

EurSafe News

VOLUME 26 #1 JUNE 2026



Dear EurSafe members,
It is my pleasure to share the Summer 2026 issue of the EurSafe Newsletter, featuring a rich collection of topics of interest to the EurSafe community.



The first contribution is about functions of metaphors in recent public communications on new developments in biotechnology. Andreas Bachmann from the Federal Office for the Environment in Switzerland who was kind enough to summarize the key findings of the expert report by the Swiss Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology (ECNH) on the functions of metaphors, as well as the opportunities and risks associated with their use in science and politics communications. The report analyses two metaphors in particular that play a prominent role in German-language discussions on plant breeding: genome editing and gene scissors. However, its considerations extend to all genome editing applications, including those in animal research, livestock breeding and human medicine.

The second contribution is dedicated to animal ethics and political philosophy. Carlo Salzani faculty member of the Paris Institute for Critical Thinking (PICT) will present his new Austrian Science Fund (FWF) project Animal Suffering and the Politics of Shame. This project is carried out at the Messerli Research Institute in Vienna and seeks to rethink shame not merely as an individual emotion tied to personal failings, but as a critical resource for questioning the very norms that structure human morality.

Contents

Metaphors in the Context of New Genomic Techniques in Plant Breeding	3
Animal Suffering and the Politics of Shame	5
The Vienna Animal Studies Group	7
EurSafe Board: Input from the Executive Committee Franck Meijboom	8
Conferences and Symposia	9

Carlo, like myself, is a founding member of the Vienna Animal Studies Group (VAS), which was established at the beginning of 2025. A short introduction of the aims and activities of the VAS is provided as third contribution. It also serves as an invitation to members of the EurSafe community interested in presenting their research in the framework of our monthly lecture series in Vienna. In our conference and calls section, you will find some EurSafe related events.

And finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye as a member of the EurSafe News editorial team. Over the past ten years, it has been a pleasure to share news and insights from the fields of ethics of biotechnology, philosophy of law, animal research ethics, and education of (veterinary) ethics with you. I hope to meet you soon at one of the next EurSafe conferences or workshops.

As always if you want to promote your conferences in the newsletter, contribute with a book review, or the presentation of your actual project, or if want to be part of the EurSafe News editorial board, don't hesitate to contact one of the members of the editorial board.

Dr. Samuel Camenzind
Institut für Philosophie, Universität Wien (A)
samuel.camenzind@univie.ac.at

Photo Credits

- Page 1** Top photo (Mark Stebnicki), photo Camenzind (Janine Schranz)
- Page 2** Photo (Robert Schwarz)
- Page 3** Image report (Swiss Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology ECNH)
- Page 5** Photo Salzani (Alessandro Chiodo)
- Page 7** Logo VAS (Rebecca Shen)
- Page 8** Photo Meijboom (Ed van Rijswijk)

Metaphors in the Context of New Genomic Techniques in Plant Breeding

Report of the Swiss Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology ECNH

Andreas Bachmann

In November 2025 the Swiss Federal Ethics Committee on Non-Human Biotechnology ECNH published a report on the role of metaphors in shaping public discourse and understanding of new genomic plant breeding techniques, particularly CRISPR/Cas and other genome editing methods.



The context of the report are the efforts currently under way, both at EU level and in Switzerland, to revise the regulation of gene technology in response to developments in plant breeding using new genomic techniques. This revision is the subject of a controversial discussion triggered by calls to make the regulation of these new techniques and resulting products less strict than that of conventional green genetic engineering.

While the report focuses on plant breeding, its considerations extend to all genome editing applications – in animal research contexts and human medicine. The Committee emphasizes it does not propose alternative terms or language but aims to raise awareness among politicians and the public about how metaphors function and their effects, contributing to transparent public debate.

The report distinguishes between several related concepts: metaphors (transferring terms from familiar contexts to new ones to highlight similarities), connotations (secondary meanings carrying positive or negative evaluations), and associations (ideas and connections evoked by words). These operate within broader frameworks of narratives (patterns of explanation and interpretation giving events significance) and framing (selecting aspects of reality to promote particular interpretations).

The report analyses two metaphors in particular that play a prominent role in German-language discussions: genome editing and gene scissors. Genome editing refers to a technological approach or set of techniques used to specifically modify DNA, the information-bearing structure of the genome. Literally speaking, editing means preparing an edition of an author's work for publication or revising existing texts to correct, condense, or otherwise improve them before publication. Metaphorically speaking, editing means revising and improving DNA as the 'book of life', using certain techniques for specific purposes, such as adapting to climate change, much like editing a text.

