Canine welfare: implications for behaviour & management

MIA COBB BSc(Hons)

Working Dog Alliance
AUSTRALIA

A brief background

- Bachelor of Science: Zoology (Animal Behaviour), Psychology, Ecology
- Honours year: independent research project & thesis (Ethology)

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- Guide Dogs Victoria: Training Kennels & Vet Clinic Manager
  - Australian Animal Welfare Strategy
  - PhD exploring:
    human attitudes and perceptions, management practices, welfare, stress and performance in kennelled working dogs

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Canine welfare: overview

What is animal welfare?

How do we perceive the welfare of dogs?

Why does it matter?

How do we measure welfare in dogs?

What does welfare look like?

How can we apply our understanding of welfare to dogs?

Question and answer session

What is animal welfare?

What is animal welfare?

Biological fitness:

- Healthy enough to mature and reproduce
- Genes make it through to the next generation = population welfare win

What is animal welfare?

Reproductive success/Productivity: is it a good fit definition for animal welfare for domesticated animals?

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Reproductive success/Productivity: is it a good fit definition for animal welfare for domesticated animals?

Consider intensive systems yielding high production:

What is animal welfare?

Biological fitness and productivity as animal welfare for dogs:
lots of 'owned' dogs have resources & may reproduce, but do they experience good welfare?

What is animal welfare?

Prohibiting cruelty, reducing harm, pain and suffering results in improved animal welfare

The five freedoms

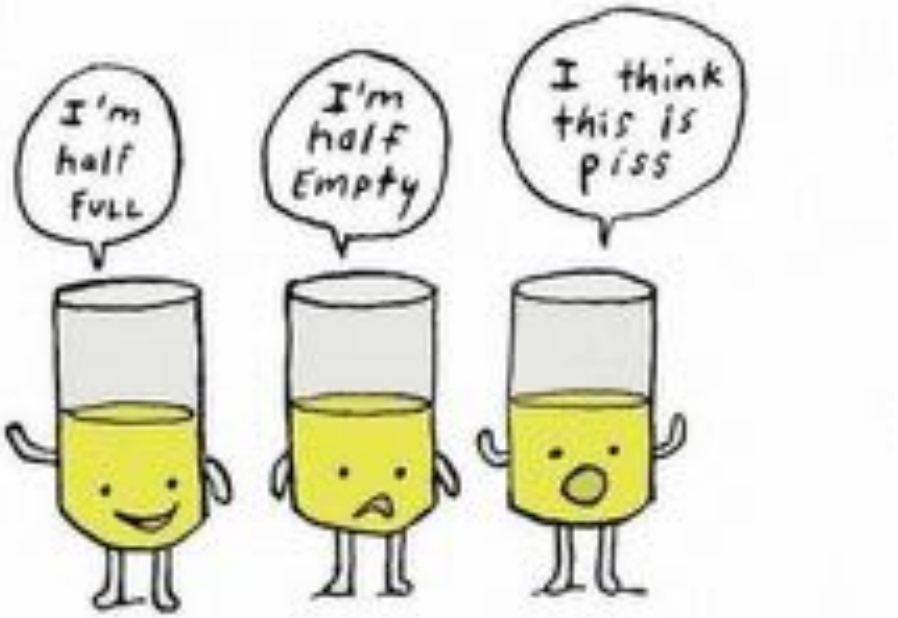
Good animal welfare can be achieved by providing animals with:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour
5. Freedom from fear and distress

What is animal welfare?

Not just acknowledging negative, but promoting positive

- Growing body of research demonstrating affective states in animals
- Animals have feelings, and we are learning how to assess them



What is animal welfare?

Refers to "its state as regards an animal's attempts to cope with its environment. This state includes how much it is having to do to cope, the extent to which it is succeeding in or failing to cope, and its associated feelings.

Welfare will vary over a continuum from very good to very poor and studies of welfare will be most effective if a wide range of measures is used " – Donald Broom

What is animal welfare?

"Animal welfare is to do with the feelings experienced by animals: the absence of strong negative feelings, usually called suffering, and the presence of positive feelings, usually called pleasure. In any assessment of welfare, it is these feelings that should be assessed.“ – Ian Duncan

Good animal welfare can be realised by asking *“Is the animal healthy (does it have what it needs)? And does it have what it wants?”* – Marian Dawkins

What contributes to how we perceive animal welfare?

What contributes to how we perceive animal welfare?

- Community standards and expectations (social licence)
- Personal experience (e.g. our education, pets, work)
- Attitudes of those around us (our family, friends, colleagues)
- Professional opinions shared with us (e.g. veterinarians, dog trainers)

What contributes to how we perceive animal welfare?

