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Mail Online

Beware 'Planet of the Apes' experiments that could create sci-fi nightmare

By David Derbyshire

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It sounds like something from a Hollywood science fiction film: a race that is half human, half ape.

But leading scientists are today demanding tough new rules to prevent the nightmare scenario becoming a reality.

In a hard-hitting report, they warn that research is close to pushing 'ethical boundaries' and that extreme attempts to give laboratory animals human attributes must be banned.

SCROLL DOWN FOR VIDEO

Summer blockbuster: A scene from the latest Planet of the Apes film Rise of the Planet of the Apes

In the film scientists search for an Alzheimer's cure create a new breed of ape with human-like intelligence

Another scene from the film out in August. Last year, more than one million experiments were carried out on genetically modified animals

While talking chimpanzees and gun-toting gorillas are currently confined to movies, the academics say the dangers of disturbing animal-human experiments are real.

Professor Martin Bobrow, a medical geneticist at Cambridge University and co-author of the report, said society needed to set rules before scientists began experiments that the public would find unacceptable.

He added: ‘We are trying to get this out in the open before anything has happened.’

Out for justice: Scientists claim chimps can be trained to wield weapons like this animal in a viral ad for new prequel Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes

Could it happen? The clips, shot to look like fly-on-the-wall documentary footage from Africa, appear scarily real

After taking the AK47 the chimpanzee fires it towards onlookers who goaded it into pulling the trigger

BEHIND THE LAB DOORS

- Mice modified to carry human genes are widely used to study diseases including cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis and anxiety.
- Goats created with a human gene are used to produce a human protein that treats blood clotting disorders.
- Mice implanted with pieces of human tumours are used to test cancer drugs.
- Rat brains are injected with human stem cells to study how the brain deals with stroke damage.
- Researchers add human cells to mice immune systems or livers to study hepatitis.

The Academy of Medical Scientists review was set up to look at the growing number of experiments in which scientists add human genes or tissue to animals.

Last year, more than one million experiments were carried out on genetically modified animals – mostly mice and fish carrying human DNA.

These ‘transgenetic’ laboratory animals are used to develop new drugs for diseases such as cancer and Alzheimer’s, or to investigate the role of individual genes.

Researchers also create humanised animals by inserting human stem cells into animal embryos. These ‘chimeras’ are used to shed light on conditions such as stroke, hepatitis and cancer.

Today’s report says that most of these experiments raise no ethical or legal concerns.

But it argues that the fast pace of science means researchers could create ‘animals containing human material that approach ethical or regulatory boundaries’, and calls for a new body of experts within the Home Office to monitor the experiments.

It also demands some research is banned outright, including injecting human stem cells into the brains of primates if it ‘engenders human-like behaviour’.

That would prevent scientists creating apes with human-like memories or the ability to speak.

The warnings have echoes of the new movie Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes, in which scientists searching for an Alzheimer's cure create a new breed of ape with human-like intelligence.

Report co-author Professor Thomas Baldwin said: 'The fear is that if you start putting very large numbers of human brain cells into the brains of primates suddenly you might transform the primate into something that has some of the capacities that we regard as distinctively human – speech, or other ways of being able to manipulate or relate to us.

'These possibilities that are at the moment largely explored in fiction, we need to start thinking about now.'

Organisations:
Cambridge University

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Indeediedoo, Wales-- You seem to want to have it both ways, you oppose animal testing but you are happy to take drugs which have been tested on animals, do you not find that a touch hypocritical? If you really oppose animal testing a more ethical approach would be to only take medicines which have not been tested on animals! You are right when you say that if you suggested abandoning all modern drugs no one would take you seriously but that does not stop you personally rejecting modern medicines! Perhaps you should read my post again? I did not say that animal testing eliminates all risk, I said animal testing is used first to check that the drugs are not so toxic that the human subjects are not poisoned immediately they take the drug. Nothing in that statement rules out the possibility of adverse reactions at a later stage! You mention human testing, how many trials have you signed up for?

- Andrew, London Uk, 23/7/2011 13:19

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Its disgusting all this GM food and experiments... I have a family of herbal medicine and have cures for arthritic, internal problems and much more.. big companies want to control us..But soon the bottom fall will out of this GM, what goes around come around those that wnat it and create it will live with it in their next life

- nip, london, 23/7/2011 07:58

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The baboons are already running amok.

- Dr Zira, :0, 23/7/2011 01:04

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Andrew London --- What a stupid thing to say "Ok I take it that those of you objecting to testing medicines on animals refuse to take all drugs? If you don't you are a hypocrite as pretty much all drugs in use today have been tested on animals!" What on earth would be the point of rejecting all drugs? If I did that & said that all modern drugs should be put down the toilet & we can start again from scratch, no one would take my POV seriously; with good reason. There are other, valid ways of testing drugs and treatments such as computer analysis, tissue testing and YES testing on voluntary humans. If you think that testing on animals first will stop the 'toxic' reactions in humans then you're talking out of your backside as you clearly don't remember the drug trials of about 5 years ago that resulted in organ failure and death in 'subjects'. Think of how many drugs that have been rejected because they didnt work on a guinea pig when they very well could have a helped human condition

- Indeediedoo, Wales, 22/7/2011 22:50

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Ok I take it that those of you objecting to testing medicines on animals refuse to take all drugs? If you don't you are a hypocrite as pretty much all drugs in use today have been tested on animals! As for testing on Humans, well human trials are carried out but animal testing is used first to check that the drugs not so toxic that the human subjects are not poisoned immediately they take the drug. Regarding ethics, all animal experiments carried out in the UK have to go before an ethics board for approval so scientists cannot just do what they like! Finally dee, leeds,england There is no evidence that your "creator" exists (unless you are referring to your mother and father .) so please don't inflict your outdated superstitions on the rest of us!

- Andrew, London Uk, 22/7/2011 22:23

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It's very funny how they say they won't allow animals to speak. That's probably only because they don't want the animal to say "You know what? I don't want to have tumours implanted into me, or be infected with hepatitis."

- Will, Sth Yorks, 22/7/2011 22:22

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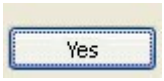

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LikeMyCase.com
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Memorex Dual Alarm Clock Radio
After failing to find a replacement that caters for all my needs, and trialling many 'new' alarm clocks over the years, I've finally found one.

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