

Module 12

The Application of Animal Welfare Ethics



This lecture was first developed for **World Animal Protection** by Dr David Main (University of Bristol) in 2003. It was revised by **World Animal Protection** scientific advisors in 2012 using updates provided by Dr Caroline Hewson.

Free online resources

To get free updates and additional materials, please go to
www.animalmosaic.org/education/tertiary-education/

In this module you will learn

How to apply ethical theories

How these should guide our actions

How our actions have broader consequences on the environment

Frameworks for application in practice

Reviewing ethical theories 1

Moral concern

Individuals may be harmed – made worse off

Ethical theory ⇒ logical reasons for action

The five main ethical theories of animal use are

Contractarian

Utilitarian

Animal rights

Relational (care ethic)

Respect for nature

Reviewing ethical theories 2

Consequentialist theories of animal use: animals may be used as a means to an end

- ❖ Contractarian – what matters is relative cost and benefit to us alone. Treating animals well can serve us well
- ❖ Utilitarian – sentience is morally relevant so costs and benefits to people and animals must be weighed up; greatest good for the greatest number overall
- ❖ Respect for nature: consequences for species not individuals

Reviewing ethical theories 3

Deontological (obligation-based) theories of animal use

- ❖ Rights: animals' intrinsic value as subjects of a life confers the right to direct own lives and not be killed or used as a means to an end. This in turn obliges us to respect that right
- ❖ Relational: mutually beneficial relationship – animals depend on us for food etc, and in return we use their products. Their dependence on us as caregivers obliges us to treat our animals well.



Areas of concern

Breeding of dogs with heritable defects

Farming animals for meat

Controlling infectious diseases in animals

Use of animals in research



Breeding dogs with genetic defects (Palmer 2012)

A concern because we are worried about the individual dog being harmed i.e. “worse off”

Concern is challenged by another philosophical argument

- “Non-identity problem”: genetic trait is part of individual’s unique identity and having it cannot make that individual worse off



Credit: Colin Seddon

Breeding dogs with genetic defects (Palmer 2012; Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Contractarian: The human attitude that permits breeding without regard to welfare is troubling because it lacks compassion. We should breed healthier dogs because that is more consistent with virtuous behaviour. Also, it saves owners money in veterinary treatment

Utilitarian: We know we can breed healthier dogs, so we should

Rights theory – not clear on companion animals?

Relational: care ethic – our role as caregiver in mutually beneficial relationship obliges us to breed healthier dogs

Respect for nature: breeding animals to improve their nature improves the genetic integrity of the breed and species

Breeding broilers

(Dawkins & Layton 2012)

Production traits are in conflict with welfare traits

Lameness

Cardiac disease

**Large appetite ⇒ very restricted food
for parent stock ⇒ hunger**



Applying ethical theories to breeding broilers

Simple utilitarianism: Loss of farmers' livelihoods outweighs the welfare issues in broiler hens

Contractarianism: lost livelihoods outweighs other costs, unless better breeding gives farmers more peace of mind

Rights: no support for farming

Care ethic: strongly supports better breeding

Respect for nature: supports better breeding

Farming and eating animals

(Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Common ethical concerns

- ❖ Farming / slaughter harms animals
- ❖ The food given to farm animals could feed many people instead
- ❖ Animal products are bad for human health
- ❖ Feeding and keeping animals, and subsequent distribution of their products, cause environmental damage
- ❖ Religious reasons – personal purity eg ahimsa

Utilitarianism

(Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Peter Singer: Preference utilitarianism

- ❖ Animals are sentient but not self-aware so incapable of having the preference to keep on living
- ❖ Therefore, killing animals for food is allowed if they have a good life, are replaced, and die painlessly
- ❖ However, most farming cannot satisfy their preferences so cannot give a good life, and we should not therefore eat animal products
- ❖ However, consumers could buy welfare-friendly products as this exerts pressure in the marketplace for higher welfare standards on farms

“Emerging social ethic” (Rollin 2006)

Prevalence of quality assurance schemes

Rollin’ s “emerging social ethic”

- ✦ Utilitarianism: prevent suffering
- ✦ Rights: live according to nature
- ✦ Relational: Maintain “ancient contract”
of mutual advantage between animals and people

Animal rights

(Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Gary Francione

Animal rights necessitate veganism

Quality assurance schemes for meat etc
still legitimise animal production and slaughter

Consumer needs vs. animal needs

Ethical challenge

Fairness?

(D' Silva & Webster 2010)

Human health needs?

**Effects on local ecosystem?
eg methane gas; destruction
of forest to enable grain production**

Depriving the hungriest people?

