Collateral Realities

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Introduction

Welcome to the world of collateral realities.

Collateral realities are realities that get done incidentally, and along the way. They are realities that get done, for the most part, unintentionally. They are realities that may be obnoxious. Importantly, they are realities could be different. It follows that they are realities that are through and through political.

This Chapter explores some of the ways in which realities including collateral realities get done. Note the verb. Not known, but done. Here is the first blockage. To talk of doing realities is to push outside the comfortable envelope of Euro-American common-sense realism. It takes us into a world of serious performativity.

So what is 'Euro-American common-sense realism'? There are whole libraries on this, but here is a gesture. First it tells us – it assumes – that there is a reality out there. Second it tells us that whatever is out there is largely independent of our actions. (A qualification: it is obvious that our actions sometimes influence reality). Third, it tells us that whatever is out there substantially precedes our actions or attempts to know it. Fourth, it assumes that whatever is out there is definite in form. Fifth, it takes it for granted that there is a single reality, that it is singular. And sixth, probably (perhaps less certainly) it assumes this reality to be coherent[2].

We may debate the specificities, but if we take performativity seriously then most of these assumptions need to be undone. Only a stripped-down version of the first (call this 'primitive out-thereness') remains. If we think performatively, then reality is not assumed to be independent, priori, definite, singular or coherent. Rather the logic is turned upside down. If reality appears (as it usually does) to be independent, prior, definite, singular or coherent then this is because it is being done that way. Indeed these attributes or assumptions become examples, amongst others, of collateral realities.

But what is it, 'to do'? Where are the collateral realities being done? The response is that they are done in practices. Practices enact realities including collateral realities. This means that if we want to understand how realities are done or to explore their politics, then we have to attend carefully to practices and ask how they work. Libraries have been written on this topic too, so I simply offer another gesture. For my purposes, practices are detectable and somewhat ordered sets of material-semiotic relations[3]. To study practices is therefore to undertake the analytical and empirical task of exploring possible patterns of relations, and how it is that these get assembled in particular locations. It is to treat the real as whatever it is that is being assembled, materially and semiotically in a scene of analytical interest. Realities, objects, subjects, materials and meanings, whatever form they take these are all

[2] For further discussion, see Law (2004).

[3] The position I am exploring has been developed within a particular version of STS (Science, Technology and Society) which includes actor-network theory and its successor projects, feminist material-semiotics, and versions of postcolonialism. For important writing in first of these see Callon (1998), Latour (1988), Law (2002), Mol (2002), Moser (2008), Singleton (1998) and Thompson (2002). For feminist material-semiotic work see Barad (2007) and Haraway (1997; 2007). For post-colonial writing see (Verran: 1998; 2001). For an introductory but specific survey of all three see Law (2008).

explored as an effect of the relations that are assembling and doing them. Practices then, are assemblages of relations. Those assemblages do realities. Realities, including the incidental collateral realities, are inseparable from the patterning juxtapositions of practices.

There is an immediate methodological consequence. We need to proceed empirically. If we are to do philosophy, metaphysics, politics, or explore the character of knowledge, we cannot do this in the abstract. We cannot work 'in general', because there is no 'in general'. All there is are: specific sites and their practices, and then the specificities of those practices. So philosophy becomes empirical[4]. Abstraction is always done in some practice or other. As, to be sure, are collateral realities.

For this reason, in what follows I work empirically and attend to specificities. My interest is in how realities (and representations of realities) are assembled in material-semiotic relations at a particular place, moment, and occasion. The place I talk about is a lecture hall in a research institute in Berlin. The moment is a meeting that took place in that hall in May 2007. The occasion was a stakeholders meeting of a programme called Welfare Quality®. The latter was a large-scale EU-funded Framework 6 Programme on farm animal welfare. It was about farm animal welfare and included: animal science research, a major social science contribution on what European consumers think about farm animal welfare, and the development of series of far-reaching proposals for monitoring and reporting on that welfare. In May 2007, the moment of this meeting, the programme was half way through its five year life, and those caught up in it, including animal scientists, social scientists, animal welfare NGOs, the food trade, and farmers, were debating the form that the ultimate recommendations might take. In short, a great deal was at stake for many of the participants.

Why do I focus on this meeting? One response is straightforward. As I've just said, much was at stake: this was an overtly political meeting. Second, however, and as a part of this, I'm interested in it because realities were also being negotiated. What is a farm animal? What is a consumer? What, for that matter, is welfare? At this meeting these were all being contested. In other words, the meeting was not simply about politics as this is conventionally understood, but also involved a 'politics of the real'. There were struggles between different versions of reality: this was, in short, a moment of ontological politics. Third, the reals at stake were sometimes explicit, but very often they were not. Collateral realities were being done too and I am particularly interested in exploring some of these. And then finally and crucially, I'm interested in the character of the reality-work being done in a meeting. We tend to think of laboratories or social science surveys as locations where the character of realities such as animals or people is determined, but realities are done in meetings too. Like laboratories, these are assemblages framed in particular ways. Like surveys, they are sets of practices, both patterned and patterning, where different ontological politics and different collateral realities are routinely done. So this chapter is also an exploration of how realities emerge from meetings.

