

## Rabbits, drugs and us

**Lethal laws: animal testing, human health and environmental policy.** Alix Fano. London/New York. Zed Books. 1997. pp 242 + xiv. Paperback. \$19.95

The controversy over regulations on animal experimentation in institutions under the control of the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research and the Indian Council for Medical Research indicates that the view that the practice is essential is widely held among scientists and intellectuals in India. But in the West, particularly in the USA over the last few decades, many debates have taken place on the very necessity for animal experimentation. At least one section of scientists feels that it could be eliminated to a great extent, and that alternatives are now available. Some scientists also believe that such experiments are irrelevant, and question the very system that conducts, legitimises and propagates them. The author of this book goes one step further: she argues that using animals to test chemicals, under the pretext of human welfare and safety, is not just unethical but bad science as well.

For many, this may sound totally unacceptable. But her view is not at odds with those who have been campaigning for elimination of dioxins and other dangerous chemicals.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter deals with animal testing, causes of cancer, and the roots of testing animals for cosmetics and chemicals. The second chapter is about the US National Toxicology Program's cancer policies for prevention of and testing for cancer and the use of animal testing data by regulatory authorities. It also provides an overview of the varieties of animals and the type of tests done on animals. In chapter three, the author marshals evidence to argue that contrary to the claims of animal testing supporters, there is much

uncertainty about the interpretations and extrapolations of such experiments. In the next chapter she argues that the regulatory regime has failed to prevent harm to human health and the environment from various toxic chemicals, despite evidence from animal tests. Chapter five describes various testing methods which do not depend on animals, their uses, and the obstacles to their adoption. The author examines the question of what is a true non-animal method. The final chapter advocates a radical shift in present toxicity testing practices and calls for environmentalists and animal rights advocates to come together to ensure that animal, nature and human health are not allowed to suffer due to the continued use of toxic chemicals.

"Indeed, as long as millions of non-human animals are needlessly killed in the most grotesque forms, on the pretext of protecting human and other life, while we simultaneously allow the manufacture, sale, and release of poisons into our environment, we can never hope to achieve the goal of physical, environmental and spiritual health we desire."

While the book is based primarily on, but not limited to, studies, debates and regulatory affairs in the USA, regulatory regimes elsewhere often look upon the USA as a model. Many readers will find the author's arguments extremist and emotional. Her stated intention is to probe the science, and not ethical/philosophical issues: to provide evidence that — contrary to what regulatory regimes and most scientists argue — the scientific case for animal experimentation is flawed and there are enough alternatives for such experimentation.

Her arguments are fairly laid out and convincing, and will be appreciated by groups such as environmentalist fighting for the elimination of toxic chemicals, the international convention on elimination of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) the

international campaign against use of chlorines, and feminist arguments linking increased incidence of breast cancer with increased pollution and the use of toxic chemicals such as dioxins.

Still, there are many questions that need further discussion. Are there real alternatives to animal experiments? How can scientific knowledge progress if such experiments are banned or reduced? Much has been written on these matters, and groups are working on various alternatives (1). In fact, recent Indian opposition to animal testing failed to go beyond mere opposition to the guidelines to indicate the alternatives, and ask for their promotion.

The book is also a critique of regulatory systems whose 'safe levels' permit the build-up of toxins in the environment, which ultimately harms human health. It may be appropriate to point out that discussions on animal rights are no longer confined to animal rights activists and philosophers/ethicists. Many feminists have campaigned for animal rights and had been active in anti-vivisection protests. Similarly, of late journals like *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism* are also providing space for debates on these issues (2).

Even if one does not fully concur with the author, the book is rewarding reading, as it contains ample information challenging the very need for animal testing.

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### References :

1. For an overview of resources visit [www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/animal\\_alternatives/organiza.htm](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/animal_alternatives/organiza.htm)
2. For example, see Planetary Liberation/Animal Rights by Paul Buhle. *Capitalism, Nature and Socialism* 10(1), March 99 (<http://www.cruzio.com/~cns>)



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