

The ethics of animal testing



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One glance around a home would find many products that have been tested on animals. Animals are commonly used to test the safety and effectiveness of products, medications, and medical treatments. Millions of animals are used every year in distressing and painful procedures and experiments to test the safety of our beauty products and medications. Pain, suffering and distress is deliberately inflicted upon animals. In other situations, this type of action would be considered abuse and mistreatment, but because it yields a small benefit, animal experimentation is legal. Animal testing should be banned due to regulations that disregard animals' lives and wellbeing and replaced with other means of testing products.

Scientific regulations and protocols are assessed differently when the research subjects are human rather than animal. The Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University's Kennedy Institute of Ethics, Tom Beauchamp, questions, " why and in what ways should the two classes of subjects be assessed differently, if they should" (Beauchamp). It is a common misconception that animals are not capable of expressing emotions or do not have a cognitive mind and therefore, they do not " qualify for rights or any significant moral protections against interventions that produce severe and enduring pain" (Beauchamp). On the contrary, primates, such as apes and chimpanzees, are known for their emotional and cognitive abilities. Studies have shown their impressive abilities in problem-solving, memory, mathematical skills. They also show that primates experience similar emotions, such as depression, anxiety, and joy, to those of humans. Due to the diverse range of emotions that animals can exhibit, they qualify for moral protections.

An important psychological factor for many primates is social interaction. There are federal laws in place that require “ institutions to house primates in groups unless there is justification, such as debilitation as a result of age or other conditions, for housing them alone” (Conlee and Rowan). Despite these laws, recent investigations by The Humane Society of the United States of two large facilities revealed that their primates are housed alone on average for 53% of their lives. This type of isolation can result in long term depression and post-traumatic stress.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, approximately 70, 000 primates are used for research in the United States each year and another 45, 000 are bred or held for research. In 2003, “ about 10 million vertebrate animals were used for scientific and other experimental purposes” worldwide (Kolar). These numbers grow each year as thousands of primates continue to be captured from the wild and transported to other countries. Infants from breeding colonies are bred to be sold to countries worldwide, including the United States. The animals are then placed in terrible conditions during transportation and experience considerable stress. They spend days in small crates with restricted amounts of food and water available. After experiencing the trauma of transportation, “ it takes months for their physiological systems to return to baseline levels, and then they face the trauma of research, including infection with virulent diseases, social isolation, food and water deprivation, withdrawal from drugs, and repeated surgeries” (Conlee and Rowan). The animals have to endure this type of treatment for years until they die from the experiments themselves or until they are no longer needed and euthanized.

Chimpanzee cognition in response to the conditions of experimentation has been studied extensively. When they are held in laboratories for decades, the effects of barren housing, social isolation, and constant experimentation impacts their mental wellbeing for decades due to their long lifespan.

Evidence has been found that chimpanzees that have been used for research are known to suffer from a form of PTSD similar to humans. In a 2008 article by Gay Bradshaw and his colleagues, they describe their studies on Jeannie, a chimpanzee who endured social isolation and invasive procedures for over a decade. " She displayed abnormal behavior, including self-injury, bursts of aggression, and, according to laboratory records, a ' nervous breakdown'" (Conlee and Rowan). After she was moved to a sanctuary, she was able to partially recover, however, she was unable to recover mentally and was diagnosed with PTSD.

A question that is often asked is whether the findings from animals in research studies are significant and if they are worth the suffering of animals. Even if those animal experiments could result in new knowledge that could help contribute to medical research, " from an ethical perspective it seems unacceptable that we, as humans, put sentient beings into states of suffering that we would never accept for ourselves" (Kolar). During these research studies, animals are often viewed as " machines" rather than living being and individual functions of their body are exploited." In applied biomedical research and testing, healthy animals are made into " disease models" by creating symptoms through deliberate feeding of toxic substances or genetic engineering. Stephen Suomi, a neurobiologist at the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human

Development, was called to the National Institutes of Health meeting regarding his research that “involved keeping infant monkeys in near-isolation and investigating their responses to stress and alcohol consumption” (Keim). In his research, Suomi and his team members caused the infant monkeys to develop a neuropsychiatric disorder. In surgical research, physical injuries are inflicted on animals, such as breaking their bones, burning their skin, and other acts of cruelty (Kolar). To test the safety of products and drugs before they are marketed, animals are force-fed or injected with the products. In other cases, products are applied to the skin or eye, or the animals are forced to inhale them. Then the animals are observed for side effects or allergic reactions. Products are also tested on pregnant animals to observe any potential birth defects in the offspring (Kolar). These tests sometimes result in no side effects, but more often than not animals experience extremely painful reactions or even death. As the safety and efficacy of products are required to be demonstrated for each batch of production, these tests are carried out often and routinely, resulting in large numbers of animals used for the same products (Kolar).

Banning all use of animal testing in a short manner of time is a unrealistic expectation. In order to move towards finding alternatives to replace animal experimentation, there has been a gradual decline in animal testing. “The number of animals used for research is about half of what it was in the 1970s” (Conlee and Rowan). While animals are still being used for research, there have been efforts made to reduce distress and suffering to a minimum. Most countries with a significant medical research center has a system to regulate experiments on animals to ensure that they are conducted in an

ethical manner. Some countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany and Switzerland, use government regulation to control decisions about what experiments are allowed and how they should be conducted. Other countries have opted for an institutional committee to make ethical decisions. The committees are usually staffed with the institute's animal-welfare staff as well as scientists. " In some cases, the members also include non- scientific staff, external law members and representatives of animal-welfare or anti-vivisection organizations" (Matfield). These committees decide whether an experiment is ethically acceptable by testing whether certain principles are met. The main parameter they refer to is " the ' 3Rs' concept as defined by Russel and Burch in 1959, i. e. that all efforts to replace, reduce and refine experiments must be undertaken" (Kolar). Replacement focuses on using other non-living alternatives to replace animals in experiments. Reduction asks scientists to lower the number of animals used in the experiment to obtain the same information. Refinement requires researchers to lower the severity of inhumane procedures on animals. The approval of animal experiments typically requires an ethical evaluation by ethics committees. Despite the efforts of the committee, there are many flaws in this system. Due to " unclear conditions and standards for ethical decisions, insufficient management of experiments undertaken for specific purposes, and conflicts of interest of ethics committees' members," housing facilities are not regulated and unethical experiments are still permitted to be conducted (Kolar).

With animals still being harmed or killed through testing, actions need to be taken to phase out animal experimentation. One step that can be taken is to

ban painful procedures on animals by law and only allow exemptions for necessary means rather than general sanctions with loopholes around them. Legislations must be made to put stricter and better defined regulations in place as well as improving the enforcement and implementation of these regulations. Another step that can be taken is to work towards replacing all animal use in science and research with alternatives. “ The design of scientific studies that currently rely on the use of animals, and the questions they are based on, have to be modified so that they can be answered by employing non-animal methods” (Kolar). There is hope that there are better methods than cruel animal experiments to test the risks new procedures or products on humans and the environment. Countless animals have already died at the hands of humans and millions more are subjected to pain and still continue to suffer. A future without animal experiments would not one with hindered scientific progress, but rather it would be one that has taken a major step towards more ethical scientific research.

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