



FUR, MORALITY AND PEOPLE

- the ethical position of the European fur sector

"We must have the means to make ethical judgements in an objective sense for them to achieve a more meaningful, more robust role in our culture and move us away from the corrosive influence of moral relativism and an emphasis on ethical subjectivity."

Michael J. Thompson

The use of animals in modern society has many forms and purposes, and only rarely can these purposes be said to be essential to humans. While the ethical debate over animal use takes on many perspectives, all farmed animals will die and they have no appreciation of their end purpose. Only one perspective matters to the animals themselves: animal welfare.

With the introduction of the animal welfare assessment programme WelFur, the European fur sector sets a worldwide standard that takes animal welfare for fur farmed species way beyond standards in other animal industries. Based on independent scientific research in a dynamic, ever-improving programme, WelFur considers biological characteristics, natural behavioural needs, mental state and the health of the animals. In this respect, fur-farming is both beneficial to society and can provide good lives for the animals.

Thus, above all, the moral justification of fur use and fur farming lies in extension of the welfare provided for the animals whilst they are alive.

Fur Europe, 2014

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of a few decades, issues revolving around human use of animals have moved from being socially invisible to becoming a major social issue attracting large attention from citizens, politicians, academics and NGOs. Occasionally, media stories concerning single animal issues are potent enough to go worldwide, and the plight of animals are being advocated from many parts of society.

In today's society, there are many different views about what humans are entitled to do with animals, but such views are often rather superficial. A large number of people may express strong views on animal welfare, yet the same people are willing to buy the cheapest animal products in the supermarket, seemingly perfectly aware of the inconsistency between what they say and what they do.

This serves to illustrate a problem of ambivalence in the attitude towards human use of animals. When rights and wrongs in our dealing with animals are defined by feelings rather than being approached through ethical theory it inevitably leads to arbitrary perceptions which again may lead to arbitrary legislation since feelings cannot be relied upon as a rational guide. In the increasingly serious debate about our treatment of animals, ambivalence encourages double standards, and such standards are both morally objectionable and logically indefensible¹.

Fur farming holds a central position in the contemporary debate about human use of animals because sporadic legislations have banned fur farming in a number of European countries². Most notably, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands have applied legislation to ban fur farming on grounds of ethical arguments. In the UK, the ban referred to the "*protection of public morality*"³ whereas central in the Dutch legislation was the reference to fur being "*an unnecessary luxury product to which alternatives exists*"⁴. With reference to the European Convention on Human Rights the National Court of The Hague, The Netherlands, reversed the Dutch ban on 21. May 2014⁵. However, whether fur is morally defensible or not may still be considered a topic of discussion in The Netherlands.

1.1 ETHICAL VIES UNDERLYING THE PUBLIC DEBATE

The paper examines the practice of fur farming and states the ethical position of the European fur sector in the context of relevant moral philosophies. As ethics proceed from existing ethics, the moral perspectives of the contemporary debate over animals are derived from the philosophical theories used to assess the

¹ P. Sandøe and S. Christiansen, *Ethics of animal use*, 18

² Legislation completely banning fur farming exists in Croatia, Slovenia, UK, and Austria

³ Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000

⁴ Wet van 4 januari 2013, houdende een verbod op de pelsdierhouderij (Wet verbod pelsdierhouderij)

⁵ Rechtbank Den Haag, 21. May 2014, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2014:6161

treatment of people. For the sake of readability and the length of this paper, a deeper explanation of the philosophical views that play their role in contemporary animal ethics, must be found outside this position paper. However, an insufficient introduction of the primary ethical views in play – the contractarian view, the rights view, the utilitarian view, the relational view and the respect for nature view – is found here⁶:

- The *contractarian view* (contractarianism) only considers human self-interest. Contractarians holds the view that morality can only emerge from an artificial political context based on contracts (often most contracts of action rather than written contracts). As animals are incapable of rational thought they are automatically excluded from moral concern, but animals may find protection if it is in the owner's long-term interest, for example by living up to animal welfare laws, by gaining higher prices through healthy animals, or if poor treatment of animals hurt fellow human beings whose cooperation the animal owner is dependent on.
- According to the *rights view* (Kantian ethics) the interest of all beings affected counts, and animals should be given a set of unbreakable rights. In the most radical form these rights are the animals' right to their own life, but holders of the rights view may also aim at minimum rights, for example the animals' right to exercise natural behaviour or the right to be exposed to a minimum of suffering.
- Supporters of the *utilitarian view* (utilitarianism) say that the interests of all sentient beings must be considered in a cost-benefit analysis of the consequences of the actions under moral scrutiny. The action that produces the greatest total fulfilment of pleasure/happiness and least amount of pain/suffering for the beings involved is the morally right action. Animals certainly enjoy protection under this view but the extension of the protection is left with the difficulties of carrying out the utilitarian cost-benefit analysis.
- In the *relational view* (contextualism) moral distinctions are drawn in accordance with the animals' relation to us. Animals differ morally in their relationship with humans, and pets will therefore have a special status and should live their whole life, whereas the relationship between humans and farm animals is one where the slaughtering of animals is built in. Regardless of the type relationship, humans still have duties and responsibilities with regards to animal welfare.
- Finally, the *respect for nature view* (ecological ethics) takes a more collective approach and aims at the protection of species, ecosystems and genetic integrity. It is less important in the context of fur farming, but relevant in the larger debate over human use of animals as many people certainly will hold the view that endangered species should be protected.

Any of these ethical views may underlie people's view about the acceptable use of animals and the result is that we live in a society where moral plurality with regards to our treatment of animals thrives. The reality is that, more often than not, people will hold a variety of these views depending on the issue they are faced with. Even though it is possible to approach animal ethics with such a 'hybrid view' and at the same time be

⁶ P. Sandøe and S. Christiansen, *Ethics of animal use*

morally consistent, this is not always the case. Moral inconsistency certainly exists in the debate over animals - that of fur animals included.

1.2 THE ETHICAL POSITION OF FUR EUROPE

Fur Europe holds the position that humans are entitled to use animals for purposes that benefits humans and human society. The prerequisite for the European fur production is that fur animals can live good lives on the farm while they are alive, and this is met with a multi-stringed, scientific approach to animal welfare. The fact that fur is a luxury product to be worn rather than eaten is not justification enough to morally separate fur farming from other farming practices: Just as humans can survive without wearing fur, we can likewise survive without eating meat. In that sense neither of the products can be deemed essential to humans and it becomes difficult to draw a 'moral line' between the two activities without being morally inconsistent. However, given the social concern that is sometimes linked to fur, the European fur sector has an obligation to engage in the public debate on animal ethics and educate the public about fur and fur farming at large. Overall, the ethics of the European fur sector is depending on the sector's ability to exist in accordance with social, environmental and economic sustainability.

The people working in the European fur industry are not philosophers, and Fur Europe shall neither claim to side with one of the mentioned outlooks on animal ethics, nor to 'own the truth' about morality as it is clear that a universal animal ethic has yet to be developed. Rather, the European fur community may well mirror the rest of the general European society in having various views in approaching our duties to animals. A fur farmer with a relational view may profoundly care about the fur animals on her farm, but easily accept the killing of the same animals because the killing is an inherent part of their mutual relationship. A contractarian fur farmer may take good care of his animals with the primary reason that good animal welfare equals higher skin prices, while the moral acceptance of fur from a fur designer may be found in the trade-off between the pleasures offered by the creative opportunities of the fur material and the possibility for fur farmed animals to live lives with a minimum of suffering.

