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Taub v. State: Are State Anti-Cruelty Statutes Sleeping Giants?

I. Introduction

Vivisection\(^1\) was practiced only on a small scale prior to World War II. Since that time, it has mushroomed into a major industry which consumes 80 million animals per year in the United States alone.\(^2\) Worldwide, the figure has been estimated at between 125 and 200 million animals per year.\(^3\) Billions of tax dollars have been spent on vivisection.\(^4\)

Opposition to vivisection has also mushroomed in recent years. "While in the past the issue of whether research animals were being abused was discussed by only a handful of animal rights advocates, today society as a whole is very aware of the controversy."\(^5\) Organizations opposed to vivisection have experienced rapid recent growth.\(^6\)

Every state in the union has adopted some form of anti-

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1. Vivisection is defined as any form of animal experimentation especially if considered to cause distress to the subject. Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged 2560 (1971).


5. Chambers & Hines, Recent Developments Concerning the Use of Animals in Medical Research, 4 J. of Legal Medicine 109 (1983).

cruelty statute to protect animals from abuse. These state statutes usually take the form of broad prohibitions against unnecessary cruelty, sometimes accompanied by exemptions for conduct such as hunting, fishing, and slaughtering food animals. Some states explicitly exempt research facilities from their anti-cruelty statutes. Only Maryland explicitly includes research facilities in the coverage of its statute. The majority are silent on the subject.

In addition to these state statutes, the Federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA), passed by Congress in 1966 and


A person commits the offense of cruelty to animals if, except as authorized by law, he knowingly:

(a) Abandons any animal;
(b) Subjects any animal to cruel mistreatment;
(c) Subjects any animal in his custody to cruel neglect; or
(d) Kills or injures any animal belonging to another without legal privilege or consent of the owner.


A person commits cruelty to animals if, except as authorized by law, he knowingly or with criminal negligence overdrives, overloads, overworks, tortures, torments, deprives of necessary sustenance, unnecessarily or cruelly beats, needlessly mutilates, needlessly kills, carries in or upon any vehicles in a cruel manner or otherwise mistreats or neglects any animal, or causes or procures it to be done, or, having the charge or custody of any animal, fails to provide it with proper food, drink, or protection from the weather, or abandons it.


amended in 1970,14 1976,16 and 198515.1 is designed to insure that animals intended for use in research facilities are provided humane care and treatment.16 For various reasons, especially enforcement problems, this federal scheme has been generally ineffective.17

The principle question to be considered in this note is to what extent research facilities are subject to state anti-cruelty statutes in the states where they are not specifically exempted. The applicability of anti-cruelty statutes to laboratory experiments on animals is generally untested. Depending on court interpretation, the anti-cruelty statutes could be sleeping giants, waiting to be used by anti-vivisectionists to bring humane protections to laboratory animals or they may be horse and buggy relics which modern courts will refuse to apply. Taub v. State18 is the first attempt to apply a general anti-cruelty statute to specific laboratory conduct. As such, it deserves attention, not because it resolves the issues raised, but because it provides a context for analysis and discussion.

II. Taub v. State

Dr. Edward Taub, the appellant in Taub v. State,19 was the chief scientific investigator in charge of animal research at the Institute for Behavioral Research in Silver Spring, Maryland. The research being conducted involved deafferenting the limbs of monkeys, that is, severing the nerves in an arm or leg to abolish all sensation from that arm or leg, and attempting to train the animal to use the deafferented appendage. The laboratory was funded by the National Institute of Health and was periodically inspected by the U.S. Department of Ag-

18. 296 Md. 439, 463 A.2d 819 (Md. 1983).
19. Id.
riculture. A U.S.D.A. inspection during the relevant period found no violations.

A complaint about laboratory conditions by an employee led to an investigation of Dr. Taub's facility by local authorities. On September 11, 1981, a monkey named Nero and sixteen other monkeys were removed from Dr. Taub's lab by Montgomery County Police. Nero was in generally good health but had open and untreated wounds on his deafferented arm. Dr. Taub was arrested and charged with seventeen counts of violating the Maryland anti-cruelty statute. Each count related to one of the seventeen primates and each count contained seven separate allegations of wrong doing. For each of the primates, Taub was charged with infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering, failure to adequately feed, failure to provide adequate veterinary care, failure to provide proper drink, failure to provide proper air, failure to provide sufficient space, and failure to provide proper shelter. The Maryland district court convicted Taub of failing to provide veterinary care to six of the animals, and acquitted him of all other charges. On appeal, the Maryland circuit court overturned five of the convictions while upholding the one pertaining to Nero. Taub was an appeal of this one remaining conviction to the Maryland Supreme Court.

