

Animal testing – necessary or barbaric and wrong? essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Animal testing has for a long time been a much debated moral issue. For many, this kind of testing has been the only kind of hope for developing new medicines and treatments for illness. For others, it is an unacceptable and unnecessary cruel way of exploiting animals for our own purposes.

Treatments for illnesses such as tuberculosis, diabetes, kidney failure and asthma have all been discovered, and vaccinations against polio, diphtheria, tetanus and measles for example have all been found.

There are strict laws in place for using animals for testing and research purposes, so as to minimise any pain and distress the animals may encounter.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 ensures that the usage of animals must be kept to a minimum and animals may only be used when no other method of testing is available.

The law states that the testing must be humane and only if no other method can be used in the particular procedure.

By “ humane”, the law means that painkillers and anaesthetics must be used when necessary, and if an animal is in severe pain it must be painlessly killed immediately to eliminate it's suffering.

The majority of animals used in research are mice, rats and other rodents. In fact, they make up around 84% of animals used. Animals more commonly used as pets, for example dogs and cats, make up only around 0. 4% of animals used.

The reason animals are used is that they have more DNA similarities to a human than you would at first think. Their bodies will react in a similar way to a human body would to drugs. Also, rodents are easily cared for. Their short lifespan means that the long term effects of medicines can be seen more quickly. Animals are specially bred for use in testing. Pets are never, ever used. The animals are kept in clean, airy surroundings, and a vet is usually available 24 hours a day. Usually, once an experiment is complete, the animals involved are killed humanely, so as post-mortem examinations can be carried out.

Most scientists would prefer to use non-animal methods, but often these just don't provide sufficient evidence as to what the effects on a living creature would be.

The numbers of animals used in testing has greatly decreased in the past 30 years. In 1972, there were around 5.5 million procedures on animals, and in 2002 it was reduced to around 2.73 million procedures. This is because alternative methods have been developed and they have become more reliable.

In some countries it is a legal requirement for a drug to be tested on animals before it is sold. Work is being done to change these regulations to minimise animal deaths.

The “3 Rs” principle is one which is used to decrease numbers of animals dying.

The first R is Replace. This means to replace the use of animals where possible. The second R is Reduce. What this represents is to reduce the numbers of animals per experiment to the absolute minimum. The final R is Refine. This means to change the ways that tests are done to lessen the distress caused to the animals involved.

Research on animals has also led to the discovery of treatment for illnesses which affect animals. For example, distemper vaccinations are available for dogs, and a cat flu vaccination is available too. Often, treatments are similar in animals and humans, therefore in some cases, their research benefits animals too.

There is a lot of opposition to animal testing. Organisations such as PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) exist in order to protect the lives of animals and to prevent animal testing from having to happen. Many people believe that it is morally wrong to experiment upon another species merely for the benefit for human beings.

Those who are against animal testing claim that animals are not treated in a thoughtful and caring manner that we are led to believe. They say that in many instances animals are forced to become addicted to drugs, and are often intentionally burnt or injured. If this is the case, then it would be obvious that this is most certainly not a humane way to treat any animal at all.

An article by Peter Tatchell explains why animal testing is not always the best way to test new drugs and treatments for illnesses. He explains why this is the case.

“ An anti-rheumatic drug killed 76 people in Britain, and 3500 others were left seriously ill. This particular medication had been researched using animals for seven years, which is a clear example of how humans and animals do not always react in the same ways. Also, thousands of people with heart conditions suffered having taken another medicine which had been tested on animals. In fact, the same drug (Eraldin) has, so far, not acted on any other species of animal in the same way that it acted on humans.”

The development of new anti-HIV drugs has also been a key issue regarding the inconsistencies of animal testing. In 1989 a major pharmaceutical company was working what seemed to be a potentially very successful drug. However, in trials on dogs and rats, all the animals died. Research immediately stopped as the company presumed it would have the same fatal effect on humans. It is clear though in the examples of the anti-rheumatic drug and Eraldin that humans and animals will not necessarily be affected in the same way. Because of the death of the dogs and rats, trials of a new HIV treatment did not start again until 1993. These 4 years lost could have saved many lives, had the researchers carried on testing of the new drug. Also, HIV is a disease which only affects humans, so the results of the animal tests may not have been reliable anyway.

The problem is that many products are tested on animals. Much of the testing will be done for non-essential reasons, such as for cosmetics, which is obviously not necessary. Animal rights protesters still say that it is immoral and wrong to test products on animals, merely for the benefit of humans. This view is justified in that we cannot and should not rank ourselves above other creatures that inhabit the world. If we were not to test on animals to develop new medicines, humankind would most certainly suffer. There are currently illnesses such as muscular dystrophy for example, which are incurable. But, with animal testing, treatment for such illnesses may become possible on a longer term basis some time in the future.

Using animals in medical research for the purpose of finding cures or treatments to human diseases could be referred to as a necessary evil. Most people will agree that intentionally inflicting pain upon a living thing which is capable of feeling and perception is wrong. But then again, the same people will also agree that it is wrong to let a person die when medical research could save them. When viewed this way, it is easy to see why this issue is so complex.

The tests carried out on animals for cosmetics are much more horrific than any procedure carried out on an animal for medical reasons. The worst of the tests endured by animals for cosmetics are the LD-50 test and the Draize Test.

The LD-50 test means that the animals are forced to inhale or ingest varying amounts of a substance. The test is complete when 50% of the animals have

died. The other 50% are killed for autopsies. The Draize test is for skin irritancy. For eye irritancy, the solution would be applied directly to the eye and the results observed. For skin irritancy, the solution will be applied directly to the bare skin of the animal. Again, at the end of this test the animals are killed in order to see the internal effects of the test. Products that would be tested in such a manner would be cosmetics and their ingredients, and things such as cleaning agents.

In my opinion, right now, there is little we can do about completely replacing animal tests for things such as medicines. I think that people who are suffering deserve a chance to live, and if that means that an animal such as a mouse or a rat has to die, then so be it. It may sound callous to some people, but in ordinary circumstances a creature such as this would be viewed as a pest anyway. By this, I mean that if a mouse or rat came into someone's house, their likely course of action would be to set up a trap anyway. So saying that it is wrong to kill some of these creatures for the good of mankind would make them a hypocrite. Animal testing is one of those things that shouldn't happen, but the benefits outweigh the bad points.

So, in my opinion, animal testing is not wrong, given the correct circumstances. As far as medical science it is acceptable, but it is totally wrong and unethical as far as the vanity of the human race is concerned.