Why People Should Not Be Able to Torture Animals in a Laboratory

Almost as long as humans have been practicing medicine, the use of animals to test that medicine has existed. Recently, there has been a push to remove animal testing from all cosmetic products and there are now increasing numbers of lotions, mascaras, and eyeliners that are “cruelty-free.” Many companies, however, still require animal testing before releasing products for human use. Though there are arguable “benefits” obtained from such experimentation, the use of any animals as test subjects for human products is unjustified.

To begin, we must define the words “animal testing”, “unjustified”, and to ensure we are all on the same page, “animal.” What exactly is animal testing? To put it broadly, animal testing is the use of animals in laboratory experimentation for the purpose of furthering human knowledge. With that being said, what does the word “unjustified” mean? An “unjustified” action is one that cannot be supported with reasonable explanations or is an action that is not morally right. An “animal” is any living creature made up of eukaryotic cells that can feel both pain and pleasure – that includes rats, fish, and gorillas, but excludes bacteria and plants. With those definitions in mind, I argue that it is unjustified to use animals in laboratory experiments because it is both unreasonable and immoral.

What, you may wonder, makes animal testing unreasonable? It is unreasonable because it is an action in which large amounts of suffering are caused without obtaining the information sought. Surely everyone can agree with the following statement: “the repetition of an activity in which large amounts of suffering are caused without producing desired results is unreasonable.” Let’s say you had very severe acne and decided to eat waffles to try and reduce the number of pimples on your face. Unfortunately, the waffles cause you to have terrible indigestion, break out in hives, and suffer a heart attack. On top of all that, your acne does not show any signs of clearing up. Would you continue to eat the waffles even though you will suffer tremendous pain and see no desired improvement? The reasonable answer is no, of course not. Though supporters of animal testing may argue that animal experimentation produces positive results that “greatly outweigh” the amount of suffering caused, the concept is the same for animal testing. Testing products and drugs on animals is an ineffective way to determine how human bodies will react to the given product or drug: “a new medicinal compound entering Phase 1 testing…is estimated to have only an 8 percent chance of reaching the market” (FDA). The millions of animals that suffer each year do so for tests producing very little relevant data. The amount of suffering caused to obtain such limited data is unreasonable and therefore unjustified.

Critics might argue that the percentage of drugs that fails in human trials would be even higher if all animal testing were eliminated, but the truth remains that products and drugs will simply react one way when in contact with animal skin and tissue and a different way in human features. This discrepancy renders animal test results irrelevant to how human bodies will react. Just as the waffles were ineffective at removing acne, so to is animal testing an ineffective indicator of human reactions to products. That is why animal testing is unreasonable – it does not reliably determine what effects the product or drug will have on a human body, no matter how many tests on animals are done. As we have established earlier, an unreasonable practice is an unjustifiable one.

Another reason animal testing is unjustified is because it is morally wrong to assert your own agenda onto another individual simply because it is convenient for you. Take slavery for example. African Americans were persecuted and treated as property for centuries. At that time, people justified slavery due to their own desire for cheap labor and beliefs that humans with darkly pigmented skin were “inferior” beings. Now, however, it is commonly viewed as immoral to treat another human being disrespectfully simply due to the color of their skin. The conflict with animal testing is similar – animals are being taken advantage of because people see it is an “easy” method to test human products and because animals are viewed as “lesser creatures.” Although it is not difficult for people to capture animals for experimentation, that does not make it right for humans to disrespect animals or take advantage of them. Furthermore, just because society views it as acceptable to treat animals differently does not mean that viewpoint is morally right. Morality is separate from opinion. The fact that animals are viewed as inferior species does not justify the use of animal testing for human products.

Speaking of beliefs in human superiority, some animal testing advocates believe that the benefits gained from animal testing vastly outweigh the suffering that animals must endure. Often, these advocates of animal testing point out that animal testing has led to significant medical discoveries that humans have benefitted tremendously from. While it is true that many vaccinations, including polio and small pox, would not have been possible without the use of animals, the main point these advocates overlook is the fact that these benefits do not necessarily “outweigh” the cost of animal suffering. This viewpoint is often a result of the belief that animals are inferior beings and so the loss of many animal lives is “outweighed” by human benefits. But what makes an animal life inferior? As Peter Singer writes in his essay, *Speciesism and Moral Status*, “[t]he mere difference of species cannot in itself determine moral status” (Singer). Currently, humans view animals as inferior beings, but what makes human beings as a species inherently superior? Proponents of human superiority might suggest humans’ more developed cognitive abilities, but Singer points out those “with profound mental retardation pose a problem for this set of beliefs, because their cognitive abilities are not superior to those of many animals” (Singer). If it is so obviously wrong to mistreat a human being with mental retardation, what is the difference when it comes to another species? There is none; animals feel pain and pleasure just as humans do. Animals are not inherently inferior creatures and cannot be treated as such – actions that mistreat animals due to this belief are immoral and unjustified.

Those who support animal testing might point out that animal testing can be beneficial to animals. It is true that better care can be given to animals as a result of information learned from animal tests. However, this point carries little weight when transferred into a human context: if you had the choice to donate your living body to research for the possible benefit of humankind, would you? Those who are inclined to agree might want to take a second to realize the option has always been available. Laws may limit certain experiments done on humans, but for the most part, many psychologists and research facilities would be delighted to have a human volunteer to examine. Given the choice, very few people have willing volunteered to be subjects in a laboratory without compensation, especially when the prospect of pain is likely. Similarly, it is unfair to subjugate an animal to experimentation simply because it would be contributing greatly to the wellbeing of its species. Although this may be a sound reason for an animal to choose to be a test subject, explicit consent by the animal must be given for experimentation to be moral and justified. Because animals are unable to communicate their consent, it is immoral and thus unjustified to force them to participate in laboratory experiments.

There may be a few reasons to test animals, but none of them are justified. The life of an animal deserves the same respect that the life of a human would. As Mark Twain once said, “I am not interested to know whether vivisection produces results profitable to the human race or doesn’t… The pain which it inflicts upon unconsenting animals is the basis of my enmity toward it, & it is to me sufficient justification of the enmity without looking further” (Twain 139). Furthermore, there are many alternative methods such as advanced computer programs and artificial tissues created in laboratories, that can be used to test laboratory findings that do not use animals and more reliably predict human body reactions. Scientific breakthroughs can occur without the use of animal subjects. For example, penicillin, which was discovered from mold, is the most widely used antibiotic to date! Alternative methods render animal testing unnecessary, but more importantly, the use of animals in laboratory experimentation is unreasonable and immoral and is therefore unjustified.

Brooke, You completely nailed this paper. Bravo to you. I’d reconsider how you introduce the slavery premise… check out a better way to contextualize it. 3.8

Works Cited

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