

# animal welfare education: promoting a critical and creative dialogue between a zoocentric and an anthropocentric relationship

Amélie Lipp and Michel Vidal

This essay positions the relationship between human and other-than-human animals as a central anchor point for animal welfare education in agricultural vocational training. This relationship is a potential source of tension between the intentions of production and the breeder's disposition to be touched and affected by these animals. The resonant experiences between humans and other-than-human animals, in the sense of Hartmut Rosa (2018a), are, in our opinion, a fruitful way to help future animal breeders to find other possible ways of relating to the world than those imposed by the acceleration and alienation that characterise the dominant animal husbandry systems in Europe. We explore and discuss the transformative potential of educational activities that promote critical, creative, ethical and embodied dialogue.

**Keywords:** agricultural vocational school, animal welfare, education, embodied education, human-animal relationship

For several decades, the dominant systems of animal husbandry in Europe have raised numerous ethical concerns: confinement, lack of social relationships, mutilations, production rates... French agricultural education was one of the instruments used in the second half of the 20th century to establish a productivist breeding model. It has contributed to the development of a distant and instrumental approach to domestic animals, which is harmful to both human and other-than-human animals. In 2022, a manifesto by eight French scientists specialising in animal welfare (Leterrier et al., 2022) denounced the impossibility of improving animal welfare on intensive farms, in particular, because of the forms of relationships they impose. They cause suffering both to the animals, in a situation of over-adaptation, and to the farmers, who are prevented or even deprived of an affective relationship (Salmona, 1985; Porcher, 2010). Both human and other-than-human animals are reified, and the results obtained are only assessed in terms of productivity. German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa describes the modes of relationship they engender as 'alienating' (2018a, p. 204), 'relationship without genuine relation' (2018b, p. 41) in which humans and other-than-humans confront each other without being internally connected. Farm animals are seen as objects that do not require attention (due to their large numbers), threats (of economic or health loss) or even risks of aggression (for the breeder or fellow animals). At the same time, the relationship between people and their pets has moved in the opposite direction, sometimes to the detriment of the animals. When humans seek a form of harmony, of 'consonance' (Rosa, 2018b, p. 43), in which the different voices are no longer discernible, the animal is anthropomorphised without its specific needs and expectations being heard.

The French agricultural education system can play a new role in this situation by fostering the development of respectful relationships with the living world, taking into account the needs and expectations of both farmers and farm animals. Since 2014, the agro-ecological transition called for by the French Ministry of Agriculture has provided fertile ground for promoting other relationships with the world in agricultural education, as long as the transition is conceived as a relational turn of the human relationship with the living, in a form of resonance (Rosa, 2018a); a dynamic relationship with the world in which the subject and the world affect and mutually transform each other. Resonant experience, in the context of human and other-than-human animal relations, is based on four central elements: (1) We experience that we are truly touched or moved by the encounter with other animals, i.e. we open up to them, we listen to their own voice, we feel that they have something important to tell us; (2) We experience a responsive self-efficacy<sup>1</sup> that touches the other, connects it to itself and brings about a response in return; (3) We accept a loss of control over the situation in order to make ourselves vulnerable to the transformative effects of this relationship for ourselves and for the other animals; (4) The resonant experience occurs when we do not expect it, when not everything in the situation is ordered, regulated and predictable, or when unforeseen aspects emerge. Resonance occurs over a short period of time and is never complete or perfect, while many other moments leave us indifferent or in a resistance or even rejection state. Resonance requires the consideration of the other as not identical to oneself, sometimes with oppositions and contradictions. Engaging in dialogue with the other means seeking an ethical balance between the pathic and the intentional dimensions<sup>2</sup> of the relationship that is established.

The reifying mode of relationship in productivist breeding systems seems to be the most commonly used solution to respond to these dilemmas by preventing any pathic communication towards the animal. However, in the European Commission's 2021 Eurobarometer survey on animal welfare, 82 % of respondents were of the opinion that animal welfare is not sufficiently taken into account on European farms. In the same year, chicken consumption in France continued to rise, displacing other meats. In France, only 17 % of poultry farms can be considered extensive. Furthermore, 46 % of chicken consumption comes from imported products, mainly from Belgian and Polish farms (Agreste, 2022). Should we then be content, as Rosa suggests, to compensate for this disconnection from farm animals with 'oases of resonance' with pets or with wild animals in a 'romantic' vision (2018a, p. 251)? Not everything is set in stone. From the perspective of a relational ontology, the subject and the world are the result of dynamic relationships and interactions. The different forms and qualities of relationship are not predetermined by the intrinsic characteristics of the stakeholders, but result from the conditions and the progressive construction of the processes of relating. As stated above, resonant experiences cannot be caused. However, they cannot be completely prevented. Because of the unpredictability of resonant experiences, in industrial farming systems, resonance phenomena may even be present, and may be an incentive for the challenging of these systems. However, resonant experiences are all the more likely to occur in non-industrial farming systems because of the lesser constraints on the animal. Resonant experiences also presuppose an appropriate disposition of the breeder. That is, an openness to the pathic dimension of the experience, to listening, to welcoming the unexpected and to potential transformations. The breeder's intention, even if anthropocentric, does not necessarily create a barrier to the pathic dimension of the relationship. The anthropocentric intentions associated with the act of production can be in synergy with a pathic relationship (for example, production is all the greater because the animal is the object of care), or even create real dilemmas, such as accepting the risks of handling horned animals versus listening to the animal's suffering during interventions such as dehorning<sup>3</sup> cattle, or intending to send an animal to the slaughterhouse versus sharing many moments of resonance with it.

