

Editorial

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The terms of veterinary ethics are being redefined in theory as well as in practice. What is the role of veterinary medicine in society and what should it become? Which values are relevant for the veterinary profession? Does a veterinarian owe primary duty to the client or to the animal patient (Rollin 1996/2016)? Veterinary ethics is subject to multifaceted change, not because its central questions have changed, but because they have become issues of interdisciplinary research. This development has gone hand in hand with an integration of veterinary ethics into the profession's research and teaching profiles at universities, a process which to date may best be described as fragmentary and heterogenic. While these innovations are often linked to a rising social concern for animals and their welfare, we offer a perspective which focuses on the novelty of the interdisciplinary nature of veterinary ethics. To be clear, 'interdisciplinarity' in this context denotes a new veterinary ethics that draws extensively on the social sciences and humanities. Thus, contemporary veterinary ethics is informed by insights gained by crossing disciplinary boundaries into adjacent fields of study. This special issue contributes to this development by exploring new perspectives on ethical dilemmas and philosophical predicaments encountered in veterinary medicine.

The professional ethics of veterinarians have always directed the profession's self-regulation. Standards of care, practical guidelines, and codes of conduct have been formulated and continuously revised according to the profession's reflection on its self-image as well as the external, societal expectations to which veterinarians are held. It is here that the profession's moral self-understanding becomes explicit. Significant aims and values are identified along with norms and principles that should guide a veterinarian's actions and decision-making. Hence, veterinary ethics also involves discussions about the ways in which the existing normative self-understanding is put into practice. Situations where contradictory moral demands are placed on a vet – which are common place in the veterinary working-life – provide the main substance and point of departure for ethical reflection. In this sense, veterinary ethics can be classified as a branch of applied ethics (Tannenbaum 1995; LeGood 2000). The recent

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calls for a further integration of ethics into veterinary research and teaching demand a *bottom up* approach which takes the everyday dilemmas of veterinary practice as a starting point. Priority is no longer given to abstract norms and values alone, and situational understandings of veterinary ethics gain increasing attention. Consequently, the very idea of veterinary ethics has changed, subjecting the whole of veterinary practice to ethical re-evaluation (Wathes et al. 2013; Weich et al. 2016; Mullan and Fawcett 2017). Increasingly, veterinary ethics reconsiders the ways in which the profession attempts to realise its commitment to (animal) health in clinics, labs, stables, and zoos. These contexts come with their own individual normative structure. Their guiding moral principles are evident in narratives which justify veterinary action, for instance the aim to restore health, end suffering, avoid the spread of diseases, provide food safety, gain knowledge, maintain productivity etc. What is called for, then, is an applied ethics predicated on a broad understanding of the profession's practical and moral complexity. Taking as a point of departure the moral problems that arise in veterinary practice means taking specific individual or public interests, moral values, legal norms, economic strains into account. In other words, it means working in a context-sensitive manner (Sandøe et al. 2016). This sort of approach to veterinary ethics helps to resolve ethical problems by revealing the moral dimensions of veterinary practice and identifying veterinary responsibilities in specific contexts and situations. This not only requires expertise in ethical reflection, but also an understanding of the social, legal and professional complexity of veterinary practice.

Following this line of thought, Franck Meijboom's contribution to this edition addresses veterinary responsibilities in the context of farm animal medicine. Meijboom argues that veterinary practice is generally characterized by the challenge of dealing with moral plurality stemming from the inconsistencies which typify moral views on animals. Further, veterinarians specialising in the treatment of farm animals are confronted with technical innovations, economic globalisation, and changing social demands with regard to livestock farming. Meijboom stresses that while professional codes or standards are important, they alone do not account for these developments. He argues for a further integration of applied ethics. Accordingly, veterinarians will benefit from acquiring moral competence prior to dealing with moral tensions.

Likewise, the paper authored by Lindsay Hamilton also investigates veterinarians' responsibility towards farm animals. Applying an ethnographic approach with a focus on organisational analysis and relational meaning-making, she analyses the cooperation between vets and farmers by examining the ways in which they respond to lameness in cows. Health is identified as a key term in the strategies devised to resolve this problem. In livestock farming, understandings of health are strongly linked to the idea of productivity, while in veterinary medicine concepts of health are generally derived from an evidence-based, scientific knowledge. Two different meanings are thus expressed by the same term: health. And these conflicting understandings are embodied by a single entity: the lame cow. Hamilton's ethnographic and epistemological approach to veterinary ethics suggests that the sharing of knowledge among the various care-givers is an essential part of veterinary responsibility.