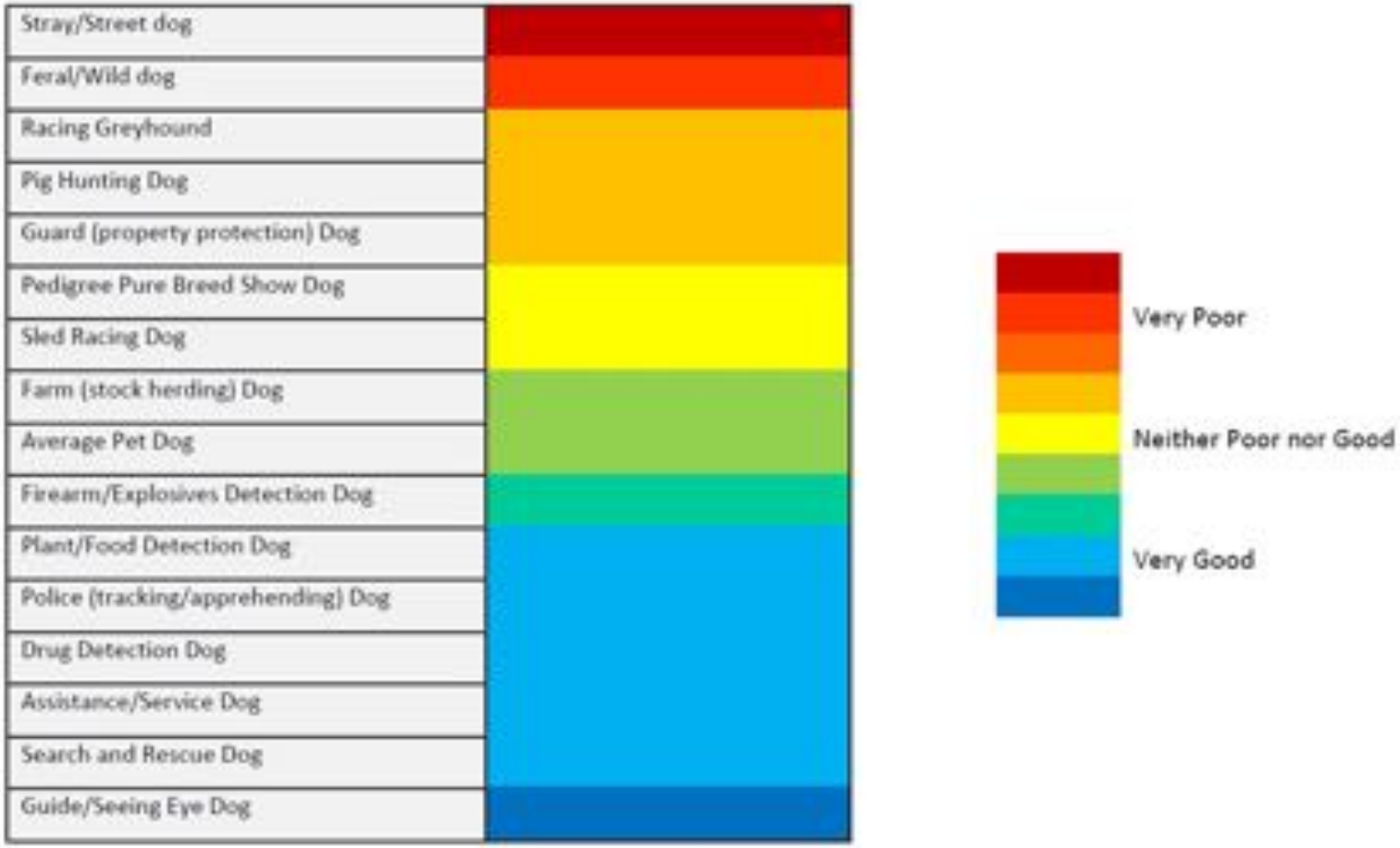
What contributes to how we perceive canine welfare?

How would you rate the welfare of different kinds of domestic dogs?

e.g. Your dog? Guide dog? Stray street dog? Racing greyhound? Show dog?

