

# Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

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## Genetically engineered insentient animals: the ambiguities of sentience

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### Abstract

The genetic engineering of animals for scientific and agricultural purposes has presented many new possibilities. In the ethical debate, a polarisation of positions is clearly evident: supporters of the so-called “genetic integrity approach” view genetic engineering as a violation of the intrinsic value of the animal, and are against it in principle. In contrast, supporters of the “animal welfare approach” defend the consequentialist position, judging the legitimacy of genetic engineering by examining the consequences in terms of the welfare of the animal. The debate has intensified as a result of the thought experiments proposed by Bernard Rollin. Assuming that it is not possible to change the conditions under which animals are currently used, Rollin proposed to genetically engineer chickens so that they would not suffer from being kept in small cages, and to render laboratory animals unconscious. Attempts to genetically engineering animal welfare pose ethical concerns, in particular to sentientist theories: can a sentientist theory, which aims to protect animals as sentient beings, justify the creation of genetically engineered insentient animals, that is, of beings who are no longer ethically relevant? Questions regarding the feasibility of these experiments must also be raised, because in order to create such animals we need an unambiguous concept of sentience linked to a genetic basis.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the significance of Rollin’s thought experiments from both an epistemological and an ethical point of view.