The historian Mieke Roscher provides a profound analysis of the role that veterinary medicine played in the animal welfare debates of the Third Reich. This historical perspective offers an insight into the on-going transformations of central concepts such as 'welfare' in the deep and complex interplay between social policy and medical strategic orientation. In her paper, the dominant understandings of both veterinary and human medicine as applied sciences are thrown into doubt. The interplay between animal welfare and veterinary medicine

illustrates the importance of reflecting on their socio-political dimensions in order to better understand the past, present, and possible futures of veterinary medicine and its ethics. This will, on occasion, require us to reflect on the historical heritage of current ethical ideas and practices.

Vanessa Ashall, Kate Millar and Pru Hobson-West focus their attention on a more recent development in veterinary ethics; the increased interest in the similarities and differences between veterinary and medical ethics. The authors draw on both medical and animal ethics in order to address a practical question of veterinary ethics: How can an animal, as a being with moral status, be effectively protected in veterinary practice? Their approach is to critically analyse the suitability of the informed consent model for the protection of animal patients. In doing so, they identify a discrepancy between the moral demands put on the veterinary profession and the practitioners' actual resources and means of meeting said demands.

The recent turn in veterinary ethics - which has made veterinary care itself an issue for ethical reflection - forms the basis for a reconsideration of animal patients, as provided by Kerstin Weich and Herwig Grimm. Emphasising the close relationship with medical and bio-ethics, they examine central concepts of veterinary medicine as though it were a life science. They further draw on various notions from the philosophy of science to demonstrate that veterinary practice makes a significant contribution to the social and cultural meaning of bodies, life, and death. They focus on the question of becoming an animal patient and suggest that the process centres on the animal's incorporation into a biosocial frame. This frame, they argue, is fundamentally structured around ideas of health and disease. Reflecting on the conceptual foundations of veterinary practice allows for ethical reforms in the relationship between veterinarian and animal patient: Instead of *speaking for* the animal, which is commonly promoted as a model for veterinary responsibility, they suggest that we respond to the animal patient by *listening to* the specific articulations of veterinary concepts in veterinarian-patient encounters.

André Krebber follows a philosophical approach in line with traditional critical theory in order to address the experience of animal suffering as a central ethical concern. While Krebber refrains from drawing specific conclusions or providing practical orientation, he discusses three different phenomena of animal suffering. Starting with a deconstructive interpretation of a painting, he highlights the importance of pain and empathy to the concept of individuality. He continues with reflections on a personal experience with a terminal ill companion animal, discussing the dialectics between subjects and objectification and their effect on the interplay of pain and individuality. Krebber avoids hazardous straight-forward answers to identified problems, instead cautiously illustrating the value of questioning what may at first seem to be self-evident. His reflections are characterised by caution and sensitivity towards the experiences of others. Veterinary ethics, then, is about more than implementing established ways of balancing competing interests. It is also, and ever more so, about being self-reflexive, which is to say that we ought to continually question why we hold certain ethical positions.

The innovative character of veterinary ethics is commonly attributed to a change that has largely come from within the profession. These internal developments have opened the subject to contributions from academia, in particular the humanities and social sciences. This has led to an exchange of ideas among disciplines which has been mutually beneficial. It has also allowed the veterinary profession to reform its understanding of its practical mandate and ethical scope. Given that the profession has gained broad respect for its scientific competence, the time has come for such questions about its role and responsibilities as a social institution. Such self-reflections are predicated on - and in turn enrich - our curiosity in the multiple ways

veterinary medicine is involved in the shaping of human-animal-relationships. The idea of a self-contained profession which only provides scientific data on questions that arise ‘outside’ the society - e.g. the concern for animal welfare - is thus challenged by a close examination of the role of veterinary medicine in society as an active cultural player. Here, it has therefore been necessary to address the variety of approaches to veterinary ethics on multiple levels. Veterinarians are involved in many aspects of human-animal-relationships, indeed, they are charged with a special responsibility for animal *and* human health as well as for individual and public health. They are expected to strive for animal welfare, to guarantee food safety, and to contribute to national economic welfare. They are scientists and practitioners, they deal with feathers, fur, and farms, they care, cull, and cure, deal with pet owners, producers, livestock industry, administrators and the media. Moral dimensions and normative implications are expressed, reaffirmed and transformed in these manifold, cross-species interactions which take place in markedly different social and cultural spheres. We are convinced that research on the moral plurality and the different contexts of animal care will not only continue but will also become further incorporated into veterinary practice. It is our hope that this special issue can support this development.

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