

BASIC CONCEPTS OF ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal welfarists believe that each individual animal has an intrinsic value and should be respected and protected. They recognise that animals have biologically determined instincts and needs and can experience pain and suffering. They believe that animals should therefore be permitted to live their lives free from avoidable suffering at the hands of humans. They should have a good quality of life and a humane death. However, good welfare is not only about the absence of cruelty or 'unnecessary suffering'. It is much more complex.



Animal welfare is generally defined using a number of concepts including: the physical, mental and natural states; the five freedoms; needs and sentience. Each concept is elaborated upon further in this section.

Physical, Mental and Natural States

Assessing the welfare of an animal entails looking at its physical health (how fit it is), its mental health (including how it feels) and its capability to act naturally (referred to as 'telos' in this chapter). The welfare of an animal can be described as good if it is fit, healthy and free from suffering.

An animal can have a physical problem, such as a tumour, and not be affected mentally if it does not feel pain or discomfort. Equally, an animal may feel fear and anxiety that is not associated with a physical problem. A condition can therefore affect either the physical or mental state of an animal, or both.

The third state – telos – refers to the ability of the animal to fulfil its natural needs and desires. For example, a pig in a natural environment would spend over 70% of its time rooting and performing other oral behaviours. It would also engage in complex social interactions. However, pigs confined in sow stalls which are so narrow that they cannot even turn around, are prevented from exhibiting their natural behaviours. The frustration of its natural needs leads to repetitive unnatural behaviours, known as stereotypes, such as bar biting.

These three concepts are often used to define animal welfare, either individually, or in combination.

Traditional definitions focus mainly on the physical state of animals: "Welfare defines the state of an animal as regards its attempts to cope with its environment." (Fraser & Broom, 1990).

Duncan (1993) advocates that feelings (the mental state) are critical and that this is not necessarily related to health or fitness: "... neither health nor lack of stress nor fitness is necessary and/or sufficient to conclude that an animal has good welfare. Welfare is dependent upon what animals feel."

Rollin (1993) recognises that both mental states (pain and suffering) and telos are relevant to welfare: "Not only will welfare mean control of pain and suffering, it will also mean nurturing and fulfilment of the animals' nature, which I call telos."

Whichever definition is used, it is clear that the three concepts are interconnected and any significant compromise in one tends to affect the other two.

The Five Freedoms

Another popular concept used to quantify animal welfare is the 'five freedoms' framework, which takes a holistic approach and considers all three concepts outlined previously.

The 'five freedoms' were originally developed by the UK's Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) and provide valuable guidance on animal welfare. They are now internationally recognised and have

been adapted slightly since their formulation. The current form is:

- **Freedom from hunger and thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour
- **Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area
- **Freedom from pain**, injury and disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind
- **Freedom from fear and distress** by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

These represent a useful checklist to identify situations that compromise good animal welfare; that is any situation that causes fear, pain, discomfort, injury, disease or behavioural distress.

Needs

Needs, defined as “a requirement, fundamental in the biology of the animal, to obtain a particular resource or respond to a particular environmental or bodily stimulus” (Broom & Johnson, 1993), should be provided for to ensure an animal's welfare.

Needs may include a range of provisions such as food, water, comfort, environmental enrichment and avoidance of infectious disease and may be classified, in terms of relative importance, into:

- **Life sustaining needs:** must be met to ensure survival
- **Health sustaining needs:** avoidance of disease and injury
- **Comfort sustaining needs:** contribute to the quality of life

(Humik & Lehmen, 1985).

All of these needs should be met to ensure good animal welfare.

Sentience

Sentience implies a level of conscious awareness; having feelings and emotions and being able to suffer.

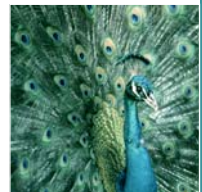
Sentience implies that animals:

- Are aware of their own surroundings
- Have an emotional dimension
- Are aware of what is happening to them
- Have the ability to learn from experience
- Are aware of bodily sensations: pain, hunger, heat, cold etc.
- Are aware of their relationships with other animals
- Have the ability to choose between different animals, objects and situations

There is now widespread recognition of the ‘sentience’ of animals, which reinforces the need to protect their welfare. The European Union has officially recognised animals to be ‘Sentient Beings’ since the inclusion of a protocol on animal welfare in the Treaty of Amsterdam signed in 1997.

Science, Ethics and Law

Animal welfare science considers the effects of humans on animals, from the animal's perspective. Scientific evidence is often used as the basis for the reform of animal welfare legislation, and has been instrumental in bringing about numerous changes for farm animals, animals used in research and zoo animals. Science is not the only criterion for judging welfare, as other less tangible factors are also involved.



Ethics looks at the morality of human actions towards animals; how humans currently treat animals, and how they ought to treat animals.

Legislation looks at how we must treat animals; it is a reflection of society's rules governing the use and treatment of animals. It is arguable that law is simply the practical application of the current state of science and ethics in a society, as accepted by consumers and ultimately politicians.

