



Conclusion

Ruth Harrison would not have been surprised by the enduring influence of value-based judgement within animal welfare science. Rooted in the synthesist principles of Edwardian reform, she would have argued that only a value-based science could inform the humane treatment of animals in a morally progressive society. There was no contradiction between science, activism, and politics. However, she did not live to see the most recent resurgence of value debates among a new generation of welfare scientists.

Approaching her 80th birthday, Harrison and other long-standing FACT members like David Sainsbury and Andrew Fraser resigned from the organisation in September 1999.¹ Harrison had created FACT and steered its development more or less single-handedly for over 32 years. With FACT chairmanship passing to Donald Broom—and later Marian Stamp Dawkins²—it was clear that “FACT would be entering a new era” and would have to “stand on its own two feet.”³ Subsequent restructuring

¹FACT Files, MD, Minute Book, Farm Animal Care Trust, Minutes of a Meeting of Trustees (13.09.1999).

²FACT Files, MD, Minute Book, Farm Animal Care Trust, Meeting of Trustees, Minutes of meeting (11.05.2000).

³FACT Files, MD, Minute Book, Farm Animal Care Trust, Meeting of Trustees (11.08.2000).

occurred without input from Harrison, who died of cancer in June 2000.⁴ Obituaries praised Harrison's tenacity and impact on animal welfare politics but also noted her chronic dissatisfaction with progress.⁵ While Harrison's long-term project of writing a second *Animal Machines* remained unfinished,⁶ Carol McKenna listed some of her most important achievements in the *Guardian's* obituary:

In her lifetime she saw many improvements. Veal crates (1990) and sow/tether stalls (1999) become illegal in Britain. Last year saw the announcement that battery cages will be phased out by 2012.⁷

Meeting two months after her death, FACT trustees noted:

Ruth had been probably the most important and influential single person in the early recognition of the threat to animal welfare inherent in many modern intensive farming methods, and a prime mover in the emergence and development of the scientific investigation of welfare in farm animals.⁸

However, as years passed, a chronological shortening of Harrison's campaigning biography set in. Fellow activists, animal welfare researchers, and historians glossed over her 36 years of full-time campaigning, 32 years of research sponsorship via FACT, 24 years on FAWAC and FAWC, and 6 turbulent years on the RSPCA Council. Harrison's impact was thus increasingly equated with her book. Within the welfare community, she was portrayed as an iconic yet chronologically distant Carson-like founding figure. In 2013, the University of Oxford organised a conference to highlight the achievements of Ruth Harrison and to celebrate the reprint of *Animal Machines*. In his foreword to the new edition, John Webster noted:

Today, *Animal Machines*, the book, should be read the way one reads Aristotle or the Bible: with great respect for its power and insight, but not

⁴FACT Files, MD, Minute Book, Farm Animal Care Trust, Meeting of Trustees (11.08.2000).

⁵Oral History Interview Ruth Layton (02.07.2014).

⁶Correspondence with Marlene Halverson January–February 2014.

⁷Carol McKenna, "Ruth Harrison", *Guardian*, 06.07.2000, 22.

⁸FACT Files, MD, Minute Book, Farm Animal Care Trust, Meeting of Trustees (11.08.2000).

to be taken as gospel. Much of what she describes has changed, ... Nevertheless, the evolution of major improvements in farm animal welfare for pigs, calves and chickens through legislation in the UK and European Union, the state-by-state legislation to ban sow stalls in the USA, the development of high welfare schemes like Freedom Foods and the Global Animal Partnership, and the massive increase in funding for the pursuit and application of animal welfare science ... can all be traced back, like mitochondrial DNA (female line), to the common ancestor, namely Ruth herself.⁹

As this book has shown, looking not just at the author but at the person Ruth Harrison reveals a much more multifaceted story of generational change and dynamic interactions between animal welfare politics, activism, and science. During her life, synthesist Edwardian campaigning gave rise to professionalised activism and new concepts of animal cognition, affective states, and welfare. The backstage of British corporatist welfare politics was similarly transformed by polarising frontstage public protest and radical animal rights thinking. Aided by the rise of a new mandated form of animal welfare science and European integration, the turbulent 1970s eventually resulted in a new era of British welfare politics characterised by transnational decision-making and market-driven assurance schemes, which relied on consumer citizens rather than citizen campaigners to drive change.

