

# Letters

To the Editors:

In recent years, animal “models” of human behavior and disease have received increasing criticism — and rightly so. Unfortunately, rather than point out fundamental problems with the use of analogies between humans and other species as a basis for scientific investigation, George D. Catalano [in “Animals in the Research Laboratory: Science or Pseudoscience” *BTS* (6)1, pp. 17-21)] resorts to incorrect statements and faulty logic.

Catalano claims that “crucial experiments” can, by Popper’s falsifiability criterion, determine whether or not animal research constitutes “science” or “pseudoscience.” However, virtually all of Catalano’s examples intended to “prove” the futility of animal research are debatable; at least two are downright specious.

Citing a 1968 opinion, Catalano denies the efficacy of the small pox vaccine on the grounds that the risk of encephalitis outweighed the risk of small pox. By 1968, when small pox had been nearly eradicated, this was probably true. However, this does not prove that the vaccine was undesirable during the late 1800’s, when small pox was a leading cause of childhood mortality. Catalano adds that fewer people have died of small pox in Great Britain, where vaccination has been optional since 1898, than in France or Holland, where vaccination is compulsory. He omits vital data, such as the period to which these statistics refer and the vaccination rate in Great Britain. It is possible that a successful vaccination program in Great Britain prior to 1898 all but eradicated the disease.

Regarding animal research for diabetes, Catalano claims that insulin “has been proposed as a cure.” By whom? I have never heard a physician claim that insulin cures diabetes. Most, if not all, physicians consider insulin an effective therapy that greatly increases the quality and length of life for millions of diabetics. The rising death rate from diabetes can be attributed to many factors other than the failure of insulin therapy.

Diagnosis of adult-onset diabetes has improved with advances in glucose testing. Consequently, deaths once attributed to “old age” may now be recorded as

diabetes-related. Extended lifespan has put more people at risk of developing diabetes, which usually occurs in older individuals. Also, now that more diabetics survive to child-bearing age (thanks to insulin), more people may be born with an inherited predisposition to diabetes. This may concern eugenicists, but it does not disprove insulin’s efficacy for treating diabetes.

Rather than establish “crucial experiments” to test the validity of animal research, Catalano has distorted facts and misrepresented data. His irresponsible statements create the false impression that there is not abundant solid evidence to support the view that animal research is of questionable applicability to human health. A growing body of careful, scholarly research, some conducted by members of the Medical Research Modernization Committee and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, is challenging the scientific foundations of animal experimentation.

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Medical Research Modernization Committee

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However, for a well argued view which accepts the effectiveness, within limits, of certain vaccines — while arguing that “the specifically medical treatment of people is never significantly related to a decline in the compound disease burden or to a rise in life expectancy” — see the first chapter (“The Epidemics of Modern Medicine”) of Ivan Illich’s *Medical Nemesis*.

John Stockwell

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To The Editors:

Reverend Gary Kowalski’s assertion that Darwin’s “qualms about vivisection” were related to his opposition to the “anthropocentric view of the Bible,” (“The Ethics Crunch: Can Medical Science Advance Without The Use of Animals?” *BTS* (6)1, pp. 22-24) is both an historical and an interpretative error. Darwin had qualms about cruelty toward animals, but he had no qualms about vivisection conducted with anesthesia and,

unfortunately for the animals, naively believed that anesthesia would make a difference in the conduct of vivisection.

Reverend Kowalski quotes Darwin as saying, "You ask my opinion on vivisection, I quite agree that it is justifiable for real investigations on physiology; but not for mere damnable and detestable curiosity. It is a subject which makes me sick with horror...." Unfortunately, it did not make him sick enough, for according to E. Westacott in his book, *A Century of Vivisection and Anti-Vivisection*, "He [Darwin] thought that physiology 'cannot fail to confer the highest benefits on mankind.' He stated that 'it is unintelligible to me how anybody could object to such experiments (when the animal was rendered insensible).... it is absolutely unintelligible to me on what ground the objection is made in this country.'"

This was Darwin's testimony before The First Royal Commission into Vivisection in 1875, which was crucial in convincing Parliament not to abolish or to seriously limit vivisection. His response was not that of an unfeeling man; nevertheless it is difficult to know whether scientific vanity or gullibility overcame his judgement; less famous men than him knew very well that the issue of anesthesia was nothing but a smoke-screen behind which all kinds of barbarities would take place. Mr. James Madden Holt (a member of the Committee of the Society for the Total Abolition of Vivisection) rightly pointed out that it was impossible to enforce with certainty the administration of an anesthetic and, moreover, that there was considerable pain associated with the recovery from many of the experiments, even if the animal were appropriately anesthetized when the actual cutting, burning or scalding were being conducted; and that many experiments, such as those which required starving an animal over many days, could hardly be conducted with anesthesia.

Dr. George Hoggan, who had worked with Claude Bernard, wrote a letter to *The Morning Post* on Feb. 2, 1875: "...I am inclined to look upon anaesthetics as the greatest curse to vivisectionable animals.... They indeed prove far more efficacious in lulling public feeling towards the vivisectioners than pain in the vivisectioned."

Darwin, if he followed the proceedings of the Commission to which he was called to testify, and if he followed the heated discussions in the newspapers of his time, should have had more than a qualm or two about giving his assent to vivisection with

anesthesia. Those who had such qualms were proven right by the course of future events: in 1878 there were 481 experiments on animals in England, performed without anesthesia; in 1946, there were 1,344,372. Only 66,101 experiments were performed with anesthesia. Presumably, Darwin would have had no "qualms" about these!

Furthermore, it is not likely that Darwin would have given his "qualified" assent had he not presumed upon his human authority to do so. Consider his statement being made about human beings: "it is unintelligible to me how anybody could object to such experiments [when the human being is rendered insensible]...." Not likely he would have been lulled into consent, even with anesthesia had the "animals" to be experimented on been humans.

Reverend Kowalski, as others in the animal rights movement, have come to believe that it is the Biblical anthropocentric viewpoint which allows for vivisection. But compare Darwin's statement with Lord Shaftesbury's, who was a charter member of the first anti-vivisection society in England:

I was convinced that God had called me to devote whatever advantages He might have bestowed, upon me to the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast, and those who had none to help them... Whatever I have done has been given to me; what I have done I was enabled to do; and all happy results (if any there be) must be credited, not to the servant, but to the great Master, who led and sustained him. (letter, April 30, 1881)

While the established churches did nothing to oppose the spread of vivisection (neither did secular institutions), many of those in the nineteenth century who fought vivisection were religiously inspired and did so precisely on anthropocentric Christian principles, on the perception that protection of the "least of these" was the core of their religion. The destiny of animals in the modern world would have been very different had the principles of Lord Shaftesbury prevailed over those of Darwin.

Sincerely,  
Roberta Kalechofsky  
Jews for Animal Rights