

When do Science and Ethics Overlap?

W. Ray Stricklin
Department of Animal & Avian Sciences
University of Maryland
College Park

Overview & Summary

Question: *When do science and ethics overlap?*

Answer: *They always overlap!*

“Science alone should be the basis of dealing with animal welfare.”

- Science is
 - a **synonym for objectivity**.
 - what scientists do.
 - data driven, hypothesis testing. (“*Darwin and Einstein were not scientists!*”).
 - consensus opinion of those knowledgeable about the subject matter.
 - simplification, public knowledge, common knowledge, etc.
 - **human endeavor** associated with gaining a rational understanding of all components that of the universe.

Science and Ethics

- Science deals with *what is*.
- Ethics deals with *what ought to be*.
- **Animal welfare** is ultimately a question of *what ought to be* but should be in harmony with the knowledge about *what is*.

Animal Welfare:

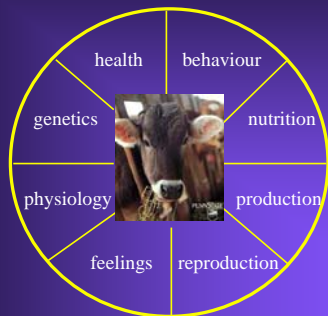
- A social and political movement with organizations and persons possessing a range of motivations, ideologies and agendas.
- How we humans ought to treat animals.
- The well-being of an individual animal.

Scientific Definitions of Animal Welfare

- Production
- Health
- Stress
- Pain and Suffering
- Behaviour
- Strictly what the animal feels

-Roughly in chronological order, and with increasing subjectivity.
-Increasingly toward the concerns expressed by the public!

Animal Welfare



Animal Welfare

- Having to do with the total life experiences of an animal.
- Animal Welfare Science?
 - implies expertise in all disciplines.
 - implies a blending or merging of science and ethics.

Science

- Discuss the limits of science and applied ethics.
- **Demonstrate with examples that science cannot answer all questions.**
- Discuss Animal Welfare movement trends and speculate on possible future developments.



Scientist: "Science tells me everything I need to know."
"Ethics is just a bunch of words."
"Scientists have a superior way of thinking."
"Ethics is to science as pornography is to love."

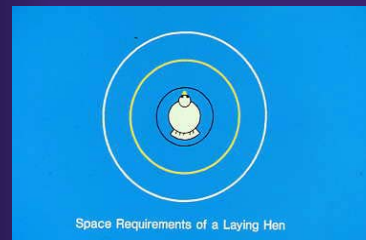
Ethicist: "Ethics derives only from a deity."
"Of course vegetarians are morally superior."

Almost everything that distinguishes the modern world from earlier centuries is attributable to science, which achieved its most spectacular triumphs in the seventeenth century.

Bertrand Russel. 1972. *History of Western Philosophy*, Allen and Anwin, London, P. 512

Role of ethics? Feudal system, polygamy, slavery, women's rights, war, horses, ...

Researchers can determine how much space is needed for a hen to perform a given behaviour.



Space Requirements of a Laying Hen

Research alone cannot determine whether or not a hen "ought to" be able to perform the behaviour!

How much space does a hen need?

- To stand?
- To turn around?
- To stretch her wings?
- To dust bathe?
- To engage in social behavior?
- To engage in courtship and mating?
- To fly?
- To roost in a tree?

"A rat, is a pig, is a dog, is a boy."

In matters of pain and suffering:

"A rat, is a pig, is a dog, is a boy."

Which element does not belong in the following set?

a) boy b) tree c) frog d) rock

- From the viewpoint of **science**, the rock is the exception.
- The rock is not a living being - a qualitative difference.

Which element does not belong in the set?

a) boy b) pig c) frog d) tree

- From the viewpoint of **science**, the tree is the exception.
- The tree is not an **animal** - a qualitative difference.

Which element does not belong in the set?

a) rat b) pig c) dog d) frog

- From the viewpoint of **science**, the frog is the exception.
- The frog is not an **mammal** - a qualitative difference.

Which element does not belong in the set?

a) rat b) pig c) dog d) boy

- **Science** classifies them all as **mammals**, and contends there is **no qualitative difference!**
- *The boy is placed in separate category on the basis of a value judgement - on the basis of an **ethical argument!***

Mammal: (rat, pig, dog, boy)

- **Science** is the basis for grouping the elements together.
- **Ethics** is the basis that one can use to argue that the boy deserves different treatment.
- Darwin - "...differ only in degree and not in kind."

Finnegan the squirrel



- Two days after giving birth, mama dog Giselle allowed Finnegan to nurse.
- A videotape shows her encouraging him to suckle alongside her litter of five pups.

What is the "scientific" interpretation of this behaviour?

"Domestication-induced alterations of instinctive behavior are, by nature, processes bordering closely on pathological events."

Lorenz (1954)

Lorenz viewed adoption of non-kin as moral decline.

My graduate student views adoption of the squirrel as indicative of caring among animals.

"Science alone should be the basis of dealing with animal welfare."

- What exactly does this mean?
- Does this mean that scientists should "write the rules?"
- Why "science alone?"
- Who defines science?
- Do we use the European view of science or the American definition of science?