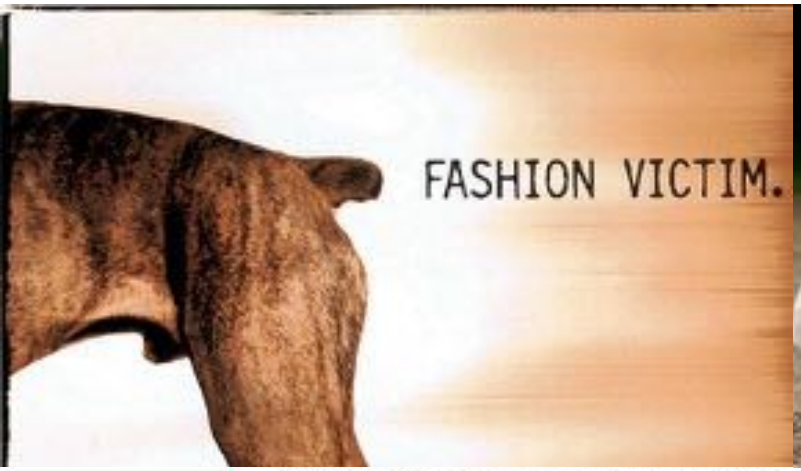
1: Very poor 2: Poor 3: Neither poor nor good 4: Good 5: Very Good

How do we perceive the welfare of dogs?



What happens when new information arrives?

Research that advances animal welfare can be hard to accept, for some.



Tail docking in dogs: a review of the issues

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Different groups in our community hold strong views about tail docking in domestic dogs. These range from veterinary associations and welfare organisations, which typically want the practice banned, to purebred dog associations, which vigorously oppose the introduction of antidocking legislation. An evaluation of the tail docking issue, which is informed and nonemotive, requires the integration of moral views with biological and behavioural facts. In recent years, much data have been accumulated concerning the welfare implications of tail docking. Unfortunately, however, there has been limited transfer of this knowledge to people interested in the issue. In this review some of the main arguments for and against canine tail docking are presented and evaluated.

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Why Do Even Committed Dog Owners Fail to Comply with Some Responsible Ownership Practices?

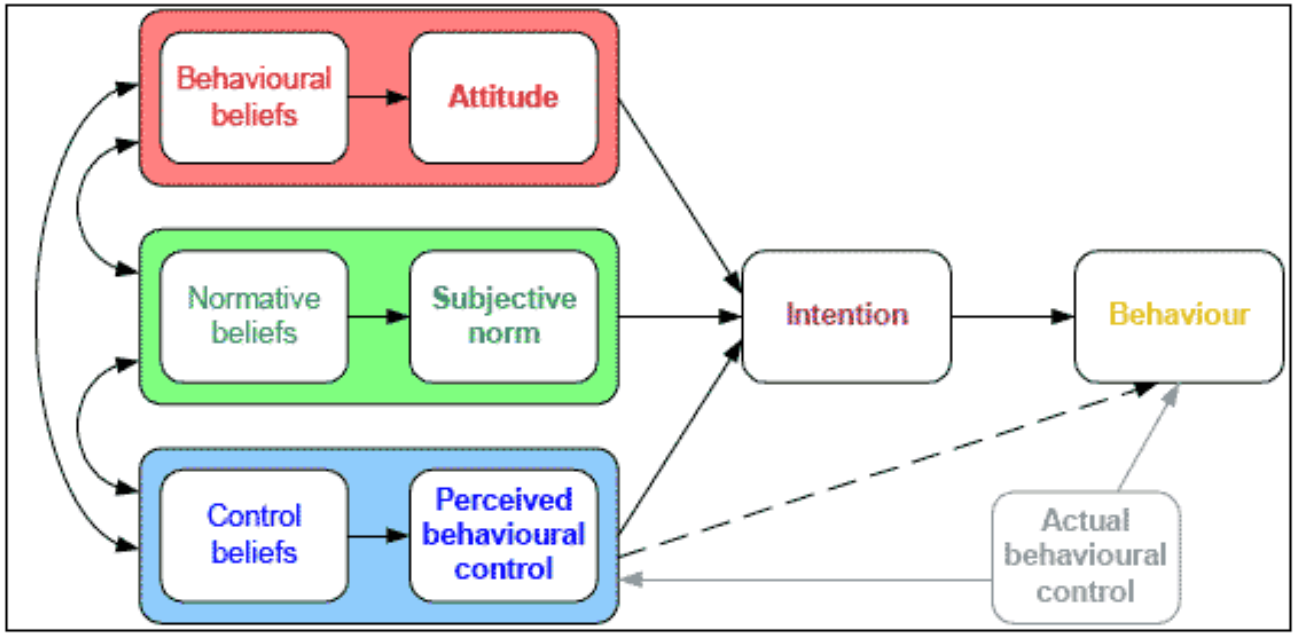
Vanessa I. Rohlf, Pauleen C. Bennett, Samia Toukhsati and Grahame Coleman
Animal Welfare Science Centre, School of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Psychological Medicine, Monash University, Victoria, Australia

Can we breathe easy about Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome? Effects of severity on canine play, exercise and feeding behaviour

CONFERENCE PAPER · JUNE 2015
Conference: Canine Behaviour & Genetics, At London

Theory of planned behaviour

- Theory of planned behaviour suggests that intentions predict behaviour.
- Intentions are predicted by subjective norms, attitudes and perceived behavioural control.



