

# 1. What is Animal Welfare?

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## Introduction

Human understanding of animals – especially their sentience, needs and natures – is developing all the time. The physical states of poor welfare are more readily accessible and understandable (particularly for veterinarians, who undertook much of the early work on welfare). But new research leads naturally to greater understanding of mental states and needs and natures. This is particularly true of ethological research, including ‘preference testing’ where animals’ preferences are measured and assessed. This may be why earlier definitions of welfare centred on physical states, whereas the latest definitions have reflected the complex, multi-faceted nature of animal welfare.

## Welfare v Rights

The difference between animal welfare and animal rights is explained in the session on ‘*Ethical and Philosophical Theories*’. In brief, this can be explained as below: -

*Animal welfare* denotes the desire to prevent unnecessary animal suffering (that is, whilst not categorically opposed to the use of animals, wanting to ensure a good quality of life and humane death).

*Animal rights* denotes the philosophical belief that animals should have rights, including the right to live their lives free of human intervention (and ultimate death at the hands of humans). Animal rightists are philosophically opposed to the use of animals by humans (although some accept 'symbiotic' relationships, such as companion animal ownership).

## Welfare v Conservation

The key difference between *conservation* and *animal welfare* is that conservation cares about species (and extinction) whereas animal welfare cares about the individual animal (and its suffering). 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, interests and natures, and can experience pain and suffer, and believe that they should therefore be permitted to live their lives free from avoidable suffering at the hands of humans.

It is not difficult to see why the conservation movement has attracted support more readily than the animal welfare movement. Animal welfare requires greater altruism and

empathy than conservation. Care for conservation can be generated by human-centred objectives, such as not wanting species to become extinct because of the loss for future generations (of humans). Although many people now recognise that animals feel pain and suffer, this comes lower down on their list of priorities for action – and may indeed challenge their own lifestyle and habits.

### **Welfare Defined**

Welfare is not just absence of cruelty or ‘unnecessary suffering’. It is much more complex. It includes the following different states: -

#### ***Physical State***

Traditionally definitions centred on the physical state of animals.

“I suggest that an animal is in a poor state of welfare only when physiological systems are disturbed to the point that survival or reproduction is impaired.” McGlone, 1993.

“Welfare defines the state of an animal as regards its attempts to cope with its environment.” Fraser and Broom, 1990.

McGlone takes the extreme view that welfare is only poor when survival or reproduction is impaired by a physical problem. This is a simplistic view of welfare, which is often put forward by the trade to minimise the impact they are having on the welfare of the animals under their care.

Fraser and Broom refer to how an animal copes with its environment. Coping is essentially a reflection of the physical condition of the animal, although mental states may have contributed to this condition.

#### ***Mental State***

Mental states play an important role in welfare. These states are becoming increasingly understood and explored, including by scientists.

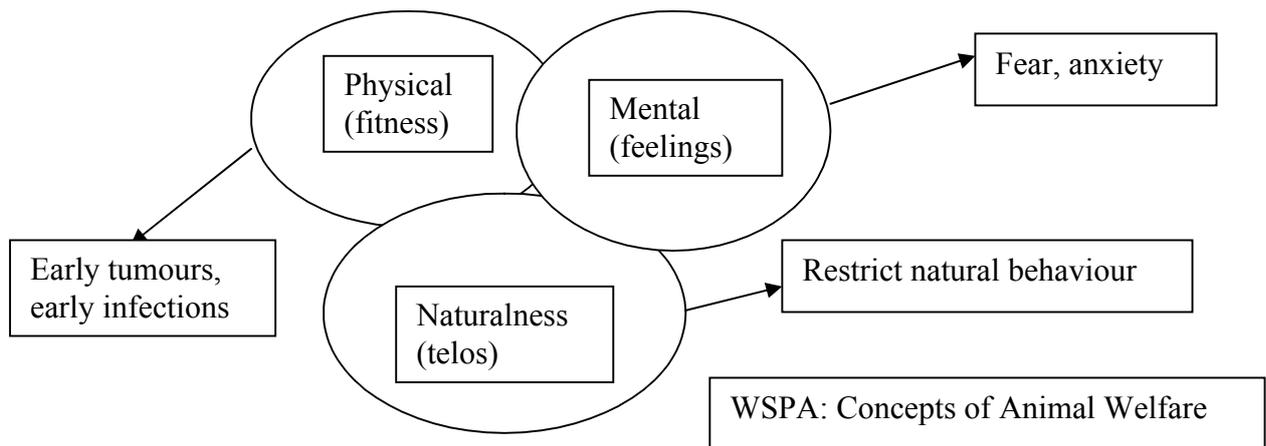
“... neither health nor lack of stress nor fitness is necessary and/or sufficient to conclude that an animal had good welfare. Welfare is dependent upon what animals feel.” Duncan, 1993.

