Conceptualizing Animal Welfare in the Context of Ethics

Application to the Animal & Veterinary Sciences
What this lecture will do:

• Describe how ethics is an inherent component of animal welfare
• Describe animal welfare
• Illustrate how inextricable ethics is from animal welfare issues

• *Trim down a bit*
Ethics is an Inherent Component of Animal Welfare
Animals as a Social Construction

• What “animals” mean to us is socially constructed

• "How people relate to animals varies by society, culture and individual relationships” (Beaver, 2003)

• Economics influence society's value of animals (i.e., how we treat them) and conversations about animal welfare

• But no consensus in diverse society!
Words Matter

• The language we use reflects our values related to animals and carries implications for our perceived obligations to them
Representations of farm animals and their implications

• Lexical representations of animals
  – “Beef” not cow, “pork” not pig
    • Animal is symbolized as a product
  – Animals as units (“broilers” - named for a cooking method)
    ⇒ Harder to identify with & easier to exploit
• Compared to racist discourse
  – “The Dreaded Comparison” (Spiegel, 1988)
• Inanimate resources cannot suffer
• Implications for quality of care
Science and Ethics

Question:  *When do science and ethics overlap?*

Answer:  *They always overlap!*
Animal Welfare = Science + Ethics

• Science deals with \textit{what is}

• Ethics deals with \textit{what ought to be}

• \textbf{Animal welfare} is ultimately a question of \textit{what ought to be} but should be in harmony with the knowledge about \textit{what is}

• The Dry Frog Problem
Animal Welfare as Quality of Life

• Quality of life is inherently a philosophical and ethical issue
  – How should we be treating animals?
  – What is acceptable quality of life for animals?”

• What is good quality of life for a __________?
  – (Fill in the blank with the species of your choice)

• Who gets to decide?
  – Individual/owner? Profession/industry? Society?
“Simply expressed, our moral responsibility must be to provide our farm animals with a reasonable quality of life and a gentle death.”

- Webster, 1993
Ethics is the Foundation for the Study of Animal Welfare

1. Concern over treatment of animals led to the scientific study of animal welfare
   – How we treat animals matters

2. Animal welfare science is directed by ethical concerns and can work to address them
   – Though ethics drives the questions, we can collect data that informs decisions

3. Regardless of the scientific findings, people’s values dictate:
   – What evidence they give priority to
   – What findings they implement
What Is Animal Welfare?
Defining Animal Welfare

• How do you define animal welfare?
  – Think about this for a few minutes

• Working with the person next to you, come up with a shared definition of animal welfare.
  – Use your individual definitions to create a common definition

• Write definition down and pass it forward
Defining Welfare

- Philosophical definitions
  - For example, it’s ok to use animals but we have obligations to use, care for and treat them humanely

- Scientific conceptions
  - For example, welfare is its state as regards its attempts to cope with its environment
    - Dr. Don Broom, Cambridge

- Everyday conceptions
  - For example, animal welfare is used to express concerns about quality of life of animals
    - Dr. David Fraser, University of British Columbia
Scientific Conceptions of Animal Welfare

- Is the animal producing?
- Is the animal healthy?
- Is the animal experiencing stress?
- Is the animal in pain or suffering?
- Can the animal perform natural behaviors?
- What does the animal feel?

-The questions are listed roughly in the chronological order that they were approached (note subjectivity increases over time).
-Increasingly addressing the concerns expressed by the public!
Animal Welfare

- health
- behavior
- genetics
- nutrition
- physiology
- production
- feelings
- reproduction
Addressing Animal Welfare

• What matters most?
  – Behavioral freedom, health, productivity, longevity?

• Typically, animal health and production have been prioritized over behavior
  – Priorities reflect values
  – Do our priorities reflect those of society?
  – Are “accepted” practices socially acceptable?
Scientific Assessment of Welfare

• Animal welfare is multidimensional in nature
  – Biological functioning
  – Natural living (behavioral integrity)
  – Affective states

• As a result, assessing animal welfare should be a multidisciplinary scientific venture
  – Animal science, veterinary medicine, physiology, and ethology
The Perspective of the Animal

• Good animal welfare represents good quality of life *from the perspective of the animal* and has to do with the *animal’s total life experiences.*
Scientific Assessment of Welfare

• The addition of these measures creates a more complex picture
  – How do animals’ bodies respond?
  – How do animals’ minds respond?
  – To aversive situations?
  – To pleasurable situations?

• Question for Thought: As we acknowledge the minds and emotions of animals, does this create a need for additional ethical consideration?
Welfare is a Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor welfare (suffering)</th>
<th>Adequate welfare (absence of suffering)</th>
<th>Good welfare (happy/healthy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical needs fulfilled?</td>
<td>Psychological needs fulfilled?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Animal Welfare Science?

• Animal welfare science implies expertise in many scientific disciplines

AND

• Animal welfare science implies a blending or merging of science and ethics

• Question for Thought: Why consider ethics?
Constraints of science

What science can answer:

**What are the effects of system X on animals?**

What science cannot answer:

**What is acceptable quality life for animals?**

Need *both* science & values

(Swanson & Mench, 2000)
An example of overlap between science & ethics:

Tie-Stalls for Dairy Cows
Swedish Farm Animal Rights

“Cows must have access to pasture.”

But this applies only during the growing season!
Tie-stalls in Sweden

• Many dairy cows tied during non-growing season (~October to May)

• Argument: Banning tie-stalls would lead to bigger barns for loose-housing:
  – Ultimately poorer welfare (larger groups, more milk per cow, feet & leg problems, etc.)
  – More environmental problems
  – Force out small farms
  – Negative for rural society as a whole
  – Loss of the traditional red barns, Swedish Red cows, etc.

• Emphasizes the importance of a holistic view