Cognitive dissonance

- Cognitive dissonance theory refers to the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioural decisions and attitude change.
- People who have already engaged in a behaviour that does not accord with their beliefs, even in light of new information, are less likely to be willing to change the behaviour, and more likely to find reasons to justify why the behaviour is necessary.

Anthropomorphism

- Great word for scrabble, not so great for animals

- The attribution of human form or other human characteristics to beings other than humans, particularly animals

Why does animal welfare matter?

- Dogs can experience pain and can suffer
- Quality of life (of dogs) has inherent worth
- Dogs have needs and feelings
- Dogs with higher welfare are more productive and will perform better
- Where humans are in control, moral & legal obligations
- Higher welfare for dogs, means better outcomes for humans, regardless of the role dogs have in our lives

How do we measure welfare?

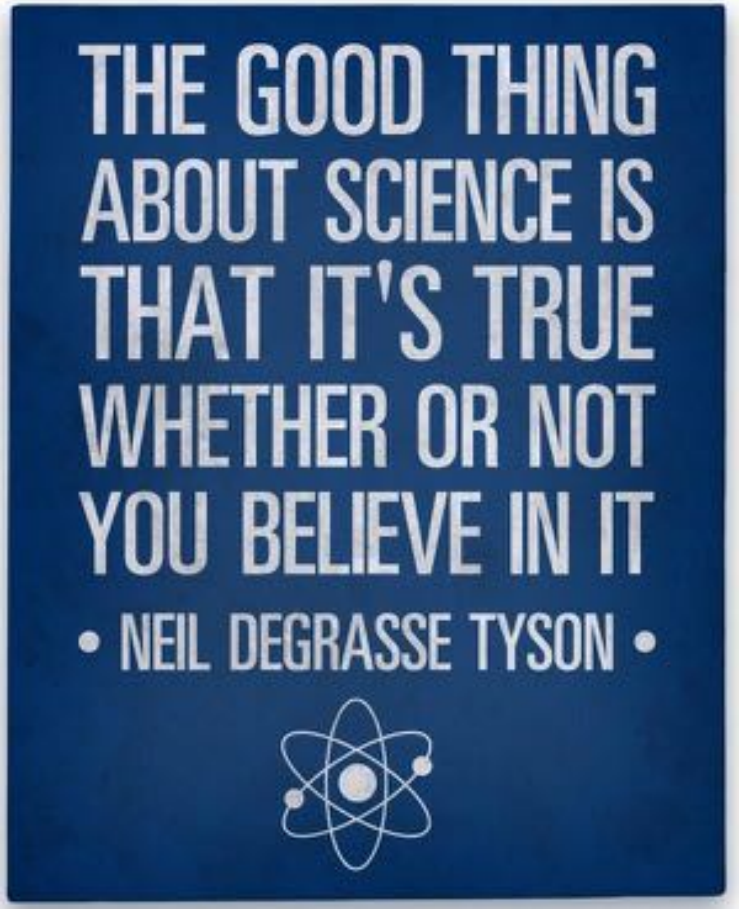
Behaviour: activity budgets, interaction (environment & social), preferences, aversion & motivation, cognitive bias, abnormal

