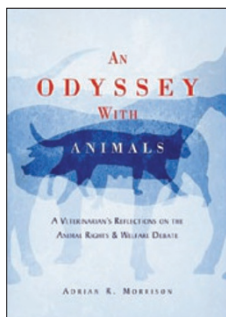


Animal research: a journey



An Odyssey with Animals: A Veterinarian's Reflections on the Animal Rights & Welfare Debate

Adrian R. Morrison

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Reviewed by Lida Anestidou

In *An Odyssey with Animals*, Adrian R. Morrison explores biomedicine's reliance on laboratory animals and how his life as a scientist was affected by the use of animals. Morrison (now retired) became a sleep researcher by way of the farm on which he grew up, veterinary school and graduate studies in neuroscience. In 1990, the Animal Liberation Front raided his laboratory in response to his vocal defense of scientists targeted for their experiments with animals. In the face of increasing violence against animal researchers, Morrison has written a Socratic apology for the value and necessity of animal experimentation in modern bioscience, partly as a protest against the scientific community's apathy and partly to articulate the need for substantive conversation about the continued use of animals in research.

Exposing one's core beliefs about the contentious topic of animal experimentation makes one vulnerable to partisan attack. Morrison's reflections deserve respect, because—unlike other books and blogs—this work is not a polemic account but a treatise on how using animals in research advances knowledge and ensures scientific progress. Science is not free of value, and this book is intentionally subjective. Through the defense of his life choices, Morrison argues for the duties imposed by scientific practice, such as a scientist's obligation to support and promote a high standard of animal welfare and well-being. He also advocates for the need to engage in meaningful dialogue about the use of animals in research in general. Morrison credits animal rights activists for his gradual change from an intense "self-defender" to an honest "thinker"—hence the choice of *Odyssey* for his title. His was a long and demanding journey to personal insight that he reached only after he overcame his anger toward the activists who decried his defense of colleagues.

Morrison offers a straightforward analysis of some of the philosophical theories that he considers the "foundation of the modern animal rights and liberation movement," especially those of Peter Singer and Tom Regan. His discussion of the relationship between animals and humans presumes an educated audience that is familiar

with the historical development of the topic. Singer's argument that animals have moral standing because they are sentient—that is, they have the capacity for pleasure, pain and suffering—has alienated the majority of biomedical scientists in this country. Morrison avoids discussing animal suffering and the thoughts of many others who have elaborated on this topic. This reticence is particularly evident in his short discussion of evolution, which neglects Darwin's implication that there are no clear moral boundaries between humans and animals. In a recent *Washington Post* interview, Morrison very carefully states that humans "respond to animal suffering through laws against cruelty and standards of care for animals in biomedicine and agriculture." It is clear that Morrison takes refuge in the safety net of legal protections that ultimately support the work in which he believes so deeply and the medical advances achieved through basic research.

Morrison calls attention to the victimization of scientists, including himself, by animal rights activism and dismisses the motives for activists' attacks. He argues that individuals who "deny the scientific value of biomedical research" systematically misrepresent its results, which he calls "data fudging." He also explains how the scientific method works and what his own research was about, and he describes medical advances gained through animal experimentation. Despite his utilitarian position, Morrison points out that laws governing laboratory animal care and use have been improved by animal rights activists' endeavors. The book, however, does not discuss in much detail the effects of such fundamental scientific and ethical concepts as the 3Rs (replacement, refinement and reduction of animals in experimentation, proposed by British laboratory scientists Russell and Burch) on practice or the challenges that emerging technologies create. For example, neuroscience research into attributes of personhood and morality raises hard questions about not only the cognitive abilities of the great apes but also the ethical use of primates in biomedical experimentation in general. If, as Paul Wolpe has written, "all good science is subversive," in that it challenges society's paradigms and comfortable norms, then Morrison's thesis that "animal needs cannot dictate all human activity" is ripe for debate.

Perhaps the biggest achievement of this book is its demonstration that, through reflective reasoning and critical scholarship, it is possible for a researcher like Morrison to "...see a changed world, and [that] I have changed with it." What is missing from today's bitter animal rights debate is the opportunity for both sides to hear the opposing view and reflect on its real meaning. Unless both sides accept responsibility for listening, there can be no genuine discourse on the legitimacy of animal experimentation. Scientists have a professional responsibility to participate in such dialogue; without it, society at large and millions of animals remain on the losing side.

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COMPETING FINANCIAL INTERESTS

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