



Locating the Middle Ground

A 'middle ground' exists, where the advocates and the opponents of vivisection can usefully negotiate, but where exactly is it?

Discussions on the use of animals in scientific and medical experiments often attract extreme points of view where two opposing sides appear to be intractable and no possibility of compromise exists. But there are many on both sides of the argument who want to find a middle ground where useful discussions can take place.

In a paper in PiLAS (Perspectives in Laboratory Animal Science) Dr Matthew Simpson, of Voice for Ethical Research at Oxford, discusses the challenges facing those who want to further the cause of science and avoid the extremes.

PiLAS is published by FRAME (Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments) as a place where bioscientists of all views can exchange opinions on the use of laboratory animals.

Dr Simpson says a middle ground should exist between the most entrenched views where useful negotiation can take place. He cites the introduction of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to demonstrate that such negotiation can lead to progress.

But he also points out that Oxford University's ethical review committee rejected co-operation with the University-based pressure group Voice for Ethical Research at Oxford, on the grounds that

its commitment to abolition meant it could not contribute anything useful.

He uses the terms 'left' and 'right' to differentiate the viewpoints but stresses they are not political stances. "On the left there is abolitionism, and it must be remembered that this is an 'extreme' only in so far as, morally or intellectually, there is nowhere further leftwards to go."

He says that the 'right' side of the argument is often seen as 'anything goes' but the existence of the 1986 Act actually prevents that being the case. "UK institutions which use animals in experiments, often seem to overlook this. They will express pride, for instance, in their ethical pre-assessment of experiments, in their efforts to minimise animal suffering, and in their preference for alternatives to animals. Reassurances of this kind appear in their collective 'Declaration on Openness on Animal Research' of 2012. But to claim all of that is not to make any concessions leftwards; it is simply to confirm that these institutions are obeying the law."

He calls on both sides to reassess their stance so that realistic discussions can take place, leading to progress, both in research, and with the aim of eliminating the use of laboratory animals.

"This isn't a tug-of-war between left and right, with only the strained rope and a referee in the middle. The middle is, or ought to be, hospitable ground to all who wish to help medical science move toward what the relevant EU Directive calls its "final goal", i.e. animal-free medical research."

The full article can be found at <http://pilas.org.uk/locating-the-middle-ground/>

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FRAME is the Fund for the Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments.

It promotes the replacement of laboratory animals with non-animal methods, through better science.

Its ultimate aim is the elimination of the need to use laboratory animals in any kind of scientific or medical procedures.