

# Author's Commentary on "What is Your Drive? Science or Ethics?"

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## Background

Two main issues arise in this case. The first is whether it is moral to use animals in fatal research for the benefit of humans, and the second is whether it is moral to use chimpanzees in research. The first issue may appear to be moot since most of the animal research conducted today results in the animals' death. Social acceptance may legitimize the research, but social acceptability does not make an act moral.

Animal research is a highly debated topic, and many philosophers and ethicists have developed strong arguments for and against this issue. For example, in his book *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer (1975) proposed the view that any organism capable of feeling forms of pleasure, pain and distress must be included under the umbrella of ethical consideration. In essence, Singer argued that animals matter because their pain matters. Singer did not maintain that all animal experimentation was wrong, but he felt the issue could be settled by the cost/benefit analysis. He argued that a standard must be established that required the predicted benefits of the research to outweigh the costs to the animals, and that the benefits must not be achievable in any other way (Singer, 1975). Largely, this standard is not met; therefore, Singer would consider much of the research now being conducted unjustified.

In this same camp, Tom Regan held a more extreme view. Regan argued that animals have rights not be harmed just because they are "subjects of a life." In other words, any entity has an inherent value, which is not conditional nor a value that has to be earned. Stated simply, an animal's life course and set of interests characteristic of that animal should be sufficient to warrant protection for that animal (Regan, 1983).

Lastly, Bernard Rollin (1989) challenged the idea that there is a right to do research on animals, and he pointed out the lengths to which some researchers will go to deny that any animal suffering is occurring.

On the other side of the debate, Carl Cohen (1986) argued that although we have an obligation to avoid treating animals badly, any notion of rights is ludicrous when applied to animals. For Cohen, rights are given to members of moral communities, who have the ability to make reciprocal agreements, such as a human research subject saying "stop" in the middle of a study that he/she had previously consented to (Gluck and DiPasquale, 2002).

This topic continues to be debated. Even though there is no valid conclusion as to whether it is humans' right to experiment on animals, research on animals continues.

The second issue relates to the type of animal used in this case study, namely, a chimpanzee. Some of the theories for and against the right to use animals in research are based on the cognitive abilities of humans versus animals. Cohen's (1986) argument for example, is based on humans' ability to meet certain cognitive criteria such as consciousness, self-awareness and intentions, which affords them rights. With the award of higher cognitive abilities comes increased moral protection, hence animals are used in more invasive research instead of humans. Following Cohen's view, one could insist that this whole matter of whether animal research is justified could be resolved by saying that animals do not share the same degree of relevant characteristics that humans do. All in all, humans are just more intelligent.

A problem with this proposal is that not all humans share the same level of intelligence, and in fact, some humans are far less intelligent than others. How should we treat humans who fall below the standard, a standard that has justified human experimentation on animals? It seems an entity must have two human parents in order to be protected.

The cognitive characteristics that are used to differentiate humans from nonhuman animals are not so clear-cut. Byrne's book, *The Thinking Ape* (1997), cites the majority of research that has been conducted on cognition in chimpanzees. Chimpanzees have been observed for many years, both in the wild and in captivity. Fouts and his research team (1997) have communicated with their captive

chimpanzees with sign language, showing chimpanzees' higher cognitive capabilities. Other studies conducted with chimpanzees showed the animal's capacity for self-awareness as in the study where a red dot was placed on a chimpanzee's head without her knowledge. When the chimpanzee was looking at herself in the mirror and saw the red dot, she took it off her forehead instead of trying to get it off the mirror (Byrne, 1997). Many more studies conducted by field biologists, psychologists, linguists and ethologists have supported the existence of greater cognitive capability in chimpanzees (Byrne, 1997). The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) recognized chimpanzees' cognitive abilities, and the 1995 amendments require better housing standards and enrichment for chimpanzees in research. Other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have banned the use of chimpanzees in research since 1998 (Orlans, 2002).

This background brings us to the dilemma of using chimpanzees in research. On one hand, chimpanzees are given greater protection through the AWA due to their "higher" level of cognition, but on the other hand, since chimpanzees are most similar to us genetically (98.4 percent), they are more commonly sought as animal models to research highly fatal diseases in humans, which frequently results in the death of the chimpanzees, a very ironic twist.

## **Case Study Discussion**

In this case, Frank was a worker in a large primate facility. His career goals and interests changed during his employment. It appears that Frank's main goal became the care of the chimpanzee, Vern. In this context, Frank responded appropriately when faced with the dilemma of whether to participate in the infection of another chimpanzee. If Frank had protested he could have been fired, which would have prevented his caring for Vern until his death.

By collaborating with the facility and allowing the research to proceed, Frank benefited directly by ensuring he could keep his job. The research facility benefited financially from the continuation of the research. However, the research subjects, chimpanzees, do not benefit at all. In fact, they are harmed by the continuance of the research. It is not clear whether society benefits directly from this research. There is a potential direct benefit to society, which will occur only if the research succeeds.

When assessing any research protocol, a balance is sought between cost and benefit. By allowing the research to continue, Frank is potentially harmed because he is acting against his beliefs. Frank may feel somewhat responsible for the infection of another healthy chimpanzee. In contrast, the research facility does not experience any harm by continuing the research, but the chimpanzees experience the greatest harm of all, death. Lastly, society is not affected by allowing the research to continue. In fact, society may not be aware that it is going on. When the subjects of research are human, huge weight is placed on the idea that the cost to the subject should not outweigh the direct benefit to the subject. However, animals are not afforded the same justice when they are the subjects of research. In this case, for example, the party that benefited least and was harmed the most were the chimpanzees.

If in fact, chimpanzees were considered "subjects" in research, not just "materials," would it change the cost/benefit assessment? Probably not. At this time, animals are not given the same rights or moral standing as humans.

The motivation behind the continuation of the research is the research facility's obligation to society. Humans are considered superior to all other animals; therefore, society has sought the use of nonhuman animals to benefit humans in a variety of ways. The research facility uses governmental funding (as well as private funding) to search for cures for fatal diseases in humans. Many diseases have been prevented in humans due to animal research. It is the obligation of this primate facility to try to find a cure for the AIDS epidemic in humans. The facility's obligation to Frank is stated in his job description. The facility's obligation to themselves is to produce findings that will bring in more money. The facility's obligation to the chimpanzees is to conduct the research with minimal amount of pain and suffering. In this case, the research facility does not appear to follow through on that responsibility. Vern spent many agonizing years full of pain and discomfort with the purpose being unclear. Instead, Vern should have been humanely euthanized to end his pain and suffering.

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