

University of Notre Dame Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee Policy on Ethics and Animal Research

Some Basic Principles

Ethics is a branch of philosophical thought which seeks to approach moral dilemmas from a logical perspective. In some sense, ethics attempts to define what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. A number of theories with philosophical underpinnings have been put forth in an effort to guide ethical thought. For example, *utilitarianism* proposes that we can determine if an act is morally right by simply summing up the total amount of good the action will bring about and weigh that against the total amount of harm that will be caused. In contrast, *deontology* suggests an approach in which individual acts are judged to be either “right” or “wrong” regardless of whether their consequences are, on balance, good or bad. Other theories and approaches abound, each with its own unique slant.

The opportunity to use animals in research should be seen as a privilege rather than a right. In this regard, there are a number of ethical principles to which one must adhere when using animals in research or teaching at the University of Notre Dame:

1. The minimum number of animals should be used. One should first statistically determine the lowest number of animals needed to yield valid data. Each animal life should be valued and conserved when possible.

2. Alternatives should be used when possible. For some types of research, it may be possible to use nonanimal alternatives such as computer simulations or *in vitro* systems. If a less sentient species (e.g., invertebrate) can yield equally valid data, it should be used. For teaching, video recordings or other inanimate models are sometimes adequate replacements for live vertebrate animals.

3. Pain and distress should always be minimized. If less invasive procedures can be used to complete an experiment, they should be used. Likewise, anesthetics, analgesics, and tranquilizers must be used when procedures involving more than momentary pain or distress are to be performed, unless otherwise scientifically justified.

4. Animal care must promote animal health and well-being. Husbandry and animal care procedures and equipment must be of a high enough standard to promote optimal animal health and well-being. Included in this should be consideration of means to enrich the animals’ environment through means such as group housing of social species or provision of objects and manipulanda which encourage species-typical behavior.

5. Personnel must be properly trained. It is critical that all personnel handling animals be properly trained so that animals are treated appropriately. Such efforts will serve to reduce the possibility of distress to the animals.

In summary, our privilege to use animals comes with the responsibility to do so in an ethical manner. Such an approach will contribute to strong science as well as the well-being of the animals.