have not already got a primitive mind, mind enough to feel suffering in the sense above?

I also accept the point of Dr. Deutsch that suffering alone is not sufficient as a criteria versus the argument for extermination as an end to natural or otherwise sufferings that will ensue. That an argument based on uniqueness, "individuality" is needed for instance as a source of creating new ideas.

My point again is how we can be so certain that a being conscious enough to feel some sort of suffering for instance- given the assumption that such being exist- won't contain "enough" originality as an "individual" of its species? That maybe it is more skillful in hunting and even "thinks up" an "insightful" maneuver in one of its hunts at the spur of the moment that would ensure its survival against all odds? Would that not be a crude primitive "idea" of some sort?

Or that it if it is capable of suffering, as an assumption, that its instinct for survival might not cause him immense fear and suffering at the moment of extermination once it its self-sustaining survival instincts become active? That at that moment it senses somewhat what is going to happen to it soon afterwards?

I guess it all boils down to this: We have no clue what a mind is really? No real model of a mind. So how can you be so certain to speak of an higher mammal as property or mere reflexive machine? Given the odds, I think an argument can be made in favor of restraining from hurting higher animals unnecessarily on moral, given that we basically have no clue of what is a mind and how it works, for these three reasons:

1- the banality of the alternative act, like fur coats, does not justify the *\*possibility\** of inflicting suffering on a primitive "mind" enough to suffer and unique enough to deserve existence.

2- Higher animals do exhibit behaviour that seem like they are semi-conscious, They do exhibit fear, they have some kind of memory etc. *\*You\** claim all of these are mere reflexes, but there is really no reason as far as I can see why we should accept such claim.

3- From an evolutionary perspective your view leaves the question of how man's consciousness, self-consciousness, mind and idea producing facility arose at all given that whatever exists among the rest of the species on the face of the earth is mere blind reflexes. Was it a miracle? Wouldn't it make sense to *\*assume\** that we as a species are capable of producing ideas at this immense scale, that does indeed set us apart from all other animals, as a result of many many little- I don't know- primitive "ideas" and "skills" of specific members of lower species, "individuals" in a crude sense, in their battle of survival that were caused and in turn-by merely surviving and adding their genes to the gene pool wher otherwise they should

have been dead- causing the growth of the nervous system untill it

reached this turning point?

To be sure I definitely agree that man has achieved a unique feature that sets her apart from all animals completely and that there is a huge gap between us and all other animals. I am simply not willing to deny the existence of hierarchy on the other side of the gap and that it could nevertheless be significant on the moral value of our behaviour to them. I am not willing to adamantly press all that is on the other side basically to the level of vegetable. The fact that the gap exists is important of course. It also makes humans alone to act under the domain of morality for instance. That is why suffering induced by natural causes or other animals do not enter the equations of morality. Animals and the world in general is amoral. There is no \*evil\* in the way the rest of the world acts.

I also want to add that I did not suggest pain or suffering to be the basis for rights. I only argued in connection to moral behaviour and the two are not the same thing. If you see another human drowning, say, you have the right as a free man to walk away and not risk your existence but it would be morally wrong nevertheless.

by [AIS](#) on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

## Human Rights

Animals do not warrant the same respect, dignity, and rights that humans do, but that does not mean that we should not treat animals with compassion. AIS makes a good point.

As importantly, those who argue that animals do not deserve respect, have hardly convinced most people that dogs should be treated as mere tools. Therefore if someone walks down the street with a dog fur coat on, he is forcing others to watch the spectacle, something that is very offensive to most people in the United States and Britain.

Before damaging other people (not just animals) by wearing dog fur coats, you need to convince people that what you are doing is right.

And you have not that. So what you are advocating is wrong.

by a reader on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 18:14 | [reply](#)

## Offending

You say walking around in fur is "damaging" people. What is your reason for this? Because, you said, it would offend them deeply.

I do agree some people would be deeply offended.

But I am deeply offended by the notion that the offensive should be illegal. And I am deeply offended by this sort of "burden of acceptability" which requires new or unusual things to justify themselves, and otherwise suppresses them.

That certainly is not one of the principles of America.

-- Elliot Temple  
curi@curi.us  
**Dialogs**

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 20:16 | [reply](#)

## Minds

AIS:

Animals have been known to do few things that a present-day computer programmer would have difficulty imagining how to write. Present day computer programs aren't intelligent, at all, although they sometimes fake it.

The exceptions are all evolved knowledge found in every animal of that species, not learned knowledge. For example, if we observe dragonflies doing very advanced flying maneuvers, which we don't understand the aerodynamics of, then that's some cool knowledge. And it's easily explained by evolution: dragon flies that do slightly more advanced flying maneuvers are favored to breed more (due to winning more fights). But it's very badly explained by intelligence. All (or most) dragonflies learn this idea? Which is so complex humans are having trouble figuring out what it is?

We can discuss any specific animal trait if you like.

-- Elliot Temple  
curi@curi.us  
**Dialogs**

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 20:40 | [reply](#)

## Here's a thought.

Human beings are often bastards, and some people build up indignation about this, which they find it convenient to release in the form of slippery arguments for animal rights.

The slipperiness of these arguments comes from the desire to make a loud noise rather than a point. The real purpose is not to make a sincere argument for equality with animals, but to remark on human failings.