Reinserting the person Ruth Harrison back into this networked world and using her biography to study it reveals these wider dynamics of twentieth-century animal welfare. It may also debunk some of the hagiography, which has risen around her, but does not diminish her achievements. Ruth Harrison was clearly not the overly sentimental, timid, or conservative housewife that critics made her out to be. Neither was she a one-hit author, who came from and vanished into nowhere. Instead, she was a well-educated, well-connected successful campaigner, who was shaped by the synthesist vegetarian and pacifist values of Edwardian reform and whose defining characteristic was the “relentless vigour”¹⁰ with which she campaigned against the inhumane treatment of humans and non-humans.

This relentlessness was already evident when Harrison interrupted her education to work as an FAU nurse in bombed-out British cities and as a

⁹Webster, “Ruth Harrison – Tribute to an Inspirational Friend,” 6.

¹⁰Webster, “Ruth Harrison – Tribute to an Inspirational Friend,” 8.

relief worker in post-war Germany. As a convinced Quaker, Harrison believed in living faith through action and non-violent change by bearing witness against grievances. Similar to many other Quakers, she was attracted by the new forms of civic protest inaugurated by the CND in post-war London and shared popular contemporary concerns about the detrimental effects of technological development on the environment, health, and social ethics. Harrison's vision of broader moral, environmental, and societal reform was shared by many other contemporaries including leading British animal researchers like William Homan Thorpe and Julian Huxley. Disagreeing with mechanistic behaviourist models and continental ethologists' decision to shy away from affective states, they saw the study of animal consciousness and cognitive evolution as key to developing a progressivist post-war programme of social and moral reform. Their ambition opened the door for the scientific acknowledgement of animal feelings beyond pain and also entailed seeing the humane treatment of all animals as a prerequisite for social and scientific progress.

By 1960, this vision of humane social reform was seemingly threatened by the dystopian "sociotechnical imaginary"¹¹ of the factory farm. Concerns about intensive livestock operations' health, environmental, and moral impacts on the self-described 'Nation of Animal Lovers' created a fertile meeting ground for scientists and activists. Ruth Harrison's talent as an author lay not in being the first to identify and target this meeting ground but in successfully staging its underlying dystopian imaginary for wider audiences. After failing to convince Britain's Society of Friends to join her campaign, she spent the years between 1961 and 1964 scouring relevant literature, contacting various political and activist organisations, and writing her future bestseller. An especially fruitful result of Harrison's networking was her contact with US environmentalist Rachel Carson. The correspondence between the two iconic authors reveals how closely post-war environmentalism and animal activism were entwined. On both sides of the Atlantic, leading campaigners came from similar backgrounds of radical reform and synthesist progressivism and shared a basic set of environmental and moral concerns about technology's impacts on humanity. Appearing within two years of each other, *Silent Spring* and *Animal Machines* contained similar core messages and helped turn intensive agriculture and associated technologies like DDT into new focal points for contemporary protest movements.

¹¹ Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun, "Sociotechnical Imaginaries," 189–196.

Aided by a skilful promotion campaign in the *Observer*, *Animal Machines*' bestselling success and resulting public outrage led to the installation of the Brambell Committee. The committee's pioneering 1965 report combined existing concepts of cruelty with new behavioural welfare considerations. It also recommended legislative reform alongside a new permanent welfare body to evaluate and guide British policy. Despite her role in triggering the installation of the Brambell Committee, Harrison was only invited to provide evidence. The realisation that resting on her bestseller laurels would not allow her to influence welfare reform made her decide to become a full-time activist. Between 1966 and 1969, Harrison used her status as a non-aligned yet widely trusted outsider to relentlessly lobby for a nomination to the government's new FAWAC, founded her own research trust, and was elected onto the RSPCA Council.

