

Animals, Ethics and Trade

THE CHALLENGE OF ANIMAL SENTIENCE

Edited by Jacky Turner and Joyce D'Silva

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- The use of animals for meat, for hide, for their labour and in laboratories has been justified with the assumption that unlike humans, animals aren't fully sentient beings.
- This book challenges that assumption with groundbreaking new research that brings into question everything we've ever thought about the ways animals experience the world.
- Over twenty contributions from internationally-renowned experts on animal behaviour and agriculture include big names such as Jane Goodall, Tim Lang and Vandana Shiva.



The complexities of animal behaviour revealed in the last few decades are astonishing, but what are the implications? In this book, internationally respected contributors are brought together for the first time to debate and attempt to answer these questions. The first sections discuss scientific and ethical perspectives on the consciousness, emotions and mental abilities of animals. Later sections address how human activities such as science, law, farming, food production, trade, development and education respect or ignore animals' sentience and welfare, and review the options for changes in our policies, our practices and our thinking.

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Introduction

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Philosophers and scientists have long argued as to whether animals are sentient beings. Can animals really feel pain – like us? Can they suffer – like us? Can they experience emotions similar to our own? Or are they just resources whose lives have meaning only in so far as they are useful to our own species? Is their apparent intelligence really only a simple response to an external stimulus?

Over the last 30 years, scientific opinion has moved sharply to agree that animals are indeed sentient beings. In truth, the animal scientists of today have begun to echo what Charles Darwin declared back in 1871: ‘We have seen that the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention and curiosity, imitation, reason etc, of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.’

If we agree that animals are sentient, then what does that mean for our own behaviour? This book brings together cutting edge international thinkers from the fields of philosophy, science, law and global policy who wrestle with this question. All agree that animal suffering should be minimized, but they disagree as to how far we should curtail our own human activities to enable animals to enjoy lives of well-being. If animals are sentient, then is it ethically permissible to cage them in zoos, laboratories and factory farms; to hunt them; to wear their fur; to trade them globally – even to eat them?

These are challenging questions and there is no doubt that this issue will be one of the key questions to be addressed by the global intellectual community and by international policy-makers and national governments during the 21st century.

The debate about animal sentience is not just a western phenomenon. As Peter Li points out in his chapter, the debate is already alive in China, where some philosophers are calling for a discussion on animal rights, whilst other protagonists are still claiming that, as animals can't feel pain and can't suffer, it does not *matter* what we do to them.

In the opposite corner to the traditionalists we find philosophers like Tom Regan, arguing cogently that, as an animal's life is as important to itself as my life is to me, then we are both ‘subjects-of-a-life’ and have an equal right to be treated with respect – or, as Steve Wise puts it, we may both have rights to bodily liberty and bodily integrity, which should be recognized in law.

Also in the opposite corner to the traditionalists – but nearer to the middle – we have the practical strategists like John Webster, someone who has played a key role in developing concepts of animal welfare, who proposes that we have a social contract with animals – yes, they work and die for us, but in return we recognize their capacity to suffer and do our best to keep them ‘fit and happy’ throughout their lives.

Pivotal to the debate are the global institutions and businesses. One might ask, why include them in this book? Part of their history and even their *raison d'être* is to treat animals purely as resources. The truth is that their influence on the lives of animals is so great that to omit them would be to tell a thinner tale.

Investment by global agencies such as the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation can deeply affect not just the livelihoods of farmers and the economies of nations, but the lives of the millions of animals farmed as a result of such investments, and possibly the wildlife living near the funded projects, who may be affected by forest clearance or polluting effluent.

The power of an organization like McDonald's to influence outcomes for animals is enormous. Their decision to use only free range eggs in the UK and some other European countries has directly influenced the supply chain. More hens have escaped life in a battery cage as a result. Their work in the US to improve the welfare of animals at slaughter has led to ‘great improvements’ according to Dr Temple Grandin (2006), one of the leading world experts in the field. Of course it's not enough to satisfy campaigners – why aren't *all* McDonald's hens free range, for example? Even Keith Kenny, speaking for McDonald's, admits ‘there is still a lot more to be done’.

