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FROM THE DAILY

Scientific accessibility

Obama opens up federally funded research to the public

Responding to an online petition posted to the White House's We the People platform, the Obama administration issued a memorandum through its Office of Science and Technology Policy to mandate that federally funded scientific research be made available free of charge to the public within the year. The proposed policy would centralize and publicize the data sets, methodologies, results and conclusions from research funded via federal agencies at institutions with budgets greater than \$100 million. Such measures are in line with the global call for further open access in science, demonstrating the Obama administration's commitment to pushing the nation's scientific efforts forward. This policy is beneficial to the public, scientists and science as a whole and finally lets taxpayers have access to the information they pay for.

Knowledge that springs from publicly funded research belongs to the taxpayers who pay for it, in the same sense that roads and parks do. However, the results published in scientific journals are currently inaccessible to the public. Hidden behind exorbitant pay walls, indecipherable language and scattered through hundreds of repositories, information is guarded instead of dispersed.

However, this policy could go further. The proposed action places a heavy emphasis on research in the sciences but fails to consider research in the humanities. Though the National Endowment for the Humanities, the nation's largest federal agency that supports humanities research, favors and intends to follow the spirit of the proposed expansion of open access research, the policy would be stronger if it applied to all research.

In fact, open access to scientific research is a logical foundation and natural extension of

the current trends toward making education and knowledge more open and available. Massive open online courses — where millions of interested people can receive world-class educations — would benefit from freely obtainable, high-quality content. Having direct access to research allows content creators to craft better teaching materials and gives others a way to use it to create new knowledge.

For the first time in the history of this country, the direct contents of federally funded research could be made available to anyone who wishes to see them. Removing the barriers to entry will only prove beneficial with time by fostering an open dialogue between researchers and the general public. While this proposal should be expanded to all research, including the humanities, it is an encouraging sign for a country struggling over questions of who owns information and knowledge.

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BARRY BELMONT | VIEWPOINT

The lives of mice and men

Twenty-one years ago, a man named Rodney Coronado firebombed the offices of a pair of animal research scientists at Michigan State University. In addition to more than three decades worth of lost research, the MSU facilities suffered more than \$1.2 million in direct damage. Coronado, acting as part of the Animal Liberation Front, targeted Richard Aulerich, a researcher who fed minks potentially contaminated food — fish caught in Saginaw Bay in Michigan — to measure the effects of polychlorinated biphenyl pollution in the Great Lakes. Minks were known to be highly susceptible to food toxins and thus would show signs of poisoning well before other animals in the food chain.

Coronado avidly disagreed with using animals for scientific research and made his point on the night of Feb. 28, 1992, as he had many times before — by planting homemade incendiary devices in the offices of those he perceived to be wrong.

If the sheer volume of books, articles, treatises and Internet comment sections are anything to go by, ethics is a contentious subject. Because the actions we take matter, and because our actions are propelled and limited by what we consider we ought and ought not to do, our moral opinions have very real consequences. If we think that there isn't such a thing as private property, theft becomes hard to dissuade. If we contend that charity doesn't help people, we might be disinclined to give to charity. In fact, it's only because our actions have consequences that the morality inspiring them matters.

Moreover, the consequences only matter if they affect the overall well-being of someone either positively or negatively. The use of the term "well-being" here is meant to encapsulate all the things that go into making someone (biologically, psychologically, existentially) happy, content, fulfilled, etc. It's meant as a catchall term, like "health," to describe the physiological state of biological beings, given the limited space of our discussion. Thus, the reader will know what I intend when saying that stealing in most cases likely diminishes someone's well-being, whereas being charitable most likely increases another's well-being. If there were no effects on well-being, the morality of our actions would be moot.

It's this consequentialist framework that surrounds the debates on animal testing for

scientific research. The debate focuses on whether the methods and results of animal testing justify the use of animals. The facts of the matter are that millions of animals each year are subjected to millions of scientific experiments, many of which can cause pain and suffering. Great scientific progress has been made as a result of these experiments, alleviating the pain and suffering of millions of people and animals around the world. How one sees the balance between the first and second points is what leads some to feed fish to minks and others to throw bombs.

Make no mistake — many of us are alive today because of the efforts of scientists working with animals. Vaccines for chicken pox, cholera, diphtheria, influenza, hepatitis, measles, mumps, polio, rabies, smallpox and tetanus, every single medication on the market, many medical procedures (from angioplasty to organ transplants) and most life-saving medical devices (replacement and artificial organs) all come as a result of tests first done on animals.

However, many would contend that these ends — good as they are — don't justify the means by which they are achieved. What's taken from animal research, be it from mice, rats, dogs, cats, monkeys or people, isn't sufficiently balanced by what's gotten out of it. That is, the suffering (minimal as it may be) and deaths of animals are too high a price to pay for the value achieved, just as stealing doesn't make all parties involved richer (and in fact makes us all poorer).

Our relationship with our fellow animals (are we not merely mammals?) must be established if we are to properly gauge the benefits and detriments of our actions to them and for ourselves. Should we consider them property, meaning that we can do with them whatever we'd like? Should they be given rights, forcing responsibilities unto beings incapable of understanding them? These are difficult questions that need answers if we're to ever to increase the overall well-being of all relevant subjects.

The borders of our morality need illumination, and it's with the light of reason — not from the flames of terrorists — that we'll continue to find them.

Barry Belmont is an Engineering graduate student.