

Fauci's 'Kennel of Horrors': A Study in Animal Protection as a Conservative Cause

[Matthew Scully](#), Reprinted with permission on [The GreenvillePost.com](#)

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OpEds

Abhorrence of NIH experiments shows institutional cruelty as a neglected but potent political issue.

Scandals come and go quickly these days, but you will surely remember [one from last month](#), a story filed under the odd assortment of keywords “Tunisia,” “Fauci,” “sand flies,” and “de-barked.” Though not an uplifting story, or a short one, it offered a glimpse into problems that don’t ordinarily catch our attention. A nonprofit called the [White Coat Waste Project](#) is devoted to investigating the precise uses of federal money in animal experimentation, making heavy use of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to unearth evidence of both profligacy and cruelty. In July, the group zeroed in on research that might have been authorized by Dr. Anthony Fauci, and in October publicized some of the disturbing details. These included a lab in Tunisia that had reported receiving grants from our National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), the division of the National Institutes for Health (NIH) that Fauci directs. At that lab, beagle puppies were force-fed an experimental drug, then left to be eaten alive by hundreds of sand flies — the flies starved in preparation for this test. In an experiment elsewhere, funded by NIAID, similar tests were conducted: the puppies drugged, surgically silenced — “de-barked,” to spare researchers from hearing the cries of pain — and killed.



Image from [White Coat Waste Project](#)

In most big-name newspapers, these studies were deemed unsuitable reading, while in the *New York Post*, *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Caller*, *The Federalist*, and at Fox News, and elsewhere, other revelations followed about “Fauci’s Kennel of Horrors,” as one headline put it. No evidence of the NIAID director’s other failings had ever broken through what writer Glenn Greenwald calls the “shield of liberal veneration.” Maybe these dog stories would be the end of him.

Considering the sweet nature of beagles, their despicable treatment also amounts to a gross violation of trust.

In their #ArrestFauci, Twitter-mob version as the controversy played out, the allegations were needlessly personal, suggesting depravity when only truthfulness and judgment were at issue. A proper statement of the case, conveying “grave concerns about reports of costly, cruel, and unnecessary taxpayer-funded experiments on dogs,” came in a letter to Fauci from Republican representative Nancy Mace of South Carolina and 15 of her colleagues, who requested a reply by November 19. Just what had been going on in the experiments, they wanted to know; why were the labs using dogs at all; and could the doctor explain the need for “cordectomy,” which “involves slitting a dog’s vocal cords in order to prevent them from barking, howling, or crying.”

Fact-checking sites inspected the claims, and in the short of it the accounts from White Coat, though disputed in some respects, were true. No, said NIAID, it had not underwritten the sand-fly experiment in Tunisia; this was funded by other, unnamed sources, and therefore, though critics had described it accurately, was not attributable to Fauci. But, yes, NIAID had funded other experiments on dogs by the same people at the same lab in Tunisia. And it had supported a very similar experiment on beagles, done at a contract lab in California, in which 44 puppies were subjected to severe methods, including “cordectomies” to muffle the irksome yapping that can fill a room when dogs are tortured.

A picture accompanying news stories had showed puppies strapped down, their heads in mesh cages as parasites fed on them. That photo, said NIAID, was of the other study, supposedly done with other funding. How the dogs in its own experiment looked, we don’t know, and NIAID didn’t volunteer other pictures to help clarify the difference. In any event, whatever Fauci’s knowledge of the business in Tunisia — and the funding source still remains murky — all concede that he has for decades overseen funding for many such experiments on dogs and other animals.

To reporting from Greenwald, we owe the definitive fact-check on all of this. In a [2018 *Intercept* piece](#), he explored “a largely hidden, poorly regulated, and highly profitable industry in the United States that has a gruesome function: breeding dogs for the sole purpose of often torturous experimentation, after which the dogs are killed because they are no longer of use.” In any given year, we learn, some 60,000 dogs in the United States are condemned to this fate, spending “their entire, often short, existence locked in a small cage” — at corporate research centers, at universities, at NIH labs in Bethesda, Md., and elsewhere. They are “bred to suffer,” in tests that often serve purely commercial interests, and that keep the federal appropriations and grant money coming, while yielding hardly anything of value to medicine, and nothing that could not be gained by other means.

