

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:

Dr Eva Berriman, Australia

QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

1. Background: the use of animals in research

ANSWER:

"Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: the human cost of experiments on animals" by Drs Ray and Jean Greek says it all - animal-based research is wasteful, dangerous, deceptive and fraudulent. It is noteworthy that "All proceeds go to Americans for Medical Advancement (AFMA), the nonprofit organisation the Greeks have established to disseminate 'Information regarding the true sources of medical achievement' and to counter the 'False propaganda perpetrated by pro-vivisectionists'." No animal (including rats, mice, birds) should be used in research that involves transgression of the Five Freedoms as outlined in the Universal Declaration for the Welfare of Animals, a document which has received escalating support since its launch at the WSPA Animals 2000 World Congress. 1. Freedom from hunger and thirst: by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour 2. Freedom from discomfort: by providing an appropriate environment including shelter 3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease: by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment and a comfortable resting area. 4. Freedom from fear and distress: by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering. 5. Freedom to express normal behaviour: by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of animals' own kind. I believe points 4 and 5 are of particular relevance to laboratory animals.

2. Genetically modified animals

ANSWER:

I am very uncertain just what my views are about GM animals. I don't believe the creation of a modified species is particularly morally or ethically wrong, it's been going on "naturally" for thousands of years, also by the human selection of and mating together of desirable animals to produce standard breeds. However I most certainly do abhor the possibility of GM processes being used to create animals with defects that would cause them to suffer until death. Are researchers really as monstrous as this? It's straight out cruelty - and that raises another issue - why aren't research animals protected by the same anticruelty laws that protect other animals? I believe the welfare legislation covering laboratory animals is far too lenient. Being "laboratory bred" or "bred for research" in no way makes animals more tolerant to pain and suffering - it's another example of the propaganda used by pro-vivisectionists. I remember reading about some researcher in America forcing rats to swim until they died from exhaustion to see whether the exercise raised their stress parameters. I mean, a six year old child to tell you the answer.

3. Alternatives

My understanding is that there are thousands of alternatives but that the researchers are stuck in the groove of the animal model. Following are some excerpts from organisations very active in this area -

1. The National Antivivisection Society (NAVS) is an educational organisation whose ultimate goal is the elimination of animal use in product testing, education and biomedical research. For more than 70 years, it has sought to identify the cruelty and waste of vivisection and to convince the general public to work actively for its ultimate abolition. It strives to educate researchers, physicians, manufacturers, teachers and government leaders in the discovery of new, humane methods that will save millions of non-human animals each year and still give humans a safer, healthier and happier future.

2. InterNICHE aims for a high quality, fully humane education in biological science, veterinary and human medicine. They support progressive science teaching and the replacement of animal experiments by working with teachers to introduce alternatives, and with students to support freedom of conscience.

3. From the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV)

a) Title: Vivisection is a flawed science

"All species, all varieties of animals and even individuals of the same species differ from one another. No experimentation carried out on one species can be extrapolated to any other. The belief that such extrapolation could be legitimate is the main reason for the failures, and sometimes for the catastrophes, that modern medicine inflicts on us, especially where drugs are concerned."

Professor Pietro Croce, Honorary President of Doctors and Lawyers for Responsible Medicine.

b) "The fact is that animal experiments tell us about animals, not about people. The results of animal studies can never guarantee the safety or efficacy of human medicines or other products because of the fundamental differences between the species. Different species can have completely contradictory responses to a range of substances; on average there is only a 5-25% correlation between harmful drug effects in humans and the results of animal experiments. For example, Aspirin is used as a relatively safe and effective painkiller for humans but can be fatal to cats; Penicillin is a widely used antibiotic in humans and yet it can kill both cats and guinea pigs; Arsenic is very dangerous for humans but does not present the same level of threat to rats, mice or sheep; insulin, a drug used safely by people with diabetes, can produce terrible deformities in mice, rabbits and chickens. Even something as mundane as chocolate, which is consumed in large quantities by humans worldwide, can be extremely toxic in dogs. The danger of relying on animal studies is illustrated by the long list of animal tested drugs that are withdrawn from sale or restricted in their use as a result of unexpected side effects in human patients. In April 2000 a study published by US watchdog group Public Citizen reported that an estimated 100,000 Americans die every year from adverse drug reactions.