[4] On empirical philosophy, see Mol (2002).

Lecture

The scene, then, is a lecture hall in a research institute in Berlin. Here's what it looks like from the back:

[5]

It is the morning of the first day of the meeting, and the room is nearly full:

[6]

The audience is listening to a talk. Here's the first PowerPoint of that talk:

[7]

And here are the opening paragraphs of the abstract for the talk (everyone has a copy of this):

Welfare Quality®: context, progress and aims

Harry Blokhuis, Animal Sciences Group, Wageningen University and Research Centre, The Netherlands

Some five years ago we started to formulate the first aims and goals of what became the largest piece of integrated research work yet carried out in animal welfare in Europe. The Welfare Quality® project has now been running for three years and it has been an exciting and very productive time. We are also making a global impact. For example, the Welfare Quality® consortium was recently extended to include four Latin American partners, so we now have a total of 44 partners from 17 countries.
Although the originally formulated goals have evolved as results emerged and as opportunities arose, the main aims still stand:

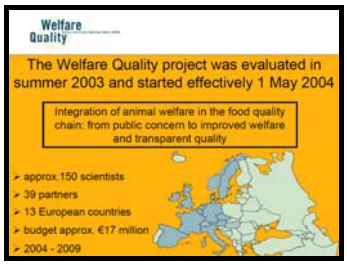
- to develop practical strategies/measures to improve animal welfare,
- to develop a European standard for the assessment of animal welfare,
- to develop a European animal welfare information standard,
- to integrate and interrelate the most appropriate specialist expertise in the multidisciplinary field of animal welfare in Europe

[8]

Those who are present have been told that the speaker is Professor Harry Blokhuis. If we just depend on Blokhuis' own materials we can see that he is talking about a large integrated European research project on farm animal welfare. We know or can infer from these exhibits, that this is called Welfare Quality®, which (its logo tells us) is about 'Science and society improving animal welfare'. We can guess (look at the Sixth European Framework Program logo) that it's being funded by the European Commission. We know

[5] Welfare Quality (2007).
[6] Welfare Quality (2008).
[7] Blokhuis (2007a).
[8] This comes from (Blokhuis: 2007b, 9).

from the text that the project extends beyond Europe. We know that it is intended to develop practical strategies and measures for assessing and improving animal welfare, including the creation of an 'information standard'. And we know that it is intended (I quote from the abstract above) 'to integrate and interrelate the most appropriate specialist expertise in the multidisciplinary field of animal welfare in Europe.' If I add this (PowerPoint number six of Blokhuis' presentation):



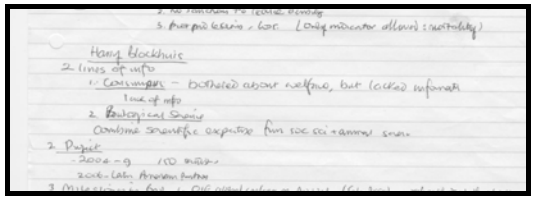
[9]

we also learn about the budget (around €17m), the span of the project (2004-2009), and something about its spread (150 scientists and 39 partners across 13 European countries.)

Now note that unless you already knew of the project, then the way in which I have represented it above is all that you know about it right now. The reason I say this is that I want to draw your attention to the performativity implied in (your reading of) my description. To put it differently, everything else being equal (probably it is not), for the moment what I have described and shown is what Welfare Quality® is for you. My text and your reading practices have assembled a putative Welfare Quality® reality, at least for the moment. This is the performativity of practice at work. I'm suggesting that my textual and your reading practices are together assembling a putative reality.

Now bracket this reflexivity away, and attend instead to Blokhuis' talk and its reception in the hall. I want to say that this too is a set of practices that is assembling a putative reality: that it is doing a possible reality. A clarification. In saying this I am not criticising or trivialising either the talk or its reception. My interest is quite different. It is to ask how these talking and meeting practices work to assemble a putative reality. But if we are to do this then we have to teach ourselves to see the work being done by the PowerPoints and the abstracts. We need to find ways of making this work visible. We need to resist the propensity to treat these texts as transparent, self-evident, or uninteresting windows on a pre-given world.

