

It is wrong to experiment on animals

The debate over laboratory animal experimentation is one that has raged for decades. At one end of the spectrum are those who think that it can never be justified because it causes suffering to animals, equating animal experiments to torture, and at the other are those who think that humanity should have no qualms about using nature for our own ends. However, there are many shades of opinion in between which are usually reflected in debates over this emotionally-charged topic. Broadly, those in favour of animal experiments argue that they are acceptable provided that suffering is minimised in all experiments and that it can be demonstrated that human benefits are gained which could not be obtained in any other way. Those against animal experiments argue they are always unacceptable because they cause suffering to animals, because the benefits to human beings are not proven and because the benefits they do provide could be gained in other ways.

Animal Experimentation in Britain

In the UK, animal experimentation is limited by a number of controls. Researchers who plan to use animals in their research have to demonstrate that there is no alternative and explain how suffering will be minimised and what will be done to keep the number of animals used as low as possible ^[1]. Government policy emphasises the principles of the three Rs: **Replacement** (replacing animal experiments with alternative techniques); **Reduction** (reducing the number of animals used in experiments); and **Refinement** (refining the experiment or the way the animals looked after in order to reduce their suffering) ^[2]. Recent European Union proposals attempt to build on these principles in order to improve the welfare of animals used in scientific procedures, ensure fair competition for industry and boost research activities in the European Union ^[3]. However, animal rights campaigners are concerned that, despite these controls, there has been a large increase in the number of animal experiments in the UK in recent years ^[4]. Advocates of animal testing counter that this should be welcomed as it reflects an increase in the volume of medical research ^[5].

[1] www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/about_research/animal_welfare_and_the_three_rs

[2] www.guardian.co.uk/science/2010/dec/31/animal-research-alternatives

[3] www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/animals/using/experiments_1.shtml

[4] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/jul/21/science-animal-medical-experiments>

[5] www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/jul/21/animal.experiments

The scientific case

Advocates of animal experimentation make the case that it has contributed to most of the major medical breakthroughs made over the last century ^[6]. They also believe that it will play a major role in future scientific progress, for example in finding cures for cancer, Parkinson's disease and HIV. Some go further, arguing that the search for new knowledge is sufficient justification for animal research ^[7]. Some critics of animal research argue that it is simply bad science, pointing out that physiological differences between species mean that the results obtained from animal experiments may not be applicable to human beings ^[8]. Some argue that tests on animal could be replaced with computer models and tests on human cells ^[9]. However, others counter that animal testing will always be essential as other tests cannot to reproduce the way a biological system operates ^[6].

[6] www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/

[7] www.spiked-online.com/index.php?/site/article/223/

[8] www.alternativevet.org/animal_experiments.htm

[9] http://www.usatoday.com/tech/science/2008-02-14-animal-tests_N.htm

The moral arguments against animal experiments

The animal welfare implications of experiments and inhumane experimental procedures tend to be the moral focus of opponents of animal testing. Their arguments hinge on notions of suffering and animal rights. Many of the proponents of such positions share the idea that we ought to revise how we view the moral standing of humans in relation to animals. The philosopher Richard Ryder, one of the founders of the animal rights movement, invented the concept of speciesism to describe the oppressive behaviour, cruelty, prejudice and discrimination associated with the belief that humans are superior to other species^[10]. The term is specifically chosen to invite comparison with the social forces, racism and sexism. Thus we are encouraged to expand the moral sphere beyond human beings and extend rights to animals. This is proposed as one aspect of overcoming the arrogance associated with the idea of human domination of nature. Advocates of animal rights cite the evolutionary heritage we share with animals, and argue that the differences between animals and humans are only ones of degree^[11]. The fact that animals show similar brain activity and bodily reactions to humans in response to pain and fear are identified as key sources of moral status which humans and animals share^[12].

[10] www.richardryder.co.uk/speciesism.html

[11] www.uncaged.co.uk/declarat.htm

[12] www.grandin.com/welfare/fear.pain.stress.html

The moral arguments for animal experiments

The advocates of animal experiments base their moral standpoint on what they see as the real differences between humans and animals (see for example^[13],^[14]). One such view is that, since animals do not have language and concepts such as fear or pain, their experiences cannot be compared with those of a human – to imagine that animals' experience are anything like ours is simply anthropomorphism: projecting human characteristics onto animals. Another argument is that humans are rational, autonomous beings: we think about our actions and make decisions on how to act based on those thoughts; we invent moral systems and then live with other humans on the basis of the moral rules we have invented^[15]. This is a view of humans as *subjects*: conscious beings who control their own destiny and invent their own nature. This contrasts with animals which simply follow the instincts they are born with. Thus, for those who hold this humanistic viewpoint, the fact that humans develop themselves, create societies and make history makes us qualitatively different from animals – the fact that we are evolved beings with a shared ancestry with animals is irrelevant and obscures real difference.

[13] www.redorbit.com/news/science/1258210/four_key_differences_in_human_and_animal_cognition/

[14] www.khurasan.wordpress.com/2006/12/29/some-differences-of-human-animal-mind/

[15] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/jun/13/animalwelfare.world>

Other links:

The Great Debate: What does it mean to be human?

www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/ChimpProc.html

Animal rights, human wrongs

<http://www.newstatesman.com/life-and-society/2008/02/animal-rights-blakemore>

Understanding animal research

www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/

Holistic vet urges that animal experimentation is bad science, inhumane and misleading
http://www.alternativevet.org/animal_experiments.htm

‘Put Animal Testing to Sleep’ –
http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom/archives/2008/05/put_animal_test.html

Of Mice or Men: The problems with animal testing by Arthur Allen
<http://www.slate.com/id/2142814/>

Animal testing rise allied to GM experiments
www.guardian.co.uk/science/2008/jul/22/controversiesinscience.medicalresearch

Monkey brain research: The case for
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3241968.stm>

Monkey brain research: The case against
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3234124.stm>

The shame of our silence by Robert Winston
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/may/31/animalwelfare.highereducation>

Animal Experimentation - The Facts (Uncaged)
<http://www.uncaged.co.uk/vivisect.htm>

Test driven – interview with Tipu Aziz
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/mar/04/animalwelfare.highereducation>

Protecting Animals in Democracy
www.vote4animals.org.uk

Pro Test: an Oxford-based group campaigning in favour of continued animal testing and in support of scientific research
<http://www.pro-test.org.uk/>

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals): Animal Rights Campaign Group
<http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-experimentation/default.aspx>

British Union Against Vivisection
<http://www.buav.org/>

National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs)
<http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/>

Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986: Legislation that regulates the use of laboratory animals in science.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/14/contents>

Home Office statistics on the use of animals in scientific procedures 2009
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/science-research/spanimals09/>