

Changing colours of rights and legislation

In 2016, the Chinese zodiac sees us enter the year of the monkey, but as we attempt to make animals fit into a harmonic vision of our world, today's consumer-centric society still contends with colliding ideas in terms of how animals are treated and where they are ranked by policy-makers in the twenty-first century

The co-existence of humans and animals is still organized by our civilization in light of a somewhat paradoxical, if not altogether schizophrenic vision. This is evident as they move through the supply chain, whether for consumption, scientific research, conservation or leisure – or more simplistically from stall to steak, from lab to game park and circus, in and out of the human domestic environment.

On one hand, the necessities and preferences of a single dominant species are still ruthlessly and recklessly imposed to the world's entire ecosystem; on the other, we built a legacy of respectful admiration and fondness for animals, carved in stone ever since cats started appearing in Egyptian bas-reliefs.

Domestic animals have been part of our communities for thousands of years. According to geneticists and archaeologists, the appearance of dogs significantly predates the origins of domestic plants and early agriculture. They were commonly recognized de facto as our most faithful companions well before legislation eventually started looking at them also beyond the narrow perspective of property rights.

Policy makers on the other hand took millennia before dealing with the subject of animal rights in legislation. It was only recently that something eventually changed, when governments started acknowledging the issue of animal suffering, mandating the registration of pets such as domestic cats and dogs and taking specific interest in them, with rules and regulations acknowledging them as individuals, much in the way they normally do with their citizens.



Inspired by technology

In many countries it has become illegal to abandon pets. An increased legislative effort surrounding domestic animals was inspired by advances in technological innovation, in particular when automatic animal identification became viable and systems became available to support secure accountability in data collection. Once radio frequency identification transponders could be safely injected under the skin of the animal to store and communicate the unique identifier related to the tagged pet's digital passport, systematic animal identification came of age. Since 2003, the European Union requires pets traveling within the Schengen Area to be equipped with an RFID chip and a regular passport for their unequivocal identification when crossing borders. All this for the sake of public safety and for the animal's own

wellbeing: each domestic pet is to be reconnected to his owner if lost; a veterinary patient record has to keep track officially of the due vaccinations responsibly secured by his caregiver. In this scenario, the pet owner remains an owner, however his duties embrace aspects that go beyond the pure exercise of being a simple proprietor. His relation with the animal takes upon aspects rather typical of parental care.

Tracking information

Animals are appreciated as a valuable resource of the economy and the world's ecosystem. Today they are tracked and traced in ever more sophisticated ways, to meet a broad range of aspirations surrounding their generic, collective or individual existence. Whether cat

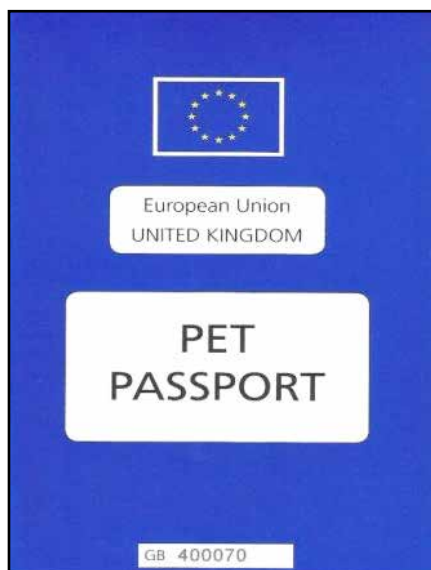
or cattle, pigeon or racehorse, rhino or bore, the fundamental questions remain the same: 'where are you?', 'to whom do you belong?', 'how many of you are there out there?', 'are you well fed, or starving?', 'are you healthy and vaccinated?', 'are you ill, contaminated, or potentially carrying a disease?', 'did you make it first to cross that line today?'

But there is definitely more to be said about animal welfare than what meets the eye and gains the attention of today's legislators engaged in animal ID and animal tracking. What is an animal and how are we to relate to this 'subject' – or 'object' – a part of the environment we live in and possibly a member of the society to which we belong? Is it entitled to be given more than fundamental necessities for existence?

Not only a semantic dilemma

Animals herds in farming and husbandry have been around a long time and started growing alongside human populations ever since the emergence of nomadic herding and settled farming practices. The dichotomy between 'the animal as a living subject' and 'the animal as a processed object' is as ancient as societal evolution. We can even imagine the moment when animals saw their names lose their tautological essence: when the farmer breeding them no longer was the gentleman enjoying the privilege of feeding on their meat. 'Pig' and 'pork', 'calf' and 'veal': these terms come in

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handy as we attempt to reconcile loose ends in the philosophical dilemma of 'humans versus animals'. They were first introduced into the English language at a time where the French-speaking dominant classes in England were the only people actually eating meat products (and defining them simply as food 'porc' or 'veau'), as opposed to those who saw the individual animals being processed and named in their original 'colours and shapes'. The latter spoke English, an altogether different language: that of the local farmers.

Even today, almost as soon as we look beyond our domestic doorstep, the animal stops being perceived as an individual and becomes an asset. If predator or plague, it can be targeted as a dangerous enemy to our safety and wellbeing. It may well become an undesired object to be removed from our surroundings at any cost. Animals are seen as simple objects also when perceived in positive terms and labelled with a financial value. To date they are bred, farmed and transformed by one of the world's most ancient and important industries. They live and die as anonymous individuals amongst innumerable similar sentient beings nobody thinks of when dining at the increasingly sophisticated tables of our cuisine. And let us not forget, after all, that animals are still traded in some cases as assets in a wife's expected dowry, in countries where wives were and still are perceived and traded as objects.