Of the other metaphors used in this context, the most prominent is the 'gene scissors' metaphor. The image of scissors, whether as a word or graphic, alludes to an important aspect of DNA editing: 'cutting' the DNA double strand. This image also draws associations with attributes such as precision, simplicity and feasibility, which are understood to be characteristic of genome editing techniques. The 'gene scissors' metaphor is generally used to represent the most important of these gene technology methods, namely CRISPR.

Within the scientific community, metaphors like ‘genome editing’ and ‘gene scissors’ function as dormant or ‘sleeping’ metaphors – they have become conventional terminology, serving primarily as shorthand for complex molecular biological procedures. Scientists use them for conceptual economy without perceiving their metaphorical nature.

In public communication, metaphors have a different effect than in scientific discourse. They are intended to convey complex issues in a simplified and vivid manner. However, metaphors are not just neutral tools for conveying information. They can be associated with hidden judgments and influence public opinion about new technologies. The ‘gene scissors’ metaphor, for instance, evokes multiple associations: positive associations such as precision, targeting, control, and direction, but also negative associations such as cutting, potential damage, and risk. The report notes that while scissors suggest precision, this is misleading – scissors themselves are not inherently precise; precision comes from where they are placed. Moreover, unlike mechanical scissors that can cut at only one specific point, CRISPR can cut simultaneously at multiple locations, potentially causing unintended ‘off-target effects’. The metaphor of ‘editing’ nature’s text implies gentle improvement and optimization, and thus low risk, while obscuring that DNA repair after cutting is an error-prone biological process conducted by cells, not a (fully) controllable technological procedure.

What does this mean for communication by the state, particularly with regard to new genomic plant breeding techniques? The state communicates with citizens. In normative terms, citizens are self-determining beings, and a democratic constitutional state should communicate with them as equals. ‘As equals’ means: as part of its public service, the state must structure communication in such a way that it conveys as complete a picture as possible of the subject matter so that it can be understood by all citizens. This allows them to understand complex new technologies to such an extent that they are able to make an informed opinion about the opportunities and risks they present, and decide how they should be handled in their view.

The ECNH’s report can be downloaded from the committee’s website: [ECNH, Metaphors in the Context of New Genomic Techniques in Plant Breeding, 2026](#). (The report is available in English, German, French and Italian.)

For preparation the ECNH consulted various experts from different fields of science and commissioned an [external report by Christina Brandt](#) (Professor of history and philosophy of science at the Ernst-Haeckel-Hauses, Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena). The [report Metaphern – Ihre Rolle für CRISPR und andere Genome Editing-Verfahren](#) (2026, written in German) can also be downloaded.

For certain topics, the state can assume that the public has a certain familiarity with the subject matter and the metaphors and connotations typically associated with it. In the case of genome editing in general, and its specific application in crop breeding in particular, it cannot and must not (yet) do so. These are complex new technologies and techniques about which the general public knows very little. Communication must therefore be tailored to this situation. Furthermore, the state must assume that this is an aspect of gene technology that is perceived differently and judged controversially by the general public.

For these reasons, metaphors should be used with caution. If state communication uses metaphors such as ‘gene scissors’, care should be taken to address the aspects relevant to citizens’ opinion-forming and to do so appropriately. This includes, for example, pointing out that this metaphor evokes different connotations and associations, which may be connected to differing evaluations of the technology; and that some of these connotations and associations are factually misleading. Even if the relevant scientific communities were to agree on them, both in terms of how they are described and how they are evaluated with regard to the risks and opportunities of the technology, state communication should not simply adopt this view. Instead, it should explicitly point out that there are differing scientific and social views, list what they are, and present the pros and cons of these views as well as those of the mainstream scientific position.

Metaphors are indispensable in communicating complex scientific concepts, but they are not neutral tools. They carry evaluative dimensions that can subtly influence public perception and opinion about new technologies. The ECNH’s central message is that transparent, careful use of metaphors in state communication – particularly regarding emerging technologies such as genome editing – is essential for democratic decision-making. Citizens must receive information enabling them to understand both the opportunities and risks of new genomic plant breeding techniques, forming independent, fact-based opinions about how society should handle these powerful techniques. Metaphors should contribute to, rather than hinder or undermine, this democratic opinion-building process.

