

Richard Brown responds: I am grateful for this letter and completely concur with the concept expressed of 'a life worth living', 'a good life', and also to quote his letter 'reducing wastes of resources consumed in keeping animals from which the return on investment is reduced or negated by illness, disease and inefficient feed conversion'.

It appears we both think that the euthanasia of a perfectly healthy two-year-old cat presents an ethical dilemma. I deduce this: irrespective that the cat, if the euthanased was unaware of the years of life it has missed, there is a moral value to a day of life of an animal. Given that concept, I would suggest one can place a moral value onto a day of life of both a feline and bovine animal. Mr Howie may disagree with this.

My comment on obesity has been misconstrued and I apologise for any ambiguity. I was referring to a human population. To restate the argument put forward, where there

is no obesity epidemic in the human population, the loss in moral value which occurs when a two-year-old steer is slaughtered (the years of good life lost) is overcome by the benefits the carcass brings to society. This is because all of a carcass can be used and much of the carcass is highly nutritious and of great benefit to those who consume it. By contrast, when a population is suffering from a high incidence of obesity and it is over-nourished, there is a potential for two losses of moral value: the loss of years of good life of the steer and an incremental contribution to the incidence of obesity.

Mr Howie suggests that allowing for shades of grey in ethical decisions unnecessarily complicates these dilemmas. It is true that there are black and white and clear-cut decisions. These often involve accepting prohibitions or agreeing not to perform certain acts. For example, vets are prohibited from producing false certificates and avoid committing acts of cruelty

toward animals. It is when vets have to be active, creative and attempt to develop systems of animal management that the way forward is less clear cut and varieties of conflicting moral issues occur. These issues produce these shades of grey. To illustrate, many, not all, vets are meat eaters (as I am). This means we have to address one of the most difficult issues: when is it acceptable to kill an animal? This is also a decision which vets have to address in other areas of work, for example working with laboratory, pet, and zoo animals. While it would be unlikely that vets will agree on all of these issues, we should clearly express our view and why we hold it. I think the general public would expect this of us. Mr Howie, in expressing his views, has contributed to this discussion and I would encourage other members to do likewise.

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