

Animal Experimentation

Edinburgh Book Festival

19 August, 2002

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There are two main objections to animal experimentation – the first is that animal experiments are inherently useless; the second is that animal experiments are inherently cruel.

The first objection I think is just plain silly. Animal experiments have been instrumental in driving science, particularly medical science, forward. Monkeys, for example, have been used to develop vaccines against rubella and in the surgical transplanting of corneas to restore vision. The design of the heart-lung transplant was developed in rhesus macaques and the technique of kidney transplantation was developed using dogs. Potent anti-rejection drugs, such as Cyclosporin, vital to the success of transplantation, were first used in nonhuman primates. Open-heart surgery was developed in dogs, and the critical diabetes work, leading to the development of insulin, was also done in dogs. Control of diphtheria came from guinea pigs and horses. From sheep came control of anthrax, and from cows the eradication of smallpox.

Ongoing research with a wide variety of animals includes investigations of AIDS, cancer, heart disease, cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy. The development of artificial arteries, the possibility of reversing spinal cord injury, and the ageing process are all being investigated using animal models. The best hopes to cure malaria, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, epilepsy, clinical obesity, infertility and a variety of birth defects all rely on current animal experiments.

Without doubt there are many experiments that will fail or lead to no useful therapy – such is the nature of all science. But to suggest that scientists are pointlessly pursuing experiments and models that do not work is just wrong headed. The process of peer review and grant allocation certainly has its problems, but it is not that bad! If there were good alternatives to animals that worked better or as well, for less money and hassle, scientists would use them. We can be stubborn but we are not totally bananas.

The second objection – that animal experiments are inherently cruel – has more potential. There is no escaping the fact that animal experiments are not in the interest of the animals and that the animals have a generally negative time of it. Giving animals AIDS and other diseases, carrying out

experimental surgeries and infusing untested drugs hardly sound like procedures aimed at protecting the animals' welfare. The fact is that medical research is *not* concerned with the welfare of animals and so, if animals are like us in any important way, then animal research is inherently immoral.

Tom Regan and Richard Ryder argue that animals *are* like us, that they share with us the capacity for seeing, hearing, believing, remembering, and anticipating and for experiencing pleasure and pain. They suggest that animals are 'subjects of a being'.

There is a trivial sense in which Regan and Ryder are undoubtedly correct; animals certainly do possess the biological properties necessary for processing information. But, in every important sense, they are flat out wrong. Animals and humans do not think alike, feel alike, or experience alike. Humans and animals are not on the same scale.

Human beings have an ability that is unique within the animal world – the ability to reflect, to have insight, to break out of our internal, personal and unknowable world. In so far as human beings live in a community of thinking, feeling, talking beings, the privacy of experience is broken down and externalised for further analysis. As we are able to externalise our inner world so we are able to reflect upon that world and become self aware or self-conscious. Consciousness *is* self-consciousness, one cannot reflect upon the world without knowing that it is I who am reflecting. If we were not conscious of being conscious, then we would be unconscious of consciousness, which is an absurdity.

This kind of awareness does not exist for animals, which is why a chimpanzee today behaves in much the same way as all chimpanzees ever have done. When chimps forage for food they do not ask themselves why or consider better alternatives any more than a beaver considers better ways of building dams. When swallows fly south in the winter they do not ask why it is hotter in Africa or what would happen if they flew further south or whether they could save themselves the bother by creating warmth in the north. Humans do ask these kinds of questions and do engage in behavior that transforms their circumstances. We are not trapped inside a purely individual view of the world. We have insight. In contrast to ourselves, animal behaviour is mechanical, driven by the dictates of nature and immune to the processes of reflective cognition that we take for granted. And it is a black, silent existence that is not conscious of its own processes. All their mental experience, if they have any at all, is diminished relative to ours and this includes all sensations including vision, hearing – and feeling pain.

