Estee Lauder Business Ethics

Estee Lauder Cosmetics has long been under major scrutiny for its trade partnership with China, which allows them to develop their scope of global cosmetic artistry through sales. However, China's local market trade laws possess requirements of beauty products, such as makeup, to initially be tested on non-human beings before its distribution to consumers. These practices can include testing potentially toxic ingredients on skin, eyes, hair etc in order to see if negative reactions occur. (Rawi, 2012)

According to virtue ethics, Estee Lauder's engagement in the abuse and suffering of animals for the mere satisfaction of the insignificant process of meeting the legal requirements of China's cosmetic industry should be vilified and is a practice that should be prohibited.

This notion has gathered much support, one of which states animals are involved in pain and suffering for the purpose and benefit of humans, which in this instance any virtuous person would condemn. Additionally, furthering this statement, it is clear that the suffering that occurs is for the trivial use of beauty and makeup products. Estee Lauder is such a powerhouse in the beauty industry, it possesses global market shares and is the parent company to many sub-brands including Clinique etc. Estee lauder's 'parent' status with various lucrative sub-brands that are operative in many countries that do not require testing on animals prove its global success. This demonstrates its emergence in Chinese markets is purely for profitability, which in this circumstance is not virtuous.

The focus of virtue ethics is on an individual's moral character and the traits expressed from their actions (Solomon, 1993) rather than the deontological approach of emphasising duties and rules, or utilitarian consequentialism. Virtue is a character trait that reflects 'excellence' but its contrary is a detrimental vice. (Hursthouse, Rosalind, Pettigrove and Glen, 2016.) A system of virtue ethics was presented by Aristotle (1954) that includes 'justice' which will be discussed in this essay. Many scholars have differing opinions of virtue ethics, however, a commonality is a view that virtues are expected to be entrenched into an individual's character, so they do not require deliberation (Frederick, 2003) Hursthouse's (2011,119) explanation "direct[s] us to think about the rights and wrongs of our treatment of nonhuman animals In terms of virtues and vices rather than terms of consequences or rights." Per Abbate (2014) the moral character of the agent's (Estee Lauder) performance of such action is fundamental.

Is Suffering and Pain Necessary

Animal testing often results in pain and suffering which contradicts virtuous individuals' characteristics, but virtue ethics accepts this in the instance of a "conflict problem" (Hursthouse, 2011). This virtue ethics dilemma not only encompasses pain and suffering but also the lack of moral necessity.

Empathy is a moral virtue that is fundamental in the maintenance of a virtuous life, it is a notion that can be extended to non-human beings also. (Abbate,2014). Stephens (1994) argues a truly compassionate person feels uncomfortable utilising the enjoyment of a luxury that is possessed at the expense of another's suffering. By engaging in animal testing for profitability, Estee

lauder are not acting with empathy because they are allowing the infliction of pain to beings with inherent worth, these actions cannot reflect a virtuous agent (Abbate,2014). The authorisation of such pain and suffering caused to non-humans can have implications that are detrimental of a character resulting in callousness, which is a vice that leads to a life of unfulfillment. (Garrett, 2012), this is justly unethical and is far from virtuous.

It can be argued that the scope of suffering such animals endure is indefensible. Truly empathetic and compassionate agents should understand the retrieval of cosmetic goods through a process of anguish is fundamentally unjust. The infliction of pain can significantly impede the fostering of compassion (Hursthouse,2011). Estee lauder fails to encourage the virtue of temperance by actively engaging in animal testing. Temperance involves the rejection of the pleasure pursuit when faced with issues that conflict with the virtue of integrity and compassion (Abbate, 2014). The integrity of establishments is a quality that is significant to consumers and ethical activists, Estee Lauder as a corporation has been criticised for lacking integrity and having poor character due to their selfish involvement in the continued use of the unnecessary suffering of animals. Hursthouse (2006) states cruelty is an action that permits the suffering of a being, without the pain infliction having any justified purpose (Hursthouse,2006) . Such unnecessary infliction of suffering would be considered cruel to any virtuous being, the use of pain in the cosmetic industry lacks moral necessity and is an inexcusable purpose

Deontological theorists such as Kant, criticise this perspective as ‘the kingdom of ends,’ in this case the moral community, is restricted to rational beings, of which only humans fit the prerequisite (Kant,2012). Kant elaborates that humans as rational beings, have no obligations towards ‘beings lacking reasoning.’ Consequently, because animals cannot possess moral capability or autonomy, they go beyond the scope of Estee Lauder’s duty of care to non-humans. (Potter,2005). Kant believes the purpose of animals is purely for instrumental use by humans (Korsgaard,2012). This is because they only have relative worth as they are without reason (Kant, Wood and Scheewind,2002). Modern philosophers such as Cohen support Kant’s model, they state sentient animals are incapable of holding moral rights due to their absence of free moral judgment (Nobis, 2014) as the concept of rights is primarily anthropological (Cohen,1997). This notion arguably justifies Estee Lauder’s selfish use of animal testing in the cosmetic market, not only because non-humans cannot hold rights but also because they are purposed for human utility.

