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**ANIMAL
EXPERIMENTATION**

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INTRODUCTION

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NOTES

In 2013, the Home Office announced that the number of animals used in scientific experiments rose 8% between 2008 and 2012, reaching 4.11 million despite coalition pledges to lower it [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. While animal rights campaigners see this increase as evidence that the scientific community are failing to meet ethical duties to avoid harming animals [Ref: [Guardian](#)], advocates of animal testing claim its potential benefit to medical and scientific progress are a necessary evil outweighing other concerns [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. Two fundamental issues are at stake. First, there is the scientific question of the nature of the contribution that animal experiments make to medical and scientific progress. Second is the moral status of animals. These ethical issues first came to prominence in the 1970s when the publication of Peter Singer's book 'Animal Liberation' helped launch the animal rights movement.

KEY TERMS

3Rs (Replacement, Refinement and Reduction)

Speciesism

Vivisection



Animal Experimentation: a contemporary controversy

While the rights and wrongs of animal testing have been disputed for decades, today the issue remains controversial with a recent poll finding that public support has dropped since 2010 [Ref: [Financial Times](#)]. This may be due to the activities of animal rights groups who led Cambridge University to abandon its plans for a primate research lab in 2004 [Ref: [BBC News](#)] and have influenced the EU's decision to ban animal testing for cosmetic purposes and the sale of any cosmetic product tested on animals [Ref: [BBC News](#)]. On the other hand, the scientific community has been vocal in advocating animal research as illustrated by the Pro-Test demonstrations in 2006. In consequence, government policy today supports the scientific use of animals in experiments albeit with an emphasis on the principles of the 3Rs – Replacing, Refining and Reducing the use of animal testing where possible. Recent high profile controversy around Imperial College's alleged breach of the 3Rs has led animal rights groups to argue that more transparency is needed to safeguard animal welfare [Ref: [Huffington Post](#)]. As such, a range of universities, pharmaceutical companies and research councils released a 'Declaration of Openness' stating their commitment to public scrutiny's: "essential role in building the world-leading ethical framework" for research [Ref: [Understanding Animal Research](#)].

What are the moral arguments for and against animal experimentation?

The case against animal testing is rooted in an understanding of a shared moral status between humans and animals, as evidenced in their capacity to suffer pain [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Scientific theories that explain the common origins of humans and animals [Ref:

[Guardian](#)] have also been used by campaigners to justify animals the extension of some rights [Ref: [Project Syndicate](#)] as evidenced in the 2010 EU ban on 'great ape' experimentation [Ref: [Independent](#)]. In contrast, Emeritus Professor of Neuroscience at the University of Oxford, Colin Blakemore, argues that absolute bans: "simply replace a defensible, common-sense ethical boundary (between human beings and the rest of the animal world) with a dubious one (between the lucky banned species and the rest)" [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Many advocates of animal experimentation have therefore historically dismissed calls to expand our sphere of concern to animals because of their past and potential future contribution to scientific research [Ref: [BBC](#)]. "Testing on animals," says Hannah Devlin, science editor of The Times, "has been involved in almost every medical treatment that is available today — antibiotics, insulin, cancer drugs, heart surgery and organ transplantation" [Ref: [The Times](#)].

Are animals necessary for better research?

Similarly convinced, Lord Robert Winston recently proposed that drugs developed using animals should be labelled: "to demonstrate that [research] is being done for really important reasons" [Ref: [RSC](#)]. In opposition, campaigners like Jane Goodall have suggested that: "the insistence on animal research might actually be holding back medical progress" by preventing the development and application of new technologies [Ref: [The Times](#)] like computer modelling [Ref: [New Scientist](#)], human volunteers and in vitro cell cultures [Ref: [The Times](#)]. Evidence that animals are: "rarely necessary in producing medicines" has also left several recent investigations questioning the value



of animals to research [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. Proponents of testing counter this by pointing out that more effective research methods, not blanket bans might better reduce the number of animals tested [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. Others go further explaining that scientific discovery is as much about learning from failure as it is about practical outcomes [Ref: [spiked](#)]. Research is therefore justified beyond its medical benefits advancing broader understanding in other areas including veterinary science [Ref: [New York Times](#)].