Despite the moral diversity which also will be found in the fur community it is easy to nail down that good animal welfare is the common ground for both the European fur sector and society at large. Whether this is rooted in good farmer-animal relationships, consumer demands or the notion that animals should enjoy some basic rights, for example the right to be protected from suffering, the importance of good animal welfare is well-established. To this end, animal welfare is also at the heart of the moral justification of fur and fur farming in Europe.

With the pan-European introduction of the world leading animal welfare programme WelFur, Fur Europe strengthens both the possibilities to offer animals good lives on fur farms to the benefit of both society and animals, as well as the ethical foundation of fur farming. In the following animal welfare as an ethical component will be explained further, just as other parts of the contemporary debate over fur will be explored.

Finally, it must be mentioned that besides the moral philosophies that has already been introduced, this position paper additionally leans on two other philosophies: traditionalism and virtue ethics.

2. THE EMERGENCE OF AN ETHICAL DEBATE OVER ANIMALS

The contemporary ethical discussion about human use of animals has largely emerged because of a growing gap between the views on how we ought to treat the animals in our care. The American philosopher Bernard Rollin says that society's moral concern has outgrown the traditional ethic of animal cruelty that began in biblical times and is encoded in the laws of all civilized societies⁷. This ethic regarding animal treatment is very minimalistic and demands that wilful, sadistic and unnecessary infliction of pain and suffering on animals is avoided. Such behaviour contradicts the nature of ethics, *i.e.* the study and recommendations of concepts of right and wrong conduct. Both divine scholars and contemporary philosophers rightfully point to the reasoning that allowing such behaviour to animals would encourage the spreading of the same behaviour to human beings⁸.

Today, the avoidance of deliberate cruelty of animals is no longer enough to capture the moral intuitions about human use of animals. It is indeed fair to talk about moral plurality, and the scope of these diverse moral views on the value of animals range from perceiving animals as mere instruments to animals having inherent worth just like humans. Rollin points to five major reasons for the rise of this new social concern:

1. The massive demographic journey from rural areas to cities has largely distanced people from animal agriculture, and instead people have developed new animal relations with pets.
2. Society's ethical concern over humans traditionally ignored or oppressed – blacks, women, handicapped and other minorities, has expanded its attention to our treatment of the non-human world: the environment and the animals.
3. Media has discovered that 'animals sell papers', and animal stories have intensively increased in the media.
4. Strong and visible arguments have been advanced in favour of raising the status of animals by philosophers, scientists and celebrities.
5. The shift from traditional animal husbandry to industrialised animal production systems has (unintentionally) led to increased animal suffering and lack of the individual attention that characterised traditional husbandry.

⁷ B. Rollin (2011), *Animal Rights as a Mainstream Phenomenon*, *Animals*, 109-110

⁸ E.g. S. Haden & A. Scarpa (2005), *Childhood Animal Cruelty: A review of research, assessment, and therapeutic issues*, *The Forensic Examiner*, 14, 23-32, and F. Ascione & P. Arkow (1999), *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse*, Purdue University Press

All these reasons can serve to explain the emergence of a new debate over the human use of animals that besides natural science is under strong influence from cultural and societal values⁹. Consequently, it is an often repeated reflection amongst contemporary philosophers working with animal ethics, that animal industries should not answer the “how to” questions on the raising of farm animals, but rather the “what ought to be” questions.

The philosophers’ purpose here is first and foremost to bring the ethical consideration into the debate in the acknowledgement that a sound societal debate will suffer without this element. People holding different ethical views simply talk past each other¹⁰.

This gap between various understandings of the ‘good animal life’, what we owe to the animals, and to what extent, can hold many different concepts, but is often most related to animal welfare, and how we ought to consider animal welfare. An example of this is illustrated by animal industries holding the view that positive animal welfare is represented by productivity alone. Though productivity indeed often can be associated with positive animal welfare, it certainly will leave the animal advocate unimpressed. A different ethical view on animal welfare is represented in the famous five freedoms articulated by the British Farm Animal Welfare Council¹¹, in which it was acknowledged that:

The welfare of an animal includes its physical and mental state and we consider that good animal welfare implies both fitness and a sense of well-being. Any animal kept by man, must at least, be protected from unnecessary suffering.

We believe that an animal's welfare, whether on farm, in transit, at market or at a place of slaughter should be considered in terms of 'five freedoms'. These freedoms define ideal states rather than standards for acceptable welfare. They form a logical and comprehensive framework for analysis of welfare within any system together with the steps and compromises necessary to safeguard and improve welfare within the proper constraints of an effective livestock industry.

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
2. Freedom from Discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

⁹ F. Ohl & F. J. van der Staay (2012), *Animal welfare: at the interface between science and society*, Veterinary Journal, 192, 13-19

¹⁰ B. Rollin (2011), *Animal Rights as a Mainstream Phenomenon*, Animals, 107

¹¹ British Farm Animal Welfare Council (1979), <http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm>

As we have seen, animal welfare as an ethical concept has held a position in philosophy since biblical times, though the recommendations have been limited to the minimalistic anti-cruelty ethic. This clearly suggests the importance of animal welfare as an ethical concept, an intuitively many people will agree to this importance.

2.1 ETHICAL ARGUMENTS BEYOND ANIMAL WELFARE

In extension of the continued focus on animal welfare as an ethical component, the contemporary debate over animals also includes other ethical considerations. For example have a large number of countries like India, Brazil and Sweden banned wild animals in circuses. Besides the animal welfare consideration found in the underlying, but also controversial, assumption that animals cannot live 'good lives' or are otherwise suffering in circuses, these bans suggests two other ethical considerations. The first is the ethical view that wild animals belong in nature and therefore it is morally problematic to place them in circus. The other consideration has to do with the purpose of circus animals, namely that they are there solely for human entertainment which can be considered as frivolous use of the animals.

Another example is the EU ban on animal testing for cosmetic products¹². This regulation is likewise associated with animal welfare, but in a sense where the ethical consideration of necessity is weighed against the outcome of the use of animals. The idea is here that the infliction of suffering, a presumably unavoidable component in any form of animal testing, does not outweigh the benefits of the animal testing seemingly because test results can be achieved without using animals. The same conclusion has not been reached in animal testing for medical purposes, because the human benefits of medical products derived from the results of animal testing seem to outweigh the negatives.

Ethical considerations similar to those behind the bans on wild animals in circuses and animal testing for cosmetics purposes are in play in the debate over fur animals. This is partly reflected in an opinion from the Danish Ethical Council for Animals:

*The public debate [...] has shown that the attitudes to fur production spans widely. The discussions in the Ethical Council have reflected this range of views which generally speaking can be divided into two groups – those who believe that fur production is an animal production to be considered in the same way, for example with regards to animal welfare, as our other livestock industries, and those who believe that the purpose of the production makes up a significant difference for the ethical assessment.*¹³

It is the latter ethical consideration that was the basis for the ban on fur farming in UK and The Netherlands, but other arguments play a role in the debate too.

¹² Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on cosmetic products

¹³ Danish Ethical Council for Animals (2003), *Opinion on fur production*, 16

3. FUR FARMING AND DOMESTICATION

As the scope of this paper is to examine the ethical aspects of fur farming, not all animal welfare issues regarding fur farming will be approached here, but rather those normally related to ethical consideration: These are *domestication* and the opportunity to exercise *natural behaviour*.

The two issues are somewhat related for holders of the idea, that farmed fur animals are essentially wild animals and therefore not able to exercise natural behavior in the farm housing systems. This is assumed to lead to suffering.

The farmed fur animals are however, clearly domesticated and with the scientific knowledge available on the issue available it becomes increasingly difficult to argue for the opposite view with any conviction. All animals in the European fur production descends from the original fur farming community in North America which means that the domestication process for mink has taken place for more than 110 generations. With a slightly longer generation interval foxes have been domesticated through a less number of generations, but certainly enough for the domestication process to take place. Thus, it is misunderstood when some people assume that domestication depends on thousands of years in captivity.

