

From the Editor: Preface to this Special Issue on Animal Welfare Impact Assessment

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When I assumed the role of Editor-in-Chief for the *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* in Summer 2013, the editorial staff and Editorial Board decided it was time to dispense with the long-standing practice among *JAGE*'s EiCs of introducing every print issue of the journal with a “From the Editor” column. One idea behind abandoning that practice was that we would be able to allow more space in the journal for peer-reviewed content; also, the fact that every article led off with an abstract made the Editors-in-Chief's summaries redundant—in fact, the “From the Editor” column had essentially become a “preview” of the abstracts' content. In short, we decided that From the Editor columns were neither necessary nor all that helpful.

The current Special Issue of the journal, however, calls out for a preface or introduction. This is because the structure and format of this collection of papers is unlike anything *JAGE* has done before. It is a unique approach that we have not seen in other academic, peer-reviewed journals. The key element here is that we have decided to publish five papers by the same two authors, with commentaries by four others, (plus a couple of additional papers).

Some History

Regular readers of *JAGE* will have noticed that over the years, *JAGE* has become what appears to be the “go to” publication outlet for scholars and others interested in and working on ethical and policy issues which fall under the general rubric “animal ethics.” It is our sense that nearly every philosopher— across the globe—who declares a specialization or professional interest in ethical issues associated

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with human interaction with nonhuman animals has published a paper in JAGE (or at least has submitted his or her work for consideration by us). It is not just philosophers, however, who see JAGE as the best journal to disseminate their work; social scientists, veterinarians, people working in the ecological sciences including wildlife ecology, and so on, have placed their best research articles with us. We have some of the most highly-regarded thinkers and authors in this domain on our Editorial Board. Added to this is our policy to take no explicit stance on the philosophical merits of a given position on any particular issue. Although papers must meet rigorous scholarly standards, well-articulated by the excellent referees in our “stable”, we are, one might say, an “equal opportunity” publication outlet for academic work in the various animal ethics arenas.

Same Authors, but Three Papers (All in a Row)?

Although initially a bit odd, it did not seem a huge surprise when I received within days of each other, two “animal ethics” papers by the same two authors, Steven McCulloch and Michael Reiss, researchers at University of Winchester and University College London, respectively. Both papers appeared appropriate for JAGE, both on animal ethics issues. I did not even think twice about the fact that these papers both concerned a policy tool being developed in the United Kingdom referred to as “Animal Welfare Impact Assessment (AWIA).” Indeed, after my initial reading of both, with generally positive reactions, I sent them for review (to two different sets of referees). Now, while those papers were in referees’ hands, I received a third manuscript by McCulloch and Reiss. This also concerned AWIA, and again, seemed appropriate enough although it was starting to seem odder that I now had three submissions from the same authors on similar topics. Nevertheless, I sent this third one out for review as well. Not long afterward, I began to receive referees’ replies and comments. All recommended publication. By this time, however, it became apparent that we had a “situation” on our hands. Three papers by the same two authors, on the same general topic, although with distinct points of focus and objectives. And all three were more or less ready for publication.

At this point (mid-fall 2016) I contacted the authors, and contacted several members of JAGE’s Editorial Board. What were the authors’ intentions regarding publication of their papers? All in the same issue of the journal? Spread out over several issues? I asked the Board members parallel questions: Should we publish all of them (one EB member suggested giving the authors a choice of which ONE they wanted to publish in JAGE, and suggest other journals for the other two papers). If we were to publish them all, should it be in one issue or spread out over 6–9 months?

At this point, one EB member suggested that we get the authors to revise some parts, add some material, develop more background, then ask a few other people who we expected were familiar with the issues if not with McCulloch and Reiss’s actual work to write brief critiques or commentaries. We would almost organically have developed a special issue of JAGE out of what initially appeared a dilemma. So that’s what we did.

The Bovine TB/Badger Story

McCulloch and Reiss's Special Issue revolves around an issue which has been brewing in Great Britain for a number of years, and one to which several previously published JAGE authors had alluded. It involves some facts about UK (mainly English) agriculture, its ecosystem, and public policy responses to a set of problems surrounding the existence of wild badgers in close proximity to British cattle farms. Badgers are carriers of the virus which causes tuberculosis in bovine species, and the population of badgers had grown so large and dense that a serious public health, animal health, and farm-economic crisis had arisen. Public Policy had settled on badger culling, and given both the fact of killing these "cute" wild animals, as well as the numbers being terminated (*The Guardian* reported in December 2016 that well over 10,000 badgers had been killed in the previous 3 months) animal rights and welfare advocates as well as the public at large were up in arms.

