CHAPTER 6: EXPERIMENTING ON ANIMALS; ANIMALS IN EDUCATION

Overview

This Chapter we will consider perhaps the most controversial ethical issues concerning animals, namely questions about the morality of animal experimentation and research for medical, scientific, psychological, educational and veterinary purposes. These issues are often considered most controversial because, unlike using animals for clothing, entertainment or even food, it is claimed that animal research provides significant medical benefits for humans that, some claim, could not be attained any other way than by using animals. Thus, this is an area where animals’ and humans’ interests are said to unavoidably conflict. This Chapter we will attempt to evaluate claims about the scientific and medical merit of animal experimentation, as these might be relevant to its morality (or the might not), and directly attempt to determine the morality of various kinds of animal use in science, medicine, education and research.

Readings

ANIMAL LIBERATION – 2. Tools for Research . . . your taxes at work

EMPTY CAGES – 10. Turning Animals into Tools

ANIMALS LIKE US – Ch. 6. Using Animals for Experiments

Gruen: 4. Animal research (optional)


Adrian Morrison; “Personal Reflections on the “Animal-Rights” Phenomenon”: http://www.the-

Charles Nicoll & Sharon Russell: selections at http://ethicsandanimals.googlepages.com/nicoll%26russellona nimalethics


Recommended Reading & Viewing:
Some advocates of animal experimentation:

- **Americans for Medical Progress:**
  http://www.amprogress.org

- **Foundation for Biomedical Research:**
  http://www.fbresearch.org/

- **National Association for Biomedical Research:**
  http://www.nabr.org/
• American Association for Laboratory Animal Science
  http://www.aalas.org/
Some critics of animal experimentation:
  Scientific:
  • Americans For Medical Advancement:
    http://curedisease.com
  • Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM):
    http://pcrm.org/resch/
  • Medical Research Modernization Committee:
    http://www.mrmcmed.org
  Ethical:
  • HSUS: http://www.hsus.org/animals_in_research/
  • PETA: http://www.stopanimaltests.org
  • AAVS: http://www.aavs.org/
  • NEAVS: http://www.neavs.org/
  • NAVS: http://www.navs.org
Science Does Not Answer Moral Questions

An important thing to remember in discussing the morality of animal experimentation is that \textit{science does not answer moral questions}. What benefits (if any) that result from any kind of experiment (human or animal) do not \textit{in themselves} show that some experiment is morally justified. That occurs only in conjunction with moral principles and moral reasons, and those aren’t determined by the science. Making arguments logically valid can make this clear because then it will be obvious that there’s a “leap” from some claim about benefits or scientific results to a, \textit{therefore}, doing this is morally permissible. As stated, the conclusion does not yet follow.

Theoretical Foundations and Unprincipled Responses

One way of addressing moral questions it to appeal to moral principles and general theories of morality and moral reasoning: philosophers often approach issues that way, and so it is often clear what their moral arguments are and what reasons are given for their premises. Many defenders of animal experimentation do not follow this pattern however and so we must make premises and conclusions clear and precise and, if needed, add the missing premise(s) needed to reveal the full pattern of reasoning. Here are a number of common arguments given in defense of animal experimentation that should be addressed before we get to the readings:

“Benefits” Arguments

Many people argue that there are medical benefits for humans that result from animal experimentation, e.g., treatments and cures for diseases, improvements in health, and so forth – and that, therefore, animal experimentation is morally permissible. The suggested argument is this:

(P1) Animal experimentation benefits humans.
(C) Therefore, animal experimentation is morally permissible.
There are many problems with this argument. First, (P1) is imprecise in many ways. Much animal experimentation is done without any expectation that it will yield (medical) benefits for humans. So (P1) should claim that some animal experimentation benefits humans. But there is more imprecision. It either says:

(P2) Some animal experimentation benefits some humans,

or

(P3) Some animal experimentation benefits all humans.

(P3) is false. About 30,000 people, many of whom are children, die each day from starvation, malnutrition, and lack of very basic medical care.¹ These people, and at least millions of other humans, do not benefit from it. About (P2), as it is stated, few scientific, humanistic and/or ethical critics of animal experimentation deny it. There have been many, many experiments on animals. To claim that not one of them has led to any benefits for any humans – even just by good luck – would be to claim something false. So (P2) is true: some humans benefit medically from some animal experimentation. Some people seem to think this automatically shows that animal experimentation is morally permissible. Oddly, they often seem to think this supports a more precise conclusion that all animal experiments are permissible, even those that do not lead to any benefits for humans and are expected not to. But no such conclusions follow, for many reasons. First, just because some humans benefit from something does not entail that it is morally permissible for them to get it: e.g., some people might benefit from an extremely expensive medical procedure, or from receiving vital organs taken from living, healthy people. But those benefits

¹ Peter Singer’s One World: The Ethics of Globalization (Yale, 2002) provides information and arguments for the conclusion that we are morally obligated to assist people in absolute poverty. See also his The Life You Can Save and more recent books on absolute poverty:
http://www.thelifeyoucansave.org
do not automatically justify directing so much money toward them (at the expense of others) or killing innocent people to take those organs.