I also offer you [a thread about PETA from b3ta](#).

by Felix\_ on Wed, 02/21/2007 - 23:05 | [reply](#)

## Deeply Offended

"I am deeply offended by the notion that the offensive should be illegal."

And who can disagree with this? But illegality isn't the issue, is it?

The point isn't whether wearing dog fur should be illegal - it shouldn't. Nor is the main question, in my view, whether great efforts should be undertaken to try to make illegal the unnecessarily painful killing of dogs for fur. Rather, it has more to do with personal behavior. Is it fundamentally moral for me to purchase these dog-fur lined coats knowing that unnecessary pain was inflicted to obtain the fur? If there are other reasonable alternatives, I say no. If there are no other reasonable alternatives, such purchases would seem appropriate. In the end, for each of us, morality is an individual endeavor.

by **Michael Bacon** on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 02:11 | [reply](#)

## Uncertainty

Elliot,

I agree about insects for instance with you completely. They are one end of the spectrum. The other end is us and we know for sure that we have a mind because we *\*are\** these minds. That we are discussing this itself is predicated on it. All I am saying is since we have no real objecting model to understand what mind is I don't see how we can say this with certainty about higher forms of animals, like chimps, say, and that this uncertainty has moral consequences in the way we should treat them.

There are for instance reports of apes, even elephants acting as though they can recognize themselves in the mirror. [Link](#). I don't see how you can dismiss all of this with such certainty.

by **AIS** on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 03:26 | [reply](#)

## Naturally induced suffering irrelevant in moral consideration

I also wanted to add that I disagree with Dr. Deutsch's claim that natural suffering should be considered as a relevant factor in deciding what actions are morally justifiable. There is an important fallacy in this line of argument.

One conclusion of such argument is that it would perhaps be more justified to kill an animal painlessly to guard it against suffering by natural causes like disease-*\*assuming\** of course that they are capable of suffering. (which we simply do not know either way in case of higher mammals at least)

There is nothing in the above argument that wouldn't apply to humans as well, even en masse and without their consent. Partly for this reason, it seems to me, **The World** concludes that suffering is not the right criterion. They propose the capacity to produce ideas and the uniqueness of the individual and its potential instead as the reason replacing the inducement of suffering.

I don't think this is the right conclusion.

Let's follow this argument. Whatever reason is given why idea creation is worthy of protection against extermination, the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the

actions of species in the past with complex nervous systems and

brains could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain- and not just the information encoded in their genes- makes them worthy of the same protection. (after all that was the point of evolving brains in the first place. Genes alone couldn't handle the complexity of the environment efficiently enough). Even lower forms of life who are basically nothing but their genetic code, aren't they themselves each an embodiment of a separate idea?

Which leads to this idea: Natural selection works by killing as many such "ideas" as it can so only the fittest can survive. Why can't the same be applied to idea creators. Shouldn't we consider actually attempting to exterminate deliberately as many of them as we can to ensure only the fittest idea creators populate the future and so ensure substantially better quality ideas to be created by them? These assumptions also could lead to some conclusions you wouldn't like.

The similarity of the last quote is of course deliberate because the two lines of reasoning are very similar and both entail the same wrong idea. Mixing the immoral acts of nature with moral acts based on choice of self-conscious beings like us who can form sophisticated enough ideas including the concept of morality itself.

Ironically precisely because it is reasonable to argue that any being that is capable of suffering must be complex enough, to have a primitive kind of "mind", to be a self contained entity, "mentally" segregated from the rest of the world at least to some degree, that it is vulnerable to natural suffering. Eliminating that self-sustained system to end the suffering would place the actions done \*against\* it outside the domain of morality. It is not dissimilar to the case of a changing system. It must remain partly unchanged to be defined as a system in that context. So killing an entity to prevent it from natural suffering is not an option viable to moral questions and by the same token natural suffering is a necessary part of any being that can be the subject of moral study. Therefore the natural world is amoral and, so far as we can say, only human actions are prone to judgement by moral standards (but higher forms of animals could themselves be the subject of moral treatment without \*their actions\* being prone to moral judgement. In the latter sense they are part of the natural world.)

Interestingly ascribing moral value to natural acts is precisely what comprises the very essence of evil in the cultural and religious traditions handed in to us from antiquity. Satan for instance literally means the accuser, that is, the one who accuses the structure of reality as whole - God in symbolic religious jargon of you want- as being the ultimate evil and the only real cause of injustice. This leads almost immediately to concluding that even the worst kinds of deliberate criminal action is not only justifiable since it ends this suffering inherent in creation but actually has the highest moral value.

I think that is also what is lurking underneath all oppositions to free society and market economy who are adapted to the amoral natural state of "unfairness" by identifying it as moral vice. As it has been

shown over and over again in history they end up justifying much

more horrible deliberate crimes at the end...and for good reasons.

by [AIS](#) on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 03:28 | [reply](#)

## Re: Naturally induced suffering irrelevant

the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the actions of species in the past ... could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain ... makes them worthy of the same protection.

A species that has the potential to evolve into humanlike beings doesn't have the same moral status as human beings.

Why can't the same be applied to idea creators. Shouldn't we consider actually attempting to exterminate deliberately as many of them as we can to ensure only the fittest idea creators populate the future and so ensure substantially better quality ideas to be created by them?