Animal Suffering and the Politics of Shame

Carlo Salzani



This project, beginning in October 2025 and funded for three years by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), explores the idea of a “politics of shame” as a response to animal suffering. Led by principal investigator Carlo Salzani, with the support of PhD candidate Thomas Kainberger, the project seeks to

rethink shame not merely as an individual emotion tied to personal failings, but as a critical resource for questioning the very norms that structure human morality. By focusing on animal suffering, the research engages a domain that exposes the fragility and contradictions of our moral frameworks and opens the possibility of a broader reflection on ethics itself.

Traditional accounts of shame usually describe it as a negative response to having violated social expectations: one feels shame when failing to live up to established standards. Over the past decades, however, some theorists have proposed more constructive views, seeing shame as a productive force in moral life. Building on these perspectives, this project shifts attention from shame as a reaction to individual misconduct toward shame as a challenge to the norms themselves. If shame can illuminate the moral inadequacy of accepted practices, then it can become a powerful tool for transformation. Animal suffering is a particularly revealing case because it highlights not only our treatment of nonhuman creatures but also our broader relation to other humans and to the environment. Confronting shame in this context promises new insights into the very foundations of morality.

The central assumption of the project is that shame is unavoidable in human life and indispensable for social cohesion, yet it also carries critical potential. Rather than attempting to eliminate shame, we argue that it can be mobilized to confront the normative structures that permit massive and ongoing animal exploitation. In this sense, shame becomes political. It no longer concerns only the private realm of personal feelings but addresses the shared values and assumptions that shape society. The politics of shame, then, is not about punishing individuals for their choices but about unveiling and questioning the cultural and ideological systems that sustain harmful practices.

To develop this perspective, the project brings together insights from moral psychology, animal ethics, animal studies, the phenomenology of emotions, affect theory, trauma theory, and literary studies. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that shame is examined not only as an abstract concept but also as a lived experience, an affective force, and a cultural phenomenon. The project will proceed through four interrelated stages, which together build a comprehensive account of shame’s political and moral significance.

We begin with a critique of “shaming,” a practice that has become increasingly visible in public discourse and activism, including in the field of animal rights. Shaming targets individuals, often reducing moral responsibility to personal choices and identities. Unlike genuine shame, which can arise internally from the recognition of one’s own moral failure, shaming is imposed from outside.

PAPER

Carlo Salzani, PhD
University of Veterinary
Medicine Vienna, Messerli
Research Institute, Unit
of Ethics and Human-
Animal Studies
carlo.salzani@vetmeduni.ac.at

It attempts to brand individuals or groups as flawed and unworthy, often reinforcing divisions and exclusions. In animal activism, this can lead to a counterproductive “politics of purity” that condemns people rather than addressing structural causes of suffering. By equating morality with identity, shaming risks alienating potential allies and obscures the larger systems that enable animal exploitation. Our analysis will show why this approach fails and why it needs to be replaced with more constructive strategies.

The project will then turn to the opposite tendency: the widespread condition of shamelessness. In contemporary culture, powerful ideological systems normalize animal suffering and render it invisible, preventing the emergence of shame where it might otherwise arise. Industrial farming, for example, is often hidden from public view, and social norms encourage us to treat the consumption of animal products as natural and unproblematic. In this context, any attempt to deviate from these norms can itself be stigmatized as shameful or extreme. This shamelessness, however, is not merely indifference; it represents a failure to recognize one’s own limitations and the perspectives of others. It reflects a deeply ingrained human exceptionalism that legitimizes domination over nonhuman creatures and, by extension, over the natural world. This moral blindness is sustained by cultural apparatuses that frame exploitation as normal and inevitable. By exposing the shameful nature of this systemic imperviousness, the project will challenge the ideological structures that shield us from acknowledging the violence inflicted on animals.

From this critique emerges the constructive dimension: the politics of shame itself. Here we focus on shame’s revolutionary potential to disrupt established moral frameworks. Whereas ordinary shame reinforces social norms by sanctioning deviations, the politics of shame calls those very norms into question. It reveals the injustices hidden beneath the appearance of normalcy and confronts us with our complicity in systemic violence. This form of shame is collective rather than individual: it arises not from being judged by others but from a shared recognition that what has long been tolerated is in fact intolerable. In this way, shame can tear through the veil of normality, transforming the perception of practices once considered acceptable and sparking moral and political change. It is an existential emotion that illuminates the presence of realities that should not exist at all. By unsettling the narrative that “things have always been this way,” shame opens the path to envisioning alternatives and to inspiring social transformation.

