

Knowing Animals: Introduction and overview

M Miele[†], H Buller[‡], I Veissier[§], B Bock[#] and H Spolder[†]

[†] Cardiff University, School of City and Regional Planning, Glamorgan Building, King Edward Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3WA, UK

[‡] College of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK

[§] INRA, UR1213 Herbivores, F-63122 Saint-Genès-Champanelle, France

[#] Department of Social Sciences, Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University, Hollandseweg 1, 6706 KN Wageningen, The Netherlands

[†] Wageningen UR Livestock Research, Postbus 65, 8200AB, Lelystad, Wageningen University, The Netherlands

To know an animal [...] is to gather together the whole dense layer of signs with which it may have been covered (Foucault 2004; p 44).

The conditions in which we study animals, the status of the facts we derive from them, the way we represent animals and interact with them, and the capacities for sentience and an emotional life that we attribute to them — in short, all the ways and means by which we ‘know’ animals — affect our views on how animals should be treated and how we think about what constitutes a good life for them. Such various ways of knowing animals are embedded in different science practices, in varied cultural and embodied relationships and encounters and within socially defined ethical and moral norms. Some of them are produced in animal science laboratories under experimental conditions; others are more empirical and hinge on direct real-life experiences of working with animals on farms. Others, again, depend on a more distanced and mediated experience of animals, as in the case of shopping and consuming animal foods. Knowledge of farm animals is highly mediated by the farming and meat industry, by the apparatuses of food safety and animal welfare science and by legislation and regulation, as well as an increasingly sophisticated process of qualification enacted by the retailing companies. Science may tell us how an animal responds to particular circumstances, whether physiologically or behaviourally, and may even provide an indicator of discomfort or pain. Understanding how we respond to that knowledge, what it ‘means’ to society and how we employ its ‘power’ to change our practices, relies upon an intersection of the natural and the social sciences; an understanding of both the animal and the human actors.

In this issue of *Animal Welfare*, we focus attention on the scientific and cultural practices associated with the different ways and practices of ‘knowing’ the welfare of farm animals. Drawing partly from the recently completed, EU-

funded Welfare Quality® research programme, we offer a set of papers that bring into conversation different approaches in social science and animal science to both the study and the assessment of animal welfare.

We start with the paper by Gail Tulloch that proposes a short historical overview of the philosophical approaches to non-human animals and how the perception of animals as sentient beings has become prevalent in the twentieth century, especially with the work of Martha Nussbaum. The second paper, by Ingenbleek and Immink, provides an overview of recent studies of consumers’ understandings and concerns about animal welfare revealing considerable variability within Europe.

A following group of papers address the complexity of regulating animal welfare when different ideas of what constitutes animal welfare co-exist in varied locations: Larry Busch’s paper, for example, points to the difficulties of creating standards for animal welfare when the concept itself effaces specifications.

The third group of papers explores new developments in understanding animal emotions within veterinary science. Webster contrasts the twin perspectives of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism and discusses how a notion of ‘reverse anthropomorphism’ (placing ourselves in the position of animals) might constructively help the scientific study of animals’ emotions. Boissy *et al* take up this theme in their account of recent research into the expression of emotions through ear postures in sheep. While exposing sheep to different situations, and studying discrete ear postures, they managed to relate individual ear postures to specific emotional states, such as fear, attention and surprise, drawing on insights from human psychology as well as ethology. The papers of Leenstra and Vossough provide detailed case studies on the application of such developments in understanding animal emotions to the development of alternatives to the killing of day-old chicks and to farrowing crates in pig husbandry, respectively.

To be effective, welfare standards need to be observed in practice. The papers of, first, Hubbard and Scott and, second, Roe *et al* investigate the practice of assessing animal welfare on farms. Hubbard and Scott compare and contrast farmer and welfare scientists’ approaches to welfare assessment while Roe *et al* consider the role and practice of professional assessors in everyday on-farm welfare assessment.

The final two papers explicitly address the need for a dialogue between different disciplines about animal welfare, and point to the productivity of a cross-fertilisation of ideas and perspectives between social sciences and animal sciences. This is most evident when this dialogue helps to introduce more reflexivity and new challenges to the research framing or when it informs new lines of research. Veissier *et al* thereby consider the

2 Introduction and overview

various ethical underpinnings of welfare assessment operating at a series of different levels and underlying many of the practical assumptions of assessment practice. Miele *et al* describe how the Welfare Quality® project combined insights from animal and social sciences when developing an animal welfare assessment tool, it explains how the science-society dialogue was organised throughout the project and analyses how this informed the scientific development of welfare param-

eters and the assessment protocol. The paper points to the effects of engaging with the issues raised by the laypersons involved in the consultation process, as in the case of the introduction of a new method for assessing animals' emotions, the Qualitative Behaviour Assessment, in the Welfare Quality® protocols.

Reference

Foucault M 2004 *The Order of Things* pp 44. Routledge: London, UK