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism. For example, the idea that animals are aware of their pain or emotional status.

by the same token natural suffering is a necessary part of any being that can be the subject of moral study

Doesn't this imply that human suffering is inevitable? If so, can you give an example of a way of suffering which can't be avoided?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 06:55 | [reply](#)

## Planned Obsolescence

When machines surpass humans in all capacities to generate new and fruitful ideas all individuals will be as irrelevant as a dog fur collar worn for fashion's sake.

Fear not this is only a intellectual theory based on the above debates and future machines will critique it better than any of us can at this point in time.

Of course it is possible that machines may grow to keep us for other reasons than our crudely formed reasoning minds.

by a reader on Thu, 02/22/2007 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

## Murder is Easier

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism.

Tom Robinson

Let's assume for a moment that it is very likely that a person will

continue to generate unproductive and wrong ideas (say he has a worsening condition like Alzheimers).

Wouldn't it be cheaper (and more ethically justified) just to kill him, instead of wasting valuable time and energy on killing his ideas and feeding him?

And if future machines are predictably better idea generators than we are, why shouldn't they exterminate all of us biological creatures. Their ethical justification would be to help their machine descendants to be exposed to better ideas. Survival of the fittest?

by a reader on Fri, 02/23/2007 - 17:21 | [reply](#)

## A few points

1. Granted animals are not the same as humans. But to suggest that animals have no rights whatsoever seems a bit extreme, since this suggests there is no limit at all to what people should be able to do to animals. Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example? I would think the answer to such questions, as some have suggested above, depends on whether animals are capable of real suffering and on whether this suffering is comparable to how a human suffers. This is an important philosophical question which is often ignored, both by animal rights activists (they simply take it for granted animals feel pain just as humans do) and by animal rights cynics (such as the post above which is only interested in animals' ideas and not in the question of whether animals can suffer).

2. To claim that laws against murder exist to protect the free development of ideas is not only very rare, but also, it seems to me, very odd. Surely, humans have some kind of intrinsic value and right to life (or at least so we assume) apart from the use of humans as a means to something else (i.e. the creation of ideas useful for other people). So, even if it can be proven that some person can never have any useful ideas, surely that in no way diminishes his right not to be killed.

3. What in fact is the argument for the assumption that ideas and knowledge play such a prime role in morality and existence? What about other factors, such as happiness? For example, is not a culture with decent happy people who do not make any advancement for hundreds of years better off than a culture with unhappy people who create a lot of technological inventions? Is creation really the only or main object of human life? Why?

4. David's argument that if animal's suffering is bad, and if an animal suffers when it dies, it would be bad to breed animals, seems incorrect. It would seem more logical to balance an animal's suffering against its experience of pleasure. If an animal enjoys more pleasure than pain during his life, then one might argue that animal's life is a good thing, and if the pain is more than the pleasure its life would be a bad thing. (This is ignoring any value animals might have for humans, but that's a different issue.)

5. I think the main reason it's ok to kill an animal (at least

painlessly) is that an animal does not foresee its own death. So for an animal it's not really a terrible experience to be killed. For humans it is, because they suffer by the knowledge that they will die. Also, a human's life has continuity. For a human it is important to finish certain projects, such as learning as much as possible, seeing his kids and grandkids grow up, etc. For an animal it doesn't work that way. Also, when a human is killed his friends and family suffer, whereas for animals I would think that is not (or much less) the case. As for the question of causing unnecessary pain to animals, I think the extent to which that should be legal depends, as said above, on the question to what extent different kinds of animals can genuinely suffer. And I think we do not yet know the answer to that question, but it is important to think about that. In any case, I do think that even if animals can suffer that is of less intensity and importance than humans suffering. And animal suffering can be justified at least partially to the extent that it helps humans (i.e. cure disease, provide food and fur, etc.).

6. The notion that one can "prove" that animals just have no rights is scientism. We have to argue about what is the best way to treat animals legally and otherwise, and one can't evade that question by some pseudologic reasoning. Rights are not objective natural "things", but rather are a human invention, a tool used to discuss and describe moral reasoning and moral conclusions.

## Henry Sturman

by [Henry Sturman](#) on Sat, 02/24/2007 - 04:30 | [reply](#)

## Dog Torture

*Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example?*

Torturing dogs is not fun. So how could a person torture dogs for the fun of it? Why are you worried that someone would?

I see that an irrational person could have a dog hurting ritual. One reason this should be stopped is because it is hurting the \*human\*. That is enough reason.

That's the moral aspect. There's also the law. Should this irrational person be jailed for hurting himself and destroying his own property? No more than I should be jailed for destroying my Cinema Display (which is much nicer than a dog).

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

**Dialogs**

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sat, 02/24/2007 - 08:09 | [reply](#)

## Avoidable?

Tom,

A species that has the potential to evolve into humanlike

beings doesn't have the same moral status as human beings.

I did not say that it does. The question was would they have *\*any\** moral status at all?

Rather than murdering idea creators we simply 'kill' false ideas through criticism.

Sure, but that does not explain why the other alternative is *\*wrong\**, as in

killing a human being is wrong, except as a necessary consequence of defending another human being.

To say any idea can prove to have merits that are not recognized does not really provide a justification. even in the most non-violent and fair traditions there is limits of efficiency, many ideas could be forgotten only to be discovered later *when their time has come* (so to speak). So one can argue if an idea has merit it will eventually come up and be accepted once the need for it arises. So- it could be argued- what's the big deal? Why spend so much time and energy to ensure non-violence and idea preservation?