Finally, the project extends this analysis beyond the debate on shame to a broader reconsideration of morality itself. If shame reveals not only our failures to live up to norms but also the problematic nature of the norms themselves, then it becomes central to our understanding of moral identity. Animal suffering confronts us with the precariousness of the values that structure our relation to nonhuman life and to the environment. The experience of shame in this context invites a re-examination of who we are as moral beings. While much of the philosophical literature emphasizes that shame concerns “who we are” rather than “what we do,” this project suggests that precisely this feature makes shame foundational to morality. It demonstrates that we are not only capable of following norms but also of questioning and reshaping them. Shame thus emerges as a resource for moral renewal, an emotion that reminds us of the ethical responsibilities we cannot abandon despite centuries of normalization and institutionalization of violence. By placing shame at the heart of moral life, the project advances the revolutionary idea that our capacity for shame is also our capacity for ethical transformation.

In sum, this project develops a comprehensive analysis of the politics of shame, demonstrating its potential to expose systemic violence, to challenge cultural and ideological norms, and to inspire new moral possibilities. By focusing on animal suffering, it reveals the deep entanglements between human morality, social norms, and the treatment of nonhuman others. At the same time, it highlights the broader significance of shame as an emotion that not only binds communities together but also equips them to confront their own failings and to imagine a different future. The project thus contributes both to scholarly debates and to public discussions on how we might respond to some of the most urgent moral challenges of our time.

The Vienna Animal Studies Group



The Vienna Animal Studies Group was established in early 2025 as a collaborative network of scholars and activists from interdisciplinary backgrounds, including philosophy and ethics,

religious studies, geography, economics, as well as science and technology. The group and its members are deeply committed to advancing animal studies through rigorous research, engaging blog posts, thought-provoking publications, and insightful events. VAS aims to bridge the gap between academia, activism, and public awareness by fostering a richer understanding of animals' lives. It currently includes members from five different universities and research centers¹ and actively creates opportunities to expand beyond these institutions.

An overview of the current VAS Summer Lecture Series as well as other activities of the Vienna Animal Studies Group (VAS) can be found on our website (<https://www.viennaanimalstudies.com/>).

Additionally, the latest news in human–animal studies, along with current scholarly publications by VAS members, are available on the VAS blog and in our publications section. Please feel free to get in touch with us at any time. We would be delighted to welcome you as a speaker in one of our upcoming lecture series.

¹ The Austrian Institute of Technology, the Messerli Research Institute at the University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna and the University of Vienna, the Institute for Change Management and Management Development at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, the Department of Philosophy at the University of Vienna and TransFamation Austria

EurSafe Executive Committee

Franck Meijboom



In the Netherlands, we commemorate the liberation in 1945 following the Second World War every year on 5 May. This is an impressive event every year, but perhaps even more so this year. Given the ongoing armed conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, freedom is less of a given than one would like it to be. Recently, the media in Europe has focused mainly on rising fuel costs, but the impact on food production and food security is also undeniable.

Current global developments are therefore inextricably linked to core themes of EurSafe: food security and food justice, the role of technology, sustainability and the future of agriculture and livestock farming. With the existing challenges of climate change and a growing global population, these issues become even more complex.

For EurSafe, it may be beyond our competence to solve these issues. Nevertheless, we have the intellectual capacity and a strong and diverse network within our association to reflect on these issues and contribute to new insights and options for action. That is why it is good to meet up also in person. EurSafe2026

I cordially invite you to join us at the EurSafe2026 congress. Sinan Akilli and his colleagues at Cappadocia University are organising a wonderful conference, scheduled to take place from 9 to 12 September 2026 in Cappadocia. Here too, we are also monitoring developments in the Middle East (see our letter dated 13 April 2026 for more information), but fortunately, everything indicates that we will be able to meet in person and travel safely to Cappadocia.

Board Meeting

The conference was also one of the topics discussed at the board meeting on 29 April. In addition, we further developed the strategy regarding the composition of the board. During the GA in 2026, four board members will step down. We want to use this opportunity to take a broader look at the board's composition, with the aim of recruiting more young colleagues and reducing the number of board members while maintaining representation of countries/regions, expertise, and experience. Over the next few weeks, we will advertise a vacancy for a board member and invite you to propose candidates or apply yourself.