**Scientific information helps because
“value free”?**

Farming and eating animals

(Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Summary

- ❖ “Animal welfare strategy” – new social ethic, care ethic, quality assurance schemes
- ❖ Veganism



Introduction to environmental ethics (Desjardins 1997)

Human-centred environmental ethics

- ❖ Only humans have intrinsic worth
- ❖ Other species have worth due to their utility to humans



Introduction to environmental ethics (Desjardins 1997)

Sentience-centred ethics

Life-centred ethics

- ⌘ All *living* things have intrinsic moral worth
- ⌘ Reverence for life

Introduction to environmental ethics (Desjardins 1997)

Environment-centred ethics

- ✦ Not just individuals but 'wholes' count
- ✦ Encompasses respect for biodiversity
- ✦ Must 'preserve integrity, stability and beauty of biotic community'

Eco-centric ethics and animal ethics – differences

(Desjardins 1997)

- 1 Unlike animal ethics, eco-centric ethics shows little concern for captive animals
- 2 Eco-centric ethics is concerned about more than just sentient animals
- 3 Animal ethics is concerned with pain and death, sometimes seen as essential parts of the life process
- 4 Eco-centric ethics is more concerned with systems or structures than individuals

Controlling infectious diseases (Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

(Test and) slaughter

UK 2001: 9 million killed to control foot and mouth disease

Ethical theories

- ✦ Contractarian: costs and benefits to humans
- ✦ Utilitarianism: consider animal suffering too
- ✦ Rights: minimise number culled
- ✦ Relational: minimise number culled

Controlling infectious diseases (Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Wildlife e.g. rats (typhus, rabies, leptospirosis)

- ✦ Poison – anticoagulants – painful
- ✦ Sticky pads – hunger, fear, exhaustion
- ✦ Rats are relatively low in our chain of moral concern (compared to dogs or monkeys)

Ethical theories:

- ✦ Contractarian: costs and benefits to humans
- ✦ Utilitarianism: consider rats' suffering too
- ✦ Rights: prove the need to kill the rats in each case
- ✦ Relational: no problem as no mutual relationship
- ✦ Respect for nature: not clear. Avoid poison.

A sliding scale of moral concern?

- ❖ **Sliding scale is different from the 'equal consideration of equal interests'**
- ❖ **Equal consideration suggests similar interests deserve similar attention whatever the species**

Use of animals in research (Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Our chain of concern and preferences

Contractarian: set animal welfare standards to allay public concern and maximise benefits to people

Utilitarian: animal welfare of major concern

- ✦ 3Rs: Replace, Reduce, Refine
- ✦ Use can only be justified if the benefit to people outweighs the cost paid by the animals

Rights: does experimentation respect the animal's rights and preserve his/her dignity?

- ✦ Right not be killed and not to be used as a means to an end
⇒ no animal testing even if any harm is minor
- ✦ or Right to be protected from certain uses eg extreme pain, but other uses permissible



Credit: Digital Visions

Use of animals in research (Sandøe & Christiansen 2008)

Compromise policy?

- ⌘ Research issue must be of vital importance
- ⌘ No other way to study the issue except by using animals
- ⌘ Animals should not have to suffer more than the experiment requires

Contractarian: satisfactory

Utilitarian: acceptable but falls short of ideal

Rights (abolitionist): unsatisfactory

Rights (moderate): acceptable

But: many research issues are not of vital importance-

- ⌘ Market forces e.g. veterinary NSAID drugs (eg carprofen, meloxicam)
- ⌘ Non-vital human ailments (eg baldness, myopia).
- ⌘ Diseases caused primarily by lifestyle choices eg smoking
- ⌘ Animal data don't predict human data

Summary so far

Breeding of dogs with heritable defects

“Non-identity problem”

Farming animals for meat

Environmental ethics

Controlling infectious diseases in animals

Sliding scale of moral concern

Use of animals in research

3 Rs

Approaches to animal ethics: an ethical matrix

(Mepham 1996; Heleski & Anthony 2012)

THEORY or PRINCIPLE	Animal	Consumer	Producer
Utilitarianism (maximise good, minimise harm)	Welfare	Availability of safe food	Producer income and working conditions
Autonomy	Behavioural freedom	Freedom of choice (food labelling?)	Freedom of choice to adopt or not adopt certain practices
Fairness or Justice	Equal consideration of interests?	Universally affordable food?	Fair trade?

Six-point framework

(Mullan & Main 2008; Heleski & Anthony 2012)

- 1 Identify all possible courses of action
- 2 Establish interests of affected parties
- 3 Identify ethical issues involved
- 4 Establish legal position of the dilemma
- 5 Choose a course of action
- 6 Minimise the impact of the decision

Conclusions

Criticisms

'Just subjective'

'Just preferences'

Ethical theories

The logic and reasoning behind how we should act towards animals, for example to avoid harming them

Feedback:

Please let us know what you think

- ❖ How have you used this module?
- ❖ What did you like about it?
- ❖ What did you not like?
- ❖ Do you have any tips to share?

Please take part in our 10 minute survey here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BKP3D6H>

Your feedback will help other teachers like you

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