On FAWAC, Harrison did not turn out to be the 'easy' choice envisioned by MAFF officials. Faced with a pro-industry majority on the committee, Harrison and other welfarists adopted a dual strategy of blocking weak compromises while simultaneously applying external pressure to push for improved codes. This dual strategy could prove remarkably successful—as in the case of the 1969 welfare code revisions. However, it also contributed to a breakdown of FAWAC decision-making, a resulting lack of meaningful code reforms, and a fraying of formerly consensus-oriented corporatist welfare decision-making.

The stagnation of backstage welfare reform contributed to the 1970s polarisation of public frontstage animal welfare politics. Ruth Harrison struggled to navigate this increasingly crowded political marketplace. Within the RSPCA, her decision to leak the BFSS letter ended her short but fruitful alliance with RSPCA traditionalists. However, her ongoing FAWAC membership and focus on gradual welfare improvements also made it difficult to form new alliances with younger, more radical campaigners in the Reform Group, who viewed older female campaigners like Harrison as being too timid to stand up for animal interests. In contrast to Harrison's contractualist understanding of humans' duty towards fellow creatures, younger activists employed concepts of speciesism and animal rights to oppose intensive animal husbandry per se.

Although Harrison exited the RSPCA Council only in 1975, she found herself isolated in an organisation that was rapidly changing in response to growing demands on its organisational capabilities and the end of post-war establishment politics. There was increasingly little space for

self-described ‘loners’ like Harrison in this new corporatist world of professionalised campaigning. Between 1970 and 1974, the still ‘traditionalist’ Council had formed new expert advisory committees and launched successful media campaigns against live animal exports. The 1974 inquiry and 1977 election of Richard Ryder as chairman ended long-standing internal tensions over hunting and resulted in a further streamlining of management, opening of leadership structures, and focus on animal rights.

Culminating in a lost libel case and personal bankruptcy, Harrison’s six years on the RSPCA Council soured future relations with the Society. However, her experience within FAWAC and the RSPCA also made her realise the growing importance of mobilising scientific support and data for welfare campaigning. During increasingly charged discussions on new welfare codes and regulations, relying solely on ethical or moral argumentation proved insufficient to counter industry arguments that existing practices did not harm animals. Alongside the RSPCA’s Farm Livestock Advisory Committee (FLAC), Harrison began to intensify relations to the new discipline of farm animal welfare science and used FACT to fund supportive research.

For animal welfare scientists, resulting sponsorship was both a chance and a challenge. After 1965, welfare research had initially been dominated by veterinary scientists, who were intent on defining physiological indicators of inadequate welfare. During the 1970s, that early emphasis on pain and stress was supplemented with a new behavioural focus on ‘abnormal’ farm animal behaviour, ‘natural’ husbandry environments, and animal preferences. With classic ethology beginning to fragment, younger researchers were attracted to farm animal welfare because of the possibility it offered to conduct and apply behavioural research. The applied aspect of their research allowed welfare researchers to tap into new governmental and non-governmental funding stream for outcome-oriented research. While MAFF and FAWAC initially prioritised physiological research on pain and productivity, behavioural researchers profited from anti-vivisectionist taboos by welfarist sponsors like the RSPCA. Similar to synthesist 1950s ethology, resulting research protocols were a chimera of hypothesis-driven science, economic interests, and value-based debates on animals’ place in society and the meaning of welfare.

Rising funding supported an institutionalisation and expansion of British animal welfare science. However, the field’s status as a mandated science in a polarised environment also meant that researchers had to be politically circumspect. As RSPCA conflicts over the meaning of animal experimentation and Harrison’s attempts to influence research show,

scientists had to balance funder expectations for useful results with the need to maintain authority over research protocols. Maintaining expert authority was further complicated by a lack of consensus over welfare definitions. While scientists agreed that welfare could be measured, initial hopes for universal welfare indicators proved premature, and it remained unclear how behavioural and physiological research results could be combined.

Clashes over whose authority to trust with regard to animal welfare reached a climax in 1979 when the RSPCA disbanded FLAC and boycotted the new FAWC. The move highlighted deep rifts between moderate and more radical activists over whether to continue cooperating with official bodies and how far to trust scientists as arbiters of animal welfare rather than rights. In 1980, the reversal of the RSPCA boycott marked a significant victory of moderates.