Following the discussion at the General Assembly in December last year about how EurSafe can attract early career scholars and encourage their involvement in our society, we have decided to organise a pre-conference workshop on Wednesday 9 September and informal drinks on Thursday 10 September. Early career scholars are warmly invited to join us!

Franck Meijboom

Updates

CONFERENCES

23-25 JUNE 2026

UFAW Centenary Conference 2026: 100 years of Science for Animal Welfare
London, UK
[website](#)

1-3 JULY 2026

ISAZ – International Society for Anthrozoology conference
Paris, France
[website](#)

13-17 JULY 2026

37th AAAS: Transforming Animal Management through Sustainable Innovations
Hotel Grand Chancellor, Adelaide South Australia
[website](#)

9-12 SEPTEMBER 2026

EurSafe – Agriculture and Food Systems: The Role of AI and Digitalization
Cappadocia University, Türkiye
[website](#)

24-26 SEPTEMBER 2026

European Association of Centres for Medical Ethics (EACME) Annual Conference
Leuven, Belgium
[website](#)

12-24 OCTOBER 2026

Caring for Non-Humans: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Care among Animals, the Environment, and AI
Prague, Czech Republic
[website](#)

9-13 OCTOBER 2026

Animal Technologies – Fourth Padova Summer School on Philosophy and Cultural Studies of Technology
University of Padoua, Padova, Italy
[website](#)

14-16 OCTOBER 2026

Environmental Ethics conference
University of Umeå, Sweden
[website](#)

21-24 OCTOBER 2026

Bear in Mind, 8th Days of Animal Studies
Split, Croatia
[website](#)

11-12 DECEMBER 2026

Minding Animals Germany Symposium
Kunsthochschule für Medien Köln, Germany
[website](#)

President

Franck Meijboom

*Ethics Institute, Utrecht University,
the Netherlands*

f.l.b.meijboom@uu.nl

Vice-Presidents

Bernice Bovenkerk

*Philosophy Group, Wageningen
University, the Netherlands*

bernice.bovenkerk@wur.nl

Herwig Grimm

*Messerli Research Institute University
of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Austria*

herwin.grimm@vetmeduni.ac.at

Secretary

Tea Kortetmäki

University of Jyväskylä, Finland

tea.kortetmaki@jyu.fi

Treasurer

Joost van Herten

*Royal Veterinary Association of the
Netherlands, the Netherlands*

Members

Diana Dumitras

*University of Agricultural Science
and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-
Napoca, Romania*

ddumitras@usamvcluj.ro

Leire Escajedo

*University of the Basque Country,
Spain*

leire.escajedo@ehu.es

Simon Meisch

University of Tuebingen, Germany

simon.meisch@uni-teubingen.de

Bjørn Myskja

*Norwegian University of Science and
Technology, Trondheim, Norway*

bjorn.myskja@ntnu.no

Per Sandin

*Swedish University of Agricultural
Sciences, Uppsala, Sweden*

per.sandin@slu.se

Ivo Wallimann-Helmer

University of Zurich, Switzerland

ivo.wallimann-helmer@unifr.ch

Ariane Willemsen

*Federal Ethics Committee on
NonHuman Biotechnology (ECNH),
Switzerland*

ariane.willemsen@bafu.admin.ch

Chief-Editor EurSafe News

Simon Meisch

University of Tuebingen, Germany

simon.meisch@uni-teubingen.de

Editorial Board EurSafe News

Raymond Anthony

University of Alaska Anchorage, US

ranthon1@uaa.alaska.edu

Mariska van Asselt

*Aeres University of Applied
Sciences Dronten, the Netherlands*

m.van.asselt@aeres.nl

Bernice Bovenkerk

*Philosophy Group, Wageningen
University, the Netherlands*

bernice.bovenkerk@wur.nl

Samuel Camenzind

*Department of Philosophy
University of Vienna, Austria*

samuel.camenzind@univie.ac.at

Jes Harfeld

Aalborg University, Denmark

jlh@learning.aau.dk

Hanna Schübel

UniFR_ESH Institute, Switzerland

hanna.schuebel@unifr.ch

Svenja Springer

Messerli Research Institute, Austria

svenja.springer@vetmeduni.ac.at

Layout EurSafe News

Caatje Kluskens

*Philosophy Group, Wageningen
University, the Netherlands*

caatje.kluskens@wur.nl

EurSafe website

www.eursafe.org

Contact