Harsh natural selection in the most brutal fashion could still be viewed by some to be as efficient a tool as any other in getting the meritorious ideas out and distinguishing them from the not-meritorious ones by speeding up the need for them. I still think this approach can't really provide a *\*moral\** basis

...can you give an example of a way of suffering which can't be avoided?

What do you mean by being avoided? I guess any particular event that causes suffering is in principle avoidable (even death I guess, once technology advances that far.)

But in practice how can every single one of them be avoided by pre-planning for every single individual at all times? Accidents happen and new forms of problems emerge by necessity and the unknown will always remain there. At any given time and for any given individual there are myriads of things that can and will cause him/her suffering even if all of them were in principle avoidable by itself. (Not to say that an individual who is so sheltered never to be challenged enough to *\*risk\** suffering won't produce any interesting ideas after a while either.)

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 01:35 | [reply](#)

## Uniqueness

AIS wrote:

Let's follow this argument. Whatever reason is given why idea creation is worthy of protection against extermination, the fact that we the idea creators are ourselves the results partly also of the actions of species in the past with complex nervous systems and brains

could be seen as a proof that their use of their brain- and not just the information encoded in their genes- makes them worthy of the same protection. (after all that was the point of evolving brains in the first place. Genes alone couldn't handle the complexity of the environment efficiently enough). Even lower forms of life who are basically nothing but their genetic code, aren't they themselves each an embodiment of a separate idea?

The point of evolving brains was to process information quickly according to particular set theories contained in their genes. For example, a beaver's brain processes information about where logs are how a particular log should be carved so that it fits into his dam and so on. But the beaver can't understand how to make a dam from other materials. His theories on how to ake a dam are fixed by his genes and don't change. As such, he is interchangeable with other beavers.

As for the assertion that a given worm, Fred, is unique this seems obviously false. The information on how to make any given worm is contained in worm genes, so we can make a worm that is identical to Fred in every respect through genetic engineering.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 16:14 | [reply](#)

## Happiness and Knowledge

Henry Sturman wrote:

1. Granted animals are not the same as humans. But to suggest that animals have no rights whatsoever seems a bit extreme, since this suggests there is no limit at all to what people should be able to do to animals. Should people be able to torture dogs just for fun, for example? I would think the answer to such questions, as some have suggested above, depends on whether animals are capable of real suffering and on whether this suffering is comparable to how a human suffers. This is an important philosophical question which is often ignored, both by animal rights activists (they simply take it for granted animals feel pain just as humans do) and by animal rights cynics (such as the post above which is only interested in animals' ideas and not in the question of whether animals can suffer).

Let's take it as given that we don't know whether animals suffer or not and are unlikely to learn at any point in the near future. Let's also take for granted the idea that animals can suffer in the service of making you criticism of the post as strong as possible. So we have to take actions that we think are likely to reduce suffering, such as only killing dogs for fur under general anesthetic or something like that. We would also presumably prevent people from torturing animals. But by the same token we might consider it right to do things that we know will make animals suffer in the interests of preventing avoidable human suffering, e.g. - testing medicine on

animals. And human suffering would still rank above animal suffering since it would also inhibit the growth of knowledge.

2. To claim that laws against murder exist to protect the free development of ideas is not only very rare, but also, it seems to me, very odd. Surely, humans have some kind of intrinsic value and right to life (or at least so we assume) apart from the use of humans as a means to something else (i.e. the creation of ideas useful for other people). So, even if it can be proven that some person can never have any useful ideas, surely that in no way diminishes his right not to be killed.

The first point that you think there is some transcendent value in a human being above and beyond ideas is unanswerable as it stands as you have not explained what you think that value consists of. When you come up with a theory we can discuss it until then I have no reason to change my position. As for the second point: how can we be sure that a person can never have any useful ideas unless he is completely brain dead? Nobody is psychic and so nobody has access to another person's ideas. Consider a homeless drug addict who roots through bins for food. Perhaps he will learn that what is doing is not a very good idea and will become a better person and develop new knowledge about how and why people end up in such distressing circumstances.

3. What in fact is the argument for the assumption that ideas and knowledge play such a prime role in morality and existence? What about other factors, such as happiness? For example, is not a culture with decent happy people who do not make any advancement for hundreds of years better off than a culture with unhappy people who create a lot of technological inventions? Is creation really the only or main object of human life? Why?

Let's suppose that totally uncreative people can be happy. I think this is a dubious proposition, but let's grant it anyway. Well, their happiness can only consist of psychological feelings generated according to a fixed set of ideas, dispositions, feelings and so on. Because they generate no new knowledge their influence on the rest of the world will be finite and indeed sooner or later their civilisation will be totally destroyed by something that catches them by surprise, e.g. - the Sun will undergo enormous changes in a few billion years that will make Earth uninhabitable for human life. So their lives will consist of pushing a finite set of buttons for pleasure for a finite time, after which they will all die and no new people of that type will ever exist again. They will also be stuck with a finite set of buttons to push to get themselves out of unhappy states and it is a lot easier to get things wrong and be unhappy than to get them right and be happy. So if a person gets in an unhappy state and pushes all the buttons and stays unhappy then he is stuck in a polluted waterway without any means of propulsion.

