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What is Your Drive? Science or Ethics?

Year

2002

Description

This case examines the costs and benefits of using animals in research, particularly chimps and higher primates.

Body

Frank Golden was an undergraduate, working on the finishing touches of his biology degree. He planned to continue his education in a doctoral program and wanted to further his knowledge in his area, immunobiology. Frank's university was associated with one of the eight main primate facilities in the United States. He felt that if he could secure a position with the facility it would help his chances when applying to graduate school the following year. Soon after graduation, Frank was hired as an animal care provider/technician and was assigned to the main facility where HIV research was conducted on chimpanzees.

Frank was assigned to be the care provider for a chimpanzee named Vern. Vern was infected with HIV by researchers eight years before Frank began working at the facility. Throughout that time, even though chimpanzees are known to be social animals, Vern was housed alone, so he would not infect other chimpanzees. Soon after Frank arrived, Vern began showing symptoms of the virus. As a result the facility determined that Vern had developed AIDS. He was the first chimpanzee said to have developed the fatal disease.

During his time at the research facility, Frank became quite attached to Vern and realized how similar apes are to humans (Byrne, 1997; Fouts, 1997). He witnessed Vern's debilitation from the pain of the disease and his endless days of suffering without relief. During the last excruciating months of Vern's life, it was obvious to many that he could only be comforted by his friend, Frank.

Frank's feelings and interests changed. He decided he no longer wanted to pursue a graduate career in this field, but he kept his position until Vern's death. One day, Frank was asked to assist in a procedure that would infect another young, healthy chimpanzee with HIV. Frank followed through with the request so he would not lose his job. He desperately wanted to stop the procedure because he was aware of the suffering Vern had endured. He watched as the virus was injected into the healthy chimpanzee.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Frank's response to the dilemma was appropriate? Why or why not?
2. In regard to Frank's change in attitude, is there an alternative solution that would satisfy both his desire to stay with Vern and to not participate in this type of research?
3. What are the benefits in allowing the research to proceed?
 - For Frank?
 - For the research facility?
 - For chimpanzees (and other nonhuman animals)?
 - For society?
4. What potential harm is there in allowing the research to continue?
 - For Frank?
 - For the research facility?
 - For chimpanzees (and other nonhuman animals)?
 - For society?
5. What are the obligations of the research facility?
 - To Frank?
 - To themselves?

- To the chimpanzees (and other non-human animals)?
- To society?

6. Given the heated debate regarding the similarities of cognitive capabilities between chimpanzees and human, should we start weighing the costs and benefits of the research for the chimpanzee? Why or why not?

7. Do you feel that the chimpanzee should be considered a participant/subject in the research? If so, what implications would this model have for research?

Notes

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