



Animals Pass the Test

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Biomedical research on animals keeps company with such controversial topics as abortion, cloning and affirmative action. The controversy is understandable because there are many misconceptions about how the animals are used and how they are treated. But perhaps opponents wouldn't be so critical if they were more aware of the regulations that protect the animal subjects, the ethical considerations that are made, and the benefits that society has and gains every day through animal testing and biomedical research.

Firstly, there are innumerable products and procedures that save innumerable lives that can be attributed only to animal testing. Antibiotics, vaccines, insulin to treat Type I diabetes, open-heart surgery, transplants, and treatments for leukemia are all in practice today thanks to testing done on animals (RDS, 2006). In this we can see the benefit of animal testing not only to society as a whole, but also each of us as individuals.

There is a general misunderstanding surrounding animal testing that refers to products "not tested on animals" as "cruelty free" (AFA, 2006). In all reality, every product used in cosmetics and the like has been, at one time, tested on animals. When companies advertise that they do not test on animals, the truth is that specific company either does not conduct its own research or is using products that have previously been tested on animals by another company and proven safe for consumers. In addition, this testing is not "cruel," and so "cruelty free" advertising is misleading.

Critics also seem to fall under the impression that animal testing is performed on fluffy bunnies and some little boy's pet dog. This is false, and there are numbers to prove it. In fact, the Foundation for Biomedical Research estimates that 95% of all animals used in research are rats and mice bred specifically for that research (2006). That means that the vast majority of animals used in testing are rats and mice. Animals like cats and dogs account for less than $\frac{3}{4}$ % of the total number of research animals (FBR, 2006). In addition, these rats and mice on average very rarely experience pain, with the exception being those that feel only momentary pain such as injections or shots. Those animals that do experience pain are given anesthesia

and painkillers whenever possible (whenever they would not interfere with results).

Another myth about animal testing is that animals are too different from people to make research done on them credible or useful in human medicine. This is in fact untrue. Because humans have the same exact basic organs as animals, and these organs work together in the same way, the research is very relevant. According to C. Cornelius (1969) the major similarities outweigh the minor differences, though these minor differences are sometimes useful themselves.

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Researchers do not test to be cruel to animals. Most experiments involve only simple procedures such as diet changes and blood samples (RDS, 2006). In actuality, scientists have no reason to abuse laboratory animals, and in fact have all the more reason to treat them well. Unhealthy, stressed or frightened animals do not yield reliable results in testing. Researchers take care to make sure that animals are medically healthy, well fed and housed comfortably. In addition, there are laws and regulations that govern animal testing and research. In most cases laboratories must submit their research design for ethical review before they actually begin work (FBR, 2006). Supplemental to this, there are strict regulations when it comes to live animal research. These laws work together to make sure that animals are used and treated with respect.

One could argue that almost any person on earth would think it acceptable to sacrifice the health of a few mice in order to save the life of a friend or family member. It seems illogical not to. However, Bill Maher, a PETA spokesman and protester of animal lab testing, had this to say, "To those people who say, 'My father is alive because of animal experimentation,' I say, 'Yeah, well good for you. This dog died so your father could live.' Sorry, but I am just not behind that kind of trade-off." (FBR, 2006). The fact of the matter is, it is

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statistically not probable that animals died to save the father, and they almost definitely weren't dogs.

While one shouldn't wish to belittle the mouse, he or she might point out that in the grand scheme of things, we tend to value human lives far more than those of lab rats. Humans have the computational capacity to better our world, while rodents do not. Humans will someday cure cancer, rats spread rabies. However, be aware that humans are not the only species that benefits from animal research. On the contrary, several developments in veterinary medicine through animal lab testing help millions of animals world wide. The bottom line is that lab testing saves lives, human and animal alike.

Researchers use animals in the name of science and progress. Critics argue that animal testing is outdated and unnecessary because there are other research methods that yield the same results. Again, this is false. There is no substitute for a living model on which to study the effects and results of an experiment. While researchers have tried and continue to try to build models that simulate a living system, they have so far been unable to parallel the scientific information gained from research on live animals. There is virtually no doubt that if technology continues to develop at the current rate, there will one day soon be a model that can eliminate animal testing almost completely.

Until the time that a suitable model is developed however, researchers follow a few general rules when it comes to animal testing. They use the smallest number of animals as is possible during experimentation to reduce the overall number of animals tested. They use them only when absolutely necessary; that is, they replace animal testing with non-animal techniques

whenever possible (RDS, 2006). Researchers treat the animals humanely to reduce any pain or suffering that may be felt by the animal, and they use anesthetics whenever possible. All in all, researchers have a commitment to science, progress and respecting their animal subjects.

It has been said that supporting medical research and opposing animal research are mutually exclusive viewpoints; that is, one cannot happen while the other one happens. So, if one professes to support the medical research and advancement, they must support animal research because the two go hand in hand. If proper research is done, and arguments are based on fact, we see that animal testing is not cruel. Animals are not tortured, and they are not killed for frivolous reasons. They are continually treated with respect, and are used for noble purposes. Those who support progress and seek to advance knowledge must recognize that animal research is key to medical innovation. Animal research contributed in major ways to almost every medical advance of the last century, and that is why we must continue to support it (FBR, 2006).

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