Chapter 3

Justifying the Means

The discussion of the previous chapter shows that, other things being equal, longevity is an important value, and one that is fundamental to the pursuit of the good life. The second area of consideration for assessing the ethical implications of increasing life spans concerns the means for promoting our values. The example of Ritalin, used by students as a means of enhancing their performance in exams, emphasises the need to consider the relationship between our ends and the means achieving them. In some cases, the means are more important than the ends: the act of climbing a mountain can be more valuable to the climber than reaching the summit (Cole-Turner, 1998, p. 155). When used as a performance-enhancing drug, Ritalin is objectionable because part of the value of good exam results is the effort required in studying to achieve them. What the example of Ritalin demonstrates is that although the end may be good, it does not always justify the means achieving it. This is particularly so when the way in which a value is promoted involves wrongdoing.

Of concern here will be whether increasing life spans involves wrongdoing, and my focus will be on the use of nonhuman animals and human embryos in the development of biomedicines. As was noted previously, increases in life spans will not be a result of a specific medical treatment, but a range of new medicines that maintain and restore the quality of people’s health. Given present medical practices, nonhuman animals (henceforth, animals) will continue to be used as standard research tools for the development of new medicines. In contrast to animal experimentation, human embryonic stem cells offer considerable potential as a future medicine, which could prolong life. In both cases, of present medical practices and of a future technology, living beings will be made to suffer and be sacrificed for the benefit of others.

A. Farrant, *Longevity and the Good Life*
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Whether or not this is justifiable will depend upon our beliefs about how we ought to behave towards animals and human embryos.²

Animal experimentation

Animals have been used in medicine for over 2,000 years, and they are now a standard tool for research and the development of new medical treatments. What makes animal experimentation controversial is that it usually involves making animals suffer and destroying them. There have been a number of attempts to argue that animal experimentation is morally impermissible. I will outline the ideas of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, where my focus will be on their claims that animal suffering is of equal importance to that of human suffering. My criticism of their arguments will provide the basis for my own objection to animal experimentation.

In order to simplify my discussion, I make two assumptions. First, I assume that vertebrates are capable of suffering. It cannot be proven beyond doubt that they can suffer, but their similar nervous systems, demonstration of pain behaviour and evolutionary theory give good grounds for believing this to be the case.³ This is not to claim that all non-vertebrates are incapable of suffering. There may be some species that can but the evidence for this is less clear. My argument, therefore, only applies to vertebrates, but these constitute a significant proportion of the animals used in medical research. Second, there have been many examples of medical treatments developed and tested on animals that have proved to be detrimental to human health, such as the use of thalidomide (Singer, 1995, p. 57). The difficulty of applying data from animal experiments to human beings raises questions about its efficacy, which may prove to be sufficient reason to doubt its permissibility. I assume that, when properly interpreted, animal experimentation can be beneficial for the development of medicine. My aim is to question the moral permissibility of animal experimentation even when it is beneficial.

Singer's objection

Singer (1995, p. xii) regards his argument against animal experimentation as an extension of the liberation movements against racism and sexism, which discriminate on the basis of arbitrary characteristics. The condemnations of racism and sexism originate in the belief that human beings are fundamentally equal and should be treated as such. Human beings are not all alike; we differ in our stature, intelligence and