The world's most groundbreaking domestication research project was carried out by Russian scientist Dmitry Belyaev who in the course of 25 generations selected silver foxes for tameness to the extent that they acted exactly like dogs and became dependent on human contact. Belyaev had compressed thousands of years of domestication into a few years¹⁴. Likewise, the domestication of mink is well documented:

Minks form a reproductive community with their wild form, and in that sense, no new species is formed in the domestication process (as opposed to different breeds, which are formed), but that is the case with all domesticated animals, including those that were domesticated 5,000-10,000 years ago. There is therefore not the slightest doubt any more as how to answer the question, namely with an unequivocal yes, minks are domesticated, on a morphological, physiological, genetic and ethological basis and research¹⁵.

As Belyaev demonstrated, the domestication process is a result of selection for behaviour. The continued focus on avoiding breeding on fearful animals is integrated in the WelFur protocols for mink and fox.

3.1 ANIMAL WELFARE AND NATURAL BEHAVIOUR

In the social debate about animal welfare, the American zoologist and phycologist David Frazer has identified three different views about how animals should be raised and how their welfare should be judged: (1) the view that animals should be raised under conditions that promote good biological functioning in the sense of health, growth and reproduction, (2) the view that animals should be raised in

¹⁴ D. K. Belyaev (1979), *Destabilizing selection as a factor in domestication*.

¹⁵ E. Decuypere (2011), *Is the mink domesticated?*

ways that minimise suffering and promote contentment, and (3) the view that animals should be allowed to lead relatively natural lives¹⁶.

These are all legitimate ethical views, and because they concern animal welfare they are also the subject of animal science. It is a characteristic for the European fur sector's animal welfare assessment programme WelFur that all three positions are practically integrated into WelFur.

In the debate on fur farming however, it is mainly the third view about natural behavior that is at stake, and the following will focus on this particular view.

The animal welfare concept of respecting animals' natural behaviour was already reflected in the Five Freedoms that were articulated on grounds of biological needs of the animals. The underlying idea is that the expression of natural behavior itself may have rewarding properties, or, if emphasized even more, the opportunity to exercise natural behavior is the precondition of the 'good animal life' as suggested by Bernard Rollins:

Animals, too, have natures – the pigness of the pig, the cowness of the cow, 'fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly' – which are as essential to their well-being as speech and assembly are to us.¹⁷

With this, Bernard Rollin does not say that animal housing systems should be copies of the original habitats of domesticated animals, but is rather advocating for the designing of farm animal housing systems in ways that allow animals to realize species-specific-behavior. To this end he has played a significant role in convincing North American animal industries to let go of housing systems that opposes this, e.g. gestation crates for pigs.

In the public debate however, there is a tendency to value what is 'natural' and many people seem more influenced by the aesthetic appearance of a housing system than by whether the scientist's detailed measurements have indicated the welfare better or worse. Thus, some people hold the ethical view that farms should be designed to fit the animal, and not the other way around.

Such a view seems to suggest that all elements from their natural environment which animals are denied in captivity can be described as deprived and leading to suffering. With reference to behavioural plasticity, the effects of domestication and humans' selective breeding programmes, this idea has largely been rejected by animal welfare scientists, who have concluded it inappropriate to assume that captive animals would require the same elements in their environment as their wild conspecifics¹⁸. Moreover, it is problematic from an animal welfare perspective to solely focus on natural behaviour. In the scientific community there is

¹⁶ D. Frazer (2003), *Assessing animal welfare at the farm and group level: the interplay of science and values*, *Animal Welfare*, 12, 433-443

¹⁷ B. Rollin (1993), *Animal production and the new social ethic for animals*, *Food Animal Well-being*, 3-13

¹⁸ E.g. E. Price (1999), *Behavioural developments in animals undergoing domestication*, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 65, 245-271; T.B. Poole (1992), *The nature and evolution of behavioural needs in mammals*, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 1, 203-220; Veasey et al. (1996), *On comparing the behaviour of zoo housed animals with wild conspecifics as a welfare indicator*, *Animal Welfare* 5, 13-24

widespread consensus that good animal welfare is multifactorial and the assessment of animal welfare must take a large variety of measures into account¹⁹.

The British animal welfare scientist Marian Stamp Dawkins has addressed the large societal attention to natural behaviour arguing that it is not the 'naturalness' that is the criterion for whether domesticated animals suffer or not: 'Natural' is not per definition something good in the wild where stress factors are high and life in general can be a risky affair. Natural behaviour will sometimes, but not always contribute to good animal welfare; whether it does or not must first and foremost be approached through scientific studies of the animals' behaviour:

[...] Do animals want to behave naturally? Do captive animals want to do all the things their wild counterparts do, or do they find plentiful food without having to hunt for it far more preferable? The connection between 'natural' and 'good' welfare becomes something that has to be established with facts by looking at the animals themselves, not just by romantic assumptions about what life in the wild might be like. The results could turn out to favour either natural behaviour or not.²⁰

The argument that natural behavior of fur farmed animals cannot be fulfilled is somewhat reinforced with the assumption that fur farmed animals are not domesticated but essential wild. Even though this premise is wrong, the study of evolutionary biology has revealed that some traits, regardless of domestication, are deeply embedded into the genetic fabric of an animal while other traits are more flexible²¹. Flexible traits will change over time when the animals adapt to their domestic environment, but some traits are perhaps never lost. These traits may, if given the opportunity to be pursued through natural behaviour, likely linked to positive animal welfare.

In the fur debate the discussion on natural behavior concerns the views that fur farmed animals essential needs for territories equaling the size of their natural habitat, that mink need access to swimming water, and that foxes need the opportunity to dig in the ground. Though these are valid arguments if one holds the ethical view that fur farms should largely mirror nature, they are not essential behavioral needs, and there is no evidence suggesting that the lack of access to these activities leads to suffering. On the contrary it becomes increasingly clear that any welfare improvements gained from swimming water or a ground to dig in can be gained from other kinds of cage enrichment.

In nature, territory size, access to swimming water and digging in the ground are activities closely linked to the search for food or the building of a nest. These needs are fulfilled in the housing environments of mink and fox. Preference tests have shown that mink and foxes are willing to work to gain access to swimming water and digging in the ground, but these activities do not appear to be essential needs but rather occupational activities, which can be replaced with other kinds of enrichment:

Research indicates that the effect of access to swimming water is less than the welfare improvements which can be achieved by cage enrichment with platforms, tubes and biting objects.

¹⁹ E.g. Welfare Quality fact sheet, *Principles and criteria of good Animal Welfare*

²⁰ M. Dawkins (2012), *Why Animals Matter*, 146-147

²¹ E. Price (1999), *Behavioural developments in animals undergoing domestication*, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 65, 245-271

In addition, not all mink enter swimming water which would be expected if mink had an essential behavioral need for swimming water²².

Still, both mink and fox exercise considerable amounts of species-specific behavior. According to preference tests the single most important quality for the farmed mink is access to a nest box in which they spend 70-80% of its time clearly corresponding to the behavior amongst its wild counterparts²³. Mink and fox also raise their own kits. Likewise, the welfare for farmed foxes is closely linked to their ability to exercise social behavior as in nature, just as the cage design is paramount for the welfare on fox farms²⁴.

