

Book Reviews

Animal Welfare: Limping Towards Eden

J Webster (2005). Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK. 283 pp Paperback (ISBN 1 4051 1877 6). Price £24.99.

This book follows John Webster's well received book *Animal Welfare: A Cool Eye Towards Eden* published in 1994. In his preface, Webster makes it clear that the new book is not intended as a second edition of *Cool Eye*. Rather, it is more a progress report on the practical developments in the field of animal welfare that have occurred, especially in the last decade.

The eleven chapters fall roughly into three sections: four general chapters, then six chapters on specific areas of animal use, and finally a conclusion. Of the general chapters, the first explores 'Facts and Values' (p 1), showing how both science and values play roles in our conception of animal welfare. The second, 'Challenge and Response' (p 24), provides a brief introduction to animal welfare science, with sections on physiological and behavioural responses to challenge. The third, on 'Sentience, Sense and Suffering' (p 46), briefly discusses perception, cognition, motivation and emotion in animals, with short sections on such topics as pain, fear and anxiety, and frustration and boredom. The fourth chapter, 'Husbandry and Welfare on the Farm: Assessment and Assurance' (p 77), introduces a central theme of the book: protocols for welfare assessment and control. This chapter makes special reference to British farm animal welfare codes, the Freedom Food program in the United Kingdom, and the Bristol protocol for animal-based welfare assessment (p 86).

The bulk of the book (Chapters 5–10) covers specific areas of animal use, with three chapters on food animals and one chapter on animal use in each of science, sport, and companionship. Here Webster provides knowledgeable accounts of the history and current use of animals, and he often uses the 'Five Freedoms test' (p 158) to identify key welfare problems under the headings: hunger and thirst; physical and thermal discomfort; pain, injury and disease; fear and distress; and the prevention of natural behaviour. These chapters reflect a strong, practical understanding of animal management based on the author's lifetime of experience as a veterinarian, educator and reformer. He does not shy away from speaking his mind. He takes an emphatic stance against such technology as stalls for pregnant sows and conventional systems for producing white veal, but he steers well clear of "the simplistic mantra 'intensive bad, extensive good'" (pp 98–99).

The concluding chapter discusses various ways forward, including the options of legislation versus voluntary welfare assurance programs, the need for education, and even briefly outlines a curriculum for teaching animal welfare to veterinary students.

The book contains several recurring themes. One is the 'Five Freedoms' as practical rules of thumb for assessing animal welfare. Another is the need for (and difficulty of creating) programs that assess and improve animal welfare in practical ways. A third is the importance of working toward the achievable in "a world of messy realities and conflicting objectives" (p 271). Another recurring theme, which has had perhaps too little attention in the past, is the influence of genetics on animal welfare; the book makes repeated references to the welfare problems of Belgian Blue cattle plus more widespread problems such as broiler chickens bred for rapid growth at the expense of health.

Of the many books available on animal welfare, how could we characterise this one?

First, it is a practical book whose primary aim is "to get things done" (p 2). It puts special emphasis on what has been achieved, and what can be achieved, through legislation, animal welfare assurance programs and education. For those wanting to explore options for improving animal welfare in practical ways, this is important reading. By the same token the book does not go deeply into the underlying research on animal welfare or ethical debates about the use of animals.

Second, it is a very British book. It makes many references to legislation, regulations and codes, the great majority of which are specific to the United Kingdom. When the text refers to "existing law" (p 176) or "our current Prime Minister" (p 204) readers from other countries will need to recognise that a British context is implied. Even the treatment of general topics like hunting has a decidedly British flavour with emphasis on hare coursing and the use of dogs for hunting deer and foxes.

Third, it is a reasonably optimistic book. Webster notes that "the last ten years have witnessed an explosion of active concern in matters of animal welfare" (p x [sic]), combined with new legislation, codes of practice, voluntary programs and other measures. As the title implies, the author espouses the "cautious optimism" of one who sees progress being made although the road is "long and hard" (p 2).

Finally, it is a very likeable book. From the ironic title, the touching dedication ("Let us limp together..."), to the last sub-heading ("Finally, but not in conclusion..."), the reader hears the voice of John Webster, sometimes teaching, sometimes philosophising, occasionally pontificating, always in an affable, conversational style. This is a book with personality.

