**Beyond the agenda of care and cure: Veterinary ethics in contemporary context**

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Abstract (English)

Tannenbaum (2010) has argued that because the veterinary profession serves both animals and people it occupies a unique and uncertain position in current discussions on care, welfare and rights. In their everyday working lives, vets are confronted by the principles that underpin all human-animal interaction: they require up to date technical knowledge and a number of ‘soft skills’ in order to make good decisions and communicate them at work. At the heart of these applied ethical problems are questions of power for, as Tannenbaum (2010: 143) writes, ‘animals as well as humans often have legitimate interests and moral claims that flow from these interests’. In other words, the rights of humans and animals are often inter-twined and vets must ‘face the difficult task of balancing animal and human interests’ as part of their professional skillset (ibid: 143). There are, of course, financial, professional and moral imperatives to ‘get ethics right’.

Training and academic research that underpins proficiency in making these decisions is partial, however, in the majority of veterinary faculty (Magalhães-Sant'Ana, 2015). Part of the reason for this is that traditional academic enquiry into animal ethics has been pursued within narrow disciplinary categories and cross-pollination between the life-sciences and humanities has been relatively limited (Whay and Main, 2009). While there are a number of quality interdisciplinary ethics textbooks aimed at vets (Legood, 2000 and Klingborg, 2011), most publications on animal ethics emerge in highly specific publications and do not cross-over into, or draw significantly from, philosophy, sociology or organisation studies where there is growing interest in animal care and welfare. Part of the reason for the lack of travel between fields resides within the humanities themselves; specifically the long-standing norm that ‘the social world’ is a human one. Furthermore, research within the veterinary field has largely been characterised as ‘positivist’ by those outside it; a criticism which has militated against collaboration (Lowe et al, 2013). There has been suspicion that life scientists see social scientists as the ‘back end fix’ or the ‘whip hand’ for scientific knowledge to find power outside the academy (UK Commission on the Social Sciences, 2003). Despite the current academic impetus to demonstrate real world ‘impact’ in research, it is problematic for academics and practitioners to work together. How then might we seek out spaces for collaboration that would have pragmatic benefits to academics, researchers and vets in practice?

Despite the difficult problems of working across disciplines, those who are interested in animal ethics are often united by a belief in the moral obligation to understand, alleviate, and prevent conditions that cause animal suffering. In seeking to build on this shared motivation, I suggest that the social sciences have much to offer the ‘scientific’ community (Hamilton and Taylor, 2014; Lestel, 2006). In making this case, I support the small but growing number of inter-disciplinary work groups that have been set up to investigate particular animal care problems (for example, Penny et al, 2009; Whay and Main, 2013). I aim to extend this literature and, using a short empirical example, suggest how those who share an ethical interest in nonhuman life might work productively together. This, I argue, has the potential to take the veterinary industry - as the place where ethical issues are at their most acute - beyond the narrow agenda of care and cure and into more creative terrain where there is rigorous intellectual space for learning across disciplines.

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Zusammenfassung (Deutsch)

In this presentation, I argue that there is much that cross-disciplinary thinking on ethics can bring to practical animal care scenarios and suggest – using a short empirical example - that we should consider new ways of enabling those who share an ethical interest in nonhuman life to work productively together, despite differing intellectual heritage and methodology. This, I argue, has the potential to take the veterinary industry - as the place where ethical issues are at their most acute - beyond the narrow agenda of care and cure and into more creative terrain where there is rigorous intellectual space for learning across disciplines.