

So *Why* Does Animal Experimentation Matter?

Ellen Frankel Paul and Jeffrey Paul, eds. 2001. *Why Animal Experimentation Matters: The Use of Animals in Medical Research*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 224 pp. \$24.95 (paperback); \$49.95 (hardback).

Reviewed by Nathan Nobis, University of Rochester

The authors of these eight essays attempt to defend animal research on moral and scientific grounds. Advocates of vivisection should find the book a serious disappointment.

Frey's essay, "Justifying Animal Experimentation: The Starting Point," should have been at the start of the book. Instead it is hidden as the last chapter. Frey notes that most supporters of vivisection attempt to justify it by appealing to its benefits for humans. But, he argues, this defense is subject to serious objections:

Whatever benefits animal experimentation is thought to hold in store for us, those very same benefits could be obtained through experimenting on humans instead of animals. Indeed, given that problems exist because scientists must extrapolate from animal models to humans, one might think there are good scientific reasons for preferring human subjects. (200)

Frey sets the challenge for the other authors: to explain why, morally, no humans can be subject to the kinds of experiments that animals are subject to and to explain how researchers can reliably use animal models to understand and cure human disease. He thinks that the first challenge has not been met; the second challenge is, unfortunately, not directly addressed in this book.

Morrison states that he "abhors" positions like Frey's, Singer's and Regan's. He asserts that all "human beings stand apart in a moral sense from all other species" (51) and that all are worthy of "special consideration" (50). Regrettably, he fails to defend his view by identifying the morally relevant characteristics that all humans (even those with less intelligence, sentience, and autonomy than animals) possess and all animals lack that might make his claim true. That omission prevents him from rationally criticizing opposing views.

To defend vivisection, Morrison appeals to "self-preservation," he explains (oddly), "in the larger sense, of helping the weak and the helpless from those who consider themselves competent to decide the fate of others" (51). Of course, "self preservation" might justify experimenting on humans: he never explains why that would be wrong. Animal advocates hold that *all* who are "weak and helpless" should be protected from those who, like Morrison, deem themselves competent to decide their fate. Morrison divines that vivisectionists have "God's blessing" (51); one wonders how he would respond to theologians who suspect otherwise.

Appeals to evolution are made in an attempt to justify a moral view that is poorly disguised as a "biological perspective." Nicholl and Russell state (falsely) that, "Evolution has endowed us with a need to know as much as we can" (164). Morrison claims that, "to refrain from exploring nature in every possible way would be an arrogant rejection of evolutionary forces" (56). Is it "arrogant" then to not perform painful and lethal experiments on humans since that is a *possible* way to explore nature and satisfy our "need to know"? Obviously not. In fact, we are often morally required to resist "evolutionary forces." And the way things *are* or *have been* never entails how things *ought* to be: evolutionary facts never, in themselves, justify moral views.

Nicholl and Russell, however, think moral arguments are "beside the point in terms of providing justification for our exploitation of animals" (150) because, they claim, this is necessary for our survival. They claim "it is an evolutionary necessity to regard one's own kind as more important than other species" (165). Biologically this is false: if anything is an "evolutionary necessity," it is that *one's own* genes get passed down. No moral imperative follows from that, and no constraint against using humans follows either.

Nicholl and Russell cry "double standard" (162) when animal advocates criticize human cruelty to animals but are silent on animal predation. They take moral advice from animals. They claim that since animals cannot claim or understand the concept of rights animals cannot have rights, but forget that some humans can do neither. Their sociological observations about animal advocates and their diagnosis that they are "adaptively unfit" (166) are irrelevant. They conclude that unnecessary animal suffering should be avoided but just sentences earlier claim that theorizing about duties to animals is a "pointless enterprise" (168). Their and Morrison's attempt at doing moral philosophy is a disaster. Stronger and more careful criticisms of Singer and Regan are found elsewhere, but not in this volume.