It may help us to do this by looking at a representation that isn't particularly clear:



This comes from my notes on Blokhuis' talk. The fact that they aren't very convincing serves to remind us that all representations – notes, PowerPoints,

[9] Blokhuis (2007a).

photographs – are the product of practices. Here, for instance, I was writing frantically, but Blokhuis wasn't. He had written a careful abstract and well-crafted a series of Power Points. But (here's the important point) the principle at work is similar in both. Both note-taking and talk-preparing are more or less ordered practices. Both generate representations that depict realities. Both, I'm saying, are helping to assemble putative realities. And since those realities are being done in particular ways, at least in principle this also implies that they could have been assembled differently. And this is why I am saying that we're watching a form of politics, ontological politics. For while it is more or less received wisdom that representations are not more or less clear windows on reality, but shape, form and diffract reality[10], I'm making a stronger claim. If, performatively, representations do realities in practice, then those realities might have been done differently. We find ourselves in the realm of politics.

More on Blokhuis' Lecture

So how does Blokhuis' talk work?

Here are some of the processes upon which it depends: selection, juxtaposition, deletion, ranking, and framing.[11] Like my field notes, the photos, and the abstract, every PowerPoint operates in one and probably most of these modalities. This, for instance, we have already seen:

12

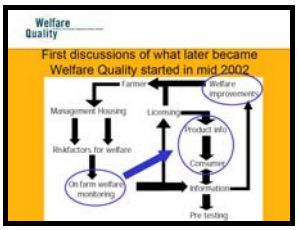
Look the juxtaposition and the framing at work here. This does Welfare Quality as or in set of relations that are simultaneously financial (there's a budget), geographical (there are thirteen European countries and a map), scientific (or at least there are scientists), and chronological (there are dates and a time-span). Performatively, for the moment this is what Welfare Quality is: a juxtaposition of selected elements. Let me add that it is also teleological. Welfare Quality® is being done as project with a purpose: 'Integration of animal welfare in the food quality chain: from public concern to improved welfare and transparent quality.'[13] A similar teleological reality is being done in other PowerPoints:

14

[10] This is Donna Haraway's metaphor See her (1991).
[11] For a related list, see Law (1986).
[12] Blokhuis (2007a).
[13] On the importance of 'projectness' see Law (2002, 183).
[14] Blokhuis (2007a).

Milestones belong both to projects and chronology, and both are being done here.

So there are relations, juxtapositions and framings. There are also rankings. Some elements are important enough to appear on the PowerPoint (certain dates, budgets, geographies, scientists and partners), whereas others aren't and fall off the edge. So what is being deleted? In principle the answer is: almost everything. Indeed it could be no other way: the ramifying complexities of the whole world cannot be included on a single PowerPoint. But one way of rendering this question tractable is to compare and contrast different depictions. Look, for instance, at this:



15

Here we see the Welfare Quality® framing again, and a title enacting the project in chronological time (2002). But otherwise the principles at work are different. The criteria for selecting, juxtaposing and ranking have all changed. This is a cybernetic world made of interconnections with feedback loops between actors that are thereby rendered significant. Farmers and consumers interact with a heterogeneous population of other elements including the quasi-legal ('Licensing'), the organisational ('Management'), the material ('Housing'), the procedural ('On farm welfare monitoring'), what one might think of as ethical or political realities ('Welfare improvements'), and abstractions ('Information'). Farmers are being defined by their relations. So they are linked with welfare improvements, licensing, management and housing. Consumers are defined by their connections with production information, on-farm welfare monitoring, and (more generally) information. The material-semiotic relations are being laid out visually. A system or network world is being done while geography, finance, and to a lesser extent chronology have all disappeared.

Here's a further PowerPoint from Blokhuis' talk:

16

Look at the row of people-figures. Presumably these are animal scientists and social scientists. They are combining their essential scientific expertise in the WQ programme in order to simultaneously understand (I impute) consumers (like the man with the shopping trolley in the photo in the left) and animals (the piglets in the second photo on the right). But we've moved on from a

[15] Blokhuis (2007a).
[16] Blokhuis (2007a).

cybernetic world. The ordering has changed. Consumers 'belong' to social sciences, and animals to animal science. Here system, chronology, geography and finance have been deleted. The principles for selecting, juxtaposing and ranking are quite different. What is being assembled is a world in which there is an intellectual and social division of labour between the domains of animal and social science. This, it turns out, isn't hierarchical: these two domains co-operate by together contributing to the 'Welfare Quality Consortium' and ultimately to the Sixth Framework Project.

