Section 55
elsbeth.stassen@wur.nl

Fundamental moral attitudes of people to animals and their role in judgement

E.N. Stassen[1], F.W.A. Brom[2] and N.E. Cohen[1]

[1]*Animals and Society, department of Animal Sciences, Wageningen University, WIAS Graduate School, Wageningen, The Netherlands*
[2]*Rathenau Institute, the Hague, The Netherlands*

summary

An empirical model to describe fundamental moral attitudes to animals and their role in judgement on animal issues has been developed. Our aim was to describe the diversity of people's fundamental moral attitudes (FMAs) to animals. Furthermore, we aimed to clarify the role of these FMAs in the public debate about the culling of healthy animals in an animal disease epidemic.
In the model we used criteria from philosophical animal ethics to describe and understand the moral basis of FMAs and the dynamics of FMAs in debates. The results of a survey performed in the Netherlands will be presented. Two dominant FMAs were identified among the respondents, group A and Group B. More group A respondents were men and were older than group B respondents. The two groups differed with respect to their views on the hierarchical position of humans to animals, in their valuation of their convictions and in judgement. Important moral arguments to support the FMAs of people could be found.
The model was also useful in discussions on various animal issues among international biomedical students. It structured the discussion because the differences in convictions and their relevance to the various animal issues became clear.

keywords
animal ethics, fundamental moral attitudes, animals, public debate, judgement on animal issues, survey.

Introduction

In many animal issues economic considerations are given priority over other values of a moral kind, such as welfare issues, and society often does not agree. In 1997-1998, 2001 and 2003 Europe faced epidemic outbreaks of classical swine fever, foot and mouth disease and avian influenza respectively. The then current European non-vaccination policy entailed the culling of infected and healthy animals. The culling included animals kept for commercial purpose, such as for the food production, and non-commercial purposes, such as for recreation, breeding of rare species, nature management and company. From the outbreaks of animal diseases it became clear that different values were at stake. To the authorities the value of an animal's life was interpreted as its economic value to a farmer, the livestock sector, or the country. Therefore the loss of a number of animals compared to the benefits for the sector and the country as a whole was justified in an economic sense (Mepham, 2001). To the opponents the value of an animal's life meant the value of the animal 'in its own right' as a living being and the value of the personal and emotional relationship between people and their animals. Another important issue was the 'duty to treat animals well' (Crispin, 2002), which for the animal keepers was the core responsibility to their animals. Care and protection in their view, is a moral duty, because people deliberately choose to keep and confine animals, and therefore are responsible for their health and wellbeing. In their view they were forced to act against this moral duty, because economic

duties to the nation prevailed. Moreover, to the individual keeper 'autonomy' meant to be at liberty to act according to one's own convictions to properly care for and protect their animals as they see fit.
People's convictions about animals are shaped by a multitude of social, cultural, religious influences, personal experience, and knowledge about the mental capacities of animals (Bekoff). In a pluralistic society, with people from different social, cultural, religious, or geographical backgrounds, one might expect a diversity of attitudes to animals.
For new policy on animal issues, more knowledge about these attitudes to animals is required, not only to know what people's opinion is, but on what values this opinion is based. Here we present a model to describe the diversity of people's fundamental moral attitudes (FMAs) to animals and their role in judgement on the culling of healthy animals during the outbreak of notifiable animal diseases. Results of a survey in the Netherlands will be presented.