The [Greenwald] *Intercept* * piece is an unflinching work of journalism, and after reading it one can easily recognize the opposite, in the form of an October 25 defense of the dog experiments by *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank. The [column reads](#) like an exhibit in some other kind of study, supporting the hypothesis that, when their icons are threatened, liberals can be made to believe and parrot anything. NIH and NIAID say their research guidelines follow only the highest standards in animal welfare; Milbank considers that assurance sufficient, and he resents it when others bother to inquire further — when the NIAID director’s “foes file Freedom of Information Act requests and search for material that could embarrass him.” The *Post*’s former White House reporter has been told “it is *mandatory* that the dogs be euthanized,” and when something is federally mandatory that should be final; only the “anti-science forces” arrayed against Fauci, so “bitter about his aggressive fight against covid-19,” don’t get that.

“Beagles,” he continued, “are used because of their uniform size.” In truth, beagles are promoted by laboratory dog breeders as ideal for experiments because they’re so compliant and trusting — undone, in

the wrong hands, by their sweet temperament — traits that NIAID criteria term their “docile nature.” Even “de-barking,” Milbank had convinced himself, is really for the puppies’ own good. Awful as the practice sounds, and despite being a criminal offense in some jurisdictions, in laboratories, he informed us, “the dogs undergo cordectomies to reduce anxiety.”

Complacent, gullible, and, in closing his piece, even juvenile with a line about critics “barking triumphantly” at Fauci’s awkward situation, Milbank at least acknowledged the kennel-of-horrors controversy, which otherwise remained confined mostly to the conservative press. This happened to be around the same time that a key element in the Wuhan-lab investigation was confirmed by NIH, in a letter regarding gain-of-function objectives in coronavirus experiments it had supported at Fauci’s direction. And even that revelation, wrote Milbank, was “not of great consequence.”

In general, the scandal was a case of excuse-making on the left as it contended with selective outrage on the right. And you have to wonder why it took the Fauci angle for our media to get on a story that’s compelling enough on its own merits. Among the hundreds of reporters on science, medicine, and congressional-appropriations beats, at least some might have made FOIA inquires of their own about NIH experiments. But other than Greenwald, who’s been on the case? Why did it take an advocacy group, White Coat, to do the journalists’ work for them? Why must they be handfed evidence of misconduct that the public should be learning about as a matter of course? And why does it require an FOIA request at all to obtain facts about the many harsh and invasive animal experiments done or paid for by NIH and other federal agencies?

Dutiful reporting would discover that in animal research, and also in the federally mandated testing of chemicals and drugs — involving the travails of millions of creatures, large and small — various aspirational guidelines and frameworks, such as the three R’s of “replacement, reduction, and refinement,” have little effect. The goals for reform get polished in committee meetings and commended in professional journals; in practice they are usually meaningless. There’s no accountability, no enforcement of standards, and one reason for that is negligible media attention to a pervasive animal-welfare problem.

Perhaps nothing says more about the mindset governing the use of animals in science than this: When they’re done with surviving dogs, cats, rabbits, primates, and other subjects, most government and private labs refuse to turn them over to rescue groups, such as the [Beagle Freedom Project](#), or to sanctuaries where the creatures can heal and be in the care of people who aren’t trying to hurt them. Instead, whether mandatory or not, the labs either kill or ship them off for further use elsewhere. Because of this practice, a federal bill was introduced this year — with co-sponsors Susan Collins (R., Maine) and Gary Peters (D., Mich.) in the Senate, and Representatives Mace and Brendan Boyle (D., Pa.) in the House — to require that retired animals be made available for adoption. To elicit just one little scrap of sympathy from the people running these labs, it takes an act of Congress.

Though the mere mention of Scientific Research can give animal experiments an aura of humanitarian endeavor, this belongs to our imagination only; the impression quickly passes on direct encounter. It’s a multibillion-dollar enterprise, driven largely by federal money and mandates, or else by scholastic credentialing in an insular world dominated by animal-use dogma, and is undeserving of inclusion when we praise the great and benevolent works of modern science and medicine. As White Coat’s [Devin Murphy explained recently at National Review Online](#), the work with animals typically involves novel experiments laboring to prove academic theories. Project ideas abound and there are none so redundant, pointless, or merciless that some intriguing thesis and attention-getting grant application cannot be produced to make it happen.