To the extent that humans accept animal farming, we also accept that housing systems cannot mirror the original habitats of the animals, but from an animal welfare perspective this may likely be an advantage. In all fairness to the animals in question, a discussion on animal welfare cannot, as mentioned earlier, rely on the concept of natural behavior alone. Other elements are at least as important, most notably issues concerning the health of the animals. In this respect the ethical discussion on whether swimming water and access to digging in the ground should be added to the housing systems of fur farmed animals necessarily must look to the foreseeable disease issues such housing conditions would cause.

Above all, the important thing when addressing animal welfare is not to be blindsided by the emotional idea that 'good' equals nature. Animal welfare is the one ethical component where the natural sciences including biology, physiology and ethology can give us clear answers about the needs and wants of the animals, and a certain answer is that the approach to animal welfare must be multi-stringed. Granted, this is far from always the case in modern animal agriculture. It is however, the case for European fur farming.

3.2 PROFESSIONAL ANIMAL WELFARE THROUGH WELFUR

As we have seen, good farm animal welfare cannot be provided with the opportunity for the animals to exercise natural behavior alone. As such, there is widespread consensus in the scientific community that animal welfare is very complex, can be affected by many factors, and embraces both physical and mental health. Such a multi-stringed approach to animal welfare is difficult to find in any animal welfare assessment legislation today, but it was exactly the purpose of the European Commission to develop a multifactorial animal welfare assessment system, when the Commission initiated the Welfare Quality project in 2004, with the involvement of 44 institutions and universities. The project aimed at accommodating societal concerns and market demands in the development of reliable on-farm-monitoring systems with practical species-specific strategies to improve farm animal welfare, and Welfare Quality is largely recognised as the most comprehensive assessment system in the world today. Thus, Welfare Quality reflects a general understanding and consensus within the scientific community of what represents good animal welfare.

²² Møller *et al* (2011), 'Welfare in mink', Report no. 104: 4-5, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Agriculture.

²³ Møller *et al* (2011), 'Welfare in mink', Report no. 104: 4-5, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Agriculture.

²⁴ E.g. Ahola *et al* (2002), 'Effects of group size and space allocation on physiological, behavioural and production-related welfare parameters in farmed silver fox cubs', Agricultural and Food Science in Finland vol. 11: 185-197; Koistinen (2009), 'Farmed Blue Foxes' (*Vulpes lagopus*) need for a sand floor', Doctoral dissertation

Whereas the Welfare Quality systems, originally developed for poultry, cattle and pigs, have found only little practical use after its finalization, the European fur industry has adopted the four welfare principles established in the European Commission's project: good housing, good feeding, good health and appropriate behavior. Based on these principles of the Welfare Quality, the WelFur project was initiated by the European Fur Breeders' Association in 2009, and the protocols for farmed mink and fox were finalized in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

The implementation of WelFur at a pan-European level begins in 2015, and when finally implemented the European fur farmers will be world leading in science-based animal welfare assessment, and at the same time the programme provides a professional hands-on tool for fur farmers to improve animal welfare. In addition, the programme is designed to ensure farm level transparency to European citizens.

WelFur is developed by independent scientists from seven European universities²⁵. During the development of the programme the scientists did an in-depth review of all existing animal welfare research on fur animals before they identified the welfare indicators and measurements which eventually became the WelFur protocols. The in-depth review includes all scientific references on fur farming including those concerning natural behavior, and as such the WelFur protocols work as the new scientific reference for animal welfare for fur farmed mink and fox in Europe.

Throughout the development of the programme, external reviewers involved in the original Welfare Quality project have conserved the quality of the scientific work and the alignment with the original Welfare Quality project. The final review of WelFur is very clear in acknowledging the scientific validity of the protocols:

We commented on scientific reviews that were conducted into potential welfare issues and potential welfare indicators. These were all detailed, scholarly, involved hundreds of person-hours of work, and were of publishable quality. Their analyses of the key issues, and of the validity, reliability and practicality of the various potential welfare indicators available, were very thoughtful and robust. The relative merits of animals-based indicators versus resource-based measures were well appreciated (animal-based measures being favoured wherever possible, a decision we support). Overall, these reviews provided a firm scientific foundation for all subsequent decisions²⁶.

The point being made by WelFur with regards to the ethical component of animal welfare for fur farmed species is that it is entirely possible to house fur animals with respect to the animals' biological characteristics and behavioural needs. In addition, Fur Europe recognises that animal welfare is a dynamic process, and new scientific knowledge on animal welfare will be adopted into the WelFur protocols every five years.

²⁵ National Institute of Agronomic Research (INRA), Clermont-Ferrand, France; University of Eastern Finland, Dept. of Biology; MTT Agrifood Research, Animal Production Research, Finland; Aarhus University, Dept. of Animal Science, Denmark; Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Dept. of Animal and Aquacultural Sciences; Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Dept. of Animal Environment and Health; University of Utrecht, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Dept. of Animals in Science and Society.

²⁶ Report by the External Review Committee (September 2013), by Prof. Harry Blokhuis, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, Uppsala, Sweden; Prof. Georgia Mason, University of Guelph, Canada; Prof. Emeritus David Morton, University of Birmingham, UK.

Though the European fur sector recognises that the ethical debate on animal use goes beyond animal welfare, Fur Europe finds that animal welfare is the single most important component in the debate. This is a moral intuition shared with the majority of animal welfare scientists, moral philosophers and society in general. After all, it is fair to say that animal welfare is the only one of the various ethical components that matters to the animals themselves. Certainly, they have no opinion on whether it is preferable to become food or fashion. More than anything else, the moral justification of fur farming lies in extension of the welfare provided for the animals whilst they are alive.

4. THE UTILITARIAN CALCULATION

The argument, that fur is an unnecessary luxury product and therefore morally indefensible is a persistent one in the ethical debate over fur. It was the central argument in the Dutch legislation banning mink farming in 2012, as well as in the UK ban in 2000. To this end, the legislations in UK and The Netherlands say that fur products are not essential enough for human beings to morally justify taking animal lives.

The only ethical framework that can accommodate this argument is the utilitarian idea that the consequences of a given action should be weighed carefully in a sort of cost-benefit analysis, and the interest of all sentient beings involved must be considered in this calculation. The morally right decision is the one that is in accordance with ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’²⁷ – or simply ‘the general good’. In classic utilitarian writings, the measuring of the consequences of an action is undertaken in terms of the capacity for suffering and the ability to experience pleasure or happiness. Today, utilitarians sometimes describe benefits and harms in broader terms.

The only philosopher who appears to have isolated fur animals from other farmed animal species fur farming and sought to explore the particular aspect of necessity in fur farming is the British theologian Andrew Linzey who also takes on a utilitarian approach:

[...] In ethical terms, to show that something is necessary requires more than a simple appeal to what is fashionable, or even desirable. Human wants do not by themselves constitute moral necessity. It must be shown that the good procured is essential, and that no alternative means are available. When viewed from this perspective, it can be seen immediately that fur farming fails a basic moral test. The wearing of fur, while conceivably pleasant, fashionable, or even desirable, cannot reasonably be defined as essential. Fur is a luxury item. When weighed in terms of a cost/benefit analysis, the case fails, and spectacularly so. It is obviously unjustifiable to inflict suffering on animals for non-essential, indeed trivial, ends.²⁸

In this statement Linzey largely captures the essence of the legislations banning fur farming on moral grounds. There are however, a large number of problems with this argument. First of all, the premise of Linzey’s argument is that fur farming inevitably inflicts suffering for the animals, but as we have seen from

²⁷ J. Bentham (1776), *A Fragment on Government*

²⁸ A. Linzey (2006), *The Ethical Case for European Legislation Against Fur Farming*, *Animal Law* 13, 158-159

the scientific community, it is perfectly possible to house fur farmed animals in ways that eliminates suffering and offer the animals pleasant lives.