But agri-business and the food industry are realizing that the issue of animal welfare is here to stay and is increasing in intensity and global scope. In this book you can read of the apparently genuine efforts by David Bayvel (World Animal Health Organization), Oliver Ryan (International Finance Corporation) and Keith Kenny (McDonald's) to reconcile agri-business and global trade with the call for high animal welfare standards.

But are their efforts doomed to failure? Is the very nature of global agri-business and trade fundamentally flawed? Vandana Shiva and Kate Rawles would have us believe so, and make powerful arguments about the detrimental impact of intensive farming on the lives of the peasant farmers in developing countries and on the environment, including both wild and farmed animals. Patrick Holden makes a strong case for choosing the organic route, with its holistic emphasis on soil health and animal welfare. Yet even he admits the difficult choices that face this movement if it is to become a widely adopted farming method.

Is it too late to give a new direction to the sustainability agenda – a direction that includes animal welfare? The ‘nutrition transition’ – the change from simple grain, pulse and vegetable diets to high fat and sugar, meat, dairy and junk food diets – is sweeping the fast-developing countries, just as it swept through the western world during the 20th century. Tim Lang eloquently elucidates its

dangers to our health in terms of the growth in non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease and diabetes. Rawles points to the failure of the nutrition transition to fit into the global sustainability paradigm. She claims that true sustainability means considering human interdependence with all life.

All these viewpoints lead us back to our perception of who or what animals are. James Kirkwood takes us on a fascinating evolutionary journey, in which we discover our common ancestors in unlikely parts of the animal kingdom. Somewhere on that journey, sentience developed – just where may still be open to question.

Of course it's not just the contributors to this book – like Kirkwood, Andrew Linzey and Ben Mepham – who accept this evolutionary continuity. As Webster points out, it was Charles Darwin himself who recognized sentience as an essential feature of evolutionary fitness and believed it to be widespread in the animal world.

So how do we define sentience? Several of our authors grapple with this key question – and it is, of course, the crucial question, because if animals don't feel pain or fear or distress, if they cannot suffer, then the animal welfarists can pack their bags and we can proceed down the route so notoriously carved out by Descartes – the animals are simply machines reacting to stimuli; moral philosophers can be silent – there is nothing to worry about.

Although few still openly support this view, we – at least in the west – are cultural inheritors of it. To be fair to Descartes, his views had historical roots and have found support from sources as diverse but influential as leading proponents of Catholicism and leftist social radicals – both groups, for very different reasons, grounded in anthropocentrism. In practice, the anthropocentric worldview means always putting people's needs or wants first.

However, concern for animals and recognition of their capacity for suffering also has a long history, and one that grows more eloquent and respected day by day. Since Donald Griffin's work over 30 years ago, there has been a revolution in how scientists perceive animals. Philosophy too has been a major influence in the debate. Peter Singer, the author of the ground-breaking book *Animal Liberation*, and Tom Regan (whom you can read here) may base their arguments in different philosophical schools of thought, but they have both inspired a radical rethink of who animals are and what our relationship to them should be.

The consensus seems to be that sentient creatures are those who have feelings – both physical and emotional – and whose feelings matter to them. As world famous primatologist Jane Goodall points out, so much of what animals do is obviously more than an automatic response to stimuli. Although her field has been the detailed study of chimpanzees in their natural environment, she is quick to extend her conclusion that chimpanzees have 'personalities, minds and feelings' to other species too.

But it's useful to pause at chimpanzees. Their behaviour has been so well documented that the comparisons with human behaviour are unavoidable. Already,

serious scientists are referring to chimp ‘culture’ in view of the different kinds of tool use found in geographically distinct groups of chimpanzees. With our DNA differing by only 1 per cent, it’s not surprising that Jane Goodall regards them as ‘ambassadors’ for the animal kingdom.

Chimps, elephants, whales, pigs – the capacity for intelligence is undoubtedly widespread. Yet the contributors to this book seem to agree that it is the capacity for emotions that is the most important attribute of sentient beings. After all, it is how *we* feel that makes (or breaks) our day. If animals can express feelings of joy or grief, contentment, excitement, fear or anguish, then presumably it is how *they* feel that makes (or breaks) their day too.

Problems manifest when our own human species interacts with these animals. Do they *feel* better for our interference – or worse? A pet dog may be cosy and well-fed, even exercised regularly, but if he is alone all day, how does he – as a creature descended from a group-living species – actually feel?

