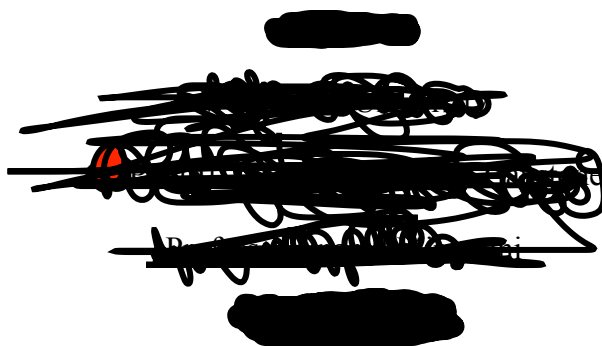


Animal Experiment: Ethical and Cultural Perspectives



Abstract

Animal testing refers to experiments conducted on animals for scientific purposes, such as education, testing, research, and production of biological agents. It is intended to check the efficacy and safety of new products or treatments and is used to predict the impact of pesticides, cosmetics, food and medicines on the human body. More than 100 million animals are killed in U.S. laboratories every year (Collins, n.d.), and this number is increasing. Issues related to animal testing still remain controversial and are interpreted from various perspectives and opinions. Mainly, animal welfare organizations and animal lovers argue for abolition and reduction of animal testing by advocating animal rights and bringing up the ethical issues. Interestingly, cultural characteristics influence the willingness to support or oppose the animal testing. In this paper, the ethical problems of animal testing and the cultural characteristics that affect public attitude toward animal testing will be discussed in detail.

Keywords: animal testing, animal right, alternatives of animal testing, animal welfare, ethical perspective, cultural perspective, religious belief, cultural characteristics, cultural background.

Animal Experiment: Ethical and Cultural Perspectives

Worldwide, many cosmetics, medicines, drugs and even foods that are encountered in our daily life are developed through animal testing for a long time. However, animal testing, which has been conducted for human benefit and safety, is at the center of controversy today. Some public opinion has pointed out that animal testing is inhumane that ignores animal rights and harms animal during the experiment. On the other hand, another opinion insists that animal testing is still necessary for scientific development. The attitude of viewing an animal experiment varies depending on cultural characteristics and factors. In this paper, the issues of animal testing will be viewed in two perspectives: ethical and cultural perspectives. In the ethical perspective, the level 1 research question is, “What ethical obstacles affect how the medical community addresses the issue,” and the level 2 research question is, “What are the current efforts to reduce the ethical obstacles.” In the cultural perspective, the level 1 research question is, “How is the issue addressed differently in varying cultural contexts and situations,” and the level 2 research question is, “What cultural factors play an important role in perspectives toward animal experiment?”

Ethical Perspective

Level 1 Research Question: What Ethical Obstacles Affect How the Medical Community Addresses the Issue?

An ethical problem of animal testing has been consistently pointed out by several researches. According to an article, “animal is forced for feeding, forced inhalation, food and water deprivation, prolonged periods of physical restraint, fasting for long period of time [...]” (Jain, Gilota, & Mital, 2017, p.97). Moreover, levels of pain and anesthesia during invasive procedures are poorly monitored, and methods of euthanasia for toxified animals are not clearly

reported and, if reported, mostly inappropriate for them (Bara & Joffe, 2014). The way animals are treated in an experiment is unethical because it causes excessive mental and physical stress and negatively affects their lives.

The cruel treatment of animals is more severe in cosmetic experiments. A majority of cosmetic testing is conducted by Draize eye test using rabbits and guinea pigs. Developed in 1944 by American toxicologist John H. Draize, Draize eye test applies certain substances to rabbit's eyes or skin without anesthetic to watch its progress after a certain period of time (Lee, Hwang, & Lim, 2017, p.192). During this procedure, rabbits are forced to open their eyes and feel itch, tingle, or pain for hours or days. On the other hand, it is well known how animals are cognizant. As an example, chimpanzees, when their colleague dies, keep their position by looking at his body, and dogs, who know how painful the syringe is, struggled to avoid the pain. Even rabbits, suffering from chemicals, struggle to break out of their experimental fixture frames. Animals can feel pain and emotion just like humans do. Despite the fact, it is unethical to repeat animal testing without any effort to improve simply because it contributes to the scientific development.

Level 2 Research Question: What are Current Efforts to Reduce the Ethical Obstacles and Its Limitation.

As more people raise pets, there is a growing interest in 'animal rights' for a society where people and animals live together. It is asserted that animals should no longer be subject to experiment for human benefits. As a result, reducing and banning animal testing is a global trend now. Animal welfare organizations suggest related laws on cosmetics, which are relatively less important to scientific development, need to be reinforced. Additionally, eco-friendly companies have been raising its voices to abolish animal testing in the world. For example, Lush, a cosmetic

company, states that “our goal is to continue to inform, encourage and participate in the fight for animal rights” (We’ve been fighting, n.d.), and The Body Shop puts *Forever Against Animal Testing* campaign forward for animal rights (What is forever, n.d.).