Now consider a culture that grows new knowledge. First, each time

they invent a new idea or technowhatsit they have to consider their new situation to be better than the old one or they would scrap the new idea or technowhatsit. The growth of knowledge is potentially open-ended so they could have an infinite number of such improvements. Furthermore they will become happy in new ways that don't involve pushing the finite buttons on the pleasure machine in their genes and their current ideas. For example, quantum theory is a lot cooler than classical physics and makes people who understand it happy in a way that somebody who doesn't understand quantum physics won't understand. So I don't think it can be true that everyone in a culture that is growing knowledge is unhappy. And the unhappy people will have more chances to make themselves happy than they can possibly explore.

Now let's return to the culture that doesn't grow knowledge. Knowledge can grow by accident: a person can make a mistake and then decide it is an improvement. For example, a person can mispronounce some word and find the result funny or illuminating. Perhaps this is how Freud came up with his psychological theories and I have little doubt that lots of jokes come from this process. And then of course there is the famous story of how Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, how Roentgen discovered X-rays and so on. With finite knowledge mistakes are bound to be made and some will be regarded as improvements by those who make them? So where does this new knowledge go? The only answer can be somebody has to deliberately squash it, which will make its originator unhappy. So I don't think a culture that fails to generate knowledge can be a happy place.

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 17:11 | [reply](#)

## How did it get there?

Alan,

Let's forget about the worm, but how do you think the information to make a dam got into the beaver's genes?

If you go enough back in the line that led to beavers you'll get a point where no dam building information was coded.

How did it get there?

How could it ever have got there if, as you say, every member of all the species in that line were always interchangeable to each other given all the changes of their environments and the emerging threats to their survivals?

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 02/25/2007 - 20:43 | [reply](#)

## By Accident

How did genes enabling dams to be built become incorporated into beavers?

A descendant of beavers had a series of genes that mutated. In a given environment, these genes increased the frequency of dam-

creating behaviors which helped the organism to survive. So the

behaviors were selected for and therefore genes promoting those behaviors were selected for, as well.

An idea, namely that building dams is sometimes useful, was created by accident by evolution, but it was nonetheless an interesting idea.

So the evolutionary process generates ideas, and this argues that evolutionary processes should be protected and respected. And the growth of ideas and anything that generates them should be protected -- including animals species' as a whole.

This could imply that the beaver species should be protected, because it evolves, but it (unfortunately) does not argue that any given beaver should be protected. My intuition tells me that a given beaver should have some protection if in the hands of a human (e.g. protection from torture).

AIS can you help me formulate an argument as to why an individual beaver, as opposed to animals as a whole, should be protected, at least to some extent?

To those who would give an individual higher mammal no rights at all, I don't need to be reminded that humans should have considerably more rights. That is obvious to me.

I'm wondering why it is ethically wrong to torture an individual beaver, or for that matter an elephant or a primate, if it gives a human being pleasure to do so? Why do we (in my view appropriately) react with revulsion to the sight of a higher mammal being tortured?

by a reader on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 16:57 | [reply](#)

## **Moral judgements precede preferences**

why it is ethically wrong to torture an individual beaver, or for that matter an elephant or a primate, if it gives a human being pleasure to do so?

I think that there's a false premise implicit in that question. It is that preferences precede moral judgements. In other words, preferences are a given, a parameter to be input into our moral theories, which then produce an output such as: yes, you may do it if it gives you pleasure, or no you may not do it even if it gives you pleasure. And it's true that moral theories may sometimes have such implications. But that conceals the more important underlying fact that in reality, how much we are pleased or repelled by doing a thing depends on how we judge it morally. For a human, the moral judgement precedes the preference.

That is, I think, why Elliot was asking above why a person would want to torture an animal. Asking whether they 'would be right to do it if they took pleasure in it' may not make sense in the absence of a clear theory of why they might be right to take pleasure in it.

by **David Deutsch** on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 18:05 | [reply](#)

## Autonomy and Happiness -- Important Principles

"Asking whether they 'would be right to do it if they took pleasure in it' may not make sense in the absence of a clear theory of why they might be right to take pleasure in it"

Human happiness is an ethical value in its own right and human autonomy is also an ethical value. People often honor others' preferences, by allowing them to pursue actions in pursuit of their preferences, because doing so often increases human freedom and joy. Morality is often, but not always, increased when human freedom is increased.

A person may believe that his happiness and autonomy are increased by folding and unfolding a piece of paper 3 times and/or by torturing an animal. If no other more important ethical principles are violated, I am disinclined to try to discourage someone from folding and unfolding a piece of paper three times, if paper-folding seems to cause broad smiles after the creases are made. The folder's happiness and freedom from coercion are important ethical values to me.

On the other hand, if someone were to torture a Bonobo (intelligent primate) or an elephant, or even when natural phenomena injure these animals, I become upset.

The fact that I become upset in either case means that I must believe that intelligent mammals have some right not to be injured, unless other more important principles are violated in protecting them. Somehow the right of a torturer to autonomy and short-lived happiness does not seem to me sufficient to justify intentionally injuring an intelligent mammal, unless there are more compelling ethical principles involved.