So what do we learn if we attend to the PowerPoints in this way? What happens if we see them and the work they are doing, and manage to treat them as part of – and an expression of – practice, rather than as more or less transparent windows on a pre-given reality? The answer comes in three parts:

- The first is that it becomes possible to explore the character of their performativity. The PowerPoints do work, and as I have tried to show, they do this by selecting, juxtaposing, deleting and ranking. All in all, they work by framing. This is a methodological point. We need to overcome obviousness of representations if we are to understand how it works.
- Second, we discover that the way in which they work is quite startlingly varied, for it turns out that quite different Welfare Quality® realities are being done at different moments. As I have shown, the first PowerPoint does the programme as some kind of genealogy, as a teleological project with its roots and origins spread through layers of time. The second performs it quite differently as a heterogeneous cybernetic system: here Welfare Quality is being done as a set of feedback loops that are indifferently social, political, animal, industrial, and normative. And the third does Welfare Quality differently yet again. Here it becomes a form of professional co-operation, an expression of the division of scientific labour. Interdisciplinarity is being done.[17]
- Genealogy, system, and interdisciplinarity: if we read these representations as enactments by asking how they work we also discover that in five minutes in a single lecture hall this project has been done in three quite different ways. Let me remind you that this is not a complaint. On the contrary, attention to the specificities of practice and its enactments usually uncovers difference, and suggests that non-coherence is a chronic condition[18]. It may well that such multiplicity is a necessary condition for institutional survival[19]. But if this performative way of thinking shows that reals are done in multiple ways, then it also suggests that at least in principle those realities – or the balance between them – could be different. And this is my third point. To attend to the specificities of practice leads us to the possibility of an ontological politics. At the same time it allows us to explore the enactments of collateral realities. For what are genealogy, system and division of labour if they are not collateral realities, versions of the social that are being done quietly, incidentally, and along the way?

[17] A related distinction that includes system and genealogy is developed in Law (2002).
[18] For discussion, see Mol (2002).
[19] See Law (1994).

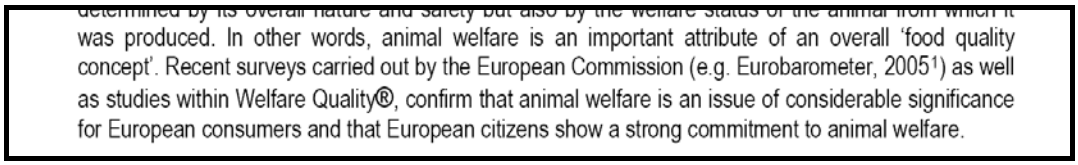
Practices All the Way Down

Let me briefly revisit the question of realism.

I have suggested that common sense realism tells us that realities are independent, and prior to practices. They are also taken to be definite, singular and coherent. In this way of thinking, depictions (talks, charts, PowerPoints) more or less adequately represent those realities.

Comment. Philosophers who worry about the adequacy or otherwise of representation, are often called epistemologists. Practitioners who attend to this are sometimes called methodologists. Both endeavours have produced large libraries. There are many specificities, but if we stick with the methodologists, then we know that they worry about technical adequacy. The assumption is that good techniques produce satisfactory representations of reality. What follows? One implication that I've already touched on is that techniques themselves become essentially uninteresting. This is because when they are working properly they are transparent. In this way of thinking they don't distort realities, but merely transmit them. In short, good methods are a like window on reality[20]. This means that unless something has gone wrong they can be ignored. As is clear, I have been arguing against this. No representation, I've been saying, is actually transparent.

Now look at this:


determined by its overall nature and safety but also by the welfare status of the animal from which it was produced. In other words, animal welfare is an important attribute of an overall 'food quality concept'. Recent surveys carried out by the European Commission (e.g. Eurobarometer, 2005[1]) as well as studies within Welfare Quality®, confirm that animal welfare is an issue of considerable significance for European consumers and that European citizens show a strong commitment to animal welfare.

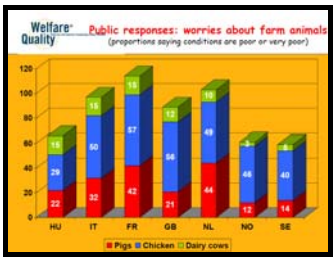
[21]

These words come from Blokhuis' abstract. 'Recent surveys … confirm that animal welfare is an issue of considerable significance for European consumers.' 'Recent surveys confirm' (my emphasis). The words (appear to) open a small window onto reality. At the same time (this is a part of the realist trick) the methods for making that window have been more or less erased. All we get to see is a European reality composed of European consumers and citizens. 'Eurobarometer 2005' is being done here as a source of representational authority, but at the same time it is essentially uninteresting. We do not need to know about the methods involved. This is presumably because it can be assumed that the technique mechanically discovers the nature of a particular European consumer- and citizen-reality and then reports on it. Put that performatively. Survey research is being done here as a window on a specific reality.

Now look at this:

[20] There are huge literatures both on epistemology and on research methodologies (the latter especially in social science). The classic epistemological literatures offer two large narratives about method. The first is that the descriptions that it produces (should) correspond to reality. For a classic example see Nagel (1979). The second is pragmatic, and suggest that those descriptions are best understood as simplifying tools for handling a complex reality. For an example of the latter, see Kuhn (1970).