Nonetheless, virtue ethics would strongly criticise Kant’s argument by focusing more on justice. Nussbaum (2007) demonstrates that animals have capabilities beyond sentience, they have autonomous movements and abilities to create social groups, however, when confined for testing these abilities are suppressed (Kuhse and Singer,2001). By denying animals the opportunity to express such given means through unethical restrictive testing purposes, Estee Lauder faces a major issue of injustice. The issue of injustice is also an argument over moral capability, as Kant fails to consider human beings like, senile beings or infants as the lacking rationale. This is where the paradox of Kantian perspectives lay (Pluhar,1995). If marginal humans are protected from moral exclusion, surely, animals should hold similar moral standing (Mcginn,1996).

Revenue

Estee Lauder and its many sub-brands hold a prevalent global consumer base, the reasoning

behind their expansion into China, where suffering from animal testing is inevitable, is merely fiscal. Aristotle coins this as ‘chrematisike’ which is defined as a trade for profit that is absolutely devoid of virtue (Solomon,2004). He believes all trade is a form of exploitation and contends those who engage in such practices are ‘parasites’ and are not respectable individuals, they just sit at the peripheral of society (Solomon,2004). It is clear Estee Lauder act as ‘parasites’ through their profit-focused agendas that continue to exploit animals and consumers, who gather information from their website which states they are a cruelty-free corporation except in countries that mandate it, which as a statement is contradictory and misleading. An act is either selfless or selfish, mistreatment of animals in exchange for revenue can either, as in this case, result in irresponsibility and wealth or failure and integrity (Solomon,2004). Estee Lauders possible most virtuous act would be the ‘selfless’ one of maintaining the integrity and avoiding animal cruelty by disregarding Chinese cosmetic markets until legislation is overturned and be considered ‘failures’ by those potential consumers for that period, as they still are prominent enough to still create global revenue.

Utilitarian stockholder theory can be applicable to Estee Lauder’s revenue model. Friedman (1970) argues ‘the only social responsibility of businesses is to increase its profits’ and extended this to encompass a responsibility to legally, without fraudulence or deceit, use its resources to gain profit (Freidman,1983). Therefore, it is reasonable for Estee Lauder to extend to china’s cosmetic market for revenue, despite its engagement in animal testing as it is a legal practice, and per their website have advised customers about the exception to their cruelty-free stance, so there is no deception. This notion reaffirms Bartol’s (1998) statement of the free markets ‘invisible hand,’ which emphasizes that the social responsibility of corporations is to generate profit while obeying legislations. Consequential utilitarianism combined with Friedman’s perspective stipulates if ‘an act is morally right depends only on consequences’ rather than the inherent nature of the act or circumstances that prelude it (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2015). Such reasonings indicate Estee Lauder are in fact acting morally because the most successful ethical act maximises revenue (Clark and Johnson,1995) which Freidman consistently argues is the focal responsibility of a company.

According to Dobson (2004), the presence of a community that functions to nurture the virtues of character is an essential aspect of virtue ethics. Aristotle stipulates, as people our focus should be considering ourselves part of the wider community, that of which defines our virtues (Solomon,2004). Virtue Ethics criticises the utilitarian perspective as it believes businesses are in a position to be a community that nurtures virtues, they are not exclusively responsible for maximising revenue. Virtue ethics believes successful business policy should promote a virtue of integrity for people (Solomon,2004). Estee Lauder, in an attempt to encourage revenue growth, concentrates on external goals, as opposed to internal ones. MacIntrye (1984) separates external goals as being financial wealth and yield, whereas internal has intrinsic value to which virtues can be applied. In order for Estee Lauder’s revenue to be maximised they ought to be guided by internal goals rather than wealth, which in turn will also be more ethical (Arjoon,2000). This idea is concurred by the various prominent beauty brands who refuse to profit off China’s cruelty-prone system. These brands are extremely successful and continue to gain revenue because of their ethical virtues. Despite utilitarian perspectives of maximising profits, the communitarian concept that virtue ethics follows reinforces the importance of community, virtuous thinkers would believe the demise of such establishments would benefit the development of good within the community (Naughton, Alford and Brady,1996). This reiterates the notion that corporations can be considered communities that promote virtues.

Subsequently, good social and corporate policy should be adopted and developed by Estee Lauder so that an environment where virtues can be nurtured is recognised. Arjoon (2000) proves ‘there is a positive relationship between corporate social and corporate financial performance’ which demonstrates the adoption of virtues within a business can lead to increased ethical revenue.