What researchers who have just burned through millions in public funds, studying fear in animals, or pain tolerance, or addiction and obesity, or emotional deprivation, or whatever, are going to report back that nothing of much value has been learned? There is always some prospective stride forward in the quest for knowledge, some elusive insight still to be gained, if only they just keep doing it and getting paid for it again and again.

For such supposedly inquisitive and innovative people, too, it never seems to occur to the experimenters that they're operating on the least empirical premise of all — that animals are just things, raw material — or that the more coercive and violent methods they employ are little different, as experienced by the victims, from the barbarities that once drew street crowds to public vivisections.

Researchers themselves, as they sometimes admit, grow numb to grotesque and unnatural scenes, much as happens to workers in factory farms, and they don't make the best judges of fairness and need. Objectivity is likelier to come from outside the labs where the animals are hidden. And to reasonably weigh what is essential and what is not, we need to know the details.

Consider, for example, another feature of the NIAID scandal, reported by *Breitbart* under the headline “Fauci’s Freakshow: NIH Conducted Psychological Torture Experiments on Monkeys,” and by the *Daily Beast* with a rebuttal titled “Health Agency Debunks Wild Claim That Fauci Carried Out Experiment to Terrify Monkeys.” The way this one works is that they take rubber spiders and mechanical snakes and use these to sneak up on and frighten the monkeys — about 150 of them, bred or captured — who are caged and chained. The researchers destroy part of the monkeys’ brains — with acid — to intensify the experience of fear.

It’s ongoing and is overseen not by NIAID but by a division called the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), at a cost, White Coat tells us, of some \$46 million. The NIMH assured an Associated Press fact-checker that such research is “critically important” to obtaining “insights into the neural regulation of defensive responses to threat and inform the etiology and treatment of anxiety disorders in humans.” What’s more interesting is NIMH’s own defensive response to White Coat requests for some 50 hours of videotape documenting the experiments. It took not only an FOIA filing but also a lawsuit to make this publicly funded, “critically important” research public. And if there are insights to be gleaned from watching the videos, they concern the mental health of people who spend millions to torment primates in secret while imagining that they are doing humanity a service. Anyone with an anxiety disorder would feel worse after learning what his or her supposed benefactors at NIMH were up to.

Having confirmed with NIMH that Fauci “is not involved and has never been involved in this study,” the *Daily Beast* dismissed the whole “ridiculous claim.” The Associated Press fact-checker was likewise relieved to find that “the nation’s top infectious disease expert had no part in the research.” Everyone writing about, commenting on, or fact-checking the primate experiment was acting on the assumption that it would be troubling, and perhaps ruinous to his reputation, if he had been involved. But since the experiment itself is a fact in any case, shouldn’t *someone* at NIMH still answer for it? How many horror-house routines like this are going unreported, at the expense of the [68,000 or so other primates](#) held captive in laboratories in the United States — not counting the 40,000 more who are captive but not currently in use? Isn’t such cruelty worth investigating, reproaching, and ending, even if it cannot be laid at the door of Anthony Fauci?

Greenwald, in a Substack piece on November 3, observed an emerging storyline in the NIAID scandal. Having disclosed upsetting information about Fauci, White Coat, founded by Republican consultant Anthony Bellotti, was under suspicion by the media as “an anti-science MAGA organization.” *Washington Post* reporters were suddenly calling the group in search of donor information, evidently hoping to prove that it was financed by right-wing detractors of the inerrant Dr. Fauci.

And if you were following the scandal at the time, maybe you noticed another recasting, surely for the good. Placed by the lab revelations in the role of defenders of animals against institutional abuse, prominent Republicans found themselves on the right side of a moral issue with broad public support. Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida, Tucker Carlson on his show, and other conservatives, spoke with force and eloquence about what DeSantis called “despicable” treatment of the dogs, undoubtedly conveying the bipartisan sentiments of most listeners as well. Now that the appalling facts of animal exploitation were widely known, after all, what political leader would want to be out there defending “science” as practiced with devocalized beagles or mechanical snakes?