[21] Blokhuis (2007b, 9)



[22]

I've moved to the next talk of the day. This is by three Welfare Quality social scientists, Unni Kjærnes, Emma Roe and Bettina Bock, and it is more specific. We learn (for instance) that the French public is more worried about farm animal welfare than the Swedish, and in all seven countries the public worries most about the welfare of chickens. Once again the methods and how they work have been deleted. They have been done as essentially uninteresting, a means to an end, another window on reality.

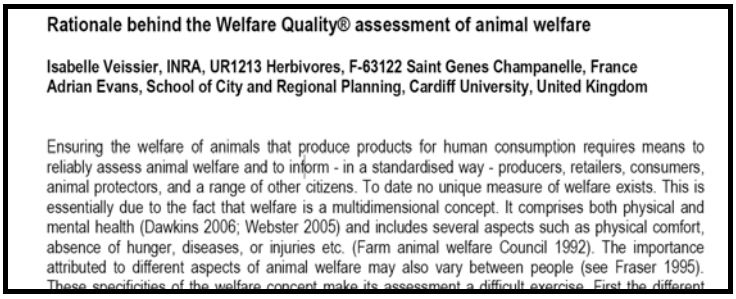
One consequence of this is that the assumptions of common-sense realism are being redone. We've moved from European realities in the form of 'consumers' and 'citizens' in Blokhuis' talk, to another set of possibly-related realities, this time in the form of 'publics'. It is now the latter that are being enacted as prior to and independent of the research. They are also being done as having definite opinions, and collectively they have been rendered singular and coherent. As we can see, it is possible to talk of 'public responses' in, for instance, Hungary. Such are the kinds of reality work being done in Berlin in these presentations. But there is implicit work being done too. So, for instance, realities such as nation states are implied in claims about the views or attitudes of groups of people in Hungary or France. In other words, the nation state is a collateral reality being carried along and enacted in the wake of explicit research findings. The survey doesn't set out to demonstrate the existence of the nation state, that is not its point at all, but it does this quietly and therefore all the more effectively.

The argument works for individuals as well as collectivities. We can see how this works by looking, for instance, at survey research methods. This is because like PowerPoints, surveys also delete, select, juxtapose, rank, and frame to enact a version of the real. Thus in one of the Welfare Quality® commissioned surveys, people were phoned and asked: 'Thinking of farm animal welfare in general, how important is this issue for you on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all important and 5 is very important?' Critics of survey research would say that this deletes important ambivalences, uncertainties and situational complexities: that people aren't really like that. They might add that complexities are better explored in, say, focus groups[23]. This might be right, but it also misses the performative point. This is that both focus groups and surveys delete, select, juxtapose, rank, and frame realities. Both, that is, enact reals and (here's another collateral reality) they enact people in particular and distinctive ways. For if focus groups may be understood producing talk about situated political and community positions and debates, then a survey question of the kind that I have just quoted assumes that individuals may be understood as containers of attitudes that are somewhat

[22] Kjærnes et al. (2007).
[23] For discussion see Waterton and Wynne (1999) and Law (2009b).

stable and behaviourally-relevant. Indeed, it enacts them that way. In short, models of the individual as well as the collectivity are being performed – and if the findings derived from that model are taken seriously by audiences such as those in the Berlin hall, then those models count as another collateral reality[24].

It is important to add that this isn't just the case for the social world and its social sciences. It applies just as much to natural science and the natural world. Look, for instance, at this:



Rationale behind the Welfare Quality® assessment of animal welfare

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Ensuring the welfare of animals that produce products for human consumption requires means to reliably assess animal welfare and to inform - in a standardised way - producers, retailers, consumers, animal protectors, and a range of other citizens. To date no unique measure of welfare exists. This is essentially due to the fact that welfare is a multidimensional concept. It comprises both physical and mental health (Dawkins 2006; Webster 2005) and includes several aspects such as physical comfort, absence of hunger, diseases, or injuries etc. (Farm animal welfare Council 1992). The importance attributed to different aspects of animal welfare may also vary between people (see Fraser 1995). These specificities of the welfare concept make its assessment a difficult exercise. First the different

[25]

These are the opening lines of the abstract of the third talk of the Berlin morning by animal scientist Isabelle Veissier and sociologist Adrian Evans. 'To date' it says, 'no unique measure of welfare exists. … welfare is a multidimensional concept. It comprises both physical and mental health … and includes several aspects such as physical comfort, absence of hunger, diseases, or injuries … .' Here is one of their PowerPoints:

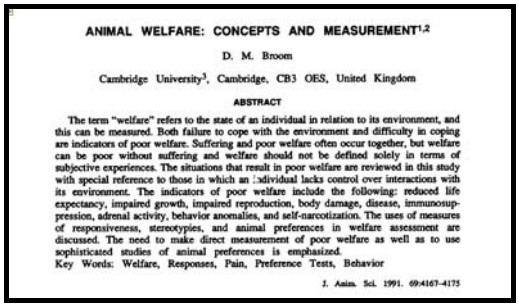
[26]