The Maryland Supreme Court held in the Taub case; the court "do[es] not believe the legislature intended § 59 of article 27 [Maryland's anti-cruelty statute] to apply to this type of research activity under a federal program. We shall, therefore, reverse Dr. Taub's conviction. . . ." Preemption

One question raised by the Taub case is whether the Federal Animal Welfare Act preempts states from regulating the
activities of research facilities. This issue received lengthy
treatment by all parties to the case but was not reached by
the court. This issue merits discussion because it is potentially
determinative of the role of states and state statutes in regu-
lating experimental use of animals.

Recent Supreme Court opinions have identified four situa-
tions in which a state statute will be invalidated because of
preemption: (1) Where Congress has explicitly mandated the
preemption, (2) Where Congress has indicated an intent to oc-
cupy the field, (3) Where compliance with both the state and
federal enactments would be impossible, and (4) Where com-
pliance with the state statute would frustrate the purpose of
the congressional enactment. It is the second and fourth of
these situations which merit an in depth examination here.

A. Has Congress occupied the field of regulating laboratory
use of animals?

Appellant argued that the AWA was a comprehensive
federal enactment designed to fully occupy the field of regu-
lating research facilities. There is no doubt that Congress
can preempt state activity by occupying the field. The ques-

25. Brief for Appellants, supra note 23, at 29-37; Brief for Appellees, supra note

26. When federal preemption is invoked under the directive of the supremacy
clause, it falls to this court to examine the presumed intent of Congress. . .
Our task is quite simple if, in the federal enactment, Congress has explicitly
mandated the preemption of state law. . . or has adequately indicated an
intent to occupy the field of regulation, thereby displacing all state laws on
the same subject. . . Even in the absence of such express language or implied
congressional intent to occupy the field, we may nevertheless find state law to
be displaced to the extent that it actually conflicts with federal law. Such
actual conflict between state and federal law exists when compliance with
both federal and state regulations is physically impossible. . . or when state
law stands as an obstacle to the accomplishment and execution of the full
purposes and objectives of Congress.[citations omitted]

Brown v. Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union,

27. Brief for Appellants, supra note 23, at 34-36.

Corp. 331 U.S. 218, 230 (1947). But see Engdahl, Preemptive Capability of Federal
Power, 45 U. Colo. L. Rev. 51 (1973-74) and Engdahl, Some Observations on State
tion is whether Congress did so in this case. Appellant relied primarily on the specificity of regulations adopted under the AWA\textsuperscript{29} to show "a scheme of federal regulations so pervasive as to leave no room for the states to supplement it."\textsuperscript{30}

Appellee's position against preemption rests on Congress's specific recognition of the existence of state law in this area and endorsement of its continued existence.\textsuperscript{31} The appellees further supported their position that Congress did not intend to preempt state law with the holding of the Supreme Court of Colorado in \textit{Winkler} v. Colorado Department of Health.\textsuperscript{32} Even though the AWA comprehensively regulates the transport of animals, \textit{Winkler} held that the AWA did not preempt a state law governing transport of animals.

This author finds the argument against preemption to be the more persuasive one. The AWA, when enacted, was not sufficiently comprehensive to preempt the field. The AWA covers treatment of animals before and after but not during research procedures. The AWA covers certain warm blooded animals, but no cold blooded animals, and other warm blooded animals only upon a finding by the secretary.\textsuperscript{33} The AWA covers research facilities which are federally funded or which buy or ship animals "affecting commerce,"\textsuperscript{34} but this definition excludes the majority of research facilities. Statistics on the scope of the AWA provided during debate on adoption of the AWA exemplify the narrow applicability of the statute:

\textit{and Federal Control of Natural Resources}, 15 Houston L. Rev. 1201 (1978) arguing that Congress lacks the power to preempt in areas where their power to regulate is implied, not express.

\textsuperscript{29} For example, federal regulations governing non-human primates specify minimum cage sizes, feeding frequencies, watering frequencies, ventilation, sanitation, etc. 9 C.F.R. § 3.75-3.91 (1985).

\textsuperscript{30} Brief for Appellants, \textit{supra} note 23, at 34.

