Bioethics
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Veterinary Euthanasia
by Bernard Rollin, Jerrold Tannenbaum, Courtney Campbell, Kathleen Moore, and Gary Comstock

Write your name here:

Ethics pre-test

1. Read the following case.
Ms. White brings in Tiger, a four-year-old male castrated shorthaired cat. Tiger has recently begun "spraying" in the house, a behavior that began shortly after the birth of Ms. White's first child six months ago. She is at wit's end. In addition to the aggravation of the problem, she has already spent more than five hundred dollars on cleaning bills. She wants you to euthanize Tiger. You recommend several behavioral specialists, but she is too busy with the new baby to spend any more time or money on the animal. You became a veterinarian years ago with the intent of helping orphaned animals. You ask Ms. White whether she has tried giving the animal to a neighbor or family member. She says no. Should you euthanize Tiger?

2. Place a check mark next to all stakeholders, that is, individuals or groups that may be affected by your decision.

A veterinary client
Other veterinary clients
All veterinary clients
A veterinary patient
Other veterinary patients
All veterinary patients
A cat
A dog
A cow
A horse
A pig
A domestic animal not named above
A wild animal
Cats
Dogs
Cows
Horses
Pigs
Domestic animals not named above
Wild animals
All cats
3. Name the individuals and their interests that are in conflict with other interests in this case.
________________________________________________________________________ v. _____________________________
________________________________________________________________________ v. _____________________________
________________________________________________________________________ v. _____________________________
________________________________________________________________________ v. _____________________________

4. Philosophers and theologians develop ethical theories in part to help us to answer difficult questions, such as when, if ever, we are justified in killing. Which of the following theories discuss principles relevant to animal euthanasia? If you do not know, leave the space blank.

Utilitarianism _______
Social contract _______
Ecofeminism _______
Cartesianism _______
Talmudic law _______
Jainism _______
Christian dominionism _______
Animal rights _______
Buddhism _______
Christian stewardship _______
Islamic law _______

5. Which of the following theories is likely to object to euthanasia for Tiger? If you do not know, leave the space blank.

Utilitarianism _______
Social contract _______
Ecofeminism _______
Cartesianism _______
Talmudic law _______
Jainism _______
Christian dominionism _______
Animal rights _______
Buddhism _______
Christian stewardship _______
Islamic law _______

6. Which of the following theories is likely to approve euthanasia for Tiger? If you do not know, leave the space blank.

Utilitarianism _______
Social contract _______
Ecofeminism _______
Cartesianism _______
Talmudic law _______
Jainism _______
Christian dominionism _______
Write and Pass
Ms. White brings in Tiger, a four-year-old male castrated shorthaired cat.* Tiger has recently begun "spraying" in the house, a behavior that began shortly after the birth of Ms. White's first child six months ago. She is at wit's end. In addition to the aggravation of the problem, she has already spent more than five hundred dollars on cleaning bills. She wants you to euthanize Tiger. You recommend several behavioral specialists, but she is too busy with the new baby to spend any more time or money on the animal. You are certain that Tiger would do well in a childless home with some modest behavioral assistance. And you have space in the back room to take him. On the other hand, you already have five stray cats back there, and each of them is, to the best of your knowledge, problem free. Each cat has been waiting for adoption for more than two weeks. Tiger will be more difficult to place and, of course, keeping the cats costs you time and resources. Ms. White asks you, again, to euthanize the animal. You remind yourself that one of your primary ethical values in becoming a veterinarian was to help orphaned animals. You ask Ms. White whether she has tried giving the animal to a neighbor or family member. She says no.

Question: Should you euthanize the cat?
Formulate your answer in a clear and complete claim, and write it here:

(1)

Pass this paper to the person on your right-

(2) Write down one good reason that supports the claim stated in (1).

Pass this paper to the person on your right-

Together, statements (1) and (2) form an argument. An argument is a claim and a reason that supports it. Every argument makes certain assumptions. (E.g., from the claim that "All scientists are smart," it follows that "Lewontin is smart," but only if one assumes that Lewontin is a scientist.)

(3) List one assumption made in this argument.

Steps in ethical decision-making
You are able to convince Ms. White to keep her cat. * She attends to his behavior problem, and thanks you for your advice at his next check-up. A half dozen years pass. Tiger is in good health. Then, his blood work tests positive for the feline leukemia virus. The news comes as a shock to Ms. White because Tiger is her only cat and rarely leaves the house, although he has gotten out on occasion to spend some time with a neighbor's cats.
Other than testing positive for FeLV, Tiger is in excellent condition. You explain to Ms. White that although there is no cure for feline leukemia, Tiger has no signs of the active disease and could live several years completely free of symptoms. Then, when Tiger does become sick, it might be possible to treat him with chemotherapy.