It is no longer a question of calling upon one or another of the various strands of animal and environmental ethics, but rather of thinking situated ethics. We consider resonance, as a criterion of the ‘good life’ (Rosa, 2018a, p. 25) in response to the problematic tendency of reifying and antagonistic relations. In a professional situation, the resonance process can be part of an eco- or zoo-centric ethics, as well as an ethics of virtue “which starts not from nature, as in ecocentrism, but from the human being thought of in his corporeality and considered in the materiality of his existence” (Pelluchon, 2017, p. 7, personal translation). In the field of vocational training, it is therefore to a *phenomenological education* of the living or lived experience of the relationship that we refer (Selvi, 2008), moving away from any abstract interpretation, but on the contrary observing, describing and questioning the expression of ethics in situations. With the aim of transforming one’s way of relating to the world, it is a matter of encouraging the development of capacities and dispositions to listen to oneself and to others, to enter into dialogue with the living, to become aware of and to question one’s own perceptions, representations, thoughts, understandings, intentions, values, affects in the relational experience.

In the recent reform of French agricultural curricula, critical citizenship education, in its aim to promote a democracy that reduces social injustices (Lipp & Cancian, 2022), is a privileged field for developing dispositions and capacities to enter into relationships with other people: to listen actively, to argue, to engage in actions that influence the social space... Relations between humans and other-than-human animals, on the other hand, are the object of more hesitant and groping prescriptions (Vidal et al., 2023). While the disciplines of philosophy and moral and civic education invite the teacher to question our relationships with other living beings, the critical and pathic approach to which they invite is not explicitly prescribed in the discipline of animal husbandry. Despite the fact that animal husbandry is the main discipline at the agricultural school for the relationship between students and farm animals, its prescriptions tend to ‘cool down’ the treatment of this issue (as this is called in the didactics of Socially Acute Questions ; Simonneaux & Legardez, 2011) and tend to avoid the study of the controversies and problems raised by this issue. The relationship is considered at the biological level (material flows between living entities, interdependence, pain felt, etc.), the psychological level (animal welfare, animal emotions, etc.), the ethological level (behaviour of domestic animals, etc.) and the zootechnical level (layout of living quarters, animal handling, etc.). The ethical dimension is considered to be a duty of the farmer towards the farm animals without being questioned in the different farming systems. The farm animal, although conceived as a sensitive or even sentient being, remains an object of study rather than a subject that can affect the students. The pathic dimension remains a grey area, or even a taboo, which risks thwarting the ultimate goal of selling animal products from livestock farming.

Although the pathic relationship is not specifically addressed in learning situations, the students are likely to experience genuine dissonance and intrapsychic conflicts between a mode of action that brings into tension zoocentric and anthropocentric issues, their values, their emotions and their representations of the farm animal (when it is necessary to decide, execute or refuse certain invasive interventions on the animal, such as dehorning a calf or giving an injection). The emotional discomfort (Cahour & Lancry, 2011) and ethical suffering (Dejours, 2006) that the students feel lead them to various defensive strategies (Vidal & Simonneaux, 2015; Lipp, 2016):

- A strategy of distancing: some pupils ‘partially’ reify farm animals. Even if they have acquired knowledge about the processes of pain and suffering in farm animals, they mobilise an erroneous representation of them (calves, when dehorned, would feel little pain compared to older ones) to justify such mutilation. In an echo of the empathy they feel for the suffering animal, the

minimisation of pain allows them to reduce their emotional and ethical discomfort. Other students voluntarily try to create a distance or even an emotional disconnection with farm animals. In their view, this is the only way to carry out a productive act with animals, since the interests of the breeder remain paramount.

