

The Neuroethics of Animal Welfare

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In this presentation, building off a recent workshop at UPenn, I provide an overview of the under-discussed intersection between neuroethics and animal welfare. I consider new developments in applied ethics that can come from (A) what neuroscience can tell us and (B) from what neuroscience allows us to do. Regarding (A), I consider a recent proposal that suggests that information from the neurosciences occupies a privileged position in arguments by analogy for the presence of mental states in nonhuman animals. I reject the practical significance of the claim, arguing that it does not avoid the most serious epistemological challenges of arguments by analogy. Nevertheless, I argue that findings from the neurosciences, when used in combination with results from behavioral studies, is critical for our understanding of which animals have various affective and cognitive states. Regarding (B), I suggest that recent developments such as neural chimeras, animal brain machine interfaces, and the ability to genetically manipulate the nervous system present a number of new challenges and questions for applied ethicists.