

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.

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QUESTION ONE:

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

In my opinion it is completely unacceptable for human beings to use other animals as a means to our ends; especially when this use causes suffering to the animals being experimented on. For me this argument from principle overrides arguments from expediency. However, I will nonetheless proceed to consider some of the expedient arguments because my aim is to persuade other people to my point of view, and I am realistic enough to know that many people believe that arguments from principle (when applied to animals) are utopian. In my opinion this lack of principles is demeaning to the human being as a rational agent. However, I have to recognize that many people believe that the human 'right' to gain information outweighs the animals 'right' not to be made to suffer.

In my view these people oversimplify the issues; It is never simply an animal life for a human life. Many procedures developed through animal experimentation would be considered immoral on grounds other than animal cruelty and of course most are not directly for medical advancement. We cannot know how any piece of research will be used.

I would like to challenge the impression given (notably on page 11 but also throughout the document) that pain is always minimised in animal experiments. I enclosed a photocopy of a Dr Hadwen Trust letter about 'pain research' which outlines experiments where pain is deliberately inflicted onto animals.

It is not only medical experiments that can be cruel; many behavioural experiments are extremely painful for the animal. For example when psychologists wanted to test the concept of learned helplessness, they did not send out a questionnaire to teachers to ask them why the felt underachieving children often 'give-up' on paying attention in class. Instead they preferred to give electric shocks to dogs; no matter what the dogs did they could not avoid the shocks, so in the end the dogs gave up and did nothing. Not only would teacher consultation have been less cruel, it would also have been more subtly informative.

Although not all behavioural experiments are cruel, they can none the less be performed equally well in non-lab conditions. For example: I have watched wildlife programs where a squirrel adopts increasingly ingenious strategies to get to the seed on a bird table despite the best efforts of human beings to stop it doing so. A lot of knowledge can also be gained from observing pets such as cats and dogs, and other wildlife courtesy of David Attenborough.

QUESTION TWO:

What are your views about the use of genetically modified animals in research?

I do not consider that genetic modification is necessarily worse than selective breeding, although potentially it could be because of the speed at which GM animals can be created. However, I consider selective breeding pretty abhorrent – cows bred for high milk yield, horses for racing speed, rag doll cats, etc – both selective breeding and GM cause extra suffering to animals (for details refer to the Compassion in World Farming web site). In particular look at the suffering (caused by selective breeding) to our modern dairy herds: mastitis, lameness etc.

Animals such as the onco mouse (a transgenic mouse born to develop cancer and suffer all its life) should never have been created and it scares me to consider what other, more extreme, creatures (born to suffer) might be created in a very short period of time through GM. According to the Dr Hadwen Trust (*Alternative News 81* page 2 Autumn 2003) "procedures on genetically modified animals now represent more than a quarter of all animal experiments."

QUESTION THREE:

What is your view about the use of alternatives?

I certainly do not accept that animal experimentation necessarily provides information that is not available by other methods. The truth is that no one knows to what extent alternative methods would make satisfactory substitutes for animal experiments because the vast majority of pharmaceutical companies and research establishments have largely neglected these alternatives (funding a small amount of alternative research as a sop to the concerned general public). It is cheaper and easier to use animals. People who say that alternatives definitely cannot replace animal experiments are simply not making a statement of fact because not enough research has been done for anyone to know either way definitively.

Organizations such as FRAME and The Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research (while doing excellent work) rely on charitable donations and therefore have limited resources available to develop alternative techniques. They desperately need both government and industry funding.

Tough-minded people throughout history have trotted out the argument that cruel behaviour is necessary for the benefit of 'The Human Race.' This argument has been used to justify all sorts of appalling atrocities. For example in Victorian times they said: "if we don't send small boys up chimneys, how will our chimney's get cleaned?" Yet when they finally introduced laws to stop people sending small boys up chimneys remarkably the chimneys got swept using alternative methods.

The point I am making is that Necessity is the Mother of Invention! If we make animal experiments illegal the research industry will become much more inventive in their search for alternative tests.

Just as in the past slavery and ill treatment of other human beings was justified for the benefit of one group, the mistreatment of non-human animals today is justified for the benefit of the human race. It is my belief that in one hundred years time we will look back on our era of animal experimentation with disgust.

QUESTION FOUR:

What is your view about ethical issues relating to the use of animals in research?

Before I start to answer this question I would like to point out that there is no sharp distinction between animals having rights and human beings having duties to animals. Duties, responsibilities and obligations are simply the 'flip-side' of rights. People have a 'responsibility' to treat animals in a humane fashion by virtue of animals requiring 'rights' on the grounds of some 'thing.' I would like to argue that that 'thing' is the ability to suffer.

So, what constitutes suffering? Is there something special about the human species that entitles us to rights while other animals have none? Do human beings have a kind of 'inner' mental suffering that other animals do not have? If it is the case that human beings suffer and other animals don't what is it that gives us this extra ability to suffer? The usual answer put forward is:

That there are high levels of consciousness and self-consciousness unique to humans which mean that we are capable of abstract thought, reasoning, and planned, purposive action. These give us an ability to internalise suffering and this mental anguish increases the intensity of perceived suffering when subjected to not only physical abuse but also the denial of our freedom and dignity.

