

Animal Consciousness: Evidence & Ethics

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Which animals have welfare? Is it all animals, potentially bringing trillions of microscopic invertebrates under our moral umbrella? Or should we use the term "welfare" more narrowly, perhaps only referring to mammals or vertebrates? For many ethicists, this question - if an animal has welfare - depends on whether the animal in question is conscious. Consciousness, at its most basic, means the capacity to have feelings. We should only care about an animal's welfare if it can experience feelings, like pleasure and pain. Yet answering this new question - which animals are conscious - is notoriously difficult. I will outline the current state of scientific evidence for consciousness in different groups of animals, and discuss the implications for their welfare.