

Five freedom folly?

This document has been written to provoke thought, not to suggest that concerns over animal welfare can be dismissed out of hand. Rather, it questions whether current scientific fashion and ethical balance have tipped too far towards the animal rightist viewpoint. The Five Freedoms have been formulated as guides to the way we should husband farmed stock. What if we tried to apply them to wild animals and ourselves?

Freedom from hunger and thirst:

Domestic (farmed) animals. It is generally not a sensible economic option for farmers to allow hunger and thirst because it reduces profits. There are exceptions (e.g. rationing pigs and broiler breeding chickens to prevent obesity). The hunger induced in these cases is not of sufficient magnitude to limit productivity or fitness. In fact, in both cases, fitness in the reproductive sense, is enhanced. Further, longevity of domesticated mice is increased by lowering feed intake to 70% of *ad-libitum* rate.

Conclusion: Any suffering likely to be caused will not be an integral part of the husbandry system but might still occur through neglect, farmer poverty or, in extensively kept stock, bad weather.

Wild animals. There are countless examples of animals and birds dying from starvation or thirst.

Conclusion: Domesticated animals are lucky.

Humans: Consider Africa and, to a lesser extent, other parts of the world.

Conclusion: Domesticated animals in developed countries are luckier than humans in many under-developed ones. Ethically, where should one's priority concerns lie?

Freedom from discomfort:

Domesticated stock. Discomfort is stressful and will result in a deterioration of food conversion and reproductive efficiencies, neither in farmers' economic interests.

However, genetic selection, for example in dairy cows for increased milk production, may predispose to lameness, exacerbated by such things as unsuitable cubicle design. Much more obvious concern arises in the area of pets. Consider show breeding of dogs which exaggerates points of conformation to the extent that discomfort becomes inevitable. Consider also the reluctance of many pet owners to euthanase elderly pets with chronic joint degeneration.

Conclusion: Problem most severe in case of companion animals.

Wild animals: Within their optimum ranges, seasonal variations often impose periods of discomfort. Wild species expand to the limits of their ranges where discomfort will be more frequent and severe.

Conclusion: Domesticated animals are generally lucky but pets can be subject to discomfort, particularly if bred from extreme breeds or kept by sentimental owners.

Humans: In the under-developed world, there are countless examples of discomfort.

In the developed, consider old age and chronic degenerative change. On a less serious note, consider daily commuter travel, bearing in mind the fuss made by animal welfarists over an animal's one-way trip to an abattoir.

Conclusion: Farmed animals and most pets in developed areas of the world are lucky.

Freedom from pain, injury and disease.

Domesticated stock: Farm animals are unprofitable if in chronic pain or if injured and diseased. Further, they are mainly killed well before they have reached old age and

euthanasia is the option of choice for those that have serious problems before their normal slaughter age. In general, therefore, they usually fare well in this context. Old pets would, were they to possess sufficient consciousness, suffer in an equivalent manner to old people.

Conclusion: Farm animals are lucky.

Wild animals: If they consciously experience as humans experience, there will be very serious suffering indeed.

Conclusion: Back of the queue again!

Humans: Most humans in old age and many humans at other times in under-developed areas lack these freedoms.

Conclusion: Farm animals luckier than humans.

Freedom from fear and distress

Domesticated stock: Penning animals in the presence of those that bully and from which they cannot escape may lead to behaviours suggestive of chronic fear or severe anxiety. It is not in a stockman's interests to allow this because severely stressed (distressed) animals produce inefficiently. Domestication has reduced intra-species aggression.

Conclusion: As in the case of the previous freedoms, farmed animals are lucky because their welfare correlates with profitability.

Wild animals: Fear of conspecifics in hierarchical or territorial disputes, fear of predators to name but two types illustrate the absence of these freedoms.

Conclusion: What a miserable life they must lead if one believes the welfarists!

Humans: Consider wars. Consider fear of failure, loss of self respect, knowledge of death. Contemplate its approach, now frequently drawn out thanks to modern medicine.

Conclusion: Perhaps life isn't so bad for a farm animal after all!

Freedom to express normal behaviour

Domesticated stock: The first serious glitch, particularly in intensively kept farmed stock. If animals experience as humans experience, they may even suffer more than those working in London and commuting to the suburbs. Evolved behaviours will be thwarted.

Conclusion: Possibly the first of the freedoms in which this category comes out worst.

Wild animals: There are no constraints to this freedom other than in anthropogenic environments. Freedom to run from predators and freedom to disperse from natal territories, albeit with low chances of survival. Freedom to forage naturally, even though food may be in short supply. Freedom to compete for the privilege to breed with often minimal chances of success.

Conclusion: Top score here for the wild animals. Lucky them, or are they?

Humans: Freedom to carry out evolved behaviours? Man evolved as a hunter-gatherer but to what extent is current behaviour beholden to our evolutionary past? Do we, uniquely in the animal kingdom, have free will or don't we? It is difficult to think of any other species which voluntarily over-rides its evolutionary drive to perpetuate genes.

Conclusion: Perhaps animals don't have minds in the way we have minds. Perhaps they don't suffer as we would in equivalent circumstances. Perhaps it only our empathic imaginings that cause us to raise concern over animal suffering to the level, or even above the level, that we accord to human suffering? Perhaps, therefore, it is

better to believe that majority of neurobiologists and experimental psychologists who have studied this matter and propose that animals have a reduced capacity for suffering, certainly of the mental type and, possibly, also of the physical. It would be infinitely depressing to contemplate the lives of wild animals and the unmitigated suffering that they must almost constantly experience were the views of most animal welfarists to be taken seriously. To have evolved an exquisite capability to suffer in the absence of a mind to do anything about it would seem to be an implausible state of events. Much more likely is that most of what we mean by mental suffering is the corollary of the evolution of a mind that is uniquely human.

D. R. Wise