Though animal welfare issues do exist in fur farming, these are at a very low level compared to other farmed species. A revision of the existing literature on the subject of wounded animals in the Danish mink production found that approx. 0,1% of the pair-wise housed mink have serious wounds²⁹. Similarly, when inspecting 422,176 mink in 2009, the Norwegian Food Safety Authority found serious damages in the form of wounds, inflammation, dead animals or disease in 0,078% of the animals. In this light, because Linzey's argument is based on the premise that fur farming is "inherently cruel", his cost-benefit calculation fails in labelling fur farming as morally wrong.

Another major problem with the argument also represents a classical critique of the utilitarian calculation or cost-benefit analysis. The problem is the obvious one of the difficulties connected to the measurement of the total sum of suffering and happiness following an action: How can one decide on whether the total happiness experienced by people who love wearing their luxury fur is not greater than the harm experienced by the small proportion of the fur farmed animals that are damaged? As the interests of all involved sentient beings must be considered, the calculation also concerns the creative joy of the designer working with fur material, the happiness of people inspired by seeing the fur design, the farmer content after a day of work, the good feeling experienced by fur workers able to provide for their families and so on. Our ability to measure and predict the benefits and harms resulting from a course of action is dubious, to say the least.

Even if we could measure these things, it is not given that the happiness-pain calculation would fall out in favour of a ban on fur. The utilitarian calculation must consider how intense the pleasure or pain will be, for how long it will last, how likely it is to happen etc. To this end, fur is in a unique position because of its long life span. Whereas the joy of eating a chicken wing is rather quickly replaced by the longing of the next meal, fur coats are enjoyed again and again over the course of many years, often only to be re-modelled and then used and enjoyed by the next generation of consumers. Thus, the utilitarian view might as well work in favour of fur and fur farming.

In spite of it being a powerful, important and influential philosophy, utilitarianism also has the fundamental problem that it is inherently unjust. If our moral decisions are to take into account considerations of justice, then apparently utilitarianism cannot be the sole principle guiding our decisions³⁰. What is good for the greatest number can easily be unjust to individuals or minorities and in this respect utilitarianism conflicts with another major philosophical branch, the rights theory, over and over again, in philosophical debates as well as in daily life. This conflict is beautifully exemplified in the case of the Dutch mink farming ban where the national court in The Hague reversed the ban on mink farming with reference to the universal property rights found in the European Convention on Human Rights. This serves as a reminder that legislation based solely on utilitarian arguments, on top of the difficulties involved with the fair calculation of these arguments, may easily be in conflict with or arbitrary to other legitimate moral views. For this reason alone, lawmakers should be very careful in basing legislation solely on the subjective foundation that characterises

²⁹ Steen H. Møller, NJF Congress 2011, the Nordic Association of Agricultural Scientists.

³⁰ M. Velasquez et al (1989), *Calculating Consequences: The Utilitarian Approach to Ethics*, Issues in Ethics

utilitarianism, and is the only philosophical branch that can justify animal legislation based only on loose references to ‘morality’.

4.1 THE NON-ESSENTIALS OF MODERN SOCIETY

The ethical view underlying both the fur farming bans in UK and The Netherlands and Andrew Linzey’s view is also problematic in characterising fur as a luxury product that deserves special consideration because the purpose of the product is not essential. This problem has been captured by the Danish Ethical Council for Animals:

If you generally perceive fur as a commodity on equal terms with other goods we get from animals, it becomes difficult to see how fur is any different as a special luxury product. In our society we surround ourselves with products that are not necessary for us, and the definition of when something is luxurious becomes somewhat random. For example it is difficult to argue that fur is more luxurious than meat, because in our part of the world there are plenty of substitutes for both. And if you choose to broaden the discussion to include environmental issues, fur seem less luxurious than meat consumption, since one can argue for the use of fur as a more environmentally friendly product than synthetic materials, and against the production of meat, which gives a larger environmental impact and has lower energy use of the soil than plant production.³¹

It is indeed true that fur is non-essential to human survival, but the same can rightfully be said about meat, dairy, sports fishing, hunting, circus, zoos, and large parts of the animal experiment industry. In addition, the global annual production of fur animals make up approx. 0.15 % of the 56 billion animals slaughtered for food purposes³² (not counting fish), which makes it difficult to observe a moral gain of any significance by banning fur farming and allowing other livestock productions.

With regards to Andrew Linzey, he does in fact admit to that a ban on fur farming over other animal agricultural species is inconsistent³³. A vegetarian himself his writings makes no attempts to hide that he favours a ban on animal use in general, and that a ban on fur farming in this respect is just a first step on the road to end human use of animals. This naturally leads us to the origin of the anti-fur position: The animal liberation movement.

4.3 SINGLE-ISSUE CAMPAIGNING IN ‘THE ETHICAL ERA’

By and large, the issue of fur farming has been on the international public agenda since the late 1980ies when People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) famously began campaigning against fur with

³¹ Danish Ethical Council for Animals (2003), *Opinion on fur production*, 17

³² Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2008)

³³ A. Linzey (2006), *The Ethical Case for European Legislation Against Fur Farming*, Animal Law 13, 162

support from naked celebrities. Along with lab science animals, factory farming and hunting, the fur production became a paradigm case for ethical reflection in animal ethics.

These paradigm cases were much fuelled by prominent ethicists and animal liberationists like Peter Singer and Tom Reagan, and were kept on the public agenda largely because the grassroots in the animal liberation movement somewhat successfully have advocated animal issues with no wish to engage the animal industries and professionals. Consequently, the public debate became one where the complexity of animal ethics was reduced and stood out with simple messages like ‘Fur is Cruel’ and ‘Meat is Murder’. With campaigns aimed at selling news rather than improve farm conditions, the animal rights movement succeeded in labelling certain animal issues as morally wrong in the public, and at the same time they avoided discussing the wider societal issues that animal ethics represents. This however, may have widespread consequences for human use of animals³⁴:

The mentioned issues provide a platform where specific human-animal relations are discussed in order to draw conclusions for the wider field of human-animal relation. For instance, fur farmers see themselves as farmers using minks to produce high quality clothing, whereas critics describe them as harming animals for highly questionable, i.e. luxurious, goods. The value of such goals is questioned which has an effect on comparable cases. If e.g. fur farming is banned with reference to moral values, this serves as a basis for similar cases. If producing luxurious goods with animals is publicly seen as unjustified, all practices that use animals in order to produce comparable goods with comparable costs on the animal side are put into doubt. This is why the mentioned fields can serve as paradigm cases.

It is clear to Fur Europe that all animal industries are facing an ‘ethical era’. The influence of the ethical debate over human use of animals is already well-known to a number of animal industries, in particular the ‘paradigm cases’. The debate is however, not limited to these few isolated cases, and any industry involving human use of animals must assume to be confronted with questions of ethical character at some point. The ethical era demands further engagement in the public debate on animal ethics, and for this purpose, animal industries must seek an understanding of the philosophies underlying the debate over human use of animals. Such understanding is necessary in order to meet the arguments found in the moral plurality of society.

The consequence of the ethical era is however, also an important matter for politicians because the possible implications reach much further than fur farming. Popularly speaking, if European fur farming is met by a general ban, the debate will move on to question other animal industries.

As it has been demonstrated, the moral case against fur is extremely weak to the extent that it also seeks to pursue the desirable moral consistency. In this respect it is worth to cast a glance onto the animal rights theories that fuels the campaigning of the animal liberation movement. As all other theories on animal ethics, the theories on animal liberation are derived from theories on moral duties towards humans.

