

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.

Anonymous #9

I am a scientist undertaking research involving animals, and would like to make it clear that these views are my personal opinions and not those of my employer.

Q1. What is your view about the use of animals in research?

It is vital for improving human health, and morally justified. If society is willing to kill animals for food, which is not essential for survival, then we must accept that their use in medical/scientific research is of equal or greater value. From a moral perspective, the use of animals for research is of greater benefit to the human race than the consumption of animals as food. We all could survive without eating animals, but without the treatments developed using animals many humans would have died and would die in the future. Perhaps the public should be invited to consider the use of animals in this context?

Research involving animals provides information we could only get this way unless we consider using humans as experimental subjects (not desirable or ethically acceptable for 'early stage work').

Research using animals can be transferred to humans, though there may be differences in some cases. Animal studies are the only viable moral starting point, as it would be immoral to try 'risky' experiments on humans. As long as humans eat animals it is clear that they do not have the same moral rights.

The acceptability of using animals does not depend upon the purpose of the research, though this is an argument often used in the public domain. It appears that there are higher moral/ethical standards applied to animals in research than pest control, for example.

Animals probably suffer less than humans, as they are less likely to exhibit similar consciousness as humans. They do not have similar cognitive powers.

If the benefits of the research are high, then almost unlimited suffering is acceptable. As a society/nation we are willing to sanction human suffering (eg war, prison etc.) which is of greater scale and importance than suffering induced in the pursuit of scientific research.

Other Points and issues

In the consultation paper the context of scientific use of animals was compared with statistics concerning the use of animals for food. It might be useful to include information on the numbers of animals exterminated as pests. Very large numbers of animals are exterminated as pests, and this is sometimes more out of social norms than disease control. In addition, the methods by which pests are killed is substantially below the standards for animal euthanasia set out by the Home office for animals used in scientific procedures.