Many countries, also, pay attention to the ethical problems as it is spread into the society. The European Union (EU) recently tightened regulations from cosmetic testing ban to marketing ban and announced plans to expand the ban on animal testing for further drug development (Fischer, 2015). Furthermore, other countries including Brazil, Canada, South Africa, and United States start passing the ban on cosmetic animal testing (Timeline, n.d.). Despite the movements, however, the ethical issues remain partially unresolved. “Animal Welfare Act excludes purpose-bred birds, rats, or mice, which comprise more than 90% of animals used in research” (Ferdowsian & Beck, 2011). Also, the animal experiments for medical purpose is still performed in various countries since alternatives of animal testing is underway. Therefore, to minimize the problems, it is important to reduce unnecessary animal sacrifices by taking care not to let animals suffer during experiments and transparently reporting the experimental environment from each research.

Cultural Perspective

Level 1 Research Question: How is the Issue Addressed Differently in Varying Cultural Contexts and Situations?

A public attitude toward animal testing is slightly different from culture to culture. In Western culture, recognition and movement to change the problem of animal testing are actively raised, and research for replacing animal testing is conducted. According to Karanasiou and Fotiadis (2019), “there is a growing public pressure against animal experiment in most developed countries that is leading to the development of alternative methods for pre-clinical assessment.”

Western culture has mainly rational and scientific thinking, and its scientific research and technology are advanced. Moreover, higher amount of people in this culture consider animals as pets, friends, or family. Therefore, there are relatively more opponents of animal testing in Western culture because of the tendency not to accept scientifically unstable animal testing and the idea of protecting animals.

On the other hand, the concerns of animal testing in some countries remain at relatively lower level. In China, though their awareness of animal welfare has increased, animal testing is still supported (Bayne, Ramachandra, Rivera, & Wang, 2015). China characteristically has a large size of geographic and livestock production systems, which lead animals to be placed in society as livestock rather than companion animals. Furthermore, many species of animals historically have been used in traditional Chinese medicines for a long time (Hoiberg, 2008). Having this cultural characteristic, it will be relatively more difficult to grasp the ethical problems of animal testing. South Africa also has a lack of awareness on the ethical problems of animal testing. In this culture, the hunting industry is advanced so that humans are dominant over animals. Additionally, as the animal right is weak, it does not have detailed legal regulating specific to laboratory animal care, yet (Kelch, 2014). The lack of government support and management on animal care leads to public absence of perception on the ethical issues.

Level 2 Research Question: What Cultural Factors Play an Important Role in Perspectives Toward Animal Testing?

Cultural factors play an important role in determining the public attitude toward animal testing. For example, the perspective on animal testing varies depending on cultural background. According to Ormandy and Schuppli (2014), “Some studies have shown that people with a rural background have a greater acceptance of animal use than urban people.” People who grew up in

an industrialized countryside often see animals raised for material benefits such as foods, money, or sources. Contrarily, people in urbanized area usually encounter animals as pets or family members who can reduce their stress, depression, anxiety and loneliness. Since people in the urban area have more mental interaction with animals than the rural area, they feel relatively more empathy and compassion for animals that are used in laboratories. Urban people focus more on animal suffering rather than human benefit, and, therefore, they tend to more oppose animal testing than rural people.

Religion is another cultural factor that can change the viewpoints of animal testing. According to Szűcs, Geers, Jezierski, Sossidou and Broom (2012), in Christianity, the biblical concept of man's dominion over animals is still the foundation of the attitudes of many toward human beings and animals. Christianity also teaches that the attitude toward animals reflects the attitude toward others, and animals should be treated nicely (Szűcs, Geers, Jezierski, Sossidou and Broom, 2012). For that reason, although using animals in research is viewed relatively more positive in this religion, however, people or culture in Christianity believe that animal should not be treated cruelly during the experiments. On the other hand, some religions are offensive using animals in research. Jainism and several other South East Asian religions treat animals in respect due to the religious belief that ancestors return in animal form (Szűcs et al., 2012). In a similar manner, Hinduism reveres cows because they are considered as a sacred symbol of life (Winston, 2015). In these religions, animal life is considered as precious as human life. Therefore, people or culture in these religions more likely oppose the animal experiment when certain animals they protect are used in the experiment. As a result, the different doctrine and idea of each religion are bound to affect the perspective toward animal testing.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, animal experiment is viewed in both ethical and cultural perspectives. Most animal lovers and animal welfare organizations oppose animal experiments because of the inhumane and cruel experimental environment (Level 1 research answer). Many countries are currently making efforts to change the ethical issues by reducing cosmetic testing on animals and strengthening the related laws (Level 2 research answer). Nevertheless, controversy on animal testing still persists in the society. People in Western culture are relatively more opposed to animal testing because they are aware of the scientific limitations and consider animals as friends and family. However, other countries, such as China and South Africa, have lower public awareness on the problems (Level 1 research answer). The willingness of whether support or oppose the animal testing is distinctively different depending on one's relationship with animals, religious belief, and cultural background (Level 2 research answer).

Many countries gradually notice the ethical issues of animal testing and seek ways to establish the better animal protection laws and replace animal testing. Yet, the ethical problems are on-going even now, and an immense number of animals still suffer in pain during the experiments by human greed. These problems conflict with the cultures that respect animal life. Animals should be protected as living creatures. As a solution, in the course of the experiment, animal suffering should be reduced to a minimum, and scientists and researchers should focus on developing human-based experiments—*in vitro* methods or human cell cultures—or computer models as the alternatives of animal testing, for benefits of both humans and animals.

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