

Case 14: Testing the Bounds—Advocating Animal Testing

The first day of class at most universities is often a thrilling time, when students discover the road map for the next several months of their study in a particular subject. Professors distribute a syllabus, explain their expectations of student performance, and sometimes even delve into some preliminary substantive lectures. A psychology professor at a major state university, John Smith,¹ takes his first day of class on a rather unique path. Prof. Smith spends the first day of every semester lecturing students on the benefits of animal testing.

While many people associate psychology with human rather than animal testing, some biologically-based psychological truths can be exposed through the testing of other species. For instance, animal research has helped researchers understand 1) how the central nervous system recovers after neural damage; 2) the biological bases of fear, anxiety, and other stress reactions; 3) “subjective and dependence-producing effects of psychotropic drugs”; 4) motivational processes; and 5) learning and memory.² Some of the more controversial forms of psychological animal testing include maternal deprivation and addiction studies.³

However, Prof. Smith does not limit his lecture to psychological studies. He discusses the benefits of animal testing for medicine—both in terms of the benefits from drug testing and surgical research. Prof. Smith also points out the pervasiveness of use and abuse of animals in society, noting that animals are regularly eaten, placed in animal control shelters and put to sleep, and turned into consumer goods, as with cow hides.⁴ During the lecture, he includes a PowerPoint presentation that graphically shows animal testing, harmful conditions that humans suffer without the products of animal testing, and other ways that animals are used in society (such as meat processing and animal shelters).

At the end of the first class, Prof. Smith warns students not to rail against testing unless they avoid all sorts of products, particularly cosmetics, leather, and meat (for consumption), and don’t mind the lost opportunities at curing AIDS, cancer, etc.⁵ Some students found Prof. Smith’s lecture to improperly advocate personal beliefs, and others were highly offended at the depictions of the processes.

Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Regional Ethics Bowl Cases 2010

¹ Professor John Smith is a fictional character.

² “Research with Animals in Psychology,” *American Psychological Association*, <http://www.apa.org/research/responsible/research-animals.pdf> (last accessed Aug. 7, 2010).

³ “Types of Research: Psychology and Addiction Research,” *American Anti-Vivisection Society*, <http://www.aavs.org/researchPsychology.html> (last accessed Aug. 7, 2010).

⁴ “Animal Testing,” *U.S. Food and Drug Administration*, <http://www.fda.gov/Cosmetics/ProductandIngredientSafety/ProductTesting/ucm072268.htm> (last updated Nov. 19, 2009);

“Animals Used for Experimentation FAQs,” <http://www.peta.org/about/faq-viv.asp> (last accessed June 28, 2010).

⁵ Bob Torres and Jenna Torres, *Vegan Freak: Being Vegan in a Non-Vegan World*, 127-137 (Tofu Hound Press 2006); Laura Blue, “How Much Does Animal Testing Tell Us?” *TIME*, June 17, 2008, <http://www.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1815241,00.html>.