Scientific diet



The Stricklin diet



- ✓ Diet is a matter of personal choice.
- ✓ Eating habits are strongly tied to ethnic, religious and other traditions.
- ✓ Scientific information about food should be made available to persons.
- ✓ However, freedom of choice should not be taken from citizens (consumers) in the name of science!

Elements of Moral Philosophy

Rachels (1993)

- "Most people believe ... that while the slaughterhouse may be an unpleasant place, the animals that are raised for food are otherwise treated well enough. But Singer's argument points out, nothing could be further from the truth."
- "So for these animals, the slaughterhouse is not an unpleasant end to an otherwise contented existence. As terrifying as the process of slaughter is, for them it may actually be a merciful release."

Animal Agriculture and Ethics

- Don't give up the "high ground."
- Do the right thing.
- Address the issue of animal "quality of life."

Making Reasonable Moral Judgments

- Care about discovering the truth.
- Establish the facts.
- Avoid prejudice.
- Consider arguments/avoid logical mistakes.
- Consider relevant moral principles/achieve moral consistency.
- Reflect on what one knows.

A Moral Argument

Premises

- 1) It is wrong to cause pain and suffering.
- 2) Meat animals experience pain & suffering.

Conclusion

- 3) Therefore, one should not eat meat.

A Moral Argument

Premises

- 1) It is wrong to cause pain and suffering.
- 2) Meat animals experience pain & suffering.

Conclusion

- 3) The pain and suffering that meat animals experience should be eliminated where possible (practical).

Quality of Life

- Quality of life of animals is the primary ethical argument against animal agriculture.
- Should move to ensure that quality of animal life is a net plus for animal agriculture.
- Goal of Animal Scientists should be maximize benefits and minimize *costs*:
Animals used in agriculture benefit from having existed.
- Every PhD student should be required to construct a moral argument for their research and for animal agriculture in general.

Natural Ecosystems

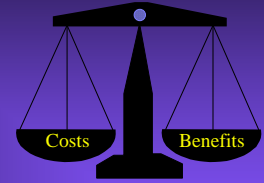
- A balance between animals and plants.
- **Appropriately practiced agriculture** involves a *managed* ecosystem wherein the costs are minimized and benefits are optimized for humans, animals and the environment.

(Stricklin 1989)



Goals of Animal Agriculture

- **Minimize the costs to:**
 - animals,
 - environment, and
 - humans (health, worker safety, rural society, etc.)
- **Maximize the benefits** to each party.



"We must move quality of life of food animals from a cost to a benefit."

Swedish Farm Animal Rights

"Cows must have access to pasture."

But this applies only during the growing season!



Tie-stalls in Sweden

- Many dairy cows tied during non-growing season (~October to May).
- **Argument:** Banning tie-stalls would lead to bigger barns for loose-housing:
 - Ultimately poorer welfare (larger groups, more milk per cow, feet & leg problems, etc.)
 - More environmental problems.
 - Force out small farms.
 - ✓ negative for rural society as a whole.
 - ✓ loss of the traditional red barns, Swedish Red cows, etc.
- Emphasizes the importance of a holistic view.

A Major Challenge

- The animal industries compete for the same consumer dollar.
- There is no single "Animal Agriculture."
- Animal protein consumption per capita has remained almost constant during the past 50 yrs but with an increase in cheese and poultry and decrease in red meat.
- The challenge is to develop AW standards that do not create an "unfair" advantage for one species-production system relative to its competitors.



A review of survey data of the past 50 years. (HSUS Publication; Herzog et al., 2001)

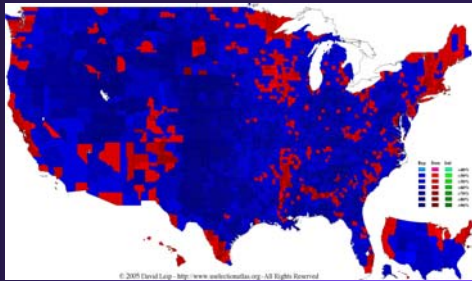
- There is no society-wide consensus regarding the moral status of animals.
- However, public opinion has:
 - shifted toward providing greater protection to animals.
 - dramatically increased its membership in animal protection organizations.
 - agrees (~65%) that, "An animal's right to live free of suffering should be equally important to that of a human."
 - an ~65% favorable view of the animal rights movement.

A review of survey data of the past 50 years. (HSUS Publication; Herzog et al., 2001)

- Only ~2% of Americans are “true” vegetarians.
- Majority of persons state that health concerns are the basis for choosing to avoid certain animal products.
- There is no detectable trend toward increasing vegetarianism.
- Wish to continue animal products in their diets.

Possible implications

Trend seems to be toward **uncoupling** the ownership of the **animal’s life** from ownership of the **animal food products**.



Red = Democratic vote Blue = Republican
Colors are reversed from the typical “Red State vs Blue State.”

Simply expressed, our moral responsibility must be to provide our farm animals with a reasonable quality of life and a gentle death.

Webster (1993)

World Conference on Animal Production