Industrial 21st century farming

The food industry and modern industrial farming in particular are expected to evolve substantially in the twenty-first century, with technology being introduced at every step of the value chain; while overall sustainability of the food delivery model is being questioned and investigated thoroughly. In today's collective planning and quest for more efficient, convenient and ethical ways to offer proteinic products to the world's growing population, vegetarian alternatives to meat are seen as an integral part of the solution and are promoted as such.

Unveiled as the latest possibility brought about by advanced research, in vitro meat and synthetic proteins are expected to remain at the bleeding edge of innovation for quite some time. In this scenario, legislation and technologies to track and trace animals, as well as deriving food-products throughout the supply



Animal welfare still remains a controversial topic, engaging public opinion more than expert debate

chain remain today's most vibrant territory of modernization and preservation of a strategic industry part of the world's economy.

To date, the risk of global epidemics arising from new epizootics are a prime threat worrying the legislator much more than animal welfare. No wonder, considering the recent outbursts of swine flu, bird flu and the forgotten hecatomb of cattle that became necessary when the colloquially called mad cow disease or BSE was on all headlines across so many countries.

Beef war memorials

On May 1, 2016, it will be 10 years since the decade-long ban on British beef enforced by the European Union was finally lifted. Thirty years have passed since the first confirmed instance in which an animal fell ill with BSE in the UK in 1996. In between these dates, the UK, as country worst affected by BSE, identified more than 180,000 cases of infected cattle. And as part of the BSE-related epidemic, affected by the new variant Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease, 177 people died.

Automatic identification and tracking played a pivotal role in supporting strategies enacted to

4.4 million animals were slaughtered during the BSE eradication program



contain the safety threat the UK BSE outbreak brought about. In general, the role of auto ID is fundamental to grant transparency of the supply chain delivering food on our tables, as mandated by law.

But as much as the food industry leans on advanced technologies, how could it ever claim to be modern and how can our society in general claim to embrace modernity if we neglect to secure that much more fundamental rules are strengthened at the outset? How long will it take until we change our mindset to understand and assert by law that animals have their own rights to be respected, just as herbivores are simply entitled to be fed as such?

Dawn of a new debate

Creating new rules for how domestic animals are to be treated in general and as individuals is just a first step in the direction of understanding and defining animal rights within laws



In vitro or cultured meat is prohibitively expensive, but recent studies raise expectations that costs could be reduced to compete with conventional meat products as technology improves

and constitutions. In light of the abundance of means and supplies of the post-industrial economy, times seem mature for a new effort to take place. Having succeeded in asserting its own rights and seeing its own basic needs

by and large fulfilled, humanity could well be motivated to elevate the debate on fundamental rights to new levels.

In the wake of the digital revolution, today's global interconnected society started expressing an imperative aspiration to universal social inclusion. Moreover, after the first euphoria in the era of consumerism, a modern philosophy of sustainable resource management emerges from the ashes of disillusion, seeing concerns about ecology and animal rights grow in popularity. Concerned with the issue of global sustainability, legislators are busy tracing new paths to transition from the obsolescent schemes of a predatory, uncontrolled economy, to more transparent supply chains and fairer service delivery models.

The vision of an inclusive society granting fair treatment to all and expressing concern for animal suffering is not a new or modern idea. Many read the ancient Hindu and Buddhist scriptures as advocating a vegetarian diet for ethical reasons.

A smart and sustainable society of the future will look for intelligent ways to grant respect to each and everyone of its members, regardless if human, animal or tree. Transitioning from multi-racial and multi-cultural to multi-species, the next debate on the intelligent, inclusive democracy might attempt to embrace the entire population of sentient beings, extending individual attention to new counterparts and pondering how to recognize and preserve their unique contribution to life on this planet.

by Sophie B. de la Giroday

The cost of unbalanced legislation

Today the word 'hecatomb' remains synonymous with any massacre, or slaughter, on a large scale, and it still reminds of blood shed on the altars of distant civilizations. In ancient Greece, a hecatomb was considered a massive sacrifice to the gods, even though it involved the killing of what now may seem only a small crowd of only 100 (hecaton) oxen (bous) or cattle. Enacted during special religious ceremonies to propitiate a deity at a topical moment, such as Zeus at the end of the Olympic Games.

In fact, none of the ritual killings of the past ever equaled in numbers and size the mass killing that became necessary to protect the health of consumers served by modern industrial cattle-farming in the UK because of the Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) outbreak. Beyond the 177 human casualties, there were 4.4 million animals slaughtered during the eradication program. Cattle are naturally herbivores, eating grasses. In modern industrial cattle-farming, though, various commercial feeds are used, which may contain ingredients including antibiotics, hormones, pesticides, fertilizers, and protein supplements. Worldwide, soybean meal is the primary plant-based protein supplement fed to cattle. However, soybeans do not grow well in Europe, so cattle raisers throughout Europe turned to the cheaper animal byproduct feeds as an alternative.

BSE, commonly known as mad cow disease, is a fatal neurodegenerative disease (encephalopathy) in cattle that causes a spongy degeneration of the brain and spinal cord. BSE has a long incubation period, usually affecting adult animals at a peak age onset of four to five years. It is caused by a misfolded protein – a prion. The BSE epizootic is caused by cattle, which are normally herbivores, being fed the remains of other cattle in the form of meat and bone meal, which lead to the spreading of the infectious agent. The disease may be most easily transmitted to human beings by eating food contaminated with the brain, spinal cord or digestive tract of infected carcasses. However, the infectious agent, although most highly concentrated in nervous tissue, can be found in virtually all tissues throughout the body, including blood.