Increasingly people are coming to realise that animal based research is, at best, 'flip a coin' science that cannot accurately predict human responses and is failing to find cures for human diseases. Anti-vivisectionists are not anti-human in their defence of animals. Nor are they opposed to medical progress. The BUAV wants to see real advancement in the treatment of painful and debilitating human diseases, but believes that the route to these advances depends on developing and using research techniques that do not involve animals. In fact, by relying on animal based data we are actually holding back the potential of medical science. Our experiments should be based on cutting-edge,

biologically relevant non-animal techniques of the 21st Century, and not on the antiquated assumption that test results from one species can be safely applied to another. Ending animal experiments would not harm human health, rather it would free up valuable resources that could be used to develop non-animal research techniques. Government, regulatory bodies and industry must work together to rethink our scientific endeavour, and to invest in retraining scientists and re-equipping laboratories to use the high-tech in vitro research techniques that will enable us to develop life-saving drugs and safe consumer products for the future - progress with compassion and health with humanity."

4. From the Australian Association for Humane Research (AAHR) site - "The value of animal experimentation has been grossly exaggerated by those with a vested economic interest in its preservation. Because animal experimentation focuses on artificially created pathology, involves confounding variables, and is undermined by differences in human and nonhuman anatomy, physiology, and pathology, it is an inherently unsound way to investigate human disease processes. The billions of dollars invested annually in animal research would be put to much more efficient, effective, and humane use if redirected to clinical and epidemiological research and public health programs." A Critical Look at Animal Experimentation Medical Research Modernization Committee, New York, 1996.

5. The Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR) maintains an extensive database on alternatives to the use of animals in research and teaching.

Website address <http://www.angelfire.com/sc2/petswelfare>

4. Ethical issues

ANSWER:

I endorse the RSPCA Australia Animals Charter, in particular that "Animals have an intrinsic value of their own and, accordingly, must be considered to possess the right to live in a way which enables them to have a positive life and to develop and enjoy their inherent qualities". I endorse the campaign currently being run by In Defence of Animals (IDA) "Animals are not our property. The notion of animals as "things" or "property" and therefore open to abuse and exploitation has prompted IDA's "They are not our property" campaign, which aims to transform the social and moral status of animals from property to living beings with their own needs, interests and legal rights. Thousands upon thousands of compassionate people have thrown away the word "ownership" of animals and replaced it with "guardianship". Already several US states and cities legally recognize the concept of animal guardianship. Pain is a protective mechanism, common to all vertebrate species (and even invertebrates will show avoidance behaviour). I believe animals suffer pain, distress/stress and discomfort just as humans do, though thresholds may be different (variable between individual animals and people anyway). The only difference is that humans have the power to anticipate pain - animals develop this after repeated painful procedures. I am undecided about "happiness", although companion animals certainly show sadness and happiness

5. The regulations

ANSWER:

I'm not from the UK, but I believe that the codes of welfare governing lab animals in this

country (Australia) and certainly America are open to a variety of interpretations and individual projects/institutions can get away with only paying lip service to them. My understanding is that it depends very much on the composition and sympathies of the respective animal care and use committees. Often the membership is heavily weighted towards the institution or research personnel. I believe people like Neil Barnard (PCRM) and the Greeks of course have a lot of information about the workings of these committees.

6: Providing information to the public

ANSWER:

The public is almost totally ignorant about the numbers of animals used in laboratories and the procedures done on them. Most average people will tell you they don't like the thought of research animals but that they are a necessary evil, that no advances in medicine can be made without animal experimentation - I believed this myself once, and I'm a qualified vet. There is total suppression in the media of any footage depicting an experimental animal. Once, on SBS here, there was a millisecond of footage showing a mouse being pulled up against the bars of its cage by the tail and injected by someone in a white coat. It caused some phonecalls and other forms of protest to the station. I know it stayed in my mind, and it was so minor compared with what really goes on in research labs. I think that more enlightenment of the general public would make a really telling difference, especially about the alternatives that exist. Then there is the duplicity - L'Oreal the cosmetics company advertises its products as not tested on animals, but in fact though the final product isn't tested on animals, the ingredients still may be.