As with so many books, it is a little hard to identify the exact target audience. The general chapters are too brief for the book to be a student textbook on animal welfare science, and the scarcity of references to the primary literature will limit its value for graduate students or scientists who want to delve more deeply into the underlying research. The book would be useful to anyone interested in regulatory or corporate animal welfare programs, although the strong

emphasis on the United Kingdom may occasionally tax the patience of non-British readers. The multitude of practical wisdom and insights would make this a valuable book for animal welfare campaigners and concerned citizens, but they would need to tolerate occasional passages that assume an understanding of phenotypic correlations, megajoules of heat production and other technical matters. Perhaps the exact target audience is rather like the author himself: scientifically trained British people involved in the practical improvement of animal welfare. Nonetheless, almost anyone involved in animal welfare policy and reform would profit from reading it.

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Physiology and Behaviour of Animal Suffering

NG Gregory (2004). Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK. 280 pp Paperback (ISBN 0 632 06468 4). Price £39.99.

Animal suffering is, self-evidently, a cause of concern to compassionate people and the notion of suffering becomes especially abhorrent when the suffering is seen to arise as a consequence of human acts and omissions regarding the animals 'in our care'. We have a legal obligation not to cause 'unnecessary suffering', although a rather fuzzy understanding of what should, or should not, be categorised as necessary. We have a larger moral responsibility to minimise animal suffering in any circumstances, irrespective of our own perceived need to use an animal, for example, for food or for a scientific procedure. Those whose business it is to care for animals, whether as farmers, animal technicians or veterinary surgeons, have a professional responsibility to acquire the competence necessary to recognise the many and various things that may cause an animal to suffer and the physiological and behavioural signs that indicate that an animal is in distress.

Neville Gregory's new book *Physiology and Behaviour of Animal Suffering* directly addresses this need for professional competence in identifying the causes and signs of suffering in animals. It opens with a simple definition of suffering as "an unpleasant state of mind that disrupts the quality of life", then poses (but does not attempt to answer) the much more difficult question, namely "What are the criteria that determine whether a particular species has the capacity to suffer?" He makes the statement that "cognition is presumably a prerequisite for suffering", an assumption that owes more to Descartes than Bentham, then speculates at what stage in evolution did animals acquire the ability to learn from experience, concluding that animals as primitive as the earthworm can learn, if only subconsciously.

Chapters 2–4 deal with the nature of physiological stress and distressing emotional states, such as fear, anxiety, deprivation and depression. Here, and throughout the book, the description of each category of stressful situations or responses includes a comprehensive list of almost all

possible things that may be included within that category. For example, the section on 'Restraint Stress' (pp 19–21) lists 16 methods ranging from the obvious (eg yoking) to the exotic (eg birdlime traps and glue boards). The section 'Ways in which Animals Express Pain' (pp 99–102) begins with a list of 13 bullet points describing over 40 possible behavioural and physiological signs that may be associated with the sensation of, and emotional response to, pain. These lists are useful both as an aid to diagnosis for the veterinarian (etc) seeking evidence of suffering and for the inspector on the look-out for possible causes of suffering, either in the context of a possible prosecution, or in the course of a routine welfare inspection of a farm, laboratory or other commercial establishment.

The majority of the book (about 80%) deals with specific, potential causes of stress and suffering: discomfort, exercise, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, trauma and pain, sickness and disease and, finally, dying. This is a big list, and inevitably the treatment of physiological changes associated with these conditions tends to be rather slight. In the chapter 'Sickness and Disease', for example, inflammation, cytokines, cancer, stress and immune function are covered in four pages. The chapter on pain is good. The novel element and strength of Gregory's approach to these subjects is his focus on the consequences of actions that we deem 'necessary', for example, mutilations such as castration and tail docking, the slaughter of farm animals, the shooting of wild animals. His comprehensive coverage of the ways in which our actions may cause pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm provides an authoritative source from which to form judgements as to the acceptability or otherwise of certain practices and address the general principle of minimising suffering.

So far, so good. The author's definition of suffering simply as "an unpleasant state of mind" is sufficient within the context of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act (1986) and his subsequent comprehensive lists identify those things *likely* to cause 'pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm'. What it does not address, however, is the nature of suffering itself; ie how a particular individual member of a sentient species may feel when faced by one or more of the insults that Gregory lists, nor what its motivation may be to action designed to deal with the insult. There is no mention of Marian Dawkins' pioneering approach to the investigation of animal suffering and animals' motivation to avoid disruption of the quality of their life. I am sure this omission is deliberate but it should not go unchallenged because it leaves too many loose ends.

The fundamental problem with the definition "an unpleasant state of mind" is that it leaves the word 'mind' undefined and so ignores the extent to which the capacity of a sentient animal to suffer is determined by its innate emotional and cognitive capacities and the way in which they may be modified by experience. In Chapter 2, for example, fear and anxiety are described separately as sources of suffering. There is no discussion of the extent to which fear, a natural acute response to an acute threat, may progress either to