METHODOLOGY

In the model the term 'fundamental moral attitude' (FMA) with reference to people's moral convictions is used. The word *fundamental* is chosen to indicate that it concerns the most deeply felt beliefs. It is *moral* because it tells us something about the right or the wrong way to treat animals, whose welfare can be promoted or harmed by our actions. The word *attitude* to animals is used to describe people's views on animals and their treatment (Knight and Barnett; 2008). To clarify what moral attitudes *are about* the philosophical animal ethics literature, the public debate on animal issues in general and on the culling in an animal disease epidemic has been studied. Four elements are at the heart of debates about animal issues and their moral importance. These elements are: the position of animals with respect to people, their value, their welfare and their rights. We defined fundamental moral attitude as the fundamental convictions of a person, or a group of people, on the hierarchical position of animals, their value, their care and protection against harm (to be good), and their rights. For full description of the model on fundamental moral attitudes to animals see Cohen et al, 2009.
In 2007 an Internet survey among 2545 randomly selected respondents was performed. A questionnaire was sent to the panel. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of questions about the respondents' moral convictions. The second part was a case-study to study the role of these convictions in judgement. In part one the respondents were asked to give their opinion on the four elements. This opinion we called the *what* question of a moral conviction. First, they were asked about their opinion on the position of animals with respect to people. Are people superior to animals, equal to them, or are animals superior to people? Second, they were asked how they valued animals. Did they value animals for their utility to humans, to the ecosystem, or as living beings? In this way we could determine whether a shift had taken place from a functional to an intrinsic valuation. Third, they were asked if people have a moral responsibility to care for and protect animals and if so, does this include all animals? Four, they were asked if animals have a right to life and if so do all animals have this right?
The respondents were asked to support their opinion by arguments. The arguments gave us the *why* of an opinion. In literature arguments for moral consideration of animals have been described. The arguments used for this study are presented in tablel 1.
The second part consisted of four cases. Each case presented an argument in favour of culling healthy animals in an epidemic. These arguments were: to stop a disease from spreading, to safeguard the export position of a country, to protect people against eye infections and to protect human life. Per case arguments against the culling were given as well. The arguments against culling were derived from the moral convictions in part one.

Results

FMA is determined by the combination of the dimensions of choice and by the numerical valuation of the arguments With this model, 54 combinations of dimensions, therefore 54 FMAs are theoretically possible. The arguments can be valued by a number between 0 and 10, with 0=not relevant for my opinion and 10= very relevant for my opinion.

Table 1 Schematic representation of the model for Fundamental Moral Attitudes

Elements		Hierarchy			Value		To be good			Right to life		
		3 dimensions			2 dimensions		3 dimensions			3 dimensions		
		Humans are superior	Humans and animals are equal	Animals are superior	Animals have value	Animals have no value	Obligation to be good to all animals	Obligation to be good to some animals	No obligation to be good to animals	All animals have a right to life	Some animals have a right to life	Animals have no right to life
Categories	Arguments reflecting animal ethics theories											
Intrinsic	Life		x		x		x			x		
	Sentience	X	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	X
	Rationality, consciousness	X	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	X
	Moral agency	X	x	x				x	x			
	Mental states: urge or will to live, awareness of life, death and the future							x	x	x	x	x
	Life-cycle: birth, growth, reproduction, death Having a future							x	x	x		
Functional/ Instrumental	Function of an animal (species) in the ecosystem	X	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
	Instrumental utility to people				x			x	x		x	
Relational	Relational human-animal bond				x			x	x		x	

Empty cells=argument not relevant for element.