\textsuperscript{31} "The secretary is authorized to cooperate with the officials of the various States or political subdivisions thereof in carrying out the purposes of this chapter and of any state, local, or municipal legislation or ordinance on the same subject." 7 U.S.C. § 2145(b) (1973 & Supp. 1985).

\textsuperscript{32} 193 Colo. 170, 564 P.2d 107 (1977).


\textsuperscript{34} 7 U.S.C. § 2132(e) (1973 & Supp. 1985).
Of the 11,000 laboratories in the United States, approximately 2,000 will be covered by H.R.13881 [The Laboratory Animal Welfare Act of 1966]. Of the hundreds of millions of animals consumed by the laboratories, the bill will, at most, bring its limited benefits to 5 million. [E]ven these limited benefits of housing and care stop when research starts, and once that determination is made, protection for the animal ceases under the terms of the legislation.35

Further, preemption by occupying the field is seldom established simply by the scope of a federal statute.36 It is common for Congress to enact complex systems of regulation, not as the last word on a subject, but as a minimum level upon which the states are encouraged to build.37 Congress included language in the AWA encouraging cooperation between the federal government and the states.38 This language would be consistent with a congressional intent to establish a floor upon which the states may build, and inconsistent with an intent to preempt the field.

B. Does state regulation of laboratory animals frustrate congressional intent?

Appellant's second preemption argument was that the AWA was intended, in part, to protect research from outside interference. Appellant argued that any attempt by a state to

35. 112 Cong. Rec. 19,608; 112 Cong. Rec. 19,559. Subsequent amendments have expanded the scope of the AWA (see supra notes 13-15), but these amendments do not affect the preemption discussion. If the Act as originally passed did not displace state law, it is hard to see how incremental changes in the Act's scope could have that effect.

36. "It will not be presumed that a federal statute was intended to supercede the exercise of the power of the state unless there is a clear manifestation of the intention to do so. The exercise of federal supremacy is not lightly to be presumed." New York State Div. of Soc. Services v. Dublino, 413 U.S. 405, 413 (1973), quoting, Schwartz v. Texas, 344 U.S. 199, 202-03 (1952).


38. See supra note 31.
regulate laboratories would frustrate Congress's purpose and would therefore be invalid. Support for this position appears in the legislative history for the 1966 Act.

We have diligently tried to bring back to the House an effective bill which will codify the noblest and most compassionate concern that the human heart holds for those small animals whose very existence is dedicated to the advancement of medical skill and knowledge while at the same time still preserving for the medical and research professions an unfettered opportunity to carry forward their vital work in behalf of all mankind.

The appellant also found support for his position in the legislative history of the 1970 amendment to the AWA, which stated that "[t]he bill in no manner authorizes the disruption or interference with scientific research or experimentation. Under this bill the research scientist still holds the key to the laboratory door."

These passages show that Congress did not intend the AWA to interfere with actual research. They do not necessarily show that Congress intended to prevent the states from interfering with actual research. The 1966 history speaks of the AWA preserving, not creating or expanding, an unfettered opportunity to carry on research, yet in 1966 every state had an anti-cruelty statute. While these statutes varied in their stringency and applicability to research facilities, the words chosen by Congress are inappropriate to express an intent to displace this state patchwork. Since the passage of the AWA in 1966 marked the first federal effort to protect laboratory animals, it seems likely that it was freedom from federal regulations, not all regulations, that was being "preserved".

The passage from the 1970 debate quoted above states that the bill does not authorize interference with research and

under this bill the scientist retains the key to the laboratory door. The 1970 language seems to apply only to the 1970 amendments. Congress's words indicate that in 1970 they were leaving unchanged their 1966 decision not to protect animals during actual experimentation. Congress gave no indication that in 1970 their objective was to oust the states from the field of laboratory animal protection or that they considered the states already ousted by the 1966 act.

If Congress had wished to preclude state regulation of laboratory research, an unambiguous provision to that effect could have been made. Instead, Congress precluded the misinterpretation of the AWA by clarifying the purpose of that bill but stopped short of the language which would be necessary to bar the states from the field.

Having determined that the AWA should not be read as preempting state involvement in the regulation of research facilities, the next inquiry is whether Maryland in particular, and other states in general, became involved in regulating research facilities when they passed general anti-cruelty statutes.

