Correspondence

The utilization of animals

SIR,

In the 'Ethics of animal experimentation' (*Journal of medical ethics*, 2, 119-126), Lane-Petter writes:

'But there is a positive advantage in man exercising his dominance in dealing with animals in this [experiments] as in most other ways that bring him into intimate contact with animals. Whether in the laboratory, on the farm, in the zoo or the circus, hunting with gun or camera, harpoon or net, the people thus involved have to study and understand their subject. Understanding, among people of goodwill, brings respect, and respect is likely to be followed by considerate treatment and a general enrichment of life for both man and animal.'

As Clark notes in his comment (*Ibid*, p 125), this exhibits a considerable degree of naïveté. But more than this, the argument as an argument is spurious. It lumps together a range of different human-

animal associations and assumes that the human understanding of animals which genuinely characterizes some of these associations must somehow characterize all of them, a risky assumption about matters of fact which the facts themselves do not support.

It is certainly true that some understanding of animals is necessary in order to raise them successfully, to maintain them in zoos and circuses, and in the case of wild animals to find and kill them. But the kind of understanding which is necessary for the effective realization of these ends is scientific and technical and not at all the kind which includes or engenders respect for animals and considerate treatment of them. If the ill treatment of animals always had serious economic costs with no compensating benefits, then of course ill treatment would be a much rarer phenomenon than it in fact is. Unfortunately, at the vast commercial scale on which animals are produced and utilized in modern

industrialized societies, the systematic ill treatment of animals in great varieties of ways is economically and technologically most efficient and therefore most profitable. The understanding of animals necessary to produce and utilize them on a commercial scale is precisely an understanding of these efficiencies, including an understanding of the profits to be made by systematic ill treatment. The production and utilization of experimental animals on a commercial scale is probably no better and no worse than our production and utilization of animals for food, but the human understanding exercised in all of the human-animal associations is not even implicitly considerate and humane. To remind ourselves of this we need only consider the ethical problems posed by our use of humans as research subjects.

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News and notes—continued

New subscription rates for the *Journal of medical ethics*

Due to increased production costs and postage rates, the annual subscription for subscribers in the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic will be £12.00 and US \$25.00 in all countries overseas. The information relating to the purchase of the Journal is set out in full in the notice to subscribers on the page facing the Editorial.

Philosophers join New York teaching hospitals

From the *Harvard Bulletin* comes the interesting news that the Society for Philosophy and Public Affairs has received a grant from the New York Council for the Humanities so that philosophers

may be appointed to part-time positions in New York teaching hospitals for six months ending on 30 June 1977. Those so appointed will work with medical staff, nursing and medical students and patients to encourage interest in and knowledge of medical ethics and related philosophical topics. This interest and understanding will be aroused by means of lectures, symposia, notes in hospital newsletters and informal discussion. The programme will be directed by the Bio-Ethics Committee of the Society for Public Affairs.

Medical ethics debate in Israel

In a conference on 'Clinical research problems in endocrinology' to be held in Tel-Aviv, Israel, from 14 to 24 January 1977, some of

the topics to be discussed may be of interest to the readers of the *Journal of medical ethics*. In particular the papers on 'Abortion, contraception and the fetal rights', should continue the debate which has had so much publicity in Britain. Among the bodies sponsoring the meeting is the Society for Medicine and Law in Israel.

Bioethics Digest

A new publication concerned with medical ethics is the *Bioethics Digest* which is published monthly by Information Planning Associates Inc, Post Office Box 152 Rockville, Maryland, USA. It costs \$48 a year, single copy \$6. Basically the *Digest* is an abstracts journal, but it also has feature articles.