But it is not obvious to me why I want to give an individual elephant at least a few rights to protection, even if it violates a torturer's ethical right to pursue worthy goals like increasing his own autonomous action and happiness. I was asking AIS or someone else to help me formulate why an individual intelligent mammal, like an elephant, should have some protection from people and even natural phenomena, unless \*more\* important and relevant human values are compromised.

by a reader on Mon, 02/26/2007 - 19:59 | [reply](#)

## One Little Thing

This isn't the whole answer, but: neither repeated paper folder nor elephant torture are much fun. If my friend was doing either, I'd be strongly inclined to discourage him from continuing. That doesn't mean psychological pressure, or force, only advice. I don't see any basis for choosing one or the other extreme: leave them to rot, or feel force is OK.

One consequence of this is that he may voluntarily change his

behavior to something that he (now) considers better. That's a result we can all applaud.

Another is that he may engage in rational discussion, and give reasons for what he does. If so, I can argue with him. Then one of us may be persuaded by the other, and we'll all agree and be happy. And if no one is persuaded, that's OK too: I'll be content not to use force knowing my *\*weak arguments\** that *\*failed to persuade\** are a very poor justification for using force. And I won't feel bad, because I will have a *\*way forward\**, a *\*path available to make progress\**: all I have to do is improve my arguments.

That's a wonderful path because it has the happy consequence that the more I progress along that path, the more I'm creating the chance that if I actually was mistaken for some reason, I'd find out.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

**Dialogs**

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 21:25 | [reply](#)

## individual higher animals

One of the reasons I chose beaver over a worm was that this genetic information concerns behaviour of the animal. My point is the mutant individual is therefor a bit different than all the other ones. Also it is the change in environment that distinguishes a "mutant" from the rest. (there are many "irrelevant mutations" going around. Also in higher mammals the differences ultimately can concern behaviours. I guess that means that any individual of that animal can potentially be the one, or better said, be among the ones in consecutive generations who would bring about a behavioural change, a sort of very primitive "idea creator" of sorts. The best answer I can give would be something like this: I see morality a specifically human trait that need not, and IMO should not, be based on any more abstract and universal grounds than the specific features of us humans. Like say sexual drive. There is no need to search for it in the stars. We, through evolution, have acquired two features. One is that we have a developed notion of ourselves and this gives us a complicated instinct of self preservation that we could generalize, conceptualize and so on. The second is that we can put ourselves in another person's shoe and identify with him/her on an almost instinctive level. "Person" here would be anything that *\*looks\** intelligent and anthropomorphic enough to our senses. The two together drive us towards an attitude to preserve the other (related to the idea of a "self" separated enough from the world to have independent existence) and also to reduce his/her suffering (related to the idea of a "self" complicated enough to actually suffer) as much as possible. We need to act this way to be whole and functioning to our best potential.

Now, in the absence of objective model of minds etc. and the possibility that higher mammals might actually suffer and be the

way they look and tickle those instincts in us I think a case could be

made against unnecessarily commit acts that could be torture and sources of suffering.

of course if we eventually manage to construct a good enough objective and scientific understanding of minds that are reliable (in the sense our best scientific theories are reliable at any given time) to be the basis of our judgements and if it so happens that that theory tells us that humans are alone in having such features, then this case shouldn't be considered as valid anymore no matter what our "instincts" continue to tell us.

I guess you can say that would define a certain category of rights for them: the right to not be potentially suffered for no good reason. But I am reluctant to talk about rights, because there are other categories of rights that have completely separate sources (like the right to not to be killed painlessly , as Dr. Deutsch pointed out) many of which are based on attributes that clearly only humans posses.

Besides rights and morality there is also the concept of compassion that although has overlaps with the other two (as they do with each other) should be considered independent from them too. But that's another story.

by [AIS](#) on Tue, 02/27/2007 - 23:38 | [reply](#)

## Thanks

"...guess that means that any individual of that animal can potentially be the one, or better said, be among the ones in consecutive generations who would bring about a behavioural change, a sort of very primitive "idea creator" of sorts."

I think it is possible (but very very rare) that an individual animal (or an evolutionary process within an animal) creates a genuinely useful idea, but creativity is so rare that I find it hard to base a theory of animal protection based on it.

"Now, in the absence of objective model of minds etc. and the possibility that higher mammals might actually suffer and be the way they look and tickle those instincts in us I think a case could be made against unnecessarily commit acts that could be torture and sources of suffering."

So uncertainty about whether or not an individual animal has a very primitive consciousness, forces us to utilize our intuitions. Since higher mammals seem to "tickle those instincts" that make us believe that we are in the presence of a simple mind, we should protect animals to some extent, unless proven that there is no vestigial mind to protect.

OK. I'll buy that. I hope that you would add, however, that once it can be shown that a fully functioning mind is present, capable of genuine creativity, then such a being should have virtually absolute sorts of protections (for example, to life)

The fear is that if animals have some rights, and we have \*more\*

because we are smarter, then more intelligent aliens than we, will be able to "ethically" take our rights, just as we take the primitive rights of animals if they conflict with ours.

Should there not be some absolute "cut-off", beyond which a being is said to be "fully conscious" and therefore entitled to a full spectrum of rights, for example the right to autonomous action?

by a reader on Thu, 03/01/2007 - 00:55 | [reply](#)

## Cut Off

Should there not be some absolute "cut-off", beyond which a being is said to be "fully conscious" and therefore entitled to a full spectrum of rights, for example the right to autonomous action?