A few minutes earlier a social and consumer reality was being done, but now it is the turn of the animal and the natural world. Welfare – the animal-with-welfare – is being staged here in four large categories: 'Good feeding', 'Good housing', 'Good health', and 'Appropriate behaviour', which are then broken down into twelve sub criteria. Common-sense realism is hard at work again. For the moment the animal-with-welfare is this way. The PowerPoint is a window onto this reality. Footnotes and references aside, the methods and the practices for doing this animal-with-welfare have been deleted. As with the survey research that staged the consumer, how they work is being treated as essentially uninteresting. It is the reality they end up describing and enacting that is the focus of attention. The methods themselves, and the assumptions that they enact, are erased. In short, there are collateral realities being done here too. So what do they look like?

As with the social sciences, it is methodologically helpful to look for differences between practices within animal science, and to search for

[24] Law (2009a).
[25] Veissier and Evans (2007a, 19).
[26] Veissier and Evans (2007b)

contrasts in the ways that these delete, select, juxtapose, rank and frame their reality, the animal-with-welfare. Look, for instance, at this which comes from the scientific literature:



ANIMAL WELFARE: CONCEPTS AND MEASUREMENT[1,2]

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ABSTRACT

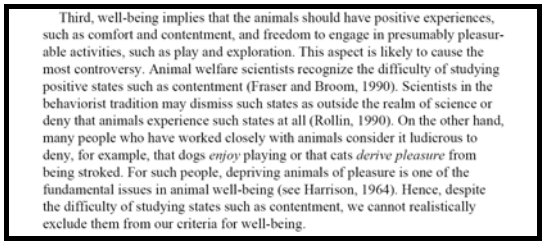
The term "welfare" refers to the state of an individual in relation to its environment, and this can be measured. Both failure to cope with the environment and difficulty in coping are indicators of poor welfare. Suffering and poor welfare often occur together, but welfare can be poor without suffering and welfare should not be defined solely in terms of subjective experiences. The situations that result in poor welfare are reviewed in this study with special reference to those in which an individual lacks control over interactions with its environment. The indicators of poor welfare include the following: reduced life expectancy, impaired growth, impaired reproduction, body damage, disease, immunosuppression, adrenal activity, behavior anomalies, and self-narcotization. The uses of measures of responsiveness, stereotypies, and animal preferences in welfare assessment are discussed. The need to make direct measurement of poor welfare as well as to use sophisticated studies of animal preferences is emphasized.

Key Words: Welfare, Responses, Pain, Preference Tests, Behavior

J. Anim. Sci. 1991. 69:4167-4175

[27]

Here poor welfare isn't necessarily the same as suffering but/and poor welfare can be measured objectively, ('reduced life expectancy, impaired growth, impaired reproduction, body damage, disease.') What's being implied? The answer is that the animal is being done as a body. This is a body endowed with clinical and endocrinological attributes that may be measured by the instruments of animal science. As a part of this, emotions and experiences are made not to count. But this is only one possibility. Look now at this:

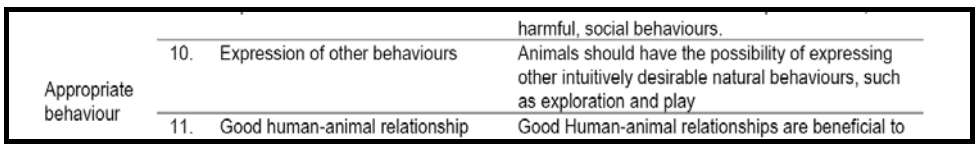


Third, well-being implies that the animals should have positive experiences, such as comfort and contentment, and freedom to engage in presumably pleasurable activities, such as play and exploration. This aspect is likely to cause the most controversy. Animal welfare scientists recognize the difficulty of studying positive states such as contentment (Fraser and Broom, 1990). Scientists in the behaviorist tradition may dismiss such states as outside the realm of science or deny that animals experience such states at all (Rollin, 1990). On the other hand, many people who have worked closely with animals consider it ludicrous to deny, for example, that dogs *enjoy* playing or that cats *derive pleasure* from being stroked. For such people, depriving animals of pleasure is one of the fundamental issues in animal well-being (see Harrison, 1964). Hence, despite the difficulty of studying states such as contentment, we cannot realistically exclude them from our criteria for well-being.

[28]

Here we have a different scientific article, a different author, and a different set of practices. For here there is talk of 'positive states'. These may be difficult to study, but in this practice animals enjoy 'presumably pleasurable activities, such as play and exploration.' '[C]ats', we learn, 'derive pleasure from being stroked'. Here, then, though bodily states are not being deleted, suffering and pleasure are also important. The animal is being done differently. The animal isn't just a body. It isn't just an object, but it becomes a subject too. The framing and the mode of deletion here are both different.

