

Teaching animal ethics to understand animal welfare

Alma Massaro and Paola Fossati

Thanks to higher consumer expectations that animals in the production process are treated with appropriate care, there has recently been a significant increase in the attention given to issues related to animal welfare across Europe. For this reason, from the 60s onwards several attempts to define a concept of welfare that applies to animals reared for human ends have been made.

The first step in this direction was the publication of the 'Report of the Technical Committee to Enquire into the Welfare of Animals Kept under Intensive Livestock Husbandry Systems' (1965) better known as 'The Brambell Report'. In it the Authors stated that animals should have the freedom 'to stand up, lie down, turn around, groom themselves and stretch their limbs'. These recommendations – widely known as the 'Brambell's Five Freedoms' – are still used as a framework for good animal husbandry and as a basis for action for professional groups, including veterinarians. They are also highly regarded by the main organisations for the protection of animals.

Another important step has been the recognition of animals as 'sentient beings' under the law (Treaty of Amsterdam, European Union 1997, a view then inherited by the Treaty of Lisbon, European Union 2007). As a result, the protective legislation in force has been strengthened so that animals enjoy superior protection compared to mere goods, and animal interests are expected to be taken in consideration.

Following this trend, Universities and their Veterinary departments have created courses meant to cover the issues related to the concept of animal welfare, in order to prepare professionals to be able to understand and deal with the different problems connected with the rearing of animals. Teaching animal welfare in Veterinary School is therefore a quite recent phenomenon, 'The first lecture for veterinarians was in 1986 at Cambridge Veterinary School in the United Kingdom (Broom, 2005). Since that time, courses in Veterinary

Schools have been implemented beginning in European Universities' (Zapata, 2016). From that moment students all over Europe started to be introduced to the concept of welfare, animal welfare issues, and all the legislation that concerns it.

However, notwithstanding the big role played by this concept, it is still quite difficult to find an unambiguous definition (Sobbrio, 2013): is it to be construed in a negative way as the absence of all those conditions listed in the Five Freedoms? Or, is it to be construed in a positive way as the presence of certain characteristics, in order to improve the conditions of the animals reared?

Likewise, should this concept be thought as a minimum for animal survival, as 'the ability of an individual to cope with its environment' (Broom, 1986), or should it include their 'mental, psychological, and cognitive needs' (Duncan and Petherick, 1991, 5017-5018)? In the first case, welfare would be a state that can be scientifically measured according to well-defined indicators 'without the involvement of moral considerations' (Broom, 1991). On the contrary, the second case includes conditions that go beyond the physical level and hint at the consciousness of non-humans animals (The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness), making it harder to find those scientifically assessable indicators needed by scientists – including veterinarians – in order to assess if the animal is benefiting or suffering from good or bad welfare. The second point of view integrates values and judgements about the quality of life of single animals.

But if this is the case then veterinarian students cannot be introduced to animal welfare only from a scientific/legal approach but need also to be trained in different ethical frameworks and approaches that underlie this concept. Philosophy, therefore, becomes an important tool for the veterinary profession, able to provide thought instruments to analyze the numerous quandaries raised by human-animal relationship in general and animal farming in particular.

Ethical considerations have already been recognised to be of foremost importance for the assessment of good scientific and farm practices (Shammo and Resnik, 2009). Veterinarians, in fact, face a range of ethical challenges that affect their professional roles. This increases their need to be trained in the ethical dimension of the profession, in order to ensure best veterinary practices, and also to foster the public's trust in the veterinary profession itself.

For this reason, it is realistic to preview a deeper training in ethics for veterinarians and practitioners in order to encourage them to consider the ethical aspects of their practice and to prepare them to critically think about the different ways animals can be handled and treated, foreseeing improvements for humans and non-humans. In this sense animal ethics needs to be thought of as a propaedeutic topic to the courses of animal welfare in order to offer students the tools to understand what Welfare (as a concept) means and what it can be in practice for an animal reared for human ends. And in order to let philosophical thought make its way into veterinary practice, animal ethics classes should be carried out by philosophers, rather than by animal welfare scholars, who are familiar with the legal framework surrounding this concept but are not trained in ethical thinking.

The development and refinement of veterinary ethics teaching is supported also by the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) and the European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE), who states that 'one cannot be a good clinician without being aware of the ethical issues in decision-making in practice' (Morton, 2013).

Providing veterinary students with ethical frameworks and teaching them a correct approach to animal welfare will help integrate science-based knowledge about animals and preferences with ethical values, which will strengthen ethical welfare vocabulary and reasoning skills of future practitioners. As has already been noted, we are witnessing 'an increasing convergence of science

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and philosophy. In fact, ethicists began to look at empirical research to solve ethics issues, while animal welfare science started to recognise the importance of subjective experiences' (Carenzi, 2009).

In this sense veterinarian students need to be introduced to the different ethical frameworks and approaches employed to address animal welfare in order to develop a deep understanding of this concept that goes far beyond the knowledge of its scientific and legal frameworks.

Paper

Handle with care: An alternative view on livestock medicine

Johanna Karg and Herwig Grimm

The following summary takes reference from the full paper as published in the Conference Proceedings 'Professionals in food chains' of this year's Eursafe Conference in Vienna.

The basic idea of care ethics is still of little importance in veterinary practice. However, veterinary medicine is undergoing a radical gender change as the percentage of female graduates has risen from 15% to 80 % in the last thirty years. Since the ethics of care originates from a largely feminist approach, the radical increase of female veterinarians may require a reevaluation. We wanted to create new links between feminist approaches, and veterinary ethics by asking: What happens if a feminist criticism of traditional ethics is transferred into the field of veterinary ethics?

We will present one response of a distinguished philosopher, Bernard Rollin, to a typical dilemma in livestock practice, to demonstrate how answers to moral questions are given within the classic veterinary ethics frame. We will subsequently examine this dilemma with criteria addressed in care ethics and contrast them on that basis with traditional accounts.

The case: Cow with cancer eye

The practical case to be discussed here is presented by the author as follows: 'You examine a cow in late pregnancy that has keratoconjunctivitis, blepharospasm, and photophobia due to an ocular squamous cell carcinoma. You recommend enucleation [surgical removal of the tumor] or immediate slaughter. The owner wants to allow the cow to calve, wean the calf, and then ship the cow. He does not want to invest in surgery for a cow that will soon calve.' (Rollin, 2006: 106)

In this case surgery and elimination of the tissue affected by the often painful tumor would be the therapy of choice for the veterinarian. But surgery is an expensive procedure and sedation, stress or anaesthesia can cause a loss of

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