Tannenbaum worries about what might happen if vivisectionists were required to ensure animals not only "freedom from unnecessary or unjustifiable pain or distress, but to well-being, pleasure, and even happy lives" (93). This is especially worrisome, according to him, because calls for this moral consideration come from within the research community itself. He worries that more scientists will see

animals as “friends,” not “research tools,” and that animal research will then stop.

Stuart Zola notes that the distinction between “basic” and “applied” animal research is not clear. He expresses worries about restrictions on projects “devoted simply to increasing knowledge” that *might* have “serendipitous” results (90). No calculations of and comparisons to the serendipitous results from nonanimal research are provided.

Brody suggests that since there are “special obligations” between humans (e.g., parents to children), there also are “special obligations” to humans that require “discounting” comparable animal interests. But no special obligations to our friends or family allow us to discount strangers’ and even enemies’ interests so much that, to try to benefit ourselves, we deliberately inflict pain, suffering and death on them and treat them as animals in laboratories are treated. He criticizes impartial moral thinking but, fairly, notes that his partialist approach requires further reflection. To avoid begging the question, it is clear that *much* more reflection and argument is needed.

One dissenter, H. Tristram Engelhardt, defends animal rights. These “rights,” however, include “the right to be skinned” and “transformed into fur coats [and] trimmings on hats,” to be used in bullfights and cockfights, and to be “used to produce knowledge of interest to humans, even if it will not have any practical application” (178). Animals even have a “special right to be the object of the culinary arts of Chinese and French chefs.” Furthermore, he claims, “*pace* Singer” (actually, Spira) that it *is* “appropriate to blind rabbits for beauty’s sake” (193). Sometimes he advocates human enjoyment as a criterion for the rightness of causing animal suffering, other times it is necessity or usefulness. His moral principles are logically inconsistent.

There is too little discussion of the scientific issues. Remarks are scattered and, typically, underdeveloped. An important series of articles and a book, which some of the authors surely were aware of, is ignored (LaFollette and Shanks 1993a; 1993b; 1994a; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b; 1996). One chapter is primarily historical, although as one biologist has argued:

Wind- and steam-powered vessels were certainly vital in the exploration of much of the globe, but this fact in no way indicates that they should continue to be seen as useful even as newer and more efficient technologies develop. In this regard, scientific arguments for and against the use of vivisection

are best addressed in the context of modern medical research. (Gregory 2000, 163)

Those who advance modern medicine through clinical and in vitro research, computer and mathematical modeling, epidemiology, and other methods will be shocked by Morrison’s claim that “medicine cannot progress without animal experimentation” (58).

Readers should carefully identify the scientific objections to vivisection and the case for nonanimal-based research methods (Greek and Greek 2000; 2002a; 2002b) and see if this book provides an adequate response and an independent, positive case for vivisection. The book’s value might consist in spurring others to articulate stronger reasons why vivisection matters and is morally justified, despite its high costs for animals and, perhaps, humans as well. ■

References

- Gregory, T. R. 2000. The failure of traditional arguments in the vivisection debate. *Public Affairs Quarterly* 14(2):159–82.
- Greek, C. R., and J. Greek. 2000. *Sacred cows and golden geese: The human cost of experiments on animals*. New York: Continuum.
- . 2002a. Searching for alternatives. *Nature Biotechnology* 20(5):431–32.
- . 2002b. *Specious science: How genetics and evolution reveal why medical research on animals harms humans*. New York: Continuum.
- LaFollette, H., and N. Shanks. 1993a. The intact systems argument: Problems with the standard defense of animal experimentation. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 31(3):323–33.
- . 1993b. Animal models in biomedical research: Some epistemological worries. *Public Affairs Quarterly* 7(2):113–30.
- . 1994a. Animal experimentation: The legacy of Claude Bernard. *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 8(3):195–210.
- . 1994b. Chaos theory: Analogical reasoning in biomedical research. *Idealistic Studies* 24(3):241–54.
- . 1995a. Two models of models in biomedical research. *Philosophical Quarterly* 45(179):141–60.
- . 1995b. Utilizing animals. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 12(1):13–25.
- . 1996. *Brute science: Dilemmas of animal experimentation*. Philosophical Issues in Science series. New York: Routledge.