³⁴ H. Grimm, *Leaving the ivory tower or back into theory? Learning from paradigm cases in animal ethics*, Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Ethical Perspectives on Land Use and Food Production, 442-444

4.3 STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE THE VEGAN SOCIETY

Likely the most influential philosopher alive, the utilitarian moral philosopher Peter Singer is often credited as ‘the father of the modern animal rights movement’ for his book *Animal Liberation* (1975). Introducing the concept of ‘equal consideration’, Singer’s view is that animal production inevitably leads to the consequence that farm animals suffer, and since this suffering should be given the same moral consideration as human suffering, the human use of farm animals easily looks like racism or sexism.

This leads Singer to the radical conclusion that animal products should be boycotted. Even though Singer did point to, and thus possibly contributed to shape, the paradigm cases mentioned in the previous chapter, he makes no attempts to isolate fur animals from other animals. As a utilitarian, it is the capacity for suffering that matters for Peter Singer. His achievement, though choking to many people, was rather his strong argumentation for the equal consideration of interests between species. As he famously begins his influential work *Animal Liberation*: “All animals are equal” (including human animals).

However, even though Singer advocates for veganism, he does so in a more optional sense. As a utilitarian he looks at the suffering of the animals so in principle it is o.k. to eat animals if they had lived free of all suffering and been instantly, painlessly slaughtered - only this is not possible in practice:

*Yet practically and psychologically it is impossible to be consistent in one’s concern for non-human animals while continuing to dine on them.*³⁵

Peter Singer’s idea has caught the intuitions of many people. With a qualified estimate, the vegan community in the Western Hemisphere may count more than one million vegans – or ethical vegetarians - in Europe³⁶. Besides the animal ethical considerations, environmental benefits can be attributed to veganism. The animal liberation movement largely equals the vegan community, whose most clear trait is the insistence on a diet consisting of products not involved in animal use, including dairy products, eggs and fish. The refrainment of consuming animal-related products possibly gives vegans the feeling that they ‘actually make a difference’³⁷. As such the animal liberation movement must be seen as a highly motivated social movement that has a strong ethical foundation in not only one, but two influential moral philosophies.

The other major philosophy that has fuelled the 25 years long campaign against fur farming is the rights theory derived from German philosopher Immanuel Kant. As opposed to utilitarians who are willing to sacrifice an individual for the benefit of the many, rights theorists advocate for unalienable, universal rights also sometimes termed ‘natural rights’. In Kant’s view, human beings have “an intrinsic worth that is dignity” and therefore humans should be treated “always as an end and never merely as means”³⁸. The principle of intrinsic worth was later extended to animals by the philosopher Tom Reagan in another influential book ‘*The Case for Animal Rights*’ (1983). In practice the principle means that all animals have the

³⁵ P. Singer (1975), *Animal Liberation*, 2. edition

³⁶

³⁷

³⁸ I. Kant, *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*

right to their own life, to bodily integrity, because, regardless of their consciousness level, they have intrinsic worth which grants them a natural right not to be used by humans. Following this, no human benefit can justify our use of animals, not even if the use only causes minor harm. When the rights theory is applied to animal ethics the way Reagan and animal rights advocates does it, it is often referred to as ‘abolitionism’, and for an abolitionist the only possible answer is veganism. Obviously, abolitionists too cannot separate fur morally from other animal species as legal scholar Gary L. Francione points out:

*There is, of course, no rational distinction between between meat and other animal products, such as eggs or dairy, or between fur and leather, silk, or wool.*³⁹

As we have seen before, the two major philosophies, utilitarianism and the rights theory are involved in an ongoing conflict, and within the animal liberation movement this conflicts is not alone about philosophy, it also represents a strategic discussion on how the vegan society is best achieved. In spite of being an ethical vegetarian and advocating vegetarianism Singer has also expressed sympathy with a positive attitude to animal welfare reforms. This seems to be a strategic move reasoning that the support of welfare reforms will give those morally concerned about animals an ability to exert influence on mainstream life and eating habits⁴⁰.

Welfare reforms are plausible, at least in theory, for utilitarian vegans: If animals can live good lives and be painlessly killed the human benefits would advance over the non-existent suffering of the animals. Utilitarianism speaks not only in terms of right and wrong, but also in terms of better or worse, and prominent organisations with vegan goals, including PETA and Humane Society International are involved in welfare reforms and issues. These advocates of veganism also consider a concept like Meatless Monday a win; a step in the right direction in the utilitarian numbers game where a reduction in the number of animals consumed equals a reduction in the total amount of suffering and consequently is desirable.

For the rights-based abolitionist welfare regulations are impossible to defend, since the animals have inherent right to their own life. Gary L. Francoine argues that vegan organisations supporting welfare reforms are basically legitimising the ethical view fur animals may be used for human consumption. Thus, even a concept like Meat Free Monday may be strategically problematic for the rights-based part of the vegan movement, because the name implies that eating meat can be legitimate⁴¹.

This is the classical conflict between utilitarianism and the rights view as it plays out in the internal philosophical and strategically discussion in the animal liberation movement. For the utilitarians, the individual animals can be sacrificed as a mean to meet the end goal of a vegan society. For the rights-based vegans, this is not an option, at least in theory. In practice, the vast majority of organisations advocating veganism emphasises welfare-based arguments in their public communication, while only few organisations publicly admit to the abolitionist approach. This welfare reform strategy has also highly influenced traditional animal welfare organisations in a vegan direction:

Recently, things have changed somewhat because, with few exceptions, there really are no classic welfare groups around any longer. Groups like HSUS (Humane Society of the United States, red.) now claim - at least sometimes depending on the audience - to be opposed to animal use altogether but to see their campaigns as addressing the "worst abuses". When I became involved in animal ethics in

³⁹ G. L. Francione, *Abolition of Animal Exploitation: The Journey Will Not Begin While We Are Walking Backwards*, <http://www.abolitionistapproach.com/media/pdf/abolitionist-online-200607.pdf>

⁴⁰ P. Sandøe og S. Christiansen, *Ethics of animal use*, 81-82

⁴¹ G. L. Francione, http://www.abolitionistapproach.com/vegan-mondays/#.U_krm_m1Zb4

the early 1980s, finding a vegan at HSUS would have been impossible. Now, there are vegans at top positions in HSUS. This is true of many of the large organizations. So most of the large groups have the same line: we'd like to see it end but we are going to campaign for welfare reform and "happy" exploitation in the meantime [...] Yes, there are still traditional welfare groups around, such as the RSPCA in the UK and Australia and a few others. But, for the most part, most of the large groups are new welfarist in that they claim to believe that animals matter morally; they claim to want to see the end of or a significant reduction in, the numbers of animals exploited, but they support welfare reform and "happy" exploitation as a supposed means to that end.⁴²

5. PUBLIC OPINION AND ‘THE TYRANNY OF THE MAJORITY’

The opinion of the public on a given issue naturally comes in play as soon as the issue become centre of political and legislative discussion. The observation that a majority of the population was against fur farming was thus highlighted in the debates leading up to both the UK ban on fur farming in 2000, and the Dutch ban on mink farming in 2012.

It is clear however, that it is not appropriate to decide a moral question simply by ascertaining public opinion. Slavery, for example, has upheld large popular support in various societies in spite of it being obviously morally wrong⁴³. Every day public opinions are influenced by information level and public relations, and as we have seen, the polarised debate over fur has made the climate difficult for a nuanced public debate about fur. Consequently, public opinion thrives as a component in the debate over fur along with other components of real ethical character.

Naturally, Fur Europe finds the bans on fur farming in UK and The Netherlands wrong. Though the argument of necessity prevailed in these legislations, it seems easy to draw the parallel that public opinion simply was turned into law in UK and The Netherlands. It must of course be accepted, that politicians have short-term goals – votes next month or next year – whereas morality has a broader perspective. Still, if public opinion translates into law, it can be fundamentally wrong.

