

ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION IS BOTH USEFUL AND ETHICAL

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Richard Pothier, a writer from Philadelphia, was dying of cardiomyopathy¹ until he was saved by a heart transplant. An animal rights supporter, Pothier still feels that some medical practices on animals are unethical, but he also believes that the lives of animals are not equal to the lives of humans. If it had not been for experimentation on dogs and sheep, Pothier realized he would have died with his diseased heart still remaining in his chest. He understands fully the value of animal testing and experimentation since it was his own life that was extended by direct result of practices perfected on animals (Pothier 18). The example of Richard Pothier is one that exemplifies the main reason for all animal testing, to advance humankind. Without this type of experimentation, Pothier, along with millions of others, would have died prematurely.

Despite strong opposition, animal testing is still the most vital and effective method of research in developing many consumer and medicinal products. Since the earliest research in developing vaccines, millions of human lives have been saved. From penicillin to cosmetics to the transplantation of organs, animals have helped scientists enhance human lives. This advancement of humankind is being thwarted by animal rights activists because of their efforts to stop all animal testing. They claim that the testing of animals is not moral, and that humans have no right to use animals in such ways. On the contrary, animal testing is extremely useful and is not ethically deviant, because the development of humanity is the most important aspect of all scientific development.

Experimentation on animals started with a human need for vaccinations against diseases that formerly ravaged humanity. In 1928, the success of Alexander Flemming's discovery of penicillin and its effects on the staphylococci bacterium came as a result of his testing on rabbits (Sheehan 24). In 1941 after hundreds of tests on different bacteria and viruses which involved first infecting rabbits, then repeatedly healing them with injections of penicillium spore, Flemming decided to try this new cure on humans (Sheehan 35). By this time, widespread animal research was carried out to find the best method of curing streptococcal and staphylococcal infections. Although unfortunately expensive and difficult to produce, the penicillin extract from the penicillium spore cultures did start to help save lives soon after the first human injections (Sheehan 37).

Along with Alexander Flemming, Jonas Salk also used animal experimentation to discover the widely needed vaccine for polio. In the early 1900s, polio was crippling thousands of children and forcing many of them into iron lungs. Salk, along with many others, sought to end this horrible disease. Eventually he discovered a possible vaccine he called the "killed virus vaccine," and tested it on animal patients (Rogers 178). After an acceptable success rate, he and his colleagues made the vaccine

available for human consumption. Polio, the Great Baby Killer, came to an end with this vaccine and others similar to it, thanks to the perseverance of science and the use of animals as control objects (Rogers 182).

Scientists have not only used animals as a method of discovering vaccinations, but nearly all organ transplants, whether a xenograft or human to human transplant, has been developed from surgical procedures on animals (Xenotransplantation is a method of transplanting organs of one species into that of another species.). Presently, research is being done to mutate pigs to produce genetic characteristics so that they express human rather than porcine antigens (Skolnick 2958). This will allow easier transfer of the organs and less risk of GHVD, or graft vs. host disease (Skolnick 2951). The reason pigs are used instead of primates is because there is less risk of transferring viral disease and there is less worry of attacks from the animal rights movement (Skolnick 2951). No matter what comes from this research, the goal is the same: "to keep critically ill patients alive with a good quality of life" (Skolnick 2958).

Many household products that contain potentially dangerous chemicals have gone through some sort of animal testing. Each company that produces a consumable product must abide by certain governmental regulations. These regulations are set forth for the purpose of ensuring the safety of consumers. Cosmetic testing is a good example since it has gotten so much media attention these past few years. Because cosmetics are applied to the face, many potentially harmful aspects of each type of cosmetic must be tested. Animal testing is the only way for the manufacturer to determine whether or not the product is safe. If certain types of mascara are repeatedly blinding rabbits, more than likely humans will be adversely affected also (Lederer 66). The same goes for household cleaners, hand soaps, perfumes, and most other chemically based products that can be purchased. The companies that manufacture these items could not afford the liability if animal testing was not required by the government (Lederer 73). The dangers of products must be known before they are sold. Without first finding out how and why they are harmful on the animals, possible injury may occur to the consumer. The fact that humans benefit at the cost of animals is what the animal rights movement is most concerned with.

With a strong force of millions of people and tens of millions of dollars, the animal rights activists try to bully their prerogative onto the scientific world. David G. Porter, Chair of the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario, thinks "all scientists should become anti-vivisectionalists at heart." His reasoning, similar to most of the moderate activists, is that animals are sentient and should not be harmed by humans unless absolutely necessary. It is not our place to abuse helpless animals for repeated experimentation to prove hypotheses that often don't have any way of elevating humanity. Huge lobbying schemes are set up by the leaders of PETA and other organizations in order to make their points well known. Swaying public opinion isn't difficult when a near monopoly on popular media exists (Rose 21). Since the activists presently own a monopoly, they can draw support from the population because only the worst cases of animal mistreatment are shown. Using graphic pictures of crippled animals, the activists make their plea for mercy on the innocent beasts. "Elaborate,

extreme cruelty is still generally accepted because of its academic context" (Binding 21). This is also a major argument because activists think that being "declared an instrument of education" is not ethically or morally acceptable (Binding 21).

Since they realize that we need some sort of experimental method, the activists support a "hands off" policy. This policy they claim will teach students and give scientists just as much information as previous live testing (Regan 1113). The activists offer their own methods of attaining knowledge, other than that of vivisection. The same tests, with new detailed computer simulations, videos of previous experiments, and cell culture tissues can be put to use on a wide basis (Binding 22). This would seem to be ethically and scientifically acceptable, but unfortunately it isn't.

The ethics on the side of the scientists has not nearly been as widely publicized as that of the activists. As we all have witnessed, the media mainly concentrates on the animal rights activists' agenda. The reason for this is that the scientists have not been understood by the activists and thus they claim cruelty and inhumane behavior toward the experimentation processes (Cullington 517). By having an effective campaign against reason, the activists get much more support from the media (Binding 517).

Science claims the argument is their reason vs. the activist's unreason (Binding 517). Extremist viewpoints, those of complete inflexibility, rule the animal rights agenda. Scientists have a difficult time proving their point when those with whom they are arguing are not thinking (Rose 21). Ethics of science have been clearly developed over the years. The purpose of science is to advance humanity with the tools it was given and with any methods that are found (Vance 1114). Humanity must develop, and the only way to do that is through scientific analysis and experimentation. In testing animals, vast knowledge in many areas can be gained (Rose 21). The methods that activists sometimes give as replacements, like computer simulation, are not nearly as good as actual testing (Cullington 517). Progress would be slower, knowledge limited, and science hindered if experimentation on animals were disallowed (Vance 1114). Animal rights activists must realize that what Bernadine Healy, director of the National Institute of Health, said is true: "animal activists espouse a fallacy, namely, that medical progress can be maintained without essential animal research" (qtd. in Cullington 517).

Notes

1. Cardiomyopathy is a fatal degenerative heart disease of unknown cause. Its only effective treatment is that of a heart transplant.

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