

## Ethical Intuitions, Welfare, and Permaculture

Within the field of ethics concern for anything other than humans was very late in coming. Apart from occasional mentions of, for example, kindness to a companion animal developing a propensity for kindness towards humans, or the statement in Bentham that what mattered was suffering, not what kind of being was doing the suffering, humans appeared to be the only entities worthy of ethical concern. Even Bentham's radical suggestion from 1789 was made only in a footnote (Fox, 2006: 286), and its implications were not properly explored until Singer's ground-breaking 1975 text *Animal Liberation*. However, outside formal philosophical ethical thinking, in religious texts or works of fiction, kindness towards animals or care for a natural environment was sometimes expressed. Of course, many counterexamples from such sources can also be found that promote a cultural attitude of seeing animals and land as resources to be used in any way we please. An achievement of the animal welfare and environmental movements has been the growing shift in attitudes in many parts of the world to consider entities other than ourselves as worthy of moral concern.

The papers in this issue tackle some of the complex questions that arise once we ask 'what should we do' questions relating to other species. Should we move the whitebark pine to assist its survival in the face of climate change? (Palmer and Larson, 2014). Who should decide about controlling both the numbers and the use of wild horses? (Bhattacharyya and Larson, 2014). Should we respect the flourishing of a plant? (Kallhoff, 2014). How should we manage the financially useful but potentially destructively invasive Barents Sea king crab? (Falk-Petersen, 2014). And should we breed blind hens for commercial egg production if this benefits their welfare by reducing feather pecking and cannibalism? (Sandøe et al., 2014).

Something that emerged for me in reading these papers was the extent to which I was relying on a gut instinct or intuitive feeling about some of the questions raised even though I have a philosophical training. I wasn't unwilling to test my intuitions against reasoned arguments, I just found it helpful to tune in to what I was feeling about these questions. Intuitions can be shaped by unquestioned cultural norms, and we have seen in the past where that left concern for non-human animals. Yet sometimes something jumps out to most people as just wrong. As Sandøe et al. say in their paper about the blind-hens' challenge, 'many people find breeding blind hens intuitively repellent, yet "welfare-only" positions appear to be committed to endorsing this possibility if it produces welfare gains' (p. 1). This raises the question of whether we should physically impair animals (for welfare-related reasons) in order to fit our mass production systems or whether we should rethink our whole approach here.

In contrast, consider the example of a permaculture approach, in which hens can be integrated into a system that allows for and utilises their natural

behaviours. Rather than create large buildings for hens and then find their pecking behaviours a problem, the wastes they produce a poisonous by-product that must be disposed of, and the heat they generate having to be counteracted by air conditioning, a permaculture system allows them actively to contribute to the flourishing of a garden or farm. The hens are kept in numbers suitable for integration into cycles of production: their foraging clears ground of plant pests; their scratching clears weeds and their manure is a valuable addition to the soil for future crops; warmth from their night time roosting box can help protect tender plants in an adjacent greenhouse from frosts (Whitefield 2000); they can be fed on scraps rather than grain grown and transported in an energy-intensive way; oh, and they lay eggs! The eggs are produced close to where they will be eaten, sold or traded and can be enjoyed in the knowledge of their sound welfare because the hens can be seen.

Can we see good welfare though? The healthy looking plump hen scratching at the ground and uncovering grubs, taking a dust bath, and rushing over to the bearer of the scrap bucket along with their social group to sift through and compete for the choicest tidbits looks like a hen with good welfare. We can't know her inner state but her behaviour suggests a hen that is not suffering as she punctuates her day with a variety of behaviours natural to her species. She probably isn't raising young and broody behaviour might suggest an unmet drive, but the extent to which she experiences this as a loss is debatable. Her behaviour and outward appearance seem to the untrained eye like a flourishing hen. If we want to see further – to check our intuitions – we can of course learn more about hens, we can read up on welfare research and spend more time with a flock and talk to experienced poultry keepers to hone our 'hen welfare seeing' skills.

An inherent aspect of the permaculture approach is just such careful observation of the land, plants and animals. They can be brought together into an integrated system because we have seen their natures, needs and preferences and can design with them in mind. Rather than bend the other to our will to produce exactly the cut of meat or feed to weight ratio we desire, regardless of its impact on the individual animal or species, we look for intelligent synergies where lots of organisms get to flourish. We don't need impaired plants or animals, like terminator genes bred in crop seeds and blind hens, because intelligent design of the whole system can use the land forms and weather patterns and the natural behaviours of animals and plants for both their and our benefit.

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## EDITORIAL

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