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Why does not everyone feel responsible?

Ethical aspects of animal welfare education

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Warning

The following are only hypotheses for discussion.

- Result of reflections on almost ten years' professional experience in teaching Animal Welfare and Animal Ethics.
- Not based on statistically validated research.

Hypothesis 1



To accept responsibility for others initially requires indignation.

- Responsibility ← Indignation ← Injustice ← Violation of Equality
- Responsibility for AW ← Experience of Speciesism*

(*Speciesism: Applying double standards to *Homo sapiens* and members of other species who are equal in relevant aspects; cf. Racism)

Example: Sports spectators may be indignant after referees make bad decisions, which are experienced as the unequal treatment of persons who are equal in relevant aspects (in general, competitors are equal in all characteristics relevant for referees).

Hypothesis 2



But: Deliberately caused experiences of injustice are possibly the greatest problem of animal welfare education.

- Public relations work of AW-NGOs → experiences of indignation → ‘suffering’ of the viewer → protective mechanisms → blunting people’s reactions to animal welfare topics or immunizing them against these (= opposite result to that intended)

Example: A German TV Journalist reported recently that a significant number of today’s viewers change TV channels (channel-hop) when AW issues are presented – in contrast to the very first TV-broadcasts about AW.

Hypothesis 3



This Problem could be avoided if ethics were given more emphasis in animal welfare education.

- To approach AW via ethics is possible without presenting shocking facts.
- Both the public discussion and the discussion between animal welfare experts reflect a low ethical level.
- Where ethical arguments are disregarded, then at the latest in the political debates this results in setbacks.

Example: During the consultation process for the new EC Directive (on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes) the aim of making an ethically justifiable prescription faded away, because ethics was not capable of winning a majority.

Hypothesis 4



People need education in ethics, i.e. making rational decisions which requires us to set priorities* and to justify them.

(*to set priorities = to give values different levels of importance)

Example:

The simplest way to weigh values against each other relates to cases where only one person is involved and that person weighs the values himself or herself.

The situation becomes more difficult in cases where one person is involved, but the weighing of values is done by another person, for example by a guardian.

It is more difficult still to weigh values where the costs and benefits relate to different persons – for example a decision on how to keep farm animals or a review of the ethical defensibility of planned animal experiments.



Thank you!