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Ethics in a World Context

Research Paper

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Ethics Regarding Animal Testing

Is it ethical to use animals to test various products? While this may be a tough question as there is much controversy that surrounds the topic, I believe that it is unethical to use testing upon animals. To help better understand, animal testing refers to the many procedures that are performed on different species of animals to test the biology and diseases as well as the effectiveness of new products. These products range from cosmetic products to cleaning supplies to food additives and industrial chemicals. The way that they are tested is very unethical in my opinion. The animals are forced into toxic chemical exposure, skin and muscle injection, food and water deprivation, infliction to pain such as wounds and burning, genetic manipulation, physical restraint, and much more. I believe that there are alternatives to animal testing and that there are better ways of going about testing in labs. Animal testing should be eliminated because it is only doing harm towards the different species. There are many companies who have been qualified under the Leaping Bunny Program which helps terminate the use of animal testing by going ‘cruelty-free’ or ‘animal friendly’. I will discuss upon this more. I can also support this stance by using the views of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Milles, incorporating a utilitarianist perspective while discussing this topic. Because this issue brings up many different sides, I want to discuss the views and perspectives of why individuals believe animal testing should not be banned and how it’s deemed necessary for specific companies. By doing so, I can compare and debrief both sides as there is much information leaning towards both an ethical and unethical approach.

Philosophers view animal testing, as well as other issues, in a situational aspect. They think outside of the box, accounting towards situations where humans are present in the experiments in replace of the animals. This brings upon some interesting points that help lead me to my own opinion. Several arguments upon animal testing being unethical are that it is a basic principle of justice to ‘treat like cases alike’; this meaning to treat the animals as if they are human. A question that arises from this using the utilitarian principle is whether using non-consenting human beings in scientific research that produced substantial benefits for other human beings is justifiable or not. In the case that the utilitarian perspective is applied, it is unethical and wrong to use animals for testing and scientific research even if it benefits many people. The reason for this is because although it poses benefits to a large group, being humans, it is still causing much harm and suffering for another large group, the animals. According to AnimalEthics.org, the philosophical perspective of utilitarianism explains that we should consider all sentiment beings aside from just humans. We should reject speciesism, which is discrimination against those who don’t belong to a certain species. This article explains this by saying how we should reject animal exploitation, which is causing the harm to all the animals, outweighing the benefits that it provides for the humans. This approach ultimately suggests that animals are just as important and their lives are valued as much as humans, that the advantages towards human beings are exceeded. In relation to utilitarianism, getting rid of animal testing is maximizing the well-being of the animals, decreasing their pain and suffering.

Philosophers Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mills have been used for their work in advocating towards animal rights movements. Kant believed that the only way to avoid being cruel and harming animals is because if we have those actions towards animals, we are likely to develop these cruel habits that we would possibly inflict on human beings. Kant’s view helps the point of unethicality upon animal testing because in doing experimentation upon animals, we are doing nothing but causing harm and pain towards them. Although these experiments are done under professional work and are done in rational ways, it still doesn’t take away from cruelty fact that is being acted upon the animals. The other philosopher, John Stuart Mills, was already an animal friendly philosopher. According to an article conducted by Michigan State University, “He believed that in any given situation the right action would be the action that tended to minimize the suffering and pain, and maximize the pleasure and happiness, of all interested parties.” This means that Mills believed that the pain and suffering these animals endure in the testing and experimentation process should be included in his calculus upon his utilitarianism beliefs. Both philosophers and their perspectives and ideas help support the claim that it is unethical to continue various products being tested on animals.

Aside from the philosophical perspective, there have also been many actions taken in recent times to help limit the amount of animal cruelty. An example is the Leaping Bunny Program. This is The Coalition for Consumer Information on Cosmetics (CCIC), which manages a cruelty-free and animal friendly standard upon companies that produce cosmetic products as well as household products. It provides assurance towards consumers that no animal testing has been done on any of the products that the companies who are certified under this are selling. This program is represented internationally and globally and is becoming more and more popular. An example of a brand that falls under the list of companies qualified to be Leaping Bunny Certified is Beautycounter. Beautycounter is clean beauty brand that advocates towards safe, environmentally friendly, and most importantly cruelty-free cosmetic, skin care products. This company takes a very different approach to testing their products compared to companies that rely on animal testing for their products. Beautycounter assesses every ingredient including carcinogenicity and developmental toxicity, which are of the 23 safety endpoints they take into consideration. Only the safest ingredients make it into the formulas that make up the different products. The way that they test these products, according to the Beautycounter website is by testing their formulas for trace contaminants that can unintentionally enter products through raw materials and manufacturing—such as phthalates and heavy metals in color cosmetics. They completely refrain from using animals in any of their manufacturing and testing operations, which is a huge factor in how other companies can do the same to help limit the use of animal testing. By becoming a cruelty-free company, a wider range of consumers is being opened and welcomed as there are many advocates for animal testing to stop. This program is just one of the many other programs that exist upon supporting the rights of animals in attempt to get rid of animal testing.