Ms. White responds very slowly and deliberately. She regrets to say it, but she has decided that she would like Tiger put to sleep now, before he becomes ill. "I don't want to see him get sick, and I don't want him to die a painful death, and that is all I have to say about the matter." You ask whether she would consider giving Tiger up for adoption. You tell her that your practice knows several people who adopt FeLV-positive cats. Ms. White refuses. She asks you, "Do you have objections to having him put to sleep? "Well," you say, "yes, I believe it is unethical to put this animal to sleep. I know what you must be going through, but I would no sooner put Tiger to sleep because he will eventually become sick than I would euthanize a relative of mine with Alzheimer's disease."

Ms. White politely picks up Tiger and begins to leave your examining room. You intervene. "I'm sorry. Did I say something to upset you?" Ms. White looks at you with tears in her eyes. "My brother died six months ago from leukemia after considerable suffering. We were extremely close, and toward the end he asked me to help him put himself out of his suffering. But there was nothing I could do. I cannot bear to think about putting Tiger through similar suffering. So, when I ask for euthanasia for this little friend of mine, I do not ask for it without having thought long and hard about it. But, I understand your position. I will find another veterinarian to assist us."

Question: Given the new information about the client's situation, and your belief that she will easily be able to find another veterinarian to perform the procedure, do you think you should now euthanize Tiger?

1. **Identify the moral issue.** What ethical decision do you have to make in this case? Formulate the problem as a normative question. (Hint: Normative questions often contain the formulaic phrases "Should I do . . . ?" or "Ought I do . . . ?") Write your normative question here:

2. **Identify the stakeholders:** List every individual and group who may be affected by your decision. Indicate whether they will be positively or negatively affected, and briefly explain why.

2. **Identify the ethical principle most important to your decision**
Which of the following principles is most important to you in making this particular decision?

- **Love of wildlife, nature** - promote and protect wildlife interests
- **Self-satisfaction** - direct my own career, be allowed space for personal creativity
- **Love of large animals** - promote and protect large animal interests
- **Obligation to client** - promote and protect interests of my clients
- **Love of small animals** - promote and protect small animal interests
- **Loyalty to profession** - work cooperatively to advance vet profession
- **Religious faith** - loving God, adhering to faith, following a religious call
- **Knowledge and science** - discover and promote scientific understanding
- **Animal rights** - act to benefit all animals, end animal pain and slaughter
- **Social beneficence** - act to promote the good of all human beings
- **Fame or wealth** - be financially independent, achieve recognition, honors

Most relevant principle:
3. Ethical theory
Before deciding what to do, it is useful to review alternative approaches. There are at least three major theories in animal ethics. Review the brief descriptions of these three theories on the next page. Then, using the form called "Ethics and Euthanasia" (see below), explain whether euthanasia for Tiger would be ethically justified according to each ethical theory. Defend each of your answers in at least two complete sentences.

4. Moral closure
Finally, taking into account the various alternative theories and options open to you, decide what you will do. Will you honor Ms. White's request to euthanize Tiger? Why, or why not? Write your answer here, and then defend it by writing at least two complete sentences:

Ethics and Euthanasia
Refer back to the chart in Chapter 13, A. called "Representative Views on the Moral Status of Animals." Using Varner's categories of Animal Welfare (AW), Human Dominion (HD), and Animal Rights (AR), explain whether euthanasia for Tiger is ethically justified according to each ethical theory.

1. On each line, write "J," "NJ," or "D"
   J = Ethically justified
   NJ = Not ethically justified
   D = Depends

2. Defend each of your answers in at least two complete sentences.

Euthanasia of otherwise healthy, FeLV-positive cat

Animal Welfare : ____________

Human Dominion: ____________

Animal Rights : ____________

Gary Comstock
Iowa State University
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   - A dog
   - A cow
   - A horse
   - A pig
   - A domestic animal not named above
   - All dogs
   - All cows
   - All horses
   - All pigs
   - All domestic animals not named above
   - All wild animals
   - All pet owners
   - A farmer
   - All farmers
   - A rancher
   - All ranchers
   - Food manufacturing industry
   - Food consumers
   - People in developing countries
   - People in developed countries
   - Future humans
   - Future animals
   - Future human generations
   - Future animal generations
   - All living beings
   - All present and future living beings

3. Name the individuals and their interests that are in conflict with other interests in this case.

   ___________________________________ v. ____________________________
   ___________________________________ v. ____________________________
   ___________________________________ v. ____________________________
   ___________________________________ v. ____________________________
   ___________________________________ v. ____________________________

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Animal rights
Buddhism
Christian stewardship
Islamic law

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Cartesianism
Talmudic law
Jainism
Christian dominionism
Animal rights
Buddhism
Christian stewardship
Islamic law
7. Which of the following ethical theorists would unambiguously endorse euthanasia for Tiger? If you do not know, leave the space blank.
Rene Descartes  _____
John Stuart Mill  _____
Peter Singer  _____
Tom Regan  _____
Peter Carruthers  _____
Immanuel Kant  _____
Total correct: ______

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