Physical: physiology, immunology, nutrition, exercise, reproduction

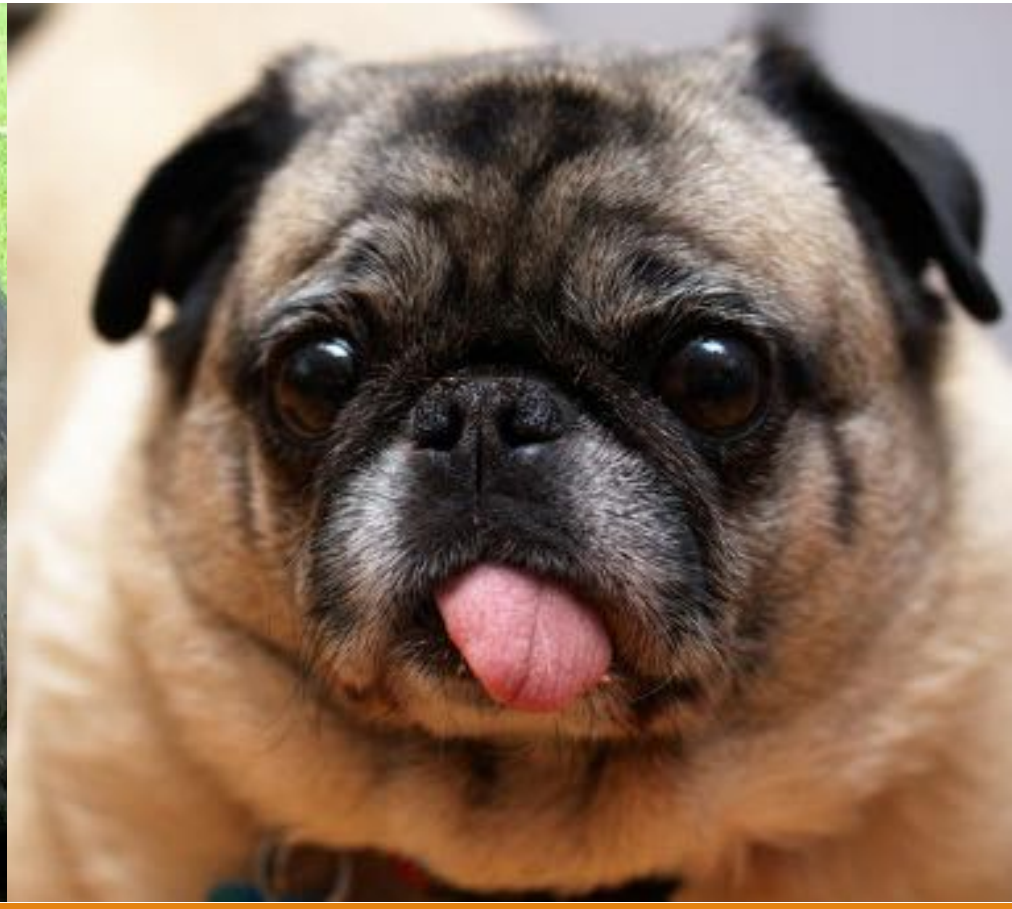
Human psychology: attitudes and perceptions, behaviours

What does science offer?

- Objective
- Repeatable
- Open to change



Applied science example 1



Applied science example 2

Applied science example 3

Applied science example 4

Is death a welfare issue?

"Wastage represents one of the most significant threats to the industry's sustainability and public licence to operate"

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ARTICLES

Death is a Welfare Issue

James W. Yeates

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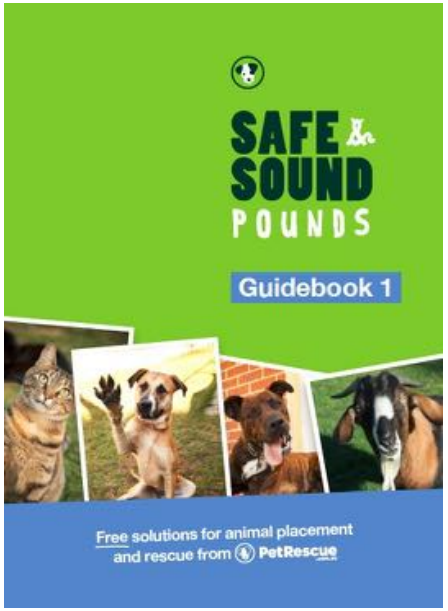
Abstract It is commonly asserted that "death is not a welfare issue" and this has been reflected in welfare legislation and policy in many countries. However, this creates a conflict for many who consider animal welfare to be an appropriate basis for decision-making in animal ethics but also consider that an animal's death is ethically significant. To reconcile these viewpoints, this paper attempts to formulate an account of death as a welfare issue. Welfare issues are issues that refer to evaluations concerning an animal's interests. This includes evaluations that refer only to comparisons between the presence and absence of states, including positive states. This means that an animal's death may be a welfare issue insofar as it leads to the exclusion of relevant positive states. This allows us to deny that death is necessarily not a welfare issue.

Keywords Animal welfare issue · Ethics · Euthanasia · Harm of death ·

Best practice



- Encourage registration by offering great service
  - e.g. return a dog home in first instance without fine
- Help people do what you want them to do
  - microchipping events
- Help dogs get back home
  - create (or use existing) social media, or online presence
- Help dogs in kennels
  - encourage volunteer participation
- Help dogs find homes
  - explore your options, exchange experiences & ideas with colleagues
- Ask your council for support
  - to achieve better outcomes for the community and animals

Thank you

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Questions? Ideas?

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