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Mounting Opposition to Vivisection

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1. Justin R. Goodman is in the department of sociology and criminal justice at Marymount University and a council member of the ASA section on Animals and Society. He is also Director of Laboratory Investigations at PETA. He studies humans' complicated relationships with other animals.
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Abstract

Justin R. Goodman, Casey A. Borch, and Elizabeth Cherry discuss public attitudes toward animal testing and its growing opposition.

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Opposing views on animal testing predate the scientific method. In third century Greece, physician Galen conducted experiments on monkeys and pigs, while philosopher Plotinus was a vegetarian who refused any medical treatment derived from animals. During the Renaissance, when René Descartes's experiments on live rabbits and dogs led him to conclude animals were soulless machines, philosopher Henry More wrote a letter to Descartes decrying his theory as "deadly and murderous."

Today, more animals are being used in experiments than ever before (around 100 million in the United States alone), and the debate about this practice has never been more visible. Dueling letters to the editor appear in major newspapers, and billboards featuring sympathetic photos of children and monkeys overlook buildings and highways in many cities. Every day, Google aggregates a list of animal testing-related news stories, blogs, petitions, message board discussions, scholastic essays, protests, and press releases. The issue has even been the plot basis on several episodes of the hit TV dramas *Law & Order* and *Grey's Anatomy*, and in the big-screen comedy *Legally Blonde 2*.

Animal advocacy groups contend that the biological, emotional, and cognitive similarities between humans and other animals make the practice of using animals in experiments unethical. Some opponents to animal testing cite research such as the Food and Drug Administration finding that nine out of 10 drugs that are safe and effective in animals fail in human clinical trials, to argue that animal experiments do not reliably predict outcomes in humans, and can even be harmful.

Those in favor of animal testing use these same interspecies similarities to justify the use of animals as models for humans, and they point to Nobel Prize-winning research involving the use of animals, such as the development of in vitro fertilization, which won the award in 2010. They argue the potential benefits to human health justify the harm caused to animals, and that existing laws and guidelines adequately regulate the practice.

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