

**The Neverending Flame**  
*An Ethical Debate on Lab Animal Research*

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Six miles outside of the bustling metropolis of Reno Nevada, a scientist hovers over a flock of fifty sheep. Each sheep looks normal on the outside but all possess partial human livers, hearts, brains and other organs. The scientist discusses his anticipation for euthanizing the flock to finally reveal effects of human cells that were injected into the fetus's brain two months prior. As strange as this may be, it lies within the ethical guidelines for stem cell research.

Lab animal research is a moral and ethical issue that forms a picket fence between humankind alike. It plays a crucial role in the development of theory and research in all aspects of medicine and psychology. The AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) and APA (American Psychological Association) recognize that animals play an imperative role in research testing for the continued improvement of health and welfare issues of both humans and animals. However, they enforce the idea that humane care of lab animals is essential in the process. The AVMA personifies the three R's of refinement, reduction and replacement. The concepts embody the elimination or reduction of pain, decreasing the number of animals used in experimental research and the ability to replace animal subjects with non-animals when possible. The AVMA believes that working with animals is a privilege carrying professional, scientific and moral obligations.

Aside from government and ethical legalities, there are multiple opinions on the issue of lab animal research. These opinions are dominated primarily by two polarizing views: the animal welfare activist and the cheeseburger munchin' scientific go-getter. Jeremy Bethem, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Utilitarian and animal welfare advocate, claims that "the question is not can they reason, nor can they talk, but can they suffer?" Indeed we must answer yes to this ethical question. On this side of the spectrum, welfare advocates argue that experiments inflicting pain should be stopped or curtailed because pain is evil, unethical and immoral. They believe that animals are worthy of respect and since it is wrong to inflict pain on humans why fail to reciprocate the honor?

Animal welfare activists agree that curtailing animal experimentation would put a damper on scientific advancement. However, they also believe that it is a scientist's moral obligation to discover alternatives to using animals for experimentation. Opposing the animal welfare activist view is the belief that halting painful experimentation would negatively impact our society. Therefore, society has an obligation to minimize harm to animals and maximize benefits collectively. Even though most agree that animals deserve respect, the value placed on an animal's life is inferior to the value placed on a human's life. If we considered animals as equals, would our moral obligations lie in the hands of animals or humans? Where exactly do we draw the line?

These two polarized spectrums, when mixed together, form a tangled middle view. This view regarding the treatment and use of animals in research becomes rather inconsistent. Individuals caught in the middle are pulled both ways. Ideally, a person with this chaotic view frowns upon animals in research but eats meat and wears animal products at leisure. One could ask, do these individuals refrain from using drugs, gadgets and other products that were tested using animal research? Or better yet, do these individuals even know which items were tested on animals? Perhaps people with these views should not impose their beliefs on others until they can make reason of their own actions. These individuals, that have the desire to close animal research facilities, should think twice and clam up while they are still walking animal advertisements.

Statistically speaking, about twenty million animals are experimented on and killed annually. Three fourths of those animals are used for medical purposes and the remaining to test products. About eight million are used in painful experiments and only about ten percent of them receive painkillers. Despite the overwhelming statistics, animal research has been the basis for new vaccines, advancements in deadly diseases, artificial organs, and new surgical techniques. Substantial knowledge has been gained through research with lab animals. It continues to provide the human race with answers to questions that are essential to the advancement of both behavioral and medical science. Human benefits of research have far surpassed the costs of animal suffering, as it seems our moral obligation lies within the prevention of suffering and welfare of humans over animals. Despite divided opinions of right and wrong, the debate of moral and ethical issues of animals in research remains stagnant. A grim haze of ethical and moral questions encompasses our substantial social benefits. Where exactly do we draw the line between equality of all of God's creatures, both big and small?

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