- A strategy of anthropomorphising the animal: when an act is recognised as painful for the animal, the students attribute malicious intentions to the animals (the animal's desire to hurt the breeder), which removes their responsibility ('it's the animal's fault');
- A strategy of social loyalty: dehorning, which is carried out on 80 % of farms, is then seen by the students as a professional norm. They disconnect themselves emotionally from animal suffering by making the professional gender of 'breeder' responsible (Clot, 1999). For other students, it is the consumer who is primarily responsible for the purchase of animal products.

In the context of animal husbandry, these strategies run the risk of limiting the inquiry into alternative responses that could lead to an original outcome and resolution of the dilemmas. Welcoming, clarifying and questioning the tensions between the pathic and intentional dimensions of the relationship between humans and farm animals is a potentially fruitful way of both positioning one's responsibility and emancipating oneself from the shackles of a narrow professional gender<sup>4</sup> in its way of relating to living beings. We propose to gather educational approaches based on the engagement of the person in a relational experience and/or in reflexivity towards a lived relational experience. Our intention is to promote a form of relationship that fosters a healthy interactional system, i.e. based on a quality of being present to oneself and to other living beings, an attunement that focuses attention on one's own inner world and that of the other and welcomes it in its singularity, a resonance as ethical acting that responds as well as possible to the vitality of the relationship, and a form of trust in the interaction (Siegel, 2010).

We are currently testing the transforming effects of various educational activities. The common denominator of these activities is that they position cognition as *embodied*, thus involving the whole body in learning, situated (or *embedded*) in a physical and social environment (in relation to human and other-than-human animals) giving or restricting opportunities for action, *enactive* (action-oriented between the subject, others and the environment), and *extended* (involving elements present in the environment in the learning process) echoing the cognitive theory of the 4 Es (Embodied, Enactive, Extended, Embedded; Gallagher, 2018). Two educational activities were tested with the aim of encouraging the expression of a pathic relationship with the farm animals without anthropocentric professional intentions. In a first activity, we used the game called 'BAFA-BAFA', originally developed to bring together two different human cultures, and adapted to raise awareness of stereotypes, of the emotions that run through us in the relationship with the animal, and of the effort, time and respect needed to understand another species. The activity takes place between humans only, with students divided into two groups, each with specific relational and communicational codes. Each student is invited to discover the other culture, to be open to difference, to be affected and to enter into a game of mutual influence. The game approach enables a pathic dimension more easily than other more traditional pedagogical approaches. In a second activity, the students are asked to enter into a dialogue with farm animals in the outdoors (to enable them to express their behaviour more easily). They are given instructions beforehand on how to behave (e.g. to walk slowly with their head down and speak softly), while at the same time paying attention to the individual and collective responses of the animals present and adjusting their behaviour accordingly. In addition, another combination of activities was tested, and focused on the study of an anthropocentric and zoocentric professional dilemma. This activity aims to overcome the tensions between anthropocentric and zoocentric ethics by refocusing, as Pelluchon (2017)

suggests, on the corporeality of the human being. First, in several activities, we invite students to construct the problem they face when they question the relationship with animals in a production context. Their emotional feelings through introspection and confrontation with their peers, evolve and become more refined as the dilemma becomes more complex. In the final stage, students are invited to use their bodies to collectively represent a static image (like a sculpture) of one of the participants' dilemmas (in the form of a metaphor, a symbol or a more realistic representation). This collective image is not considered an authentic representation of the lived dilemma. It is a new way of 'knowing' the dilemma than the previous activities realized. We assume that the embodied dimension will be a source of new elements of intelligibility. More specifically, we make the students' felt sense an internal site of creativity (Gendlin, 1992). Applied to science education, the concept of felt sense opens up a new heuristic in the embodied cognition. It is based on the hypothesis that experience can represent a source of knowledge offering new ways to build relationships with farm animals. During this activity, students' felt sense is not only related to dilemma. The staging of the bodies can also be a source of emotional and bodily feelings that can be intense. The facilitator then suggests that the person with the dilemma pays attention to his/her bodily feelings and finds a posture that makes him/her feel less uncomfortable. The facilitator then suggests that the other members of the sculpture adapt their posture in response to the change. These two steps are repeated until the person with the dilemma feels that they have found the best possible posture. The facilitator then invites him/her to verbalise the changes that have taken place during the sculpture and what they evoke (or not) for him/her. This evocation testifies (or not) to the relevance of sculpture in the metaphorical translation of the dilemma. The effects of this activity are open-ended, i.e. the facilitator does not know in advance what the outcome will be. Whatever the outcome, the voice of the person with the dilemma is heard and welcomed. This phase allows the students to verbalise the feelings that they consider legitimate to take into account regarding the dilemma. Feelings, in particular reducing tension, could provide new keys to understanding the dilemma. By introducing the pathic dimension into the epistemic registers of the school, the proposed process introduces, in learning situations, phenomenological knowledge "composed of intuition, intentionality, and perceptions" (Selvi, 2008, p. 43). The proposed process not only allows the initial tension to be reduced, but above all allows original responses to emerge, offering a new dialogue between an anthropocentric and a zoocentric ethic (Vidal & Simonneaux, 2015; Vidal, 2022). This is illustrated by Sylvie, caught in a dilemma between raising farm animals and killing them, who at the end of the activity changes her representation, considering the death of the animal as allowing 'the living to circulate' within the eco-sociosystem made up of her own person, her animals, the consumers, and the slaughterhouse killer. She explains that all humans in relation to the animal must be grateful to it, which through its death allows them to live. This change in representation can potentially lead to a change in the relationship with the animal. We believe more generally that the suffering of a living being is the symptom of a relational dysfunction (Watzlawick, 2014 ; here between the human and the farm animal). Allowing one of them (in our example the human) to reduce her suffering by finding a response that corresponds to her, and not by means of a non-conscious defence mechanism, modifies potentially the mode of interaction more favourable to a resonant relationship, even if it is, in our example, unpredictable.