Conclusion

In summation, Estee Lauder has not acted as ethical virtuous agents who reflect values of integrity, empathy or justice, they have instead exhibited actions of vices rather than those of virtue. Their focus on the maximisation of profits alongside their voluntary engagement in the infliction of pain and suffering on animals who are tested for cosmetic use displays aspects of selfishness is far from virtuous. Estee Lauder have the ability, as a corporation, to gain profit while maintaining a virtuous and ethical standpoint. By continuing cosmetic trade in China, they willingly choose to act unethically, which suggests their failure to consumers by refusing to promote virtuous values. This analysis demonstrates the immorality of Estee Lauder as a company that favours global revenue at the expense of exploitation and fundamental virtuous ethics.

References:

1. Abbate, C. (2014) ‘Virtues and Animals: A Minimally Decent Ethic for Practical Living in a Non-ideal World’, Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics. 27 (6), pp 909–929
2. Aristotle, Ross, W. & Brown, L. (2009) The Nicomachean Ethics. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press
3. Arjoon, S. (2000) ‘Virtue Theory as a Dynamic Theory of Business’ Journal of Business Ethics 28 (2), pp 159–178
4. Journal of Business Ethics and Organization Studies, 9(1). Available at: http://ejbo.jyu.fi
5. Frederick, R. (2003) A Companion To Business Ethics. Malden, Mass; Oxford: Blackwell
6. Freeman, R.E. (1984), Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach, Boston: Pitman.
7. Friedman, M. (1970) The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”, New York Times Magazine
8. Garrett, J.R. (2012) The Ethics Of Animal Research: Exploring The Controversy. Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press,
9. Guerrini, A (2003) Experimenting with humans and animals: from Galen to Animal Rights, 1st edn (John Hopkins University Press)
10. Hursthouse, Rosalind and Pettigrove, Glen (2016) 'Virtue Ethics', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ethics-virtue/ (Accessed: 13 April 2019)
11. Hursthouse, R. (2011). Virtue ethics and the treatment of animals. In T. Beauchamp & R. Frey (Eds.), The oxford handbook of animal ethics (pp. 119–143). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
12. Kant, I., Wood, A., & Schneewind, J. (2002) Groundwork For The Metaphysics Of Morals. New Haven: Yale University Press
13. Korsgaard, C.M. (2012) 'A Kantian Case for Animal Rights.' In Animal Law - Tier and

Rect: Developments and Perspectives in the 21st Century, ed. Margot Michael, Daniela Ku?hne, and Julia Ha?nni, pp 3-27
14. Kuhse, H., & Singer, P. (2001) A Companion To Bioethics. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
15. MacIntyre, A. (1984) After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd edition (University of Notre Dame Press).
16. McGinn, C. (1996) 'Beyond Prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals', The New Republic, 15, p. 39
17. Naughton, M., Alford, H., & Brady, B. (1996) ‘The Common Good and the Purpose of the Firm’, in J. Donahue and M. Theresa Moser (eds.), Religion, Ethics and The Common Good (College Theology Society and Twenty-Third Publication)
18. Nobis, N. (2004) ‘Carl Cohen’s ‘Kind’ Arguments for Animal Rights and Against Human Rights.’ Journal of Applied Philosophy, 21 (1) pp 43-59
19. Nussbaum, M. (2007). Frontiers of justice. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press
20. Pluhar, E. (1995). Beyond prejudice: The Moral Significance of Human and Nonhuman Animals. Durham: Duke University Press
21. Potter, N.T. (2005) 'Kant on Duties to Animals' Faculty Publications - Department of Philosophy. 18. Available at: h p://digitalcommons.unl.edu/philosfacpub/18 (Accessed: 3 April 2018)
22. Rawi, M. (2012) ‘Cruelty Free? Avon and Estee Lauder under fire as PETA reveal cosmetic brands order animal testing’, Daily Mail, 22 February. Available at: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2104319/Avon-Est-e-Lauder-Peta-reveals-cosmetic-brands-ordered-animal-testing.html (Accessed: 7 April 2019)
23. Sinnott-Armstrong, W, 'Consequentialism', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Available at: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/ (Accessed: 16 April 2019)
24. Solomon, R.C. (1993) Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in Business. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
25. Solomon, R (2004) ‘Aristotle, Ethics and Business Organizations’ Organization Studies 25 (6)
26. Stephens, W. (1994). Five arguments for vegetarianism. Philosophy in the Contemporary World, 1, pp 25–39.
27. Bartol, K. (1998), Management A Pacific Rim Focus, Sydney, Australia, McGraw Hill.
28. Clark, G.L. & Jonson, E.P. (1995), Management Ethics: Theory, Cases and Practice, Australia: Harper Educational.
29. Cohen, C. (1997) ‘Do animal have rights?’ Ethics & Behaviour, 7, 2 pp 91-102
30. Dobson, J. (2004) ‘Applying Virtue Ethics in Business: The Agent-Based Approach’, Electronic
31. Watson, W. (2009) ‘ Animal Testing: Issues and Ethics: Rosen Publishing Group