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# Veterinary Parasitology

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## Letter to the Editor

### Philosophy of veterinary parasitology

“Philosophy of science without history of science is empty; history of science without philosophy of science is blind.” (Lakatos, 1999: 102). Although this reformulation of Kant’s famous phrase may seem extreme, there is a grain of truth to it.

Excellent articles on the history of veterinary parasitology have been published in this journal several decades ago. Coverage was provided for the case of Spain (Del Campillo, 1989), France (Touratier, 1989), Germany and Scandinavia (Enigk and Habil, 1989), the United States (Malone, 1989), and Canada (Slocombe, 1989). Yet none of them explicitly stated what their philosophical underpinnings were, if any. If Lakatos is right, then the lack of a solid philosophical framework hinders historical investigations such as these.

Why? Because a commitment to any given philosophy of science will shape the way in which historical investigations are made. If, for example, one adheres to Karl Popper’s (2002) point of view, one will reconstruct the history of a scientific discipline giving prominence to the concepts of conjectures and refutations, and not to the role of certain institutions, like the first schools of veterinary medicine, for example. On the other hand, if one sides with Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) proposal, one will divide the history of a scientific discipline in discrete periods, to wit: pre-paradigmatic, normal science, crisis, scientific revolution, and new period of normal science. Schwabe (1982) has done exactly this, in his historical outline of veterinary medicine.

If one sides with Imre Lakatos instead (1999), then one will rationally reconstruct the history of veterinary parasitology paying attention to competing Scientific Research Programs as well as their components: the hard core, the protective belt of auxiliary hypothesis, and the positive and negative heuristics.

But what would be the point of all this, beside the fact that the history of veterinary parasitology would be presented in different ways? The major point, to us at least, is that one would have to explicitly state if there has been scientific progress throughout the history of veterinary parasitology, and if that were the case, one would have to explain, in a precise way, *what this progress consists in*. From a Popperian point of view, scientific progress in veterinary parasitology would consist in eliminating hypotheses and theories which were shown to be false, and in replacing them with new hypotheses and theories. From a Kuhnian point of view, matters would be completely different. Scientific progress in veterinary parasitology would consist in paradigmatic revolutions. From a Lakatosian viewpoint, that progress would consist in the ability of progressive Scientific Research Programs to make novel predictions.

Depending on which philosophy of science is chosen, the history of veterinary parasitology will look different, and the progress made throughout that history will be assessed according to different criteria. Even more so, if one sides with Paul Feyerabend (1993), then one would have to declare that there has not been any progress whatsoever in veterinary parasitology, because Feyerabend explicitly rejects the concept of “scientific progress” to begin with.

Now, it may be the case that these discussions should concern only those working within philosophy of science, but we think that this is not necessarily so. First of all, because philosophical discussions on the history of veterinary parasitology would be quite superficial if veterinary parasitologists did not participate in those discussions. Second, because historical investigations on veterinary parasitology are bound to look equally superficial if one does not explicitly state what are the criteria for assessing scientific progress in this discipline.

The works of Del Campillo (1989); Touratier (1989); Enigk and Habil (1989); Malone (1989), and Slocombe (1989) show that bridges should be built between the professions of veterinary parasitology and history of science. The problem is that no professional historian of science would be willing to set aside, without further ado, what philosophers of science have to say. Until philosophy of science is taken into account in works dealing with the history of veterinary parasitology, those bridges will look makeshift. That may suffice for crossing from one side to the other a few times, but it cannot serve as a substitute for a well-founded channel of communication between the professions in question.

If philosophical works on veterinary parasitology are to remain confined to journals dedicated to philosophy of science, then building bridges will be a difficult task. If a journal on veterinary parasitology is willing to publish historical works, it should also be willing to publish philosophical works pertaining to the discipline. In other words, I am proposing that works dealing with philosophy of veterinary parasitology should be within the scope of journals such as this one. For what advantage is to be gained from excluding these works from the scope of the journal? There is much to be gained by their incorporation, because they will help stimulate debates on the very foundations of veterinary parasitology as such. Otherwise, each profession (veterinary parasitology, history of science, philosophy of science) will remain confined within its own, self-imposed limits. Let us replace makeshift bridges with actual dialogue between our professions.

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