

## Ethics and Animal Welfare

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The use of animals in research, testing and teaching is a global enterprise, but the issues facing such use vary regionally as well as in specific countries. The term “animal welfare” is often defined through the lens of cultural differences. Concomitant with the advancement of animal welfare science has been the publication of a number of descriptions of what constitutes good animal welfare. Many of these descriptions have been proposed by individual experts, while others have been generated by organizations influential in the field. The challenge associated with characterizing animal welfare is that personal opinions and experiences may bias individuals’ acceptance of a particular definition. As Fraser (2008) noted, “...‘welfare’ and roughly similar terms such as ‘well-being’ and ‘quality of life,’ are rather nebulous concepts....It is hard enough to agree on how to define quality of life for human beings, let alone for laboratory mice.”

Societal concern for the welfare of animals is certainly shaped by economics, religious values and collective experience. For example, the religious and cultural context of the country where animal research is performed may influence animal treatment. Traditions of Confucianism, Taoism, Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism variably speak to a relationship between human beings and non-human animals. Some reflect the philosophy that humans are superior to other animals and view animals as a source of food, labor, and utility. In such a perspective, a person treats an animal with kindness “not because of their inherent value but as a reflection of one’s own refinement as a human being” (Chapple 2000). As Chapple discusses, other schools of thought, particularly those that emphasize reincarnation, place value on animals as a component of the human-animal continuity. However, in addition to religious influences, societal mores—customs, teachings, etc.—can affect commonly held opinions regarding acceptable care and use of animals. According to the Islam faith, Mohammed said, “It behooves you to treat the animals gently” (Hadith Muslim, 4:2593). Christian based religions generally refer to human stewardship of animals, and the Torah emphasizes compassion for animals, illustrated by the prohibition to cause pain to animals in the Talmud (*tzaar ba’alei chaim*). Thus, as the status of animals varies with religious views, so too does the level of welfare afforded them.

The relationship between ethics and animal welfare has clearly evolved over time. Broom (1986) noted, “The assessment of [animal] welfare should be quite separate from any ethical judgment but, once an assessment is completed, it should provide information which can be used to take decisions about the ethics of a situation. Subsequently, Tannebaum (1991) argued that animal welfare and ethics are inextricably linked. A more contemporary position taken by ethicists is reflected by Rollin (2011) as he argues against the notion that science is “value free.” Rather, he opines that scientists operate “within the boundaries of consensus social ethics.” As Mellor (2012) states, discussions of animal welfare now include scientists and ethicists, which results in increases in scientific understanding of welfare in a context of what is ethically acceptable. Further, he proposes that the early focus on animal welfare enhancement by eliminating/minimizing negative animal states has been replaced with a more proactive approach to requiring the presence of positive affective states.

Concern about animal welfare is increasingly occupying the public’s attention as well as law-makers’ agendas, and tremendous strides have been made across the globe to improve animal welfare. The range of animal welfare issues is very broad, but research animal welfare is especially important due to the diversity of species of concern, the potential impact on both animal and public health and well-being should the research enterprise be compromised by inappropriate animal use practices, the wide range of legal protections for research animals around the world, trade issues, and the need for a better scientific understanding of methods to improve the welfare of animals used in research. In addition, in some types of research (e.g., infectious disease research), the welfare of the study

animals is knowingly compromised so that a greater good (e.g., a suitable vaccination or treatment modality) results. The harm-benefit analysis for these types of studies carefully balances individual animal welfare with expected benefits to humans and other animals. Clearly, there remains room for improvement as the field of animal welfare science matures and yields meaningful information about how best to care for all species of animals. In many ways, the enhancements to research animal welfare serve as a model for other areas of animal welfare. The attention to the Three Rs, the availability of state-of-the-art equipment, detailed monitoring of environmental conditions, highly qualified veterinarians providing care, excellent nutrition and husbandry, as well as many other factors contribute to a state of research animal welfare that is unparalleled. The global diversity of perspectives regarding research animal welfare elicits a healthy dialogue among stakeholders that will advance harmonization efforts and ultimately improve the care of and refine procedures used with these unique animals.

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