Yes. I believe There is. It is not just that we are \*more\* intelligent. It is much more than that. We have passed a critical point in which our intelligence is now of a different quality altogether. We are self-conscious entities and we have developed verbal abilities, we produce and enhance on abstract concepts and as the success of our scientific endeavours have shown we possess the ability to understand nature with basically limitless depth that far exceeds what was needed to survive in our immediate surroundings, and as such we are real and genuine 'idea creators' as **The World** points out.

As I said before that gives us rights of a completely different nature than what we have been discussing here.

by [AIS](#) on Sun, 03/04/2007 - 18:50 | [reply](#)

## Other way around?

You wrote: "But that conceals the more important underlying fact that in reality, how much we are pleased or repelled by doing a thing depends on how we judge it morally."

Why isn't it the other way around? How we judge the morality of doing a thing depends on how much we (most of us in the human race) are pleased or repelled by it.

by a reader on Sat, 03/17/2007 - 00:51 | [reply](#)

## Re: Other way around?

a reader asked:

Why isn't it the other way around? How we judge the morality of doing a thing depends on how much we (most of us in the human race) are pleased or repelled by it.

Say you are at a friend's house for dinner and he serves you a delicious stew. Halfway through, he informs you that the stew is made from the freshly-killed bodies of your arch-enemy's children.

Whether you are now pleased or repelled by the prospect of eating the second half of your dinner depends on your moral judgements. If you were raised in a culture in which revenge-cannibalism is deemed highly moral, and you agree with those values, you might well relish the second half even more than the first. If your moral stance is informed by Western values you might well be repelled by the second half - and acquire a want to rid yourself of the first half for good measure.

You are right that it is common for people to invent moral justifications *after* they have first decided what they want. But perhaps what has happened in such cases is that 'what they want' was itself determined by other moral values which, however, they want to shield from criticism (perhaps including their own) by denying that they exist. Then they can claim that the 'want' is just a brute fact, allegedly immutable, by which they cannot be judged or judge themselves. Thus, for instance, a wife-beater may first blame his wife, and if that argument seems to fail, he might fall back on blaming his rage, not his dehumanising opinions of the proper role of women. Yet without the latter opinions his rage might not even be present, or if it were, might result not only in different behaviours but in different wants.

Ideas have consequences!

Does that answer your question?

by [Editor](#) on Sun, 03/18/2007 - 05:30 | [reply](#)

## When...

...dogs make themselves a society in which they can enumerate their rights, I'll recognize those rights. Until then, they're the bounty of the Earth and free for the taking as far as I'm concerned. Of course, if someone owns a dog it would be wrong to harm or interfere with that dog without their owner's consent, but if I ever own a dog, I shall do with it as I please. I happen to be rather fond of dogs in fact, so 'as I please' is unlikely to involve killing it. However, if someone else owns a dog and wants to kill it, I respect their right to do so.

Now, where did I put my seal-pup-skin slippers...

by [The Cynical Libertarian](#) on Sun, 03/18/2007 - 11:56 | [reply](#)

## New or Unique?

Is it the creation of "new ideas" or "unique ideas" the criterion set forward by [The World](#) as the moral basis of not causing harm? These are different and could have different consequences.

In the examples examined in the post, it seems to me that [The World](#) is actually taking "unique ideas". This could be too strong. It

could exclude, depending on what is thought to be unique, a sizable

chunk of humanity.

On the other hand, "new ideas" would include machines running certain forms of intelligent programs.

Also, what does **The World** mean by "creating an idea"? Do you consider the expression of the idea in human-intelligible terms (e.g., language) part of the creation? If so, wouldn't that also exclude some members of the human kind?

-- Cyrus Ferdowsi, <http://libiran.blogspot.com>

by **Liberal Iranian** on Thu, 05/31/2007 - 09:01 | [reply](#)

## **Dogs don't suffer. It's a fact!**

Dogs suffer less than people. It's a scientific fact. I don't know where I read that in a journal. But it doesn't matter because facts no longer matter. They said so on the 6 o'clock news. Facts are passé.

by a reader on Fri, 06/15/2007 - 07:37 | [reply](#)

## **Idea creation as a competitive goal**

Although animals do not create ideas on the same level we do, there are some cases in which our interaction with animals seems to have driven them genetically to copy our ability to acquire behavior beyond genetic tendencies, and this could be considered a definition of an idea. This can work both ways: Dogs create ideas because their survival depends on helping us. Bears and tigers create ideas because their survival depends on hurting us.

You could argue what this means about how to treat bears and tigers, but as far as dogs it means they are, objectively, our friends, deserving of respect, and that torturing them is absolutely wrong.

by Collin on Tue, 10/16/2007 - 19:13 | [reply](#)

## **example?**

can you give an example of an animal idea?

it should pass the test of being something we could *\*not\** easily program our non-intelligent desktop computers to do.

