

Open letter regarding comments on essay “*Opponents of animal research should get their facts right*” by Dario Ringach.

Dr. Dario Ringach has posted an essay titled “[Opponents of animal research should get their facts right](#)” on the [Speaking of Research](#) website. In his essay, Dr. Ringach creates the illusion that 30,000 scientists support using animals in research and that the only people opposing such use are misanthropic nonscientists. There are several falsehoods in his essay.

1. A vast majority of the scientific community does not see animal models as predictive for humans. The pharmaceutical industry as a whole is working to find predictive tests as animals have not been and even the National Cancer Institute has said society has lost cures for cancer because of misleading effects in mice. The people who support animal use regardless of efficacy are those who pay their mortgages with the proceeds from the enterprise. Upton Sinclair in his book *I, Candidate for Governor: And How I Got Licked* (1935) said “It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.”

2. Dr. Ringach uses the usual bait and switch technique of confusing basic research with predictive research. Society is uncomfortable with using animals in research but tolerates it because they have been told, by those who use animals, that cures will be forthcoming. When society asks, “Where are the cures?” the researchers respond that the research they are doing is basic research which is not goal oriented and hence was never supposed to lead to cures. They are pursuing knowledge for knowledge sake and maybe that knowledge will someday lead to cures but maybe it will not. This rhetoric is necessary, as numerous scientific studies have proven beyond doubt that animals cannot be used to predict human response to drugs or disease. However, society will only allow animals such as monkeys and chimpanzees to be used in research if they believe that such animals are surrogate humans and can be used to predict human response. The basic researcher’s dishonesty tells us much about their priorities.

3. Dr. Ringach uses the fallacy known as argumentum ad verecundiam (appeal to authority) and lists supposed historical examples he claims society has only because of using animals in science. Neither of these things is science. One is a fallacy hence should alert the reader to the strength of Dr. Ringach’s argument and the other is unverifiable without extreme effort on the reader’s part. No reader is going to exert that kind of extreme effort so Ringach is safe in making his case.

I could continue to point out the flaws in Dr. Ringach’s essay specifically but have done this in general in a book authored by Niall Shanks and myself, [Animal Models in Light of Evolution](#). However, there is another way to allow society to judge for themselves who is right on this issue. Hubert H. Humphrey said, “The right to be heard does not include the right to be taken seriously.” Facts matter more than rhetoric. Society needs to know the facts and understand this issue because lives depend upon the outcome. With that in mind, I have on numerous occasions asked Dr. Ringach and his colleague at UCLA, Dr. Jentsch, to debate this issue in a public forum on the UCLA campus. They have declined.

(Although I hear they are trying to arrange a panel discussion with nonscientists, who know nothing about the issue, or scientists who more or less agree with them. Perhaps they hope that by having such a farce they can claim they have honestly debated the issue.)

Sometimes researchers present a sweat-drenched fear of public debate because of threats to their life. The fact is, I have probably had as many if not more threats to my life as any of them have. (A little publicized fact.) What they really fear is public exposure to the facts. Furthermore, this excuse does not play when the forum for the debate is a college campus complete with security and metal detectors. If the researcher is as scared as many suggest he is then he should not be walking around campus or driving to the store but rather staying at home 24/7. Clearly this excuse has more to do with not wanting the facts exposed to the light of public debate than actual rational fear.

Hubert H. Humphrey also said, "Freedom is hammered out on the anvil of discussion, dissent, and debate." I agree. If researchers like Ringach want society to believe their rhetoric then let them engage in a time honored American tradition and debate the science behind their claim that animals are predictive for humans. I am still available.

Ray Greek MD
President, Americans For Medical Advancement