

Sickness and Abnormal Behaviors as Indicators of Animal Suffering

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Abstract

The welfare status of an animal represents the integrated outcome of all sensory and other neural inputs from within its body and from the environment. These inputs are processed and interpreted by the animal's brain according to its species-specific and individual nature and experiences, and then are perceived consciously. That being said, for an animal to be able to perceive states that we believe would reflect its welfare, the animal must be alive and conscious, and it must also be sentient. Previous studies, which I cite and describe further later in this paper, show that the brains of animals, especially mammals, have enough complexity to process mental states. The mental abilities of an animal arise as a result of sensory and other neural inputs linked to nutritional, environmental, health and behavioral components of physical or functional abilities. They are also linked to cognitive-neural inputs and activity related to external challenge. All of these components are integrated and expressed mentally as varying degrees of thirst, hunger, weakness, debility, breathlessness, nausea, sickness, pain, distress, fear, anxiety, helplessness, boredom and so on.

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Keywords

Bioethics, animal welfare, sentient, feelings, behavior, allostasis, stress, depression, cytokines, sickness behavior.

Full Text:

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