#### ***Naturalness***

The third state – naturalness – refers to the ability of the animal to fulfil its natural needs and desires. The frustration of these harms its welfare. This third dimension has been recently recognised and added.

“Not only will welfare mean control of pain and suffering, it will also nurturing and fulfilment of the animals’ nature, which I call telos.” Rollin, 1993

The definition of animal welfare is often debated. However, these three states, which are given in the definition given by WSPA in its ‘Concepts of Animal Welfare’ veterinary training resource, provide the most comprehensive to date. This is depicted pictorially below: -



This clearly shows the three dimensions of welfare, and the inextricable relationship between these.

### Five Freedoms

The ‘five freedoms’, which were originally developed by the UK’s Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC), 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 – ready access to water and a diet to maintain 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 animals own kind
- Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering

They cover all three of the states identified by WSPA above.

They are ideal states, and it is recognized that some freedoms may conflict in a situation where animals are cared for by man e.g. the conflict between treatment (such as veterinary treatment) to cure illness/disease and freedom from fear and distress (that may be caused by the handling and procedure).

### Needs

The term ‘needs’ is often used in discussions on welfare, as needs are the things that should be provided to ensure an animal’s welfare.

A need is: ‘A requirement, fundamental in the biology of the animal, to obtain a particular resource or respond to a particular environmental or bodily stimulus.’ Needs may include a range of provisions such as food, water, comfort, avoidance of infectious disease and

environmental enrichment. For animals under our care it is a human ethical responsibility to provide for their needs.

Different needs have different levels of importance to animals. Observing effects after withdrawal of needs provides an indication of their relative importance.

### **Sentience**

There is now widespread recognition of the ‘sentience’ of animals, which reinforces the need to protect welfare. The European Union has officially recognised animals to be ‘Sentient Beings’ (1997). 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

### **Animal Welfare Science**

WSPA’s ‘Concepts in Animal Welfare’ is designed to teach animal welfare to students at veterinary institutes. It was prepared in collaboration with the University of Bristol veterinary school – one of the leading centres for animal welfare science. It includes everything an activist needs to know about welfare science.

The syllabus is composed of 30 interactive modules on CD-ROM. Printed and audio-visual resources complement the CD-ROM and updates will be available via the internet ([www.wspa-international.org](http://www.wspa-international.org)).

The principles in ‘Concepts’ are supported by professional bodies such as the World Veterinary Association, Commonwealth Veterinary Association, World Small Animal Veterinary Association and the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations.

### **Welfare Assessment**

Animal welfare has developed into a science in its own right and as a result there is a growing amount of research into this subject. This research is funded by governments, corporations and industry bodies, welfare groups and other agencies. It is often used as the basis for the reform of animal welfare legislation. It is also used to improve conditions for animals reared for food, used in research, kept in captivity or as companion animals.

Three components are important for a welfare assessment: -

- Use the Five Freedoms as the framework
- Assess welfare inputs and outputs
- Quantify problem using Severity, Duration and Number of animals affected.