Here we might reflect on what further possibilities the issue holds. It’s not as though exposing two or three demented experiments has exhausted the subject. There was a day when deference seemed due to our class of medical and public-health experts in Washington. In late 2021, however, if one is told in connection with any kind of experiment or policy that “Dr. Fauci has determined it’s necessary,” that doesn’t have quite the ring of finality it might once have carried. Indeed, some of the tendencies that he and others have displayed during the pandemic — groupthink, a preference for coercion, a refusal to admit error — no doubt help explain the plight of animals in labs. We’ve seen how unyielding scientific officialdom can be, how heavy-handed, attached to false assumptions, dismissive of dissent, and prone to ordering and prolonging untenable practices even when urgent human interests are at stake. It only completes the picture to find like-minded authorities justifying and mandating the costly and medically worthless exploitation of animals in research and testing.

Along these lines, President Trump’s director of the Environmental Protection Agency, Andrew Wheeler, wrote movingly during his tenure about the needless suffering of dogs and other animals in the EPA’s mandatory testing of pesticides and other chemicals. Wheeler sought (with legislative support from Democratic senator Cory Booker of New Jersey) to replace that archaic practice with “ethically sound science” and humane testing alternatives, setting a target year of 2035. Though this switch to alternatives was set in motion in 2016 by long-overdue amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act, the main obstacle to reform here has been the environmental lobby, as usual sacrificing animals to its own relentless demands and regulatory manias. All the more reason to make ending the toxicity testing on animals a Republican-led effort, and not wait a decade to do it.

Mandates often spell trouble for animals, as Senator Paul and the advocacy group Animal Wellness Action have argued in advancing another change to rid us of abuse in labs. With Republican co-sponsors Mike Braun of Illinois and John Kennedy of Louisiana, and Booker along with Democrat Ben Ray Lujan of New Mexico, Paul last month introduced the FDA Modernization Act to amend a Depression-era law requiring that all experimental drugs be tested on animals, including primates and dogs. Almost invariably, in about 19 of every 20 cases, drugs that pass animal screening end up failing, or actually doing harm, in human clinical trials. And it’s the current mandate of the Food and Drug Administration that accounts for many thousands of NIH-funded tests like the ones that gave us last month’s scandal. There are testing methods that better predict human biological responses — computer models, cell-based assays, machine-learning software, among others — though even to list these as alternatives to force-feeding drugs to animals is, as science writer and animal advocate Jeremy Beckham points out, like citing “alternatives to astrology.” Paul’s bill would free drug companies to use other techniques, and also eliminate the animal-use requirement in NIH-funded experiments for new drugs and vaccines. The mandated animal testing, imposed since 1938, was never sound or rational in the first place.

If the misery of 44 beagles in one NIAID contract lab is distressing and heartbreaking, a public concern in need of addressing, then such measures as Wheeler’s and Paul’s to spare, in many labs, millions of dogs and other creatures from fates no better would be a good way to turn our passing indignation into consistent moral action. Everyone deplors the random, isolated cases of cruelty; for some reason it’s the systematic, never-ending ones that are easiest to ignore. A political party needs to break from form now

and then, escape comfortable patterns, and discern neglected issues, and it may be that public abhorrence of animal abuse presents such an opportunity. The cause would certainly suit our antiestablishment instincts and newfound knack for defying prediction — although, of course, once consistent action and humane alternatives are the aim, other questions follow. For example, what about other kinds of institutional abuse? What about modern “agricultural science” as applied in the intensive, mass-confinement farming of animals, with all that it entails?

Fordham theology professor Charles Camosy, in an October 27 [commentary for Religion News Service](#), doubted the sincerity of Fauci’s critics in suddenly pouncing on accounts of the goings-on at NIH, wondering, “Have conservatives, who in response to many issues raised about animal protection often respond by invoking how much they like bacon, done a 180?” It’s a fair point, worth thinking over before we rule out the 180.

Stories about “de-barked” dogs and the like catch us with our guard down, allowing for unreserved condemnation. Much as we might admire and love dogs, however, it’s make-believe to act as though abusing them is an outrage while the massive, standardized, and carefully concealed abuse of other animals is an acceptable fact of life, just the way things are. We don’t need to run them through an NIMH lab to prove that pigs, cows, lambs, fowl, and all other farmed animals also suffer. They have minds, emotions, and needs. They’re not nothing. If most humans feel no special connection to them, that is no verdict on these creatures and their worthiness. They can hardly be expected to attract our sympathy from across a chasm of willful ignorance between the animal products we use and the factory farms, which themselves resemble an elaborate torture experiment.