As for the animals reared on our intensive factory farms – it is surely not beyond our own inherent empathy to realize that a hen caged for her productive life with four or five others has little potential for fulfilment or a state of contentment, that a pregnant sow confined on concrete between bars throughout her 16-week pregnancy is going to feel frustrated, agitated and probably depressed, that a dairy cow and calf separated soon after birth, as is the norm, are going to feel longing, maybe anguish, at their parting. Ros Clubb’s disturbing account of the plight of animals bred for their fur demonstrates the extent to which the mindset of ‘profit at any price’ has spread.

Of course, Peter Sandøe, Stine Christiansen and Björn Forkman are right to point out the anomalies in how we measure an animal’s welfare. Is a free range hen, who can move about in a natural environment, stretch her wings or even fly, better off than her caged sisters – even though she could be more susceptible to predators or to soil-borne parasites? Both Sandøe and Marc Bekoff favour a mixture of common sense informed by science as the guide to our treatment of animals. Science on its own is rarely sufficient to give us all the answers – values and even intuition have vital roles to play in guiding us. Jane Goodall challenges us to acknowledge how *we* really feel about animals when we make decisions about their lives.

Many of the authors are quite clear that, when in doubt about what an animal feels – or whether or how it feels – we should give the animal the benefit of the doubt. We should apply the precautionary principle.

Both theologian Andrew Linzey and attorney Steve Wise compare the moral case of children to that of animals. As Linzey points out, both are vulnerable; in our control; innocent; and cannot represent themselves, give consent or articulate their needs. He sees both groups as subjects of a special trust. Many of the authors articulate eloquently the case for recognizing the sentience of animals and enshrining that recognition in law.

CIWF ran a campaign in the 1990s to have animals recognized as sentient beings in the European Treaty – and were successful. A Protocol attached to the

Treaty in 1997 does indeed recognize animals as sentient beings. CIWF Trust is working to achieve a similar recognition by other governments and international institutions.

Meanwhile, the agri-businesses and global bodies such as the International Finance Corporation, World Bank and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are starting the process of acknowledging that there is a case to be made for good animal welfare. But it is obvious that combining good welfare with an outlook that views animals primarily as production units is a difficult task. No wonder Bayvel and Kenny talk of ‘continuous improvement’ rather than radical change.

The problem is that the global situation of animal farming is so complex and the cultural attitudes to animals so varied that it will not be easy to achieve a consensus for reform. As David Wilkins points out, even the substantial reforms achieved in the European Union over the last 20 years are under threat from world trade rules. And when Peter Li, Song Wei and Paul Littlefair describe the situation in China – one of the world’s largest livestock producers – you can see that ensuring good welfare may be a tough battle in such a large and diverse country. But progress is undoubtedly taking place. In China, more and more people are expressing concern for welfare. In India, also rapidly industrializing, there is a long cultural tradition that recognizes animal sentience, in principle at least. Mahfouz Azzam makes it clear that – although concern for animal welfare is often not apparent at ‘street level’ in Islamic countries – Islamic teaching is rich in exhortations to care for other creatures. It would be totally inappropriate to consider such concern a prerogative of ‘western’ culture.

For those of us who are deeply concerned that all animals should have the opportunity to have lives worth living and to be spared suffering as far as possible, the future will certainly be a challenge. As several authors point out, we haven’t yet solved human problems such as hunger and poverty; but there are strong links between these problems and the welfare of both wild and farm animals.

I personally believe that recognition of animal sentience and a radical change in how we treat animals in our society will be beneficial for us all.

Compassion may be a quality which is not unique to *Homo sapiens*, but it is certainly one we can all recognize in ourselves and in each other. Many of the authors in this book demonstrate that compassion is a ‘broad-band’ quality – it can encompass both our own human society in all its diversity, and also our sentient kin in the animal world.

If this book has an overarching message, it is surely this: if we are truly to acknowledge animal sentience (and to give the benefit of the doubt where we’re not certain), then we need to actively work towards the day when all sentient beings can realize their potential in a world that supports both their individual well-being and the common good, and we need to have the vision and courage to enact and enforce strong laws supporting these ideals.

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