As of March 10th, 2023, marks the 10-year anniversary of a shift away from animal cosmetic testing. The European Union and Israel became the world’s first markets to ban animal testing for cosmetic products. This was made possible due to the many advocacy efforts upon this issue which is slowly spreading towards other countries as well. According to Kitty Block, President, and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States and CEO of Humane Society International, “The number of country-level cosmetics animal testing sales bans or restrictions has risen from 28 to 43, and that’s not even counting 10 state-level bans in the U.S. and 13 more in Brazil.” This is a huge step in the process of ridding the use of animal testing and advocating towards non-animal testing methods that are more relevant to human safety rather than the sufferable and painful chemical tests carried out on a variety of species such as mice, rabbits, rats, guinea pigs, etc. The U.S. continues to push for the passage of the bipartisan Human Cosmetic Act, which prohibits the sale and production of animal-tested cosmetics. This is a huge part of why I believe it is unethical because of the many advocacies acts that also support this issue, showing the different ways that products can be tested efficiently without having to utilize animals in the process.

There are many reasons why I believe testing various products on animals is unethical, as presented in the points above, however there are also many perspectives along the stance of why using animals in testing products is ethical. Stanford University is for the use of animal testing under several given circumstances. Stanford utilizes animals in forms of biomedical research to help discover the causes, diagnoses, and treatments for diseases that occur in humans as well as animals. They advocate for animal use in testing by explaining that they conduct their experiments in a safe way that doesn’t harm the animals. According to the Sandford Medicine article there are three main reasons why they believe it is ethical and critical for biomedical research to use animals for testing. First, animals are biologically very similar to us, so it helps them with their accuracy and understanding how it will impact human beings. Second, animals are susceptible to many of the same health problems as humans are, for example, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, etc. And finally, animals can be studied their whole life because their life expectancy is much shorter than the life expectancy of humans. Stanford researchers believe this is a critical part in understanding how a disease is processed within a human and how it interacts with a living biological system. The Stanford researchers also claim to be strong supporters of animals and their welfare and see the work that they get to do with these animals as a privilege. This perspective of animal testing being ethically right is supported by Stanford and many other individuals and companies. Although this article has presented several well thought out points, I still believe that animal testing is unethical. I do, however, respect the opinions of others, as reading more about the argument that animal testing is ethical has provided me with information and knowledge I hadn’t known before that really made me think and see from a new perspective which was very interesting.

Overall, I believe that using animals to test various products is very unethical. I believe it causes much harm, pain, and suffering towards the animals. Although there are points counterarguing the ethics of why animal testing is good, I continue to stand by my belief even while being challenged hearing other positions. By using the philosophical perspective of utilitarianism as well as the support of historical philosophers, Immanuel Kant, and John Stuart Mills, I can present my thoughts and point of view upon this issue. The cruelty and suffering that the animals endure within these experiments doesn’t enate to the benefits that humans are receiving with the products that the animals are being tested with. I understand the medical side towards this issue; however, I believe with this day in age being so technologically advanced, there are many ways to go around animal testing. Many different companies ranging from a wide variety of things, from cosmetics, to medicine, to home supplies, all are being tested without using animals and are just as successful and useful as the products that are using animals to test their products. Both sides post great arguments, especially in the stance of medicinal use, by testing animals for new vaccines, and new medicine, but I still believe there are different ways that scientists can test these things. For example, in vitro testing, computer (in silico) modeling, human-patient simulators, biomarkers, toxicology, chemical mixtures, and many more. There will always be alternatives available and with the rate that our world is growing in the technological world, it is only said to increase the number of ways to test various products, creating new alternatives towards animal testing. In conclusion, using animals to test various products is unethical as the animals undergo a state of pain and suffer. Utilitarianisms supports this claim as the benefits upon humans don’t outweigh the negative effects on the animals. Society is becoming more environmentally friendly and cruelty-free; therefore, I believe there will only be more and more steps being made in favor of reducing the amount of testing that is conducted upon many different species of animals.

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