Here too our major media rarely dig deep into the issue, perhaps mindful of advertisers, or else too caught up in their easy and overwrought climate coverage to focus on a moral calamity in the here and now. So it was again Greenwald who, last year in the *Intercept*, captured the extreme torment inflicted by industrial-scale farming, with an account of the pandemic-driven “depopulation” and mass burial of pigs, some of them while still alive. Video and audio recorders had been hidden at one farm in Iowa. As “ventilation shutdown” begins, we hear “the piercing cries of pigs as they succumb.” No less sensitive and smart than dogs, these creatures were “suffocated and roasted to death,” by the millions, across Iowa and other states. Ruthless measures, taken in an emergency, to remind us of ruthless measures taken every day as the norm. New horrors, as he writes, “in an industry that was already suffused with them.” That exposé can be read as a companion piece with Greenwald’s work investigating the breeding, agonies, and disposal of dogs and other laboratory animals. Fundamentally, it’s all the same story. It’s the same problem, the same deep moral disorder, complete with the same sort of people who won’t take it seriously and who resent those who do.

As Camosy points out, some conservatives meet the issue with habitual contempt, brushing it off with their boorish “bacon” talk and the like. But the cruelty problem and its remedies do not follow any narratives of the Left or of the Right. We can leave animals and efforts to protect them out of our culture wars. There’s nothing strictly liberal about concern for factory-farmed animals, nothing conservative about indifference, nothing partisan at all in simple fellow-feeling for these afflicted creatures, cursed for our sake. As a moral cause, it is a category all its own, not about anything else, not trying to rewrite your worldview or reorder your life. Whether progressive, MAGA, or something in between, you can be for protecting animals, including farmed animals — and even for alternatives to animal products — without giving an inch on any front. As Greenwald writes, this is “a movement that can attract people from all ideologies, who identify with either or neither of the two political parties, but unite in defense of universally held values and principles.”

Be careful before discounting the drawing power of those values among many conservatives. When Camosy writes that animals share with us “the breath of life,” as our companions in Creation, with a

dignity of their own, that's language we know, a dog whistle of the best kind. He could also have mentioned ancient ideals such as the moral restraint of the strong toward the weak and lowly, or our Judeo-Christian duty to be lenient and merciful to other creatures — truths that still speak to all but the hard of heart. Even when it's inconvenient, even when conventional opinion makes no objection, conservatives are supposed to stand against things that are degrading to life, vicious, tyrannical — all of which describes the deliberate abuse of great masses of innocent creatures in the name of efficiency and profit, no matter how much factory farmers might try to sanitize their image. Of course we should strive for and welcome alternatives to all of that — call them vegan, plant-based, or whatever you want. In an age when, at any given moment, some 50 or 60 billion [farmed animals worldwide](#) know nothing of life but pain, dread, and despair, what are those alternatives but an acceptance of personal responsibility for the consequences of our own actions? Do rules for living get any more conservative than that?

It's true that some interest groups with conservative leanings are deeply invested in exploitative industries, above all the meat industry, and are catered to in Republican policies as if enjoying their own shield of veneration against doubt or challenge. The other party hears from them too; that's one reason animal-protection issues in general never receive the earnest, consistent treatment they warrant, even though public support could often be assumed. Against the cause of animals we will always have such formidable interests and their apologists, who specialize in what C. S. Lewis, in *The Problem of Pain*, called “that covert propaganda for cruelty that tries to drive mercy out of the world.” The best refutation of such propaganda is always the sight of the practices in question. Like those scenes of man's best friend and next of kin trapped in nightmare laboratories, they leave any conscientious observer nearly as helpless as the creatures themselves to grasp the *why* of their misfortune. Ideally, it would not have taken Dr. Fauci and his kennels to set off alarms and call attention to wicked things. But if the scandal makes all of us think and care a little more, about those animals and others, then we can put at least one NIH experiment down as an enlightening and successful test of empathy.

Notes

* In general, we do NOT trust The Intercept, certainly not after Glenn Greenwald left the outfit, but the quoted piece is one penned by Greenwald when he was still affiliated with The Intercept, so it is obviously fully credible.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and may or may not reflect those of The Greenville Post. However, we do think they are important enough to be transmitted to a wider audience.