Much philosophical thought has indeed been given to the protection of individuals or minorities from majorities, and such thinking has arrived from many parts of philosophy. A notable utilitarian philosopher, who, in spite of the democratic nature of utilitarianism, was concerned about ‘the Tyranny of the Majority’, was John Stuart Mill. He saw the danger of the majority denying liberty to individuals, both through explicit legislation, but also more subtly exercised through dogmatic morals and public opinion:

Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them [...]⁴⁴

Despite being a utilitarian, and not rights theorists, Mill argues in favour of not only the protection of individuals and minorities, but does so in a defence of freedom of choice as a mean to progress the

⁴² Gary L. Francione, *The Abolitionist Approach to Animal Rights*, facebook, August 2013

⁴³ E.g. J. C. Hammond (2007), *Slavery, Freedom and Expansion in the Early American West*, 21, and S. Wise, *Animal Rights, One Step at a Time*, 19-22, *Animal Rights Current Debates and New Directions*

⁴⁴ J. S. Mill (1859), *On Liberty*, 7

democratic society from lower to higher stages through limited restrictions on individual liberty. Though consumers' freedom of choice clearly has instrumental (economic) values to society, Mill's definition was intrinsic: By having freedom to choose from a set of possibilities and by the mere act of choosing, individuals are better off.

The concept of freedom of choice may largely be perceived as an instrumental value, and therefore the ethical value of individual freedom regrettably does not seem to have been given consideration in the fur farming bans in UK and The Netherlands. As the next logical step from animal liberation advocates in both countries have been to seek a ban on fur sales, Mill's thoughts serves as a reminder that the individual consumer's freedom to buy fur, or the fur designers freedom to pursue the unique human feature of creativity, is also an ethical value that may be opposed to public opinion or 'The Tyranny of the Majority'.

Of course animal industries also have their own obligations to educate the public and participate in the debates that shape the public opinion. Rightfully, the European fur sector can be said to have somewhat neglected this obligation in the past, possibly because the depth of the ethical era has not been understood well enough. In recent years, the European fur sector has taken such measures with the introduction of an Open Farm scheme in a large number of fur producing countries in Europe. The objective is to demonstrate full transparency in the fur farming sector, and in the line of this, the showing of killing methods on fur farms can be a part of the scheme. The results of such proactive initiatives are likely to be positive. Thus, 7 out of 10 Europeans who has visited a fur farm have an acceptant attitude towards fur and fur farming according to a pan-European survey⁴⁵. Internal on-farm surveys during the Open Farm days have shown even larger support⁴⁶. In the future, Fur Europe will strengthen such public initiatives including the involvement with other animal industries as well as animal ethicists.

5.1 THE MORAL FLEXIBILITY OF PUBLIC OPINION

A survey commissioned by Fur Europe in 2013 concluded that while 80% of the Europeans found animals raised for their meat morally defensible, only 39% held the same opinion on animals farmed for their fur. As we have already seen, and if the premise is that the animal welfare is at the same level, such distinguishing between animal products is arbitrary, also within the ethical frameworks of the animal liberation movement.

Part of the explanation can undoubtedly be found in the fur production's status as a paradigm case that for many years has been the centre of attention of animal liberation campaigners. An additional reason, found at a more fundamental level, is the human capacity for moral flexibility.

It has long been known that what people say in opinion polls does not correspond very well with what how they actually act, but more recent studies further suggests a dramatic potential for flexibility in our moral attitudes. Thus, a study from Lund's University in Sweden found that a remarkable 69% of the participants willingly - but not knowingly - changed their moral stand on fundamental or currently debated moral issues to the exact opposite stand that they had had a few minutes before:

⁴⁵ Ipsos 2013

⁴⁶ Swden, DK, ??

Whether they are stated or revealed, inherent or constructed, stable or contextualised, the current study challenges our basic conception of what it means to express an attitude, and demonstrates a considerable malleability of everyday moral opinions.⁴⁷

Such dramatic moral flexibility may connect to attempts of explaining human reasoning and argumentation as primarily being means of convincing others that ‘whatever conclusion I have reached is the correct one’⁴⁸. Whatever the reason is for our dramatic capacity for moral inconsistency, it should add additional thought and consideration to animal legislation based on ‘morality’.

With regards to the fur sector there is also the point to be made that public opinion is not unequivocally against fur farming in Europe. Though opinion polls (often commissioned and published by animal liberation groups) in many European countries seem to support that a majority of the population is against fur farming, recent opinion polls in at least three countries (Latvia, Denmark and Finland) show public support from about 2/3 of the respondents⁴⁹. Other surveys have shown that even if people are personally against fur, they respect the freedom of others to wear fur, or people are against fur but do not find it an important political issue⁵⁰. More importantly, as we have seen the acceptance of fur and fur farming changes proportionally with the level of information people have.

6. UTILISATION OF ANIMAL PRODUCTS

The European fur sector strives to utilize the carcasses of fur farmed animals in sustainable ways. 15 years ago the utilization of fur animal carcasses was basically non-existent but the development in the European animal by-product sector has led to new opportunities, and carcasses from the European fur sector are largely utilized on European bio processing plants. Today, 69% of the carcasses from the fur production are processed⁵¹, making sure that the animals are used 100%. When fur animal carcasses are not utilized it is largely a matter of logistics, *i.e.* having access to bio processing plants. The European fur sector is engaged in an ongoing dialogue with European fat processors and renderers with the aim to ultimately utilize all carcasses from the European fur production.

The above figure include 1,5% of the large Finnish fur production. The Finnish production may however, still claim sustainability in this particular area, as the carcasses in Finland are primarily used to produce green energy at kilns located on the farms. Adding the Finnish figures would boost the total figure to above 80%.

Rich in protein, the fur animal carcasses are generally better energy sources than other animal by-products. The most common products derived from by-products from the fur sector are second generation biofuels,

⁴⁷ L. Hall et al. (2012), *Lifting the veil of morality: Choice Blindness and Attitude Reversals on a Self-Transforming Survey*, PLOS XXX, 1-8

⁴⁸ H. Mercier and D. Sperber (2011), *Why do humans reason? Arguments for an argumentative theory*. The Behavioural and Brain Sciences 34, 57-74.

⁴⁹ Fur Europe only has opinion polls from Denmark, UK, The Netherlands, Finland, France, Spain, Poland and Latvia. The mentioned polls are independently undertaken by TNS Gallup (2014, Finland), Xxxxxxx (2014, Latvia) and Ipsos (2013, Denmark)

⁵⁰ XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

⁵¹ Internal members survey, European Fur Breeders’ Association, 2012

green energy, fertilizers and cement. Fat from the mink production is also used in cosmetic products, most notably in The Netherlands.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF FUR AND FUR FARMING

Environmental issues are typical components in ethical debates because it is our common earth and heritage that suffers from polluting activities. Though the European fur sector shall not claim to be 'green', there truly are some environmentally beneficial attributes connected to fur.

Of most importance is the extraordinary long life span of fur products. Fur coats will typically last 20-30 years, and it attributes a tremendous environmental benefit when one can distribute the environmental impact of a product over long time. The remodelling of old fur coats from second hand shops or inherited from family members (which has become increasingly popular in recent years) easily adds to the 30 year life span of fur products. This sort of consumer behaviourism strongly contradicts the throwaway culture otherwise largely characterising modern society, and it is fair to say that such sustainable consumer patterns which is limited to rather few products of which fur products are included. In addition, natural fur is significantly more environmentally friendly than artificial fur⁵².