Inputs are the factors that affect welfare.

Outputs are the actual impact of these factors on welfare.

Examples of three types of welfare inputs are: -

- Stockman - Empathy, Knowledge, Observation skills
- Environment - Housing, Bedding, Feed quality, Water provision
- Animal - Suitable breed, age and sex for the system.

Physiological measures of welfare include: -

- Heart rate
- Respiratory rate
- Adrenal habituation
- Blood pressure
- Catecholamines (adrenaline and noradrenaline)
- Enzymes and metabolites

However, measures of welfare should be applied with caution. WSPA's 'Concepts of Animal Welfare' refers to different 'components' of welfare, of which welfare science is one i.e.

- Welfare science
- Animal ethics
- Welfare law

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. However, the important point here is that science is not the only criteria for judging welfare, as other less tangible factors are also involved. It is, therefore, important that the 'precautionary principle' is applied, and where there are any cases of doubt, then the action taken should favour the animals (just in case the alternative course would impair welfare).

## **Welfare and Death**

Welfare concerns the 'quality' of animal life. Whereas death affects the 'quantity' of animal life. However, both may be the subjects of ethical concern by humans.

The manner of death is relevant to an animal's welfare e.g. the method of slaughter is important. Also, high death rates can indicate poor welfare conditions - Poor husbandry conditions can cause disease and death and production pressures and overwork can also cause early death.

## **Further Resources**

### *🔗 Web Sites*

UFAW: University Links

<http://www.ufaw.org.uk/links-news-events.php>

Animals and Society

<http://www.animalsandsociety.org/>

'Think tank' carrying out education and training, including a course on 'Animals and Society' that examines the moral and legal status of animals in contemporary society.

International Society for Applied Ethology

<http://www.applied-ethology.org/>

Animal Behaviour Society  
<http://www.animalbehavior.org/>

The Latham Foundation  
<http://www.latham.org>

**Books**

***Animal Welfare: A Cool Eye Towards Eden***

By: John Webster  
Publisher: Blackwell Science (UK)  
ISBN: 0632039280

***Animal Welfare***

By: Michael C. Appleby and Barry O. Hughes  
Publisher: CAB International  
ISBN: 0851991807

***What Should We Do About Animal Welfare?***

By: M. C. Appleby  
Publisher: Blackwell Science Inc.  
ISBN: 0632050667

***Animal Welfare***

By: Colin Spedding  
Publisher: Earthscan  
ISBN: 1853836729

***Animal Welfare (Just the Facts S.)***

By: Bel Browing  
Publisher: Heinemann Library  
ISBN: 0431161496

***Attitudes to Animals: Views in Animal Welfare***

Francine L. Dolins (Editor)  
Publisher: Cambridge University Press  
ISBN: 0521479061

***Encyclopaedia of Animal Rights and Animal Welfare***

By: M. Beckoff  
Publisher: Greenwood Press  
ISBN: 0313299773

***Through Our Eyes Only?***

By: M. S. Dawkins  
Publisher: Oxford University Press  
ISBN: 0198503202

***Stress and Animal Welfare***

By: D. M. Broom, K. G. Johnson  
Publisher: Kluwer Academic Press  
ISBN: 0412395800

***Unravelling Animal Behaviour***

By: M. S. Dawkins  
Publisher: Longman (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)  
ISBN: 0582218756

***Animal Thinking***

By: D. R. Griffin  
Publisher: Harvard University Press  
ISBN: 0674037138

***The Study of Animal Behaviour***

By: F. Huntingford  
Publisher: Chapman and Hall  
ISBN: 0412223309

***An Introduction to Animal Behaviour***

By: A. N. Manning, M. S. Dawkins  
Publisher: Cambridge University Press  
ISBN: 0521578914

***WSPA Concepts in Animal Welfare – a syllabus to assist with the teaching of animal welfare in veterinary faculties***