-- Elliot Temple

[curi@curi.us](mailto:curi@curi.us)

**Dialogs**

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 10/16/2007 - 20:12 | [reply](#)

## **It is not the Issue, It is the "Activists" that bother me.**

I am a mere laymen, but my issue with animal rights activists is the

way they go about their cause, normally in a thrust in your face, bully-ish way. I can think of one example of being on the street as a "shopper" and stepping toward a certain company store, which, unbeknown to myself on that day, was selling real fur garments ( I had, call me ignorant, just popped into town to have a look around, I had no intention of buying, it was more browsing). As I stepped into the entrance way, I was assaulted, and yes, I mean "assaulted" by a animal rights activist, who slapped an advert into my face, literally. I thought at first I was being mugged and got very flustered, in a ready to attack stance, only to realise that on this peice of paper was some issue to do with how fur was extracted from animals for clothing purposes. Now I am not being funny, I am an animal lover and have pets, and quite frankly I would happily see the abolishment on all cruelty, but it really incensed me that animal rights people think it is ok to slap humans while looking after their cause, they call this raising awareness. What did I do, on that occasion. Well, true to the human instincts of fight and flight that had kicked in, in a stance to relieve the tension, I tore up the paper and threw it back at the woman in disgust, who then, I heard, whilst walking away, said

" oh these people just don't care"

As I walked into the store I thought "we care enough but just not for your bullying ways in handling the matter." It actually has the opposite effect. I mean, why would anyone want to support them anyway, it is not the issue that puts people off but their behaviour in dealing with raising awareness to the public, and well they are just abusive. I can't support the hypocrisy of raise awareness through being cruel to stop cruelty. Bloody stupid people who are so mis informed and mis managed it beggers belief. I went into the store anyway, just to prove that point. When will they learn bullying people does not get you support.

by anon on Sun, 10/21/2007 - 21:23 | [reply](#)

## **Other Way Around (continued)**

Do one's feelings help to (correctly) determine moral behavior or not?

"Say you are at a friend's house for dinner and he serves you a delicious stew. Halfway through, he informs you that the stew is made from the freshly-killed bodies of your arch-enemy's children."  
Editors

Yes, one's ideas about the source of the meat do help to determine one's feelings about the morality of eating it and even one's feelings about the taste of the food.

Ideas, including ideas about morality, determine and should determine one's feelings about many things. But sometimes feelings provide valuable intuition about what is moral, when we lack the knowledge to formulate more definitive moral theories.

When we feel revulsion about eating the cooked bodies of dead

children, and then the food tastes bad, our thoughts are determining our feelings.

But whether we are hungry before we eat often does determine whether the food tastes good. Our hungry feelings determine our thought that the food tastes good.

To deny that \*feelings\* of hunger influence the way the food tastes (and the way we formulate a moral theory that justifies the way we eat) denies that evolution, to some extent, created feelings in us to potentially guide rational thought and behavior. Our \*feelings\* of hunger and satisfaction from food evolved for a reason. Beings who tend to be more rational may tend to survive better in a variety of environments. It is therefore likely that evolution created in us a set of rational feelings (the feeling of hunger and the feeling of satisfaction when healthy) to guide and promote the formation of rational theories ("We \*ought\* to eat when hungry and we \*should\* eat well-balanced meals in order to feel good")

Now, one might claim that the existence of an evolutionary "reason" for the existence of feelings of hunger proves the editor's point that theories, explicit or not, determine the feelings we have about things.

And if our unconscious/inexplicit theories were made conscious and examined, then possibly we could make the most rational choice possible, now taking into account our previously unexamined inexplicit theories (This is so even if our inexplicit theories, once consciously evaluated, remain the source of our feeling states. We may feel good about doing something, but know that it is wrong and so choose to do the right thing).

Perhaps our conscious and unconscious theories can be reconciled and the best chosen. But even if possible, this is quite difficult and currently not realistic in many situations. But if we were perfectly able to do it, we would act on thought alone, and not on feeling. At the very least, our inexplicit thoughts (that determine our feelings) would be readily apparent to us.

Is it the editor's position that in the absence of full knowledge, we should never trust our gut feelings in helping to determine our moral positions? For example, our intuitions strongly tell most of us that some animals, for example dogs and especially higher primates have ideas -- but very primitive ones -- in addition to more highly developed feeling states. Is it the editor's opinion that unless we fully understand the origin of these intuitions and feelings in ourselves -- so that we can subject them to conscious criticism -- we should assume that our intuitions contain no truth about the likely mind-state of higher animals? So our sense that higher animal's suffer, somewhat as we do, should not be used to help guide rational decision making vis-a-vis animals?

Why can't our feelings of revulsion at the site of a screaming, tortured dog not be used to help guide us to want to stop the torture. Do we have to be sure this feeling of revulsion is

completely rational first? It does sometimes seem that one's

feelings can be a guide, albeit an imperfect one.

What do you think?

by a reader on Mon, 10/22/2007 - 22:23 | [reply](#)

## "it should pass the test of b

"it should pass the test of being something we could \*not\* easily program our non-intelligent desktop computers to do."

What can humans do that can't easily be replicated by a computer program?

And how do you define "easily"?

by A Guest on Thu, 11/22/2007 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

## present day computer programs

present day computer programs can barely walk or drive cars. humans can correct capitalization much better, and generally parse language better. and computers today don't \*understand\* natural language at all. humans are better at writing novels too. etc

it isn't important how "easily" is defined, the point is we don't write AI programs today. if we can write a program to do something today, and especially if it's easy, then obviously that task doesn't require intelligence to do. it's mechanical. a mindless computer can do it.

-- Elliot Temple

curi@curi.us

**Dialogs**

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 11/23/2007 - 01:42 | [reply](#)

## present day computer programmes

Its true that the present day Computers are there but they do not have the feelings like the humans and more over they always need command to execute a job.

by [Max](#) on Mon, 04/07/2008 - 15:04 | [reply](#)