

Exploring the Ethics of Animals in Research

Blythe Sinclair

Saint Mary's College of California

Abstract

Animals have been a part of human cultures dating all the way back to the ancient Egyptians who followed animal worship, but in modern culture, people of science have no problem with causing harm to innocent organisms. People have been protesting animal research since the 1870's, and still, very little has been done to try and reduce the use of animals in research. While animal research has been beneficial to important advances in medicine, too many animals of animal species have lost their lives because they were an experiment. The ethical aspect of this controversy has been ongoing, and an increasing amount of alternative methods and protective laws have been established to replace harmful animal research. It is these alternatives that should be implicated, and these laws that should be strictly enforced in all institutions using animals as experiments. The ignorance of the human species has led to an inexcusable level of animal mistreatment due to lack of regard for the animal's wellbeing during and even after the treatment, and more should be done to severely limit the use of animals in research.

Exploring the Ethics of Animals in Research

Ancient cultures around the world, including the Egyptians in 3,100 B.C. and the Greeks in 350 B.C., contained ways of life that placed high value on animals. Most of these cultures preached respect for all living things, shaming any harm and dishonor of animals. Why is it then, that modern culture deems it morally acceptable to bring harm to innocent animals? Human members involved in research are protected by an extensive amount of restrictions, whereas animals are allowed to be experimented on as long as they are treated humanely (Feist and Rosenberg, 2014). The debate on the ethics of animal researching has been pertinent for around 145 years, animal activists and animal rights groups pushing to eliminate use of animals in research, and men of science advocating to maintain animal research. While it's true that some experiments that used animals as subjects have led to significant discoveries in biology, psychology, and other areas of science, it is the trials leading up to the successful ones where the animals suffer the most. Regardless of the few guidelines and organizations that maximize the care that goes into handling research animals, more steps should be taken to enforce stricter standards on using animals as test subjects in institutions.

There are five parts to the research process in science: observe, predict, test, interpret, and communicate. Theories are tested, investigating outcomes and generating expectations. It is these theories and hypotheses that are tested through research method selected depending on the topic and goal of the hypothesis. There are a multitude of research methods, but there is one that is most commonly turned to in biological psychology specifically: animal research (Feist and Rosenberg, 2014). Animals have been a component of scientific research since around 350 B.C., even though many of the cultures respected animals highly (Hajar, 2011).

Majority of ancient cultures involved animals, and their high regard for them. Egyptians practiced animal worship, using animals to represent physical forms of their gods and goddesses, and sometimes animals were buried and treated the same as humans. Ancient Hindus in India thought that both humans and animals were reincarnated after death, implying that they, among all forms of life, should be respected the same. Similar to the Egyptians, they believed that their divine gods could take on the form of animals. The fifth and fourth centuries in China brought Taoism, which believed “the path” of life was to respect all things living and nonliving alike. In comparison, Judaism established dominance over animals, yet still showed care for them. According to their Bible, God granted dominance over all the animals in the world that were created, yet when the great flood, happened two of each animal were saved (Library Index, 2015). Although it’s clear that some religions perceived animals higher than others, the common denominator in all of their beliefs is that they did care for the animals and their well-being, treating them more or less like a human being, unlike cultures and beliefs in science today.

Greek, Moorish Spanish, and other physicians were the pioneers of animal experimenting, using them to develop a better understanding of scientific divisions like physiology, as well as test procedures before applying them to humans (Hajar, 2011). Since then, people have been protesting the use of animals in biomedical research, trying to push for laws to diminish animal use, or at least make it more humane. One of the biggest controversies on animal experimenting is why animals aren’t treated the same as humans. As human beings, we are technically animals too, so why shouldn't they be treated the same as us? Scientists point out that animals can’t offer consent to experimentation, but acknowledge that, if the animals were capable of giving consent, they would more than likely oppose the experimentation. Yet, they

still proceed with dangerous and extremely risky tests, using the excuse that, since it has led to many disease treatments, it is acceptable (Feist and Rosenberg, 2014). Many organizations and laws have been passed to support that animals being used in scientific research are to be taken care of and treated as humanely as possible.

Many organizations have dedicated their time and efforts to stand up for the rights of animals. Unfortunately, there is only one law in the U.S. that serves to protect animal's rights, and it only provides minimal standards for animal welfare like housing, care, and psychological well-being. The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) was established in 1966 and manages the care of animals in testing, transport, and research. While acknowledging the fact that it's a step in the direction of helping the animals, it's impossible to ignore that the AWA only provides protection for animals that are uncommon in experiments, disregarding the most common species like birds, rats, mice, and cold-blooded animals. Ultimately, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is in charge of enforcing the regulations of the AWA. While both the USDA and the AWA propose to ensure supposedly "humane" animal treatment, there are infinite gaps in dictations that serve as loopholes for treatment of animals (neavs.com, 2015). Organizations like these are the reason why more laws should be passed with more specific regulations that ensure the safety and minimization of discomfort, pain, infection, and illness for the animals.

While it is discomfoting to see the way some of the animals are treated due to the loopholes and lack of ethical consideration when examining research proposals, it is this lack of ethics that have lead to numerous breakthrough discoveries in science. Studies in the past that didn't have to pass animal care regulations have turned out to provide exponential information about humans and their various behaviors like social, developmental, comparative, and

biological perspectives on human development. These studies have provided the scientific world with controlled “avenues to answer clinically relevant questions that simply could not be addressed with human studies,” (Bennett, 2012). In response to those who argue that it is due to this that animals should continue to be insidiously experimented on, animal rights activists retort that there are other methods that can be used to make similar discoveries without harming animals.

Some technological advances have been made which allow scientists to make observations and conclusions that used to be made through animals surgery, eliminating one excuse scientists use to cut into the brain of an innocent animal (Feist and Rosenberg, 2014). In addition, alternative medical tests can be used to attain the same results as with animals, like in vitro testing, where cell samples are taken from animals or human and prepared and studied by labs, microfluidic chip testing, where chips are implanted to create a flow through the body to record data, and computer simulations (Hastings Center Report, 2012).

Overall, animals are taken advantage of by the arrogant dominant human species with little to no regard for their health during or after the tests. Scientists become consumed with replication of data and can be driven to extremes to replicate, throwing their ethics and morals out the window. The few organizations that are implemented in the science world are doing little to increase the ethics of animal research, and more alternatives must be used to put an end to our harmful ways.

References

Feist, Rosenberg. (2014). *Perspectives and Connections Vol. 1*. 42, 66, 68.

Hajar, Rachel. (2011). Animal Testing and Medicine. *PMC*. Retrieved from [http://
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/)

(2015). Laws and Regulations. *neavs*. Retrieved from <http://www.neavs.org/>

Bennett, Allyson. (2012). Animal research: The bigger picture and why we need psychologists to speak out. *American Psychological Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/>