McCulloch and Reiss's project brings philosophical sophistication into the discussion being held at every level of public discourse and public policy formation. Their task was to explain the badger situation in the most scientifically accurate way possible; show what policy options there are; show how a policy tool, Animal Welfare Impact Assessment—which parallels Environmental Impact Assessment in terms of its ambitiousness as well as utility—might do the job, so to speak, in helping government set the right course. Their philosophical contribution here, articulated in those initial three papers JAGE received, was to explain, critique and justify if possible, AWIA, on the basis of our three dominant ethical traditions, rights theory, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics. Their project was indeed an ambitious one, and in retrospect, our decision at JAGE to publish a whole issue on this topic, with McCulloch's and Reiss's papers forming the base and target for analysis and critique, was a worthwhile move. I hope you find all of the papers to be both illuminating but also challenging, as this turns out to be an extremely complex and difficult set of interwoven issues.

So What Else is Going on Here?

In the interest of transparency/full disclosure, though, there are a few additional points that I wish to make. First, it did occur to me when I first received the two, then three manuscripts from McCulloch and Reiss that they were "gaming" the system (Sorry, Steve and Michael). By this, I mean I suspected that these papers had been parts of some report they had prepared, perhaps for the Royal Veterinary College (University of London) or a government agency in the UK, and that they were trying to "double publish" by making these chapters each stand alone. This issue was resolved—at least to my satisfaction—in a response McCulloch sent to me when I told him I would be writing this "preface" to the special issue. It turns out that these papers are connected to research McCulloch did for his PhD thesis at University College London, but are not actually parts of the dissertation *per se*. As he puts it:

I should give you a little background which may help you write this. My PhD thesis had the three research questions i) How is British government animal health and welfare policy made? ii) Why is it made that way? and iii) How should it be made? A key part of the work (not included in these papers) is a critique of British gov animal health and welfare policy making. Essentially, a chapter shows how animals are excluded from the policy making process (it discusses the ‘why’ in various ways). The third RQ, about reform, is answered in terms of i) mandatory AWIA conducted in central gov, i.e. Defra in the UK, and ii) an independent Council of ethics experts (since policy is inherently normative involving trade offs etc.). The thesis recommends that ethical analysis is conducted in a five stage process. These are i) Problematisation (analysis) of the policy issue, ii) utilitarian analysis, iii) animal rights based analysis, iv) virtue based analysis, and v) animal welfare ethic analysis. The thesis then applies both AWIA and these five stages of ethical analysis to three case studies: i) wild animals in travelling circuses, ii) bovine TB and badger culling, and iii) large indoor dairies (these are obviously the norm in the US, but year round indoor herds are only a new issue in the UK, exemplified by the failed Nocton Dairies proposal).

So, it turns out, the original papers presented here are “offshoots” of the dissertation work, with further input from Michael Reiss, and not just rewritten pieces of either the dissertation or a report. It is important to reiterate that JAGE is not publishing chapters of theses/dissertations. This might be a legitimate concern, as it briefly was for me; however, it became quickly clear that the original three submissions and now the five finished papers are original research, crafted and re-crafted for this journal.

The other part of this story which should be revealed is how we chose the authors to critique/respond to the McCulloch-Reiss papers. All four authors were suggested by McCulloch, although not surprisingly, Bernard Rollin was my choice as well; he has been an active contributor to the journal both as an author, and also as a tireless referee for many, many manuscripts having to do with animal ethics. Peter Sandøe was also suggested as a potential respondent, and again, Peter was among my first choices as well. That Peter collaborated with Christian Gamborg was a decided bonus. Rob Garner was suggested by McCulloch, and he was also an excellent choice. We are thankful to all four of these men for agreeing to comment on the McCulloch-Reiss papers, for their timely submissions, and especially for the substantive content they bring to this special issue.

In closing, I would suggest (and argue) that the kind of “case study” developed by McCulloch and Reiss covering badger control, bovine TB, the AWIA methodology and the especially the use of solid interpretations of rights theory, utilitarianism and virtue ethics, is a first-rate “model” for how applied ethics should be done. It is of course not the only model out there for applied ethics, but it is a good one. I am grateful for the accidents of connection and communication which led to the emergence of this special issue of JAGE. Indeed, I invite readers and authors to help make these kinds of “accidents” continue to happen: if you have an idea, however inchoate, for a special issue of JAGE, please get in touch (burk@ufl.edu). Who knows where an idea or two can lead?