Finally, note that both versions of the animal turn up in the list of Welfare Quality criteria.



			harmful, social behaviours.
Appropriate behaviour	10.	Expression of other behaviours	Animals should have the possibility of expressing other intuitively desirable natural behaviours, such as exploration and play
	11.	Good human-animal relationship	Good Human-animal relationships are beneficial to

[29]

Criterion number 4, 'Appropriate behaviour', welfare principle number 10, 'Expression of other behaviours': 'Animals should have the possibility of expressing other intuitively desirable natural behaviours, such as exploration

[27] Broom (1991, 4167)
[28] Fraser (1993, 39).
[29] Veissier and Evans (2007a, 19).

and play.' After looking for different practices of enactment within the animal science literatures it now becomes clear that both versions of the animal-with-welfare – the animal as object and the animal as subject – are being done in Veissier's and Evans' talk, and in the putative reality being assembled by Welfare Quality®.

Why is this important? The answer is partly methodological and partly political, and it also has to do with the distinction between natural science and social science. It is often suggested that the latter are different in kind. No doubt for certain purposes this is right. However, for present purposes it is quite wrong. This is because both, I'm arguing, may be understood as sets of practices. Indeed, they may be understood as sets of practices all the way down. Whether we look at social science reports of reality or those coming from natural science, once we start to turn up the magnification we quickly find that there isn't an independent, prior, definite, singular and coherent real out there upon which the various reports of reality are based. Instead, what we find is more practices doing reals. And more practices. And yet more practices. And since we also find as we turn up the magnification that there are different practices within each domain, we also discover multiplicities – different versions of the animal as well as different versions of the person. In short I'm saying that performativity is everywhere in natural science as well as social science. The implication is that the character of the real is as open to debate in nature as it is in society. An ontological politics is possible – and collateral realities may be found – in both.

Collateral Realities

Here is the argument.

First attend to practices. Look to see what is being done. In particular, attend empirically to how it is being done: how the relations are being assembled and ordered to produce objects, subjects and appropriate locations. Second, wash away the assumption that there is a reality out there beyond practice that is independent, definite, singular, coherent, and prior to that practice. Ask, instead, how it is that such a world is done in practice, and how it manages to hold steady. Third, ask how this process works to delete the way in which this sense of a definite exterior world is being done, to wash away the practices and turn representations into windows on the world. Four, remember that wherever you look whether this is a meeting hall, a talk, a laboratory, or a survey, there is no escape from practice. It is practices all the way down, contested or otherwise. Five, look for the gaps, the aporias and the tensions between the practices and their realities – for if you go looking for differences you will discover them.

These are the steps to follow if we are to attend well to practices, specificities, processes, and materialities. And they are also the steps that are needed if we are to undo the metaphysics of common sense realism. Is reality destiny? Common sense realism says yes. It suggests that while we may try to engineer the world and influence it, in the end the world is arranged in the way that it is: fixed more or less, definite more or less, and singular, coherent and outside practice. The move to performativity says no. It allows us to ask questions about realities that are simultaneously analytical and political. We may begin to ask how they are done. We may ask how they are contested.

We may also ask how – and indeed whether – they might be done differently. In short, we open ourselves to the possibilities of an ontological politics.

This is work to be done, though it is work that has to be done carefully.

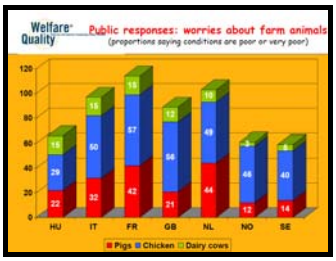
First, it is important to understand that enacting realities is not a matter of volition. Whether or not a reality can be held steady in a practice – whether or not it will hold – is a practical matter. The ordering of practices turns around what one might think of as an intricate choreography of relations[30]. Think of a stakeholder meeting in these terms and the complexities implied in holding things steady start to emerge. Crucially, observe that intentions and designs – explicit designs – only form a small part of that choreography. Yes, PowerPoints and the programme of a meeting are designed. Again, it is not by chance that consumers are depicted as having particular solid views of farm animal welfare. There is, in other words, an explicit politics of reality-making. But most of the relations assembled to do the meeting and its various realities were either designed elsewhere (think of the electricity supply, a crucial but unspoken component in the relations that made the meeting, or the computer software), or they happened anyway independently of intention. Think, for instance, of the bodies of the speakers; their clothes; the common language (English); the time-coordination; the conventions (timeslots, talks, questions and answers, breaks and all the rest) within which the meeting was structured and ordered. Here's the point. All of these were a part of the ordering of the Berlin meeting. All participated in the realities enacted there. None could be easily have been wished away. An attempt to do something different, very different, might have been possible but it would not have been trivial. Enacting realities is not a trivial matter.