A number of 1999 respondents had filled in the questionnaire completely. Two dominant attitudes could be distinguished including 78% of the respondents. Group A included 50% of the respondents. These A respondents were of the opinion that people are superior to animals, *and* that animals have value, *and* that people should do good to all animals *and* that all animals have a right to life. Group B consisted of 28% of respondents and differed only with A in that they found that people and animals are equal. The A group consisted of more men and were older than the respondents of the B group.For the opinion that people and animals are equal, that animals have value, that people should do good to all animals and that all animals have a right to life, the three most highly valued arguments were: animals are living being, animals are sentient, and animals are important for the ecosystem. The arguments that animals cannot think or distinguish between right and wrong were the relevant arguments to support the opinion of the A respondents that people are superior to animals.
More A respondents than B respondents agreed with the culling of healthy animals during an animal epidemic and more B respondents disagreed or partly (dis)agreed. Most A respondents agreed with the culling to stop a disease from spreading and most A and B respondents agreed with the culling to protect human life. Most B respondents disagreed with the culling to safeguard the export position or to protect humans against eye infections. The argument animal life is valuable, therefore healthy animals should not be culled, was found to be the most important argument against culling.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to identify moral convictions and the role of these convictions on judgement. The use of criteria from the philosophical animal ethics debate proved to be a valuable tool to describe and distinguish between attitudes of people towards animals and their role in judgement of animal cases.
The three most important values found in support of one's moral attitude to animals were: the value of life, the ability to feel pain and emotions (sentience), and the importance of animals in the ecosystem. So, these values constitute the fundament of the public morality in Dutch society. Warren (1997) argues that in the public morality more than one criterion determines moral importance. Our study shows that more than one argument was relevant, which supports Warren's multi-criteria account for moral importance. This multi-criteria account makes sense in our complex society with a multitude of animal practices and animal use. Each animal issue gives rise to different questions about its ethical justification. The culling debate centred round all three values: the value of life (culling), sentience (the animal welfare problems) and the ecosystem (the animals kept in nature areas). This could explain the strength of the opposition against culling, because all three fundamental values were challenged.
The demographic data showed that social differences exerted an influence on moral convictions. The A group consisted of older people and more men. B respondents included younger people, born and brought up in a period where more became known about animals, their mental capacities (Bekoff 2007) their importance in the ecosystem, and people's influence on their welfare and habitat. The B group also included more women. Several studies describe gender differences in the attitude to animals (Herzog, 2000 and Fidler, 2003). In these studies the attitude of women is described based more on identification with animals and empathy for their treatment, while men value animals more for their utility. Overall the B group seemed to have more empathy for animals, because they had valued their convictions significantly higher, their convictions exerted more weight in judgement, and a higher percentage was against the culling of healthy animals during an animal epidemic.
This model can be used to study differences between groups (animal practices, gender, cultures, religions, regional differences). The structure of the model is adaptable to accommodate other studies (Cohen et al, 2009). Changes can be made at all three levels:

the elements, the dimensions, and the arguments. For example element 4, for our study we chose the right to life. This can be replaced by another right, such as the right to be free from suffering. When elements are changed adjustments at the argument level is required. The model was also used in discussions about various animal issues among international biomedical students. It structured the discussion because the differences in convictions and their relevance for the various animal issues became clear and debatable.

Future research and policy

Many animal issues, such as the prevention and control of contagious animal diseases, fall under EU legislation. In the EU member states with people from different social, cultural, religious, or geographical backgrounds, one might expect a diversity of attitudes to animals. Therefore, it is of importance to study the variation of FMAs' that possibly exists between different EU member states.
In the decision-making process for new prevention and control policy the three most important arguments in animal issues in Dutch society should be acknowledged.

acknowledgements
This article is part of the research project 'New foundations for prevention and control of notifiable animal diseases' that is funded by The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO).

References

Bekoff, M. (2007). The emotional lives of animals. Novaro, California: New World Library.
Cohen,N.E., F.W.A. Brom and E.N. Stassen, (2009). Fundamental Moral Attitudes and their role in judgement: an emperical method to describe fundamental moral attitudes to animals and their role in judgement on culling of healthy animals during an animal disease epidemic. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 22, 341-359.
Crispin, S.M., P.A. Roger, H. O'Hare, and S.H. Binns, (2002) The 2001 foot and mouth disease epidemic in the United Kingdom: animal welfare perspectives, *Rev. Sci. Tech. Off. Int. Epiz,* 21, 3, 877-883.
Fidler, M. (2003). Animal status as a response to pet owner experience. *Anthrozoos*, 16,1, 75–82.
Herzog, H. A., & Dorr, L. B. (2000). Electronically available surveys of attitudes towards animals. *Society & Animals,* 8, 2, 183–190.
Knight S. and L. Barnett (2008), Justifying attitudes towards animal use: a qualitative study of people's views and beliefs*, Anthrozoös,* 21, 1, 31-42.
Mepham, B. (2001). Foot and mouth disease and British agriculture: ethics in a crisis. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 14, 3, 339-347.
Warren, M. A. (1997). Moral status: obligations to persons and other living things, Oxford: Oxford University Press.