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The Rising Status of Cats and Dogs

The article, “How The Rising Status Of Cats And Dogs Could Doom Biomedical Research”, discusses the conflict that has been occurring between advocates of animal research and those who oppose it. Lately, people have been considering their pet cats and dogs more as family members than pets, and the increase of treating these pets like humans has led to concerns over the growing legal status and “personhood” of cats and dogs. From 2001 to 2013, the number of Americans who considered animal testing “morally wrong” nearly doubled. Research advocates are concerned the growing legal status could spread to research animals, which would hinder and shut down biomedical research we rely on to find treatments. They are fighting as hard as they can to protect their ability to perform animal research and save the lives of people and animals.

Over the years, cats and dogs have continuously been treated more and more like humans, and are being considered more as family members than pets. Pets are more and more often becoming the subjects of custody cases, earning inheritances from their owners, and even “noneconomic damages” awards up to tens of thousands of dollars when killed, something usually given when a spouse or child is killed. The animal rights endeavor known as the “Guardian Campaign” has convinced many cities and Rhode Island to refer to pet owners as legal guardians. This movement to grant more rights to animals has been around since the start of animal research, with the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) forming in the 1870’s as the first ever animal welfare organization. They wanted to keep dogs and cats out of animal research, as they felt “No class of animals... contains so many creatures of high intelligence, and therefore probably of high sensibility, as dogs and cats” (Hutton). Most of the movement is in good faith, as they push to stop animals from being kept in poor conditions, stop bunchers from stealing pets, and promote humane treatment of animals in research. As pets become more popular and people get more attached to them, they continue pushing for rights for their pets and other animals.

The movement for animal rights has many distinct pros and cons from a research perspective. On one hand, much of what they are doing works to ensure the proper treatment and protection of animals in and out of research. As stated earlier, animal rights supporters have been pushing to stop animals being kept in poor conditions and prevent bunchers from stealing pets and selling them to biomedical research. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) helped pass the 1966 Laboratory Animal Welfare Act, which demanded humane treatment of research animals and stopped inhumane animal dealers. HSUS and the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF) have cracked down on labs not properly caring for their animals and lobbied to prevent invasive, unnecessary experiments. Their work ties in with the “reduce, replace, and refine” principle of modern animal research, where animals should be used only where necessary, and methods should be adjusted to either not use animals or have less of an impact on their wellbeing. The other, more drastic side of the animal rights movement has relentlessly attacked animal research with complete disregard for the nature and necessity of animal research. Their beliefs have proven troublesome for animal research, as they push for anti-vivisection laws, the removal of cats and dogs from research, as well as efforts to reduce the use of rodents and nonhuman primates in research. Groups such as HSUS and ALDF, who have pushed for

humane treatment of animals, have also gone as far as to try and end animal research altogether. Animal rights activists have even stepped into terrorism, killing people and assaulting and invading research facilities to the degree that the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act had to be passed. Their blatant attacks on animal research have devalued humanity's uniqueness and have completely disregarded the purpose of animal research. We rely on animal research to produce cures and treatments for all varieties of diseases and conditions, which we could not possibly find without thorough animal research. These radical animal rights activists disregard the fact that, without animal research, we would be forced to develop treatments by researching and experimenting on humans, and some conditions would be impossible to treat without the unique biologies of animals in research. Animal research can not only save human lives, but saves the lives of the pets animal rights activists want to protect so badly. The more extreme activists and groups, including PETA, show complete hypocrisy as they want to "protect animals" while inhumanely treating and euthanizing animals, preventing life saving research, and killing other people and damaging property.

When trying to stop animal research altogether, people need to consider the ethical dilemmas already found in research, as well as the ethics issues posed by preventing animal research altogether. In regards to the treatment of animals in research, what is considered "humane" can vary between people. People may consider some procedures to be inhumane or inhumane, but as with most ethical issues, the line is blurred depending on the context. Such is the case with the Brown Dog Affair, where a vivisection was performed on a dog to medical students, but it is unclear whether or not the dog was properly anesthetized. Each aspect of the case can raise different ethical questions, such as the following. Was the dog properly cared for while being researched - in this case, it is said that the dog was kept in a cage during the weeks between vivisections. Was the dog properly anesthetized - this is the most unclear part of the case, as the professors claimed the dog had been given morphine and anesthetized with ACE, while attendees and students made varying claims that the dog was either actively struggling, only twitching, or that the anethization apparatus was not turned on. Was the procedure itself humane - during the vivisection, Bayliss spent 30 minutes trying to electrically stimulate the salivary gland nerves to no avail, and the dog was killed by a knife through the heart despite testimonies that it was killed with chloroform. Ethical questions could be raised regarding the treatment of the animal and the recovery time allowed between vivisections, whether or not vivisections on perfectly healthy animals for education are ethical, what degree of anesthesia is adequate, and how the animal should be euthanized during or after the vivisection. With such a blurred line between answers, ethical dilemmas often become a matter of "how much is too much". When it comes to stopping animal research, an even more controversial dilemma is raised. When it comes to no longer being able to perform research on animals, we must ask how much we value the lives of ourselves and other animals. Without animal research, we would need to perform research on humans in areas where other models cannot be used or have not been developed. Are the people who want to stop animal use in research willing to allow research to be done on human subjects? Would they value the lives of some animals over those of themselves, other humans, and the countless people and animals that rely on research to treat them? They must consider that, without animal research, the rate at which we can find ways to save lives will be drastically reduced, and people and animals can and will die of new diseases and conditions. They must also ask themselves which animals they want to protect. If they don't want mammals to be used in research, what about reptiles, birds, or arthropods? Many arthropod species can be researched for their production of biological substances that cannot yet be

synthesized. If they want to save the lives of animals in research, who is to say what lives are more valuable?

I'm unsure as to whether this movement could spread to the entirety of research animals, but I hope it never does. I don't think we would ever get to that point, but I know that you can never completely predict how the masses will act. I think people should be educated on the importance of animal research to save the lives of people AND animals, as simply wanting to do away with animal research shows a complete disregard for the wellbeing of people and animals. I do agree with the calmer side of the animal rights movement, as promoting the humane treatment of animals in research is important both for ethical reasons and the research itself. I firmly believe that the mistreatment of animals should be stopped, and hypocritical "animal rights" groups need to be stopped before they can make the situation any worse. When it comes to the Brown Dog Affair, my personal opinion is that much of what they were doing is wrong, but the concept of vivisections is not entirely inhumane. They should have properly managed and enriched the dog between vivisections, should have allowed more time to recover so the dog does not only know vivisections and recoveries for its entire life, they should have used an animal that needed a surgery anyway to demonstrate it to students, they should have properly anesthetized the animal, and they should have euthanized it in a calmer, less gruesome way.

I think vivisections and dissections are a great way to educate students on the internal processes of animals and methods of performing vivisections and dissections, but people should avoid using or killing animals solely for such procedures. When it comes to the growing legal status of pets, I find it bizarre how much people are treating them like humans. I understand how much we love our pets, and I can understand why some people with deep connections would want awards for emotional damages or ownership of a pet when owners split, but so much of the terminology has anthropomorphized our pets. When looking at the entire picture, we are animals too. We have evolved to be able to solve complex problems, use tools, and develop systems to help our survival. Animal research is a part of that too, as we have developed systems to save lives and ecosystems, all thanks to our willingness to make sacrifices to help more animals in the future. Animal research should be regulated and kept humane, but is necessary to help people and animals around the world.