Siobhan Mullan comments: Sean Wensley referred to a ‘shifting moral climate’ where the quality of life of pets is increasingly favoured over appearance. One example of this is the disqualification of the winners of six of the 15 high-profile breeds at Crufts from progressing through the competition following veterinary health checks. While critics may argue that this is only a small step, it is an important one, and one of many small steps that will undoubtedly make it impossible to return to previous bad practices of pedigree breeding.

However, I’m not exactly sure what these steps are aiming for. What is the utopian vision for pet breeding? Those who hold animal rights-based views would see no place at all for human involvement in pet breeding, it being wrong to exert control over creatures who are themselves ‘subjects-of-a-life’. For others, utopia would be a situation where ‘the greatest good for the greatest number’ occurred. As it seems to me that there is no intrinsic worth in having breeds, per se, the question would then come down to the usual animal use equation: weighing up human enjoyment against animal harms. It would be possible to align these two elements in a win-win situation if the human enjoyment was derived from breeding healthy animals with a good quality of life that retained their telos (essential characteristics, often thought of as ‘the dogginess of the dog’, ‘cattiness of the cat’, and so on). Appearance could be a secondary, or non-important, characteristic. However, we would need many more steps to get there.