III. State Legislative Intent

A. Maryland

As previously noted, the Maryland Supreme Court ruled in Taub that the Maryland anti-cruelty statute did not apply to research facilities. While this ruling can be criticized on procedural grounds, it is the substance of the holding which

42. See supra note 24 and accompanying text.

43. The issue of whether or not the anti-cruelty statute applied to research facilities was not raised or decided at the trial court level and was not raised or briefed by either party on appeal. If the Maryland court believed this issue to be crucial, they could have asked the parties to brief it so the court would have a record on which to base their opinion. Also, Maryland Rule 813 states that the scope of appellate review is "ordinarily" limited to questions raised and decided by the trial court. In Taub, the court writes, "as the rule employs the term 'ordinarily', it permits exceptions and we have occasionally decided cases on issues not previously raised. See, e.g., Squire v. State, 280 Md. 132, 368 A.2d 1019 (1977); Bartholomey v. State, 260 Md. 504, 273 A.2d 164 (1971). . . Martin G. Imbach, Inc. v. Deegan, 208 Md. 115, 117 A.2d 864 (1955). Because our conclusion as to this issue is completely dispositive of the case,
is relevant to this discussion.

At the inception of the Taub case, the Maryland anti-cruelty statute\(^{44}\) set up three different standards of care, each to be used in appropriate situations. The general rule, applicable in most cases, is the "unnecessary" standard. Under this rule, a person who "inflicts unnecessary suffering or pain upon the animal, or unnecessarily fails to provide the animal with nutritious food in sufficient quantity, necessary veterinary care, proper drink, air, space, shelter or protection from the weather is guilty of a misdemeanor. (emphasis added)"\(^{45}\)

The second standard is the "most humane method" standard. It applies to "activities in which physical pain may unavoidably be caused to animals, such as food processing, pest elimination, animal trapping, and hunting."\(^{46}\) This standard is

\(^{44}\) The full statute read:

Any person who (1) overdrives, overloads, deprives of necessary sustenance, tortures, torments, cruelly beats, mutilates or cruelly kills; or (2) causes, procures or authorizes these acts; or (3) having the charge or custody of an animal, either as owner or otherwise, inflicts unnecessary suffering or pain upon the animal, or unnecessarily fails to provide the animal with nutritious food in sufficient quantity, necessary veterinary care, proper drink, air, space, shelter or protection from the weather, is guilty of a misdemeanor and shall be punishable by a fine not exceeding $1,000 or by imprisonment not to exceed 90 days, or both. Customary and normal veterinary and agricultural husbandry practices including but not limited to dehorning, castration, docking tails, and limit feeding, are not covered by the provisions of this section. In the case of activities in which physical pain may unavoidably be caused to animals, such as food processing, pest elimination, animal training, and hunting, cruelty shall mean a failure to employ the most humane method reasonably available. It is the intention of the General Assembly that all animals shall be protected from intentional cruelty, but that no person shall be liable for criminal prosecution for normal human activities to which the infliction of pain to an animal is purely incidental and unavoidable.

\(^{45}\) Taub, 296 Md. at 442-43, 463 A.2d at 821.

\(^{46}\) Id.
violated when a person fails to use the "most humane method reasonably available." 47

The third standard is the "total exemption" standard. This applies only to "customary and normal veterinary and agricultural husbandry practices." 48 These practices are totally exempt from the Maryland anti-cruelty statute.

The first standard is the general rule. The second standard applies to an open class of activities. A court may decide that a new type of conduct involves unavoidable pain and therefore should be judged by the second standard. The third standard applies to a closed class of activities. Only veterinary and animal husbandry practices receive total exemption from the statute's operation.

By finding laboratory research to be exempt from the Maryland anti-cruelty statute, the Maryland Supreme Court applied the third standard to an activity not listed in the statute. If there is a construction of the statute which supports their viewpoint, the court did not reveal it. The legislature named the activities that were to be exempt. The rationale of the Maryland Supreme Court was that the legislature could not have intended to interfere with research. This rationale does not justify the court's decision. If research were placed in the second category, any experimental procedure could be carried out if there was no more humane way of accomplishing the same result. Such a standard would appear to be entirely acceptable since science is in no way advanced by permitting the inhumane procedure when there exists a humane way to conduct the same research. In Taub, the failure to provide Nero with veterinary care in no way advanced the scientific purpose of the research. To the contrary, the lack of veterinary care led to the amputation of the very appendage Dr. Taub wished to study. Thus, science might well have been advanced by holding Dr. Taub to a stricter standard of humane care.

