Welfare

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Animal Welfare[1]

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'Animal welfare' is a wide-ranging, and often value-laden, term that is used with somewhat different meanings by different people. It appears to have been first used by Major C. W. Hume, who was instrumental in founding the University of London Animal Welfare Society in 1926.

In non-technical assertions like 'securing the welfare of animals in our care is vital' the term 'welfare' refers to positive well-being or quality of life. In the technical literature on animal welfare, by contrast, it makes sense to speak about welfare as a continuum running from negative to positive. In some contexts (e.g. in the notion of an animal welfare organisation) the phrase 'animal welfare' carries the implication that we have an ethical obligation to treat animals well, or so as to meet certain minimum standards. However, many academics who study the living conditions of domestic and wild animals normally aim to use the term 'animal welfare' descriptively simply to record the state in which an animal happens to be, without implying anything normative about the acceptability of the conditions in which the animal is kept. Also, in the academic study of animal welfare the term is normally used strictly to describe reactions of the individual animal being studied: welfare is a state of the animal. Here 'welfare' is used as a synonym of 'well-being' or 'quality of life', whereas in other, non-academic, contexts it can be used in statements about the environment in which the animals live.

The study of animal welfare is mainly undertaken as a part of natural science, building on disciplines such as ethology, pain- and stress-physiology and veterinary medicine. However, important underpinnings of the study of animal welfare are philosophical in nature. Before studying animal welfare, we need a definition that clarifies what it is for an animal to be in conditions that are good for it and what it is for an animal to live a good life. From philosophical discussion of human well-being dating back to ancient Greece, two main

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views about the nature of welfare emerge: *perfectionism* (and associated *objectivist* views), according to which welfare is connected with *doing well*, e.g. by realising important species-specific potentials; and *hedonism* (and allied *subjectivist* views), in which welfare is connected with *feeling well*, e.g. in the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Often advocates of these rather different views will arrive at similar conclusions about what is needed for an animal to live a good life. Positive feelings typically follow if an animal is allowed to pursue its natural goals, and pain or feelings of frustration may follow if an animal is thwarted in what it is naturally disposed to do. (Hens in battery cages appear to experience frustration when they are prevented from laying eggs in a nest.) However, it is not difficult to think of cases in which the two views might well diverge. Fighting to rise in the social hierarchy is natural in many animals and therefore positive on a perfectionist view. Nevertheless a hedonist may consider it desirable to prevent painful fights — perhaps by limiting the aggression of male individuals through castration.

It is fair to say that subjectivist views presently dominate academic discussion of animal welfare. When Ian Duncan (1996) states that "… sentience, in other words feelings, is what animal welfare is all about" he is presenting a mainstream view. However, there are dissenting views. Bernard Rollin (1993) has observed: "It is likely that the emerging social ethic for animals ... will demand from scientists data relevant to a much increased concept of welfare. Not only will welfare mean control of pain and suffering, it will also entail nurturing and fulfilment of the animals' natures, which I call *telos*." Again, in the following influential definition offered by Donald Broom (1986), the emphasis is on coping, or functioning — a basic form of perfection — rather than on feeling, although Broom himself acknowledges that feelings may be an important part of functioning: "The welfare of an individual is its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment. Coping can sometimes be achieved with little effort and expenditure of resources, in which case the individual's welfare is satisfactory. Or it may fail to cope at all, in which case its welfare is obviously poor. Or, if the individual does cope with the conditions it encounters, this may be easy, with little expenditure of resources, or may be difficult taking much time and energy, in which case welfare is deemed to be poor."

Well-being can be *measured* in a variety of ways. Each method of measurement tends to suit some definitions of welfare better than others. Measures focusing on biological, psychological and social

functioning are readily understood within a perfectionist framework. If, on the other hand, the researcher allows the animals to rank different outcomes, or concentrates on psychological well-being and distress, the measurements will make more sense in a hedonist (or, more broadly, subjectivist) framework. So researchers need to consider whether and how the data they record can be interpreted so as to say something about well-being in a specified sense. Measures of functioning often indicate little, directly at least, about pleasure, suffering and other subjective states of animals. It follows that the use of these measures within a subjectivist view of animal welfare requires critical discussion.

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