To assume something different about animal cases – i.e., that it is morally permissible to seriously harm animals to benefit humans – just assumes that animal experimentation is permissible: it does not give any reasons in favor of that. As we saw above, common claims about rights, importance, and moral status do not justify this assumption, but perhaps arguments discussed below will help justify it.

“Necessity” Arguments

Related to the argument from benefits is the argument from “necessity” or the claim that animal experiments are “essential”: “animal experiments are ‘necessary’; therefore, they are morally permissible.” To evaluate this argument, we must first ask what is meant by “necessary”? There is a sense of the term on which animal experimentation clearly is necessary: to do experiments on animals, it is necessary to do experiments on animals. This is true because to do any exact, particular action, it is necessary to do that action. Whatever is truly meant by “necessity,” an advocate of these arguments assumes a moral premise like the following:

If doing some action is “necessary,” then it is morally permissible.

For some meanings of “necessity” animal experimentation advocates attach to that claim, it will likely be false to say that all, or even much, animal experimentation is “necessary.” For these meanings, this moral principle will have no application. There are other meanings of “necessary,” e.g., that to say something is “necessary” could be to say that, “it couldn’t be achieved in any other way.” On this meaning, many animal experiments are “necessary.” But, on this meaning, some human vivisection is also “necessary” since some benefits from it also “cannot be achieved in any other way.” The principle above implies such vivisection is not wrong, but it is, so the above
principle is arguably false.

“No Alternatives” Arguments

The same critical observations can be given about arguments from there allegedly being “no alternatives” to animal experimentation: that’s likely false and that doesn’t seem to automatically make doing something morally permissible either.

“Painless” and “Humane” Killing, Again

In the context of experimentation, we also hear the “if the animals are killed painlessly, then that’s morally OK” assumption. Again, we should notice that we reject it about ourselves. In most cases, if we were killed, even “painlessly,” we would be deprived of our (hopefully valuable) futures: everything we would have experienced is taken from us. Insofar as animals have futures, and killing them prevents them from experiencing those futures (and any of the good experiences they would have had), it seems that the same basic reasons why it is wrong to kill us apply to many animals. So the assumption that “painless killing is automatically morally permissible” should be, at least, strongly doubted: good reasons would need to be given its favor.

Logic and Keeping Cool

While animal ethics, especially about animal experimentation and related issues, can be a heated topic, logic can help keep you cool. Find conclusions, ask for reasons, and demand a fair and impartial evaluation of those reasons. Keep the ethics and the science straight, and remember that scientific results have moral implications only in light of moral principles. By taking this course, you have more “ethics training” than nearly all scientists who defend animal use, so make use of your skills!
Discussion Questions

1. For many ethical issues, a good place to start is to reflect on “common views” about the issues. Suppose you surveyed a range of people and asked them whether it’s morally permissible (or even morally obligatory) to experiment on animals and why. What are some of the most common answers that would be given? What reasons would you often hear in favor of these answers? Are these reasons generally good reasons or not? Why?

2. Describe how animals are treated by in medical, scientific, psychological, educational and industrial experimentation and research: what happens to animals when used for these purposes? What are the facts? How do these industries describe how they treat animals? Are they correct in their description of the facts?

3. Explain the strongest moral arguments for the conclusions that animal experimentation is (nearly always) wrong and/or that an experiment on an animal is wrong unless the experimenters would be willing to perform the experiment on a similarly conscious and sentient human infant. Are these arguments sound or not? Explain and defend your views.

4. Summarize the wide range of activities and methods of research that can be (and is) done to improve human health and cure disease that does not involve animals.

5. Explain the strongest and/or most common moral arguments for the conclusions that (a) animal experimentation is almost never wrong, indeed it’s often morally obligatory and/or (b) animal experimentation is morally justified when it is “necessary” because there are “no alternatives” to produce the desired benefits. Are these arguments sound or not? Explain and defend your views.

Of course, always feel free to raise any other questions, observations, criticisms and any other responses to the Chapter’s
readings and issues.

**Paper option**

What, if any, kind of medical, scientific, psychological, commercial/industrial, educational and/or *veterinary* experimentation or research (and other uses, e.g., dissections) are morally permissible? Which are morally impermissible? Thoroughly defend your view and respond to the strongest and/or most common objections to your arguments. 4-6 pages.