If these didactic devices prove to be transformative levers for the students, as the initial results seem to confirm, they are important for the training of future livestock professionals. Making the relationship with animals an object of experience, questioning and inquiry in school is a central issue for the development of dispositions and capacities to act virtuously in the world. This relationship, conceived as a dialogue and reciprocal influence, presupposes the possibility of being affected and of affecting others. The power to be affected by and to affect a fragment of the world

allows the subject to distance him- or herself from the established ways of doing things, and renews the sense of his or her activity and efficiency: The more the worker is capable of being affected by the activity in which he is engaged in multiple ways, on different registers (cognitive, bodily, emotional), the more he is prepared to move from one level to another, the more nuanced is the palette of his already obtained possibilities, in other words, the more personal room for manoeuvre he has, the more subject he is (Clot & Simonet, 2015, p. 36). ‘Disorienting dilemmas’ of a vocational nature, as envisaged by the educational strands of SSI (socio-scientific issues; Carter et al., 2014), carry a heuristic of possibilities in the dialogue between alienation and resonance in learning situations. We mobilise them by making the pathic dimension an integral part of the cognitive process in the development of reflective, creative, critical and ethical thinking.

Opening up to others to the point of being affected by them implies welcoming and accepting one’s own vulnerability. Sharing it with one’s peers requires, in a school setting, the establishment of learning conditions based on a secure framework, an indeterminacy of the outcome of the transformation, but also a deontology, allowing each student to feel heard and recognised within the legal limits of the respect to be held towards the living. (Any statement that reflects behaviour or practices towards an animal that are punishable by law of course requires a reminder of the law and an ethical stance from the facilitator.<sup>5</sup>) We hypothesise that such educational systems based on phenomenological education have the potential to both transform the relationship with farm animals and to emancipate future livestock professionals from the dominant alienating mode of relationship.

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### Recommended Citation

Lipp, A., & Vidal, M. (2023). Animal Welfare Education: Promoting a Critical and Creative Dialogue Between a Zoocentric and an Anthropocentric Relationship. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 6(16).

[https://doi.org/10.17899/on\\_ed.2023.16.6](https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2023.16.6)

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1. The concept of self-efficacy beliefs was developed by the Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura, who defined it as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). Hartmut Rosa mobilises this concept to show that resonance is not just “built on the experience of being touched or affected but also (...) when we realize that we are capable of actually reaching out to and affecting others, that they truly listen and connect to us and answer in turn” (Rosa, 2017, p. 450).
2. The pathic dimension focuses on the ‘how’ of relationship (not the what), i.e. our relationship to the world, our presence in lived experience, felt in an interrelation of emotional, affective and bodily feelings. The French philosopher Maldiney takes up the work of Straus to qualify the pathic moments of *privileged feeling*: “The pathic belongs precisely to the state of the most original experience... it is itself the immediately present, intuitive-sensible, still pre-conceptual communication that we have with phenomena (Straus, 1956, p. 151)” (Maldiney, 1973, p. 137).
3. Dehorning of cattle involves the partial or total removal of the horns of the animals. This procedure is often justified for

reasons of safety for the farmer and the animal's fellows.

4. The professional gender is a way of saying and doing in relation to a professional environment, a way in which a work collective has translated the prescriptions to adapt them to the real working conditions (Clot, 1999).
5. [https://partage.agrosupdijon.fr/mail#\\_msocom\\_1](https://partage.agrosupdijon.fr/mail#_msocom_1)