So this is the issue. To wash away the metaphysics of commonsense realism is not to claim that anything goes. It is to shift our understanding of the sources of the relative immutability and obduracy of the world: to move these from 'reality itself' into the choreographies of practice. And then it is to attend to how the latter are done – and might be undone. But this shift also demands that we attend to the collateral realities – all those realities that get done along the way, unintentionally. For, here's my assumption, it is the endless enactment of collateral realities that tends to hold things steady. That (this is the tension) helps to make the choreography possible, but at the same time renders an ontological politics unthinkable. So what may be said of collateral realities?

Let me recap.

Put on one side, first, those realities that are being explicitly described or enacted: for instance to do with the preferences of Hungarian consumers, or the need for animals to express 'intuitively desirable natural behaviours, such as exploration and play.' These are reals and they are being done, but they are being done in a manner that is articulated and made explicit. This means that it is easy to see them, and relatively easy to imagine that they might be done differently. Indeed they are contested. Attend, then, instead or in addition, to what is being done along the way, quietly and incidentally:

[30] I borrow the metaphor from Charis Cussins (1998). See also her (Thompson: 2002).



[31]

This we have seen already. But look at what it does. Here is a partial list.

It does Hungary and six other countries. As a part of this (as I noted already) it does nation states. It does publics as statistical aggregates of individual responses. More specifically, it does nation states as statistical aggregates of individuals that may be distinguished from one another. It does surveys as an appropriate methodology for social research. It does the sample statistics built into surveys as an appropriate technique for deriving general claims about populations out of samples. It does questionnaires as workably reliable sources of data about people. As I have noted, it does individuals as quantifiable (actually self-quantifying) respondents. It does those individuals as containers of more or less stable attitudes that may be tested and determined in a questionnaire. It does something about transportability, by which I mean that it takes it for granted that questionnaire responses may be assembled, collated, summarised, but (this is the important point) moved from one appropriate location to another and still hold their validity and salience. It does something about the reliability and the relevance of social science survey research. As a part of this and the transportability, it does the possibility of a centralised viewpoint – so to speak the possibility and, no doubt, the need of a panoptical overview of country differences. And then, on top of all this, it does a series of metaphysical realities as well. So, for instance, if there is country geography, then so too there is something like Euclidean space. No doubt (as it happens this particular PowerPoint does not show this) if there are dates, then there is chronological time. It does a distinction between knower and known, subject and object. More specifically, it does a distinction between animal (object) and person (subject), and between human and non-human. And then, as a further part of this, it also does a distinction between the world on the one hand, and knowledge of the world (including statistics or number) on the other.

These are some, just some, of the collateral realities being done in this single PowerPoint. And most of them (this is why they are collateral realities) are being done incidentally and along the way, without any kind of fuss at all. As I have noted, one can imagine discussion about, say, the accuracy of the statistics about Hungary. Was the sampling appropriate? Or did the translation from English to Hungarian work? But Nation states? Statistical methods? Human and non-human? Reality, and knowledge of that reality? Or space and time? Probably, usually, these are realities that are not questioned. Rather, they work to frame what is being told more explicitly. But therefore, and very powerfully, this means that they are also being done. Here's the proposition: whatever which is not contested and, more particularly, whatever lies beyond the limits of contestability is that which operates most powerfully

[31] Kjærnes et al. (2007).

to do the real. And it is this, to be sure, that is the technique that lies at the heart of common sense realism. It is the enactment of collateral realities that turns what is being done in practice into what necessarily has to be.

Of course we cannot contest everything. Our own practices enact collateral realities like any others. We are no different. But this does not mean that we should not explore how practices do reals, and do so unintentionally and along the way. And indeed, as we have seen, there is something about the character of practices that will help us as we embark upon this adventure. This is the fact that they are never coherent. Earlier I wrote that in a series of PowerPoints, Blokhuis' talk was assembling a succession of Welfare Quality realities. These included the genealogy of a space time box; a collaboration between animal scientists and social scientists across a scientific division of labour; and something that looked like a cybernetic system. What this tells us is that the reality that Blokhuis' was assembling was non-coherent – not incoherent (this points us to a normative failure which is not what I intend) but non-coherent. Just, in fact, like the animal science, and the differences between surveys and focus groups.

Please understand that this is not a complaint about Blokhuis' talk, about animal science, about social research methods, or indeed about Welfare Quality®. Appreciate, instead, that it is an observation about the nature of practice. Coherence was the last of the features of common sense realism that I listed. But coherence is simply an aspiration. In practice, practices are always more or less non-coherent. They work by enacting different versions of reality and more or less successfully holding these together. But if there is multiplicity rather than singularity then we have an entry point[32]. If we look for non-coherences within practices we will find them. We will discover collateral realities. And, this is the move to an ontological politics, we may take sides and hope to make a difference. Reality is no longer destiny.

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[32] The point is explored at length in Mol (2002).

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