What is at stake?

Animal rights theorist, Richard Ryder, coined the term 'speciesism' to describe prejudice against animals, on a par with racism or sexism [Ref: [Wikipedia](#)]. But most of us still recognise the distinction between humans and animals in our everyday lives, whether that be eating meat or putting our interests before those of our pets, for example. Can animal experimentation ever be carried out ethically, or is the subjection of animals to human need always barbaric? Will we always need animals for scientific advancement and if so would medicine suffer without them? Should we expand our sphere of moral concern to include animals on a more equal basis, or is there something unique about human beings that justifies us in using animals for our own ends?



ESSENTIAL READING

Number of animal experiments in Britain jumps 8% to 4.1million despite Coalition pledge

Fiona Macrae *Daily Mail* 16 July 2013

You won't find chimps having this debate

Richard Ryder vs Kenan Malik *Guardian* 13 June 2006

FOR

Criticism of Animal Research at Imperial College London

Michelle Thew *Huffington Post* 11 December 2013

Animal testing – its time to talk about it again

Bibi van der Zee *Guardian* 18 July 2013

Animal Testing isn't just an ethical problem – let's invest in safer methods

Andrew Knight *Guardian* 12 July 2013

So much animal pain, so little human gain

Jane Goodall *The Times* 17 March 2012

All beings that feel pain deserve human rights

Richard Ryder *Guardian* 6 August 2005

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NOTES

AGAINST

Am I the only person who thinks that 4.1 million animals used in medical experiments

Tom Chivers *Telegraph* 31 July 2013

Don't let the forces of unreason stop research

Hannah Devlin *The Times* 17 July 2013

We all agree about Cosmetics but we still need animals for medicine

Chris Magee *Huffington Post* 27 March 2013

A Necessary Evil

Colin Blakemore *Guardian* 4 June 2008

The hard arguments about vivisection

Stuart Derbyshire *spiked* 2 March 2006

IN DEPTH

Should medicines be tested on animals?

Hilarie Stelfox *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* 28 September 2013

The ethics of animal research

Simon Festing & Robin Wilkinson *EMBO reports* 2007



BACKGROUNDEERS

How animals can help us understand disease

Dr Alison Woollard *BBC* 28 December 2013

Concordat on Openness on Animal Research

Understanding Animal Research 19 November 2013

Apes Need Vaccines, Too

Jon L Vande Berg *New York Times* 1 August 2013

Animal testing: it's time the British public saw the reality for themselves

Victoria Martindale *Guardian* 2 March 2013

One in ten research projects using moneys has no benefit, finds review

Alok Jha *Guardian* 27 July 2011

What's human? What's animal? And what of the biology in between

Nik Brown *Guardian* 25 July 2011

Can Computer models replace animal testing?

Celeste Biever *New Statesmen* 16 May 2006

The Great Ape Debate

Peter Singer *Project Syndicate* 16 May 2006

In Our Time: Animal Experiments and Rights

BBC Radio 4 18 March 1999

An Ode to Science's Most Tested Critters

Huffpost Live

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NOTES

ORGANISATIONS

Animal Aid

British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV)

Dr Hawden Trust

National Anti-Vivisection Society

National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs)

PETA

Pro-Test

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)

The Great Ape Project

Understanding Animal Research



IN THE NEWS

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NOTES

Revealed: Ordinary laboratory animals are outnumbered by GM counterparts for first time

Independent 16 July 2013

Lord Bill proposes animal research labelling for medicines

Chemistry World 22 May 2013

EU bans sale of all animal-tested cosmetics

BBC News 11 March 2013

Animal testing poll is 'wake-up call'

Financial Times 19 October 2012

Animal rights activists halt transportation of laboratory animals

Independent 14 March 2012

New EU rules on animal testing ban use of apes

Independent 12 September 2010

New Stem cells will reduce the need for animal testing

The Times 4 May 2010

Primate research lab plans axed

BBC News 27 January 2004



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