

Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

IX Annual Swedish Symposium on Biomedicine, Ethics and Society,
11-12 June 2007



Empirical facts in farm-animal welfare discourses and their moral implications

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Abstract

The scientific debate about animal welfare has predominantly become a discussion about data established in empirically based research. At first sight, this approach promises to facilitate moral decision making and to settle moral controversies in animal production on the basis of *neutral* empirical facts. However, further reflection reveals the implicit normative statements and the far reaching moral implications of this approach. On the one hand, its intrinsic methodological limitations lead to a narrow view of “animal welfare” which has a strong influence on ethical decision making. On the other hand, we find that facts and values are treated separately; this separation is problematic because it presupposes that there are value-free facts. It has to be shown that we are dealing with value-laden facts only, since empirical research always integrates normative – and morally relevant – aspects. Accordingly, the aim of the paper is to examine crucial moral implications of “scientific reductionism” in animal welfare discourses and what can be deduced from an inquiry into the entanglement of facts and values for sustainable animal production.