

Are ape rights the next frontier? Turner, Pamela S..

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Point: Apes Need Rights

While most great apes remain in the wild, about 1,100 chimpanzees are being used in biomedical research in the United States right now, according to Lori Gruen, Director of the Ethics in Society Project at Wesleyan University. Jane Goodall has worked for many decades to improve conditions for research animals, but she would like to see the practice come to an end. In her book *Reason for Hope* she writes: "What is done to animals in the name of science is often, from the animals' point of view, pure torture--and would be regarded as such if perpetrated by anyone who was not a scientist."

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Chimps held in captivity are considered "threatened" by the U.S. government, but these animals have not been given the higher "endangered" status, because it would place more restrictions on their use in biomedical research. In the current situation, captive chimpanzees have less protection than wild chimpanzees, according to Sarah Baeckler, a primatologist with the Animal Legal Defense Fund. "This allows for their exploitation," she says.

In 1999, all of the European Union nations signed the Treaty of Amsterdam, which recognizes animals as sentient beings, capable of feeling fear and pain. Since 1999, New Zealand, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Austria have banned medical research that uses chimpanzees. The only two countries besides the United States that still allow biomedical research on chimpanzees are China and Japan.

"The United States is sorrowfully, pitifully behind," says Marc Beckoff, author and professor emeritus at the University of Colorado, Boulder. "It's a very sad situation when we have to grant chimpanzees legal rights in order to protect them. Why don't we just do that out of the goodness of our hearts?"

To save human lives is no excuse for hurting or killing animals, Beckoff insists, "There's always sufficient non-animal alternatives. People say they have to do it. But if there were a moratorium on animal research for six months, people would come to the fore with non-animal alternatives."

And what about the argument that breeding animals just for medical research is not cruel, because these animals are made solely for our purposes anyway? Goodall responds to such thinking in her book *Reason for Hope*. She states that even if the

animals are bred for the purpose of medical research, "... does this make them, somehow less pig? Less monkey? Less dog? Does this deprive them of feelings and the capacity to suffer? If we raised humans for medical experiments, would they be less human and suffer less and matter less than other humans?"

Some animal rights advocates want person status for all animals with developed emotions and intellects. "Chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans experience emotions in much the same way as humans do," says Baeckler. "They express happiness, sadness, fear, sorrow and all sorts of other emotions. Many of these emotions are evident from their complex communications systems, which include facial expressions and vocalizations."

They also appear to be capable of empathy, altruism, self-awareness, and cooperation. Dr. Frans de Waal, primatologist and director of the Living Links Center at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, says that the fact that chimpanzees groom each other shows they have a sense of fairness and sharing. Chimps have also been observed helping a frightened young chimp down from a tree, an example of empathy. Dr. de Waal has noted that female chimpanzees have removed stones from the hands of males about to fight. Other scientists have observed a group of chimpanzees consoling the loser in a fight between two chimps.

Steven Wise, an animals' rights attorney, concludes, "We shouldn't do anything to a great ape that you wouldn't do to a human. Whether we need to do it or not, it's wrong."

Pamela S. Turner (including reporting by Peg Lopata)

COUNTERPOINT: But Research on Apes Helps Cure Human Disease

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

"Animal research has been responsible for nearly every medical health advancement we have today," says Jim Newman of the Oregon Health and Science University, Portland. He points out that advancements in medical care for animals depend upon using animals in research too.

Vaccines such as polio, tetanus, diphtheria, Hepatitis B, and small pox were all developed using animals. "It would be safe to say that when an AIDS cure is found, animals will have played an important role," says Dr. Eric Sandgren, scientist and director of the Animal Care Use Program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. "If an AIDS vaccine is developed without using animals, that means all the potential vaccines will have to be tested in humans. And many of them will fail," he says.

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) now requires that new medicines be tested first on animals before they can be tested on humans. However, Thalidomide, a sedative used from the 1957 to 1961 in many countries, wasn't tested on animals first. Pregnant mothers who used the drug had babies with deformed or missing limbs. Scientists say using animals could have prevented this tragedy.

Ironically, one of the purposes of animal use in research is to try to find ways to reduce or eliminate such use in future studies. For example, many toxicity studies today no longer require the use of animals. "As we learn more, we are better able to mimic conditions outside the body for many studies that once required animals," says Newman.

Rules from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Institutes of Health, and various universities all control animal research. But, according to Tom Gordon, associate director of the Yerkes National Primate Research Center at Emory University, "the ethical guideline under which we work is: You don't work with live animals when there's an alternative approach available that would allow you to gain the same information."

According to the researchers, nobody wants to use animals unless it is completely necessary. "The only way to answer some complex questions, especially those regarding understanding disease, is by using a complex system a whole, living organism," says Sandgren. And the practice does save human lives. "One of my employees in her early forties developed cancer that couldn't be cured," he says. "She received donated white blood cells, but they were rejected by her body. She died." Sandgren points out that stem Cell research might have saved her life. And how was stem cell research first done? In mice, then in rhesus macaques. "The research would have been impossible without mouse work first," says Sandgren. Stem cell researchers recently turned a skin cell into a stem cell. This research too was conducted using rhesus macaques. Stem cells could also be used to treat such diseases as paralysis, diabetes, and Parkinson's disease.

Thanks to animal advocates and concerned researchers, animal care practices continue to improve. At the Oregon Health and Science University, whenever possible, monkeys are housed together. At the University of Wisconsin's facility, animals are stimulated with puzzles that earn them food rewards and toys. When animals have to be killed so their bodies can be studied, they are humanely euthanized.

But until there is a way to replicate the complexity of a whole organism, using animals will continue. "For now at least, as a society, we have decided that it is reasonable and ethical to do a certain amount of basic biomedical research using animal models," says Gordon. "But that's if, and only if, we do it in a very, very humane fashion."

Kathiann M. Kowalski (including reporting by Peg Lopata)

Euthanized--Having ended the life of an animal (or person) that is usually suffering from a terminal illness or incurable condition, as by lethal injection or suspension of extraordinary care

FOR MORE INFORMATION, go to:

Animal Legal Defense Fund, Inc. (www.aldf.org)

Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights (www.cefr.org)

National Association for Biomedical Research (www.nabr.org)

Americans for Medical Progress (www.amprogress.org)

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Are animal experiments right or wrong? Should primates or other animals be legally protected as persons? Send your thoughts to RIGHT or NOT? ODYSSEY, 30 Grove St. Suite C, Peterborough, NH 03458. Or email it to odysseymagazine@caruspub.com.

Editor's Note: As we learn more about the culture and emotions of the great apes, a controversy is heating up over whether they should have "person" status under the law. Here, ODYSSEY looks at both sides of the issue as it pertains to apes used in medical research.