The lack of subjectivity in animals also closes them off from being holders of rights. Rights make no sense in the animal world because animals lack the capacity to exercise those rights in any meaningful way. The right to free speech for a cow, for example, is not just silly because cows cannot talk; it is silly, and demeaning to our real right to free speech, because cows cannot communicate anything meaningful period. The same is true of the right to work, the right to free passage, the right to education, and so on. These rights make no sense because cows lack the capacity to make them meaningful.

The diminished content of animal thinking and feeling denies them access to rights but it does not necessarily deny them access to welfare. We can and do advance welfare to members of our own species that have diminished capacity, so, Regan might ask reasonably, why not the animals?

Firstly there is always the possibility that our diminished human will get better, that medical science will provide the necessary breakthrough that leads to a cure. But there is a further contrast with animals that leads to the greater worth of our diminished human, which is the outside interests of society in general, and the family in particular. When a human being is lost the loss is felt at a social level. The potential that the human being represented to be productive, insightful and to provide a contribution passes with death and we mourn that loss. The loss is, of course, particularly acute for family and close friends who would have had first-hand experience of the actuality of the person's existence, and hopes and aspirations for the potential of the deceased. We do violence to the value a human being represented or could have represented if we treat a human instrumentally, even in death.

In contrast, animals never have any potential to do anything greater than their ancestors and direct contemporaries. Animals are not individual because while they may have distinct characteristics they lack the capacity to develop themselves and transform their existence. Animals are also not social because while they may live within groups, they lack the capacity to transform that group's behavior and they cannot take collective decisions within the group. In this sense, the value of animals is fixed such that it is always comparable to any other animal currently living, dead or projected into the future. When an animal dies, unless we have some particular association with the animal such as a pet, we do not mourn the passing because there is nothing to mourn. Animals never have the value that even deceased humans retain unless we provide some value through a human relation.

So it is that pets have a different value than zoo animals who have a different value than experimental animals. Animals have no “inherent value”, the value they have is that which is provided through a human relation.

The bottom line is that humans are special, but this is not a popular outlook – and for good reason. The twentieth century saw a series of calamities and disasters that battered our self-belief. The first and second world wars; the Great Depression; the Holocaust; the dropping of two nuclear weapons on populated cities; the appropriation of science for wars both hot and cold; and the general collapse of almost all social experiments aimed at changing the world for the better has left humanity feeling sorry for itself. We look in the mirror and see something a lot more brutish than it truly is, and we look at the animals and see more that is human than is truly there. The campaign for animal rights has gained greater purchase as pessimism surrounding the human condition has increased.

Scientists share in this pessimism as much as any other group and their defensiveness on the question of animal experimentation has sadly contributed to the increasing anti-human sentiment. The biggest concession to anti-humanism by animal researchers takes the form of the ‘3 Rs’ – Reduction, Replacement and Refinement. The 3 Rs are meant to remind researchers to *reduce* the number of animals they use, to *replace* animals with other techniques wherever possible, and to *refine* their techniques to involve the minimum of distress to the animal – thereby providing an element of protection for the welfare of the animals involved in research. The 3 Rs are, of course, a disaster for science, because it is not possible to advocate animal welfare and, at the same time, give animals’ untested drugs, diseases or to slice them open. Such a stance is profoundly dishonest and this crass act of duplicity is not hard to detect. Animal welfare is not the aim of animal experiments, human welfare is. To defend animal experimentation it is necessary to champion humanity.

I wonder how it ever got so difficult. For me, humans trump animals every time and it is right and proper that animals be sacrificed for the cause of humanity. If all animal experimentation were stopped the slowdown would be real and the cost would be high. Right now, for example, there are at least four compounds undergoing animal testing as a potential vaccine against malaria. Malaria kills 2.7 million people every year, over five people every minute, most of them children under the age of five. A delay in developing a vaccine by just one month would kill 225,000 people. Are we really so fed up with humanity that we would sacrifice ourselves and our children to save the monkeys?