



EAST LONDON SCHOOL DAY OF DEBATE

“THIS HOUSE BELIEVES THAT ANIMAL TESTING IS UNNECESSARY”

BY ROB LYONS

What is animal testing?

Some things, like medication and sometimes even make-up, are tested on animals to ensure they are safe for humans to use. But many people argue that animal testing is cruel and unnecessary. Is it fair to deliberately harm an animal for the benefit of human beings? We might think that it depends on the reason we are using animals in tests.

Some people have argued that causing suffering to other animals – like cats, dogs, rats, and even monkeys – is like racism and sometimes call it “speciesism”. If we are animals too, how can we justify painful experiments on other creatures that feel pain? Should we value and respect animals? And if so, how much? What is the difference between experimenting on a monkey and doing tests on a child, for example?

On the other hand, surely we shouldn’t put human lives at risk by prescribing untested medicines? If it is a choice between experimenting on animals and experimenting on humans, surely most of us would choose animals? Or are there other options?

Do we need to use animals?

Scientists are developing new experiments using cells grown in laboratories instead of living animals. Could these be as effective as animal testing? With protests against testing on animals taking place frequently perhaps it is only a matter of time before we stop using them in this way?

In the past, medication that hadn’t been properly tested has had terrible side-effects. For example, thalidomide, a sedative drug that was given to pregnant women to treat morning sickness, caused deformities in their children. Isn’t it important we do everything we can to avoid such

tragedies? Is the suffering of some animals a price worth paying for us to have safe, life-saving medication?

But since animals’ bodies are so different to ours, how can we know whether products will have the same effects on us that they have on them? Is animal testing really so effective after all? Some people argue that experimenting on animals is basically useless because rats, for example, will react in a completely different way to human beings. Some organisations have claimed that it can be dangerous to assume that a drug is safe for humans because it doesn’t harm animals.

Therefore, many people point out that we should be focusing on developing tests that don’t use animals. The group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) claims that animal testing is wrong - but also that it doesn’t work.

However, other people claim that some of the most important discoveries in medicine have come through animal testing, including antibiotics like penicillin.

What’s the right thing to do?

Nobody wants animals to suffer pain for no good reason. But animal testing might still be necessary for the time being. Maybe we should be trying to think of ways of using fewer animals and causing them less suffering. Or should we ban animal testing altogether? Maybe animal testing should only be allowed in certain situations, for example, if we know it could save lives.

Many of us don’t seem to mind eating meat, is animal testing different? Is it worse? Why?





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