

The response reproduced below was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the ethics of research involving animals during October-December 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

This response was submitted using the online facility:

Anonymous #21

QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

1. Background: the use of animals in research

ANSWER:

In some cases animal research provides information not otherwise obtainable - *only* in these cases should it be used. Where other methods are effective they should be used in preference (even if - eg - they are much more expensive); and serious effort should be put into developing such methods in cases where they do not exist. It is clear that information gained from animal research transfers to humans to some extent, in some cases . . . but this should be treated with caution and not exaggerated. Acceptability absolutely depends on the purpose of the research - animals should never be used for trivial matters (eg: cosmetics). Vertebrates should be assumed to suffer pain and distress in a manner similar to humans. They should not be subjected to suffering beyond what would be consented to by an altruistic and positively motivated human volunteer.

2. Genetically modified animals

ANSWER:

I think GM does raise new issues - 'naturalness' is a dubious concept, both philosophically and scientifically, but there are still issues. Transgenic work raises the possibility of the transmission (or even creation) of disease that could be serious. The precautionary principle should apply. Transgenic animals should not be created for research purposes. Similarly I have serious doubts about the issue of animal-to-human transplant organs - disease being the greatest issue: once a pathogen has made the species jump it can't be unjumped. I have, in any case, some questions about any transplant surgery - its prevalence tends to reinforce the view that a human being is a machine with replaceable parts - leading to abuses such as the selling a

3. Alternatives

ANSWER:

Alternatives should be proactively sought and developed. Any organisation undertaking animal research should be required to pay a levy into a fund to support such development. Government (ie: taxpayers) should also contribute - a specific tax on all goods and services (other than medicines) which have animal experiments anywhere in their provenance would help. Rather like health warnings on cigarette packs, all goods derived from animal research should be required to be labelled as such. Some central database of animal experimentation would reduce duplication - a way around 'commercial confidentiality' would need to be enforced in law.

4. Ethical issues

ANSWER:

We have taken a long time to move away from the C19 view that animals are mere automata . . . we have not yet fully done so. As research progresses, we have more (not less) evidence of animal awareness, sociality, 'emotion', suffering etc. Primate research, for example, reveals increasing information about the intelligence of these animals.

Anyone who has lived closely with even moderately intelligent animals is perfectly certain that they experience pain, suffering, anxiety, and other emotion. This is not mere anthroporphism, but observation unobstructed by prejudice. Animals should be treated with respect - whether in farming or in research. Our capacity and will to do so is an indication of our civilisation.

5. The regulations

ANSWER:

Regulation sounds fine in theory - the question is: to what extent is it enforced? This is a matter of both motivation and money. We should be willing to spend more - on both enforcement and alternatives. GM animals should be separately regulated, and these regulations should be frequently reviewed, to keep up with developments. All use of animals and the cost-benefit assessments should be published with the research and be widely available in relation to final products. (See previous answer about labelling of products). Consumer response to GM food crops indicates that this would have a powerful effect.

6: Providing information to the public

ANSWER:

'Full and frank' information should be available. Your example of a label saying 'this product was not tested on animals', when its components were, should be outlawed. The labelling should be the other way around - compulsory labelling to indicate the use of animal testing, with further background easily available (eg: online). This includes medicines. A government regulatory agency could produce an annual public information summary, widely distributed, with further detail available online - rather like local authorities do about their annual spending. A national watchdog body - properly independent - would be an advantage (realistically, 'independent' in this context probably means a judicious balance of vested interests - but it can be done, eg: with the kind of authority that the HUEFA has)