The European fur sector also plays a significant role in the European market for animal by-products. As we have seen, the carcasses from the fur production are largely utilized at bio processing plants, but the fur European fur sector plays an entirely unique role because the industry both delivers by-products to bio processing plants and utilizes animal waste products, primarily from the poultry- and fish industries, for the feeding of the farmed fur animals. To this end, the fur sector continues to cooperate with members of the European Fat Processors and Renderers Association (EFPPA) in the development of new uses of animal by-products, both for the use of fur animal carcasses and for animal by-products which are unsuited for human consumption, but can be utilized in the feeding of fur farmed animals, for example blood protein.

Finally, manure from fur farms are used as natural fertilizers yielding an environmental credit because it replaces the highly polluting artificial fertilizers. The handling of manure from European fur farms is otherwise regulated by national legislation and the EU Nitrates Directive⁵³. These environment protection measures ensure the best regulated standards worldwide.

The processing of the raw fur skins is regulated by the EU's REACH regulative (Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals) which is in force for both products manufactured in Europe as well as products imported from third-countries.

In comparison with other agricultural animal products fur can definitely be seen as having some environmental advantages, in particular with regards to the extraordinary long life span of fur products. This is an ethical component conveniently left out of attempts to discredit the fur production on grounds of

⁵² DSS Management Consultants (2011), *A comparative Life Cycle Analysis: Natural Fur and Faux Fur*, commissioned by the International Fur Federation

⁵³ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:31991L0676>

environmentally poor performance⁵⁴, however, it certainly strengthens the ethical defence of the fur production.

The European fur sector continues to explore the opportunities to strengthen the environmental aspects of a sustainable production. This also includes bio-security and the protection of European nature from invasive alien species (mink and finnraccoon). Thus, the industry has voluntarily initiated a bio-security project in 2014, the aim of which is to make sure that European fur farms are sufficiently fenced in order to keep the animals within the farm.

8. FUR, CULTURE AND TRADITION

The cultural aspects of fur farming are rarely explored in the debate over fur, but it is an ethical component that deserves to be included in the moral assessment of fur, in particular when fur farming bans are in play. Thus, from a moral point of view, it can be argued that it is unreasonable for people to demand that a person breaks with his traditions and in doing so lose his identity.

Fur farming has been an agricultural practice for 150 years, but the cultural heritage dates much longer back and has had a major impact on world history. Upon the discovery of the Americas, the fur trade was an important part of the economic and political development in the New World in the 16th century and forward. Fuelled by a European demand for fur clothing, and with Paris as the focal point of European fashion, the trade of wild fur boosted the exploration of the continent all the way to California and provided an essential source of income to many early colonial businesses. Consequently, the fur trade was amongst the world's first global businesses, a characteristic still today. Central in the international fur trade was Hudson's Bay Company that remains the oldest commercial corporation in North America today⁵⁵. Later, when the supply of wild fur started to get exhausted in North America, the first attempt to farm fur took place in Michigan, USA in 1866⁵⁶. Clearly, the human use of fur can be traced even further back, to ancient times, when fur was a means to survive when mankind from the Middle East to the colder areas of Europe and beyond.

Of course moral traditionalism cannot alone make up the defence of fur, as it clearly can be argued that not all traditions have been good, for example slavery. Yet, tradition is a value of moral justification, and it would not be morally correct to demand people to review and reconstruct their whole life, or, at the least, if some people are against a traditional practice, they should have good arguments as to why it should not be done.

Another cultural aspect to be considered is the moral plurality that arises from cultural diversity. Though it can be argued that the killing methods of the Jewish kosher or the Muslim halal traditions are compromising the welfare of the animals, it is generally accepted that such social norms and traditions should be allowed.

⁵⁴ Most notably CE Delft (2011), *The environmental impact of fur production*. Commissioned by European animal rights groups the study is not peer-reviewed and is based on major miscalculations – see <http://blog.truthaboutfur.com/lies-activists-tell-3-ce-delft-report/>

⁵⁵ The Canadian Encyclopedia, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/hudsons-bay-company/>

⁵⁶ E. Bowness (1980), *History of the Early Mink People in Canada*, 5-6

In the same line of argumentation, but divided by geography rather than religion, some societies have animal practices that may be seen as ‘barbaric’ in our part of the world. Thus, the eating of dogs is a common practice and old tradition in countries like China, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan and Mexico. The eating of dog meat is even practiced in Switzerland⁵⁷.

The point is that morality is also largely a cultural matter involving a variety of societal and cultural norms, and they too are entitled to be considered and respected. It is consistent therefore, that a person can hold the view that an issue is morally wrong, and at the same time hold that this particular part of morality should not be enforced by law. This may reflect a respect for other people’s cultural or societal values, or it may simply respect the individual freedom of other people.

A democratic and pluralistic society should hesitate with such strong measures as a ‘ban’ and even allow for activities of which many people may morally disapprove. As with many things – adultery for example – it may be legally permitted, but morally disapproved.

This is in the best interest of social coherence and the important social mechanism of free choice. Obviously, there will be differences in the nature of moral justification, but part of our goal in a human society is to stay together. This means we might have to contain differing opinions on what is ‘morally worth it’ in order to keep the fabric of society together.

9. CONCLUSION

The moral plurality in the debate over human use of animals in modern society is positive in the sense that animals largely are being recognised as sentient beings to who we owe moral consideration. This has not been part of philosophical discussions until fairly recently, and as such the modern debate over human animals is also a discussion that concerns human evolution and the important question about what kind of society we want to live in. The moral plurality is however negative in the sense that it has become increasingly difficult for people to navigate in this discussion with a sense of moral consistency. As it has been demonstrated, the bans on fur farming in UK and The Netherlands fail to deliver moral consistency, and the great danger in allowing legislation that is inconsistent with the ethical frameworks is that it makes it more difficult for mankind to point to the real moral problems in our society when such problems arise.

The public opposition to fur is rooted in campaigns from the animal liberation movement, and whereas the movement has a fairly strong, though not unopposed, ethical legitimacy, it is clear that the philosophical foundations of the animal liberation movement cannot isolate fur farming from other animal agricultural activities. To the extent that this happens, it is a matter of strategy. The goal is not a society free of fur products, but a society free of human use of animals - and the importance of this recognition lies way beyond fur farming.

It is likewise clear that the common ground people find in the ethical discussion over animals is animal welfare. Intuitively, all but a few people will agree that it is o.k. to use animals as long as the animals in

⁵⁷ <http://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/schweiz/standard/Schweizer-sollen-keine-Hunde-und-Katzen-mehr-essen/story/19945914>

question have lived good lives. With the implementation of the pan-European animal welfare assessment programme WelFur, the European fur sector is setting the highest standards for continental animal welfare across all farmed species. In all fairness, this only adds to the moral justification of European fur farming, and Fur Europe is not hesitating in announcing that animals can live good and satisfactory lives on European fur farms, because that is what the natural sciences tell us.

Animal welfare is the single most important component in the debate over animals, not only to most citizens and professionals, but also to the animals themselves. Animal welfare is the one ethical component where the natural sciences can assist us in giving some clear answers about the needs and wants of the animals in our care, and in this respect Fur Europe insists that scientific knowledge is the guideline to the determination of a good animal life. Importantly, it is inherent in this insisting that animal welfare is an ongoing process. Animal science has yet to make many discoveries, and these discoveries must be a part of the dynamic evaluation of animal welfare for fur farmed species. WelFur takes into account the dynamics of animal welfare science, just as WelFur as a tool for consumer transparency and ongoing animal welfare improvements at farm level.

The European fur sector produces luxury products which are highly in demand amongst consumers all over the world. We maintain that it is morally justifiable to produce such products in the light that the European fur sector contributes to both human and animal welfare.