Letter to the Editor

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Recommended Citation
Dear Editor,

As the primary author of a comprehensive critical review of the use of non-human primates (NHPs) in neuroscience research published in ATLA in 2016,1 I very much welcomed issue 45.2 of the journal, which contained papers of note that asked questions of biomedical experiments involving NHPs.

One of the main motivations for my 2016 review was my frustration at the repeated, unsound case put forth by many of those who advocate for continued, and greater, invasive neuroscience on our primate cousins. In my view, this case is multiply and seriously flawed. It overlooks the opposition of the public to animal experiments, in particular to NHP neuroscience; it skews the balance of associated harms and proposed benefits by understating the former and overstating the latter; it assumes a default human relevance without critically questioning this assumption and without appreciating the abundant evidence against it; it plays down the capabilities of non-animal alternatives, seeking shortcomings and imperfections to defend resistance to them, while ignoring those impacting monkey research. Its advocates claim that their research efforts, largely focused on animal models, and that he would therefore be an advocate of the human, in vitro, and in silico studies that have underpinned recent, belated, advances in the field.

Finally, Grimm and Eggel’s Comment6 on striving for a realistic view of animal research contained much that opponents of it would agree with: the importance of animal welfare and robust, honest harm–benefit analyses; the failure of some researchers to meet high scientific standards and to be realistic in the postulated human benefits of their work; that animal experiments are licensed based on confidence rather than scientific rigour, and so on. These are all issues that would benefit both animals and humans, given some significant attention. However, their assertions that good science primarily produces good data, with societal benefit secondary, I feel cannot, and should not, be applied to animal research. Knowledge acquisition per se may well be valuable, and speculative research must occasionally give rise to information that translates to human benefit. However, when that comes at huge ethical cost, as it does, for instance, in the case of NHPs, any knowledge
gained must be pyrrhic in nature. Furthermore, good data (with regard to human medicine) can only be derived from good (human relevant) models — which, I believe, animals are demonstrably not, and never can be.

It seems clear that heeding the opinions and recommendations of experienced neuroscientists such as Professor Beuter, the well-argued probable opinion of the time-travelling Parkinson, and Grimm and Eggel’s demands for high animal welfare and honest and realistic harm–benefit analyses, will be of paramount importance for the advancement and evolution of experiments involving NHPs, particularly in neuroscience. This will benefit animals and humans alike.

Sincerely,

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References