The episode also revealed how polarised and dysfunctional British farm animal welfare politics had become after a decade of relative neglect in Downing Street. Following heightened activity between 1964 and 1970, FAWAC's breakdown and MAFF inaction had led to a relative stagnation of British farm animal welfare reform. Political momentum for further reforms now frequently came from the continent. Countries like West Germany passed more stringent legislation, and major welfare decisions were increasingly made at the European level in the wake of Britain's 1973 EEC accession and the 1976 Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes.

Reacting to the growing popularity of welfare issues among voters in 1979, the new Thatcher government was not only keen to highlight its welfare credentials but also less committed to maintaining the traditional authority of MAFF and producer organisations over welfare politics. The result was both a reinvigoration of British farm animal welfare politics and a gradual shift towards market-driven standard-setting. Officially established in July 1979, the new FAWC was given independence from MAFF, staffed with more welfare scientists, and allowed to explicitly reference an expanded version of the five freedoms in its brief. The committee's rapid revision of welfare codes and recommendation of positive welfare changes ended FAWAC's regulatory deadlock and boosted the status of welfare researchers and FAWC welfarists like Ruth Harrison. Now in her 60s, the veteran campaigner witnessed the fulfilment of key demands from *Animal Machines* such as Britain's effective abolishment of intensive veal husbandry. Harrison's rising social standing also enabled her to increase

FACT resources for targeted welfare research and political networking at the British and European level. This influence only gradually diminished after Harrison's withdrawal from FAWC and the European T-AP during the 1990s. By the time of her death in 2000, Harrison was widely recognised as a thorny yet respectable establishment spokesperson for animal welfare.

The political economy of farm animal welfare had also changed. During the first decades after 1945, British welfare politics had been dominated by MAFF and industry-weighted corporatist advisory committees consisting of hand-picked welfarist and industry representatives. Following the effective breakdown of this system, the 1980s and 1990s saw an increasingly powerful second tier of privatised welfare politics emerge. Official bodies like FAWC and T-AP continued to play an important role in setting minimum standards. However, the increasing segmentation of the food market also created lucrative premium niches for products whose ethical and health properties had to be certified. Following the lead of the organic sector, animal welfare scientists, charities, and supermarkets formed powerful welfare assurance schemes. The so-called virtuous bicycle of welfare schemes was driven both by consumers' desire to pay for the ethical production of animals and by the increasing hold of a few retailers and integrated companies over British agricultural politics and farmers. Non-statutory assurance schemes also minimised public conflicts over welfare by delegating discussions over standard-setting to a more difficult-to-access corporate and expert-dominated 'backstage'.

Despite profiting from the new revenue streams unleashed by the new assurance schemes, scientists continued to disagree about the weighting of different welfare indicators. However, the resulting *Sinnkrise* was only temporary. Welfare scientists' growing engagement with ethicists and social scientists is indicative not only of the limits of a purely positivist approach that focuses on defining and measuring universal welfare parameters but also of a growing acknowledgement of the value-based side of welfare in a less polarised political environment.

Ruth Harrison would have certainly endorsed welfare scientists' reengagement with value debates. She may, however, have been more sceptical about the increasing status of animal welfare as an economic value. In 1964, both Harrison and Carson called for a consumers' revolt against intensive farming. Over half a century later, British animal production had indeed experienced a demand-led shift towards enhanced welfare. This shift was in part based on an increasingly robust British and European

regulatory framework and in part on voluntary self-regulation via assurance schemes. Millions of farm animals now live in scientifically vetted, welfare-conducive environments. It is, however, doubtful whether the chronically dissatisfied Harrison would have been content with a situation in which welfare functions as commodity that is selectively applied to add value to certain segments of animal production and not to others. Although animal welfare is now firmly established as part of mainstream politics and agrocapi-talism, it has to a certain extent been divorced from the universalist moral framework that Ruth Harrison decided to bear witness to.

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