

Science with feeling: animals and people

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Foreword

In 1886, George Romanes, a contemporary of Charles Darwin, told of a dog that was used to accompanying a nursemaid and baby belonging to its mistress, on walks. On one occasion, the wind forced the nursemaid to draw her shawl over the baby and turn for home. However, her progress was halted by the dog becoming hostile preventing the nursemaid from continuing ‘without’ the baby. The dog’s faithful sentinel-like actions were only resolved when the nursemaid revealed the baby. This anecdote, part of Romanes’ exposition of the continuity of mental life in animals and humans, serves to illustrate the feelings animals and people have. History has not been kind to Romanes, the anecdotal method, or even the existence of feelings in animals, but 125 years later, *Science with feeling: animals and people* draws on the importance of feelings in research and teaching involving animals.

Feelings matter for sentient animals, just as they do for humans. Pain can be ugly whether you are a tarantula, a shrimp, a sheep, a bird or a person but it has a function. It is even suggested that medical practitioners would benefit from experiencing the pain their patients experience. But does the fetus experience our feelings or should we consider it more of an alien? To understand pain, it is necessary to know the similarities and peculiarities of the biology of different species. To know how to manage pain, it is necessary to not only know of analgesics but also good animal husbandry.

The wellbeing of animals, as well as the quality of the scientific and educational results, is dependent on the trust between animals and people and Animal Ethics Committees play a prominent role. The approval process is dependent in a large part on Committees’ trust in researchers and teachers, and their institutions who could do worse than reflect

on the honest insights of Committee members who help provide society’s consent for this particular use of animals. On the one hand, science needs to be empowered to make valuable contributions to society. On the other hand, trust requires that we act truly for the sake of those who entrust us, as well as for personal and institutional motives (Thompson 1996).

Honesty and doubt are essential checks to the exaggerated benefits ‘demanded’ by grant applications or an unwillingness to question invalid experimental methods and models. A willingness to listen to those having to confront the unintended personal consequences of compassion for animals reflects the use of age-old rituals for dealing with the tension associated with harming creatures we have empathy with (Serpell 1986).

In addressing the above, the eclectic mix of contributions in these proceedings recognise the complex interdependence between animals and people, an inextricable connection woven with feelings. The Rotorua conference began with a notable contribution from Chester Maddock, an international citizen and member of the ‘activist’ group *Dogmatic*, who required participants to consider:

1. Should, and if so how, could the likes of groups like ANZCCART and Animal Ethics Committees be working together with animal rights activists to enhance animal welfare?
2. Are all animals equal? What is an animal and what animals do we, or should we, value more than others?
3. What procedures can we expect to perform on animals but not on people (and vice versa)?
4. What does ethics mean to different people (e.g., People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Animal Ethics Committees)?

5. Is research on animals inherently unethical? Are the secrecy and the threats of violence the best way to achieve change or do they entrench stances?
6. Should ANZCCART have a more visible public profile? If so, how might this be best achieved?
7. Should animals be rehomed after use in research, testing and teaching? Should unwanted animals be euthanased?
8. Based on the changes in society's views on animal use over the last 100 years, what do you think ANZCCART's and communities' views will look like in the year 2100?

The feelings that groups such as *Dogmatic* invoke are no less real than the pain experienced by tarantulas. The endpoint, good science and education and good animal welfare, and not just good approval processes, requires we use all our qualities of understanding. In keeping with Romanes, to study animals is to study them in their normal environment – by necessity

in uncontrolled and anecdotal-like ways (Rollin 1998) acknowledging and valuing both our feelings and theirs.

Dr Mark Fisher

Chair of Board of ANZCCART (NZ)

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