

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:

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QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

1. Background: the use of animals in research

ANSWER:

In the absence of other evidence it is only fair to assume most mammals would suffer the same as a human. As a user of Safety data sheets of experiental compounds, that are sometimes extremely lacking in detail, frequently values of LD50 etc. are the only guide to harmful nature of the material. If the experimental materials are required, then LD50s are aswell. Whether the experiemntal materials (eg. new pharmaceutical drugs or agrochemicals)are necessary is another matter.

2. Genetically modified animals

ANSWER:

I would like to see a ban on reproductive cloning of animals (including humans) due to the high risk of deformities and suffering caused thereby. Some countries attempts to ban medical and reproductive cloning have resulted in niether being banned. (source New Scientist) I would avoid the term 'natural' or 'unnatural' as unhelpful in this debate.

3. Alternatives

ANSWER:

The need for more research into alternatives is paramount, with a view to ending it completely? I would like to see the EC play a more active role in encouraging this as their directives require some testing, for example reregistration of agrochemical products in member countries. Funding; most people would turn their noses up at animal research but would they be willing to pay? Those people who would benefit must pay, ie. all of us. Would this be acheived thru pharma companies? although it is often argued that their products are already underpriced(!).

4. Ethical issues

ANSWER:

I personally work on the premise that all creatures are sentient and valuable. Practicaly, I assume most mammals to share similar feelings to myself, so i do make a distinction. Pets are regarded the same as human family members. Again personally, meat for food is accepted when the animal has been treated reasonably (eg organic) and i am grateful. Could the same general principles be applied to research? The environment in which animals are kept could be vital. eg. a study I am involved in is investigating bioavailability of a new drug, by blood samples from dogs after dosing with capsules. The lifestyle the dogs enjoy/are subject to during this experiment will make a huge difference to their quality of life, because the procedure of dosing/blood sampling is only a small part of the process. Clearly an enviroment where social contact and exercise are generously provided will take more effort, and cost more but the subjects would suffer less, and may actually have a bearable existence.