In the case of rationality and abstract thought, this does seem to be peculiar to the human species certainly at a high level (although there is evidence to suggest that some other animals possess this to a lesser degree: see enclosed photocopy 2).

So the received view is that with these high levels of consciousness & self-consciousness come complete rights. Complete rights are rights that are claimed for oneself in virtue of one's ability or potential ability to appreciate them. They are things like the right to be treated as an autonomous individual, the right to freedom and dignity and to be allowed to act as a purposive agent, to develop individual projects within the bounds of morality.

It can be argued that non-human animals do not have these complete rights on account of their inability to appreciate them.

If this were the only reason to posit rights then the issue would be justifiably controversial, but this is not the only arguable criterion for positing rights. Lesser rights can be postulated for animals, such as the right not to be made to suffer by having pain or discomfort inflicted upon them. For non-human animals these rights are gained not by an ability to suffer if their freedom is taken away, but purely by the ability to suffer when deliberate pain or discomfort is inflicted upon them. These are the types of rights that many people want to give to non-human animals. But it is controversial as to whether non-human animals really suffer in any way other than a simple response to stimulus. I feel certain that they do.

There is much evidence to suggest that non-human animals are not 'Blank Paper' that we project suffering onto in an anthropomorphic kind of way. Chimpanzees for example clearly have high levels of self-consciousness; they recognise themselves, as themselves, in the mirror to the extent that they can remove a sticky dot of paper from their own heads through seeing it only in the mirror image, they can also use a mirror to comb their hair.

There is an increasingly large body of evidence which suggests that mammals and birds (over 90% of all animals experimented on) have the ability to suffer – see photocopy 2.

Anyone who has ever owned a pet or watched a wildlife program on TV knows that non-human animals have deep feelings and emotions. We know from their behaviour that non-human animals feel: jealousy, attachment, pleasure, embarrassment, excitement, loss, frustration, anger, fear, affection and many other emotions. Indeed all pet owners who are both observant and psychologically aware can give examples of a wide range of sophisticated emotions that their pet exhibits by their behaviour.

Please read the Jeremy Rifkin book (listed on photocopy 2) for better examples of feelings, emotions and consciousness in animals.

In the light of this evidence it seems logical to assume that when we see a non-human animal exhibiting pain behaviour, that animal really is in pain.

For example, when a pet dog gets her paw shut in the door and she yelps and runs around, we think to ourselves that is how I behave when I get my foot shut in the door. We then make an analogy from dog pain behaviour to human pain behaviour and we intuitively know that that dog is in pain. We also intuitively know that that dog knows that she is in pain because she takes conscious action to avoid getting her foot caught in future.

Indeed as human beings are only directly aware of their own (personal) feelings we rely on this type of analogy to attribute feelings to other human beings. It is therefore consistent to use the same observations as a basis for acknowledging animal pain and suffering.

QUESTION FIVE:

What is your view about the UK regulations on research involving animals in the UK?

I would like a complete ban on animal experimentation.

But as a compromise, I would like to see legislation introduced to make companies provide evidence that they have attempted to develop non-animal tests (not just looked at existing tests but actively tried to develop new ones spending a considerable amount of money on doing so) and been unsuccessful before they are given permission to test on animals. They should have to apply separately for each type of test and provide strong evidence that animals will not suffer as a result of tests. Researchers should be forced, by law, to pool information. It should not be acceptable to farm out badly regulated tests to less well regulated countries in support of products and technologies intended for the UK.

There should be a ban on any experiment that does not pass the 'Peter Singer test:' "Peter Singer compared speciesism with racism and sexism, and urged that there is no good reason for refusing to extend the basic principle of equality – the principle of equal consideration of interests – to non-human animals ----- Singer urged that, in considering whether a given (animal) experiment is justifiable, we ask ourselves whether we would be prepared to perform it on an orphaned human being at a mental level similar to that of the proposed animal subject. Only if the answer is affirmative could we claim that our readiness to use the animal was not based on a speciesist prejudice against giving the interests of non-human animals a similar weight to the interests of members of our own species." (Peter Singer page 36 Oxford Companion to Philosophy edited by Ted Honderich Oxford University Press 1995).

QUESTION SIX:

What do you think about the information that is available to the public about research involving animals?

Statistics regarding animal experimentation need to be much more widely publicized. For example most people I know (educated people) do not realize that animal experimentation is increasing year on year. Most of them actually believe that it is decreasing worldwide!

Most people don't know what proportion of animal experimentation is for life saving medicines contrasted with the proportion that is for lifestyle drugs such as slimming pills and hair restorers.

Many people mistakenly believe that animal suffering is short lived, they do not realize that many animals are subjected to cruel treatment day in, day out for months, sometimes years.

I would also like to suggest that future consultation papers are advertised in the quality press and not in scientific journals. This way views will be expressed that represent a cross section of society; rather than the views of scientists and would-be scientists who tend to be pro-vivisection.

I am pleased to see a consultation paper, but disappointed by the bias shown in it. The paper tries to give the impression of being balanced and reasonable yet it still implies that researchers have to abide by strict rules and regulations. The Dr Hadwen Trust (*Alternative News* 81 page 2 Autumn 2003 Home Office Statistics) states "Thirty-one infringements were reported during 2002 ----- However, no licences were revoked and there were no prosecutions."