
Hearing on a Max Planck Society patent claiming genetically engineered primates

Opposition division of the European Patent Office to make a decision on ethics
Tuesday, 26 September 2017

Tomorrow on the 27 September, the European Patent Office (EPO) in Munich will hold a public hearing on an opposition filed by Testbiotech against the Max Planck Society patent EP2328918. This patent claims genetically engineered animals as “inventions”, including non-human primates such as baboons. The animals are meant to be genetically engineered to show symptoms of the Parkinson’s disease. Testbiotech is arguing that such patents are an unacceptable violation of ethical boundaries, because they create economic incentives that will lead to an increase in animal experiments with genetically engineered animals. Therefore, Testbiotech is calling on the Max Planck Society to set a clear signal and withdraw all claims on genetically engineered animals.

The number of experiments using genetically engineered animals has been steadily increasing for the past ten years. In 2015, the number of these animals used in experiments in Germany exceeded for the first time more than one million. There are reasons for this increase – one is an economic interest in marketing patented animals for use in experiments as profitably as possible.

Employees at the Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry filed their patent at the EPO in 2009 and it was granted in 2015. The European Patent Office has already granted over 1000 patents claiming genetically engineered animals for use in experiments – some of these claim primates, including great apes. The patent granted to the Max Planck Society explicitly covers all non-human primates.

“The patenting of genetically engineered animals is creating economic incentives to increase the number of animal experiments. This will lead to attempts to market the patented “products” as profitably as possible,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “We want a change of policy at the patent office, in research, in politics and on the part of investors.”

This is a public hearing. It starts on 27.09.2017 at 09:00 at the European Patent Office, Bayerstr. 34, in Munich. A decision is expected on the same day.

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