

Since humans and chimps are similar, do you think it would be useful to use chimp...



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Since humans and chimps are similar, do you think it would be useful to use chimps as stand-ins for humans during scientific research? Or since they are similar, do we have a moral obligation not to use them in research. The genetic similarity between humans and chimps has been known for many decades now, and over the years chimps have already been found useful in research to test out various illnesses, symptoms and cures. There is even a journal called the Journal of Medical Primatology which debates issues surrounding this subject. Clearly there is no fundamental ethical question about using animals, including both the great apes and human beings, in trials and research. Some processes can only be done with live subjects. For humans a process of informed consent is used to ensure that the rights of individuals are not compromised, but with chimps this is clearly impossible, since chimps do not have the language skills to understand what is proposed, or to express their views. In 1994 a meeting of scientists debated the use of chimpanzees in AIDS research and it concluded that the necessity was there, due to a lack of alternatives, and that it was acceptable to conduct research such as giving injections and collecting blood samples, so long as financial support for long term retirement of the chimps afterwards is guaranteed. (Akker et al, 1994, p. 51) This amounts to an acceptance of quite invasive research in return for some welfare reward later. In 2010 scientists studying genomes and human lineage specific (HLS) sequences of unknown function considered the use of transgenic techniques with great apes (chimpanzees, orang utans, gorillas) but concluded that this would cause harm to the apes and that “ these harms render the conduct of this research ethically unacceptable in apes, justifying regulatory barriers

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between these species and all other non-human primates for transgenic research." (Coors et al., 2010), p. 658. These two articles demonstrate that while it would certainly be useful to use chimps in research, and many scientists are currently involved in such work, there are increasing reservations about it, and that ultimately the benefits which could be gained in this way are likely to be a) obtainable using human volunteers and b) not sufficiently essential and valuable as to justify the high cost to the animal subjects. References Coors, M. E, Glover, J, Juengst, E. T and Sikela, J. M. (2010) The Ethics of Using Transgenic Non-Human Primates to Study What Makes Us Human. *Nature Reviews Genetics* 11, 658-662. Van Akker, R., Balls, M., Eichberg, J. W. et al. (1994) Chimpanzees in AIDS research: a biomedical and bioethical perspective. *Journal of Medical Primatology* 1994 (23), 49-51. Available online at: <http://publishing.eur.nl/ir/repub/asset/3483/1659.pdf>