The Maryland legislature apparently agrees that it is reasonable to require humane behavior from researchers. Follow-
ing the Taub decision in 1983, Maryland became the only state in the nation to expressly include research facilities in the coverage of their state anti-cruelty statute. The new passage reads, "It is the intention of the General Assembly that all animals, whether they be privately owned, strays, domesticated, feral, farm, corporately or institutionally owned, under private, local, state, or federally funded scientific or medical activities, or otherwise being situated in Maryland shall be protected from intentional cruelty." 49 The substantive portion of the Taub opinion has thus been legislatively overruled.

B. Other States

The common law gave animals no protection against cruelty. 50 Prior to this century, there were few anti-cruelty laws, 51 but by the early 1920's most, if not all, of the states had some form of anti-cruelty statute. 52 The early statutes made no mention of laboratory research, but they did generally exempt from the statutes pain inflicted for lawful purposes and with justifiable intent. 53 In 1961, the American Law Institute (ALI) published a draft model penal code section on cruelty to animals. 54 This tentative draft was approved by the ALI in 1962 and has since been included in the Model Penal Code and remained unchanged. The Model Penal Code section provides:

A person commits a misdemeanor if he purposely or recklessly: (1) subjects any animal to cruel mistreatment; or (2) subjects any animal in his custody to cruel neglect; or (3) kills or injures any animal belonging to another without legal privilege or consent of the owner. Subsections (1) and (2) shall not be deemed applicable to accepted veterinary practices and activities carried on for scientific research. 55

52. 2 H. Brill, Cyclopedia Criminal Law § 844 (1923).
53. 2 H. Brill, Cyclopedia Criminal Law § 852 (1923).
The last sentence of the model code section is explained in the comments as follows:

There remains the critical question whether the pain or suffering inflicted was unjustifiable. This issue can not be further refined and in any event is adequately suggested by the word "cruel". In light, however, of the wide differences of view as to when pain or death may justifiably be imposed on animals, it is at least necessary to exempt the professionally accepted practices of veterinarians and scientific researchers. Section 250.11 does so explicitly.\(^56\)

It can be presumed that state legislatures are aware of the Model Penal Code provision and of the possibility of exempting research activities. However, of the eight states which have adopted at least part of the Model Penal Code formulation,\(^57\) four have chosen not to adopt the scientific research exemption\(^58\) and one adopted it only to later repeal it.\(^59\) In all, twenty-seven states have modified their animal cruelty statutes since the Model Penal Code provision was adopted in 1962 without including an exemption for research activities.\(^60\)

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56. *Id.* comment 2.
58. *Id.* at 428 and n.15. ( Ala., Ariz., Or., Mich.)
There are, in addition, seven other states with older statutes which do not expressly exempt research.61

In all, thirty-four states have rejected any express exemption for researchers. They rely on statutes functionally similar to the Maryland statute discussed in Taub. Being aware of the possibility of expressly exempting scientific research, and choosing not to add scientific research to their list of exempt activities, these thirty-four states have apparently chosen to treat researchers in the same way they treat other non-exempted activities. An additional nine states and the District of Columbia deal expressly with scientific research but stop short of a blanket exemption such as the one in the Model Penal Code. At least eight of these provisions postdate the Model Penal Code.62 Only seven states have provided a blanket exemption for scientific research, such as the one proposed in the Model Penal Code.

In short, the Taub decision, the response of the Maryland legislature, and the reactions of most states to the Model Penal Code suggest that it would be a mistake for a court to imply an exemption for researchers if a state’s legislature has not expressly created one.

IV. Conclusion

The Taub case raised several new and interesting questions about state anti-cruelty statutes. Are they, in part, preempted by federal law? Do they apply to research facilities? What requirements do they place on research facilities? The answers to those questions will determine whether anti-cru-
elty statutes are sleeping giants to be used by animal rights advocates to reshape laboratory procedures, unimportant provisions used only to intervene in the event of wanton sadism outside the professions, or something in between.

The answers given in the Taub case are merely indicative of a misinterpretation of legislative intent. It is this author's opinion that state anti-cruelty statutes are not preempted by the AWA, and that if a state anti-cruelty statute does not specifically exempt researchers, those researchers can be convicted for unreasonable and unjustifiable infliction of pain and suffering to animals but not for reasonable or justifiable acts. It is for the trial courts to determine on a case by case basis whether specific conduct is reasonable. In Taub, the trial court found Dr. Taub’s conduct to be unreasonable. That finding should have been upheld.

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