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Is ‘a life worth living’ a concept worth having?

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Abstract

A recent FAWC report introduced ‘a life worth living’ as a useful concept in farm animal welfare discussions and policy. But what does this concept mean? And is it a useful one? This paper extends FAWC’s approach in several ways. It firstly provides an account of the concept of a life worth living in more detail, in relation to current animal welfare thinking, such as experiences and quality of life. It then describes how the concept might be applied in animal welfare management decisions and in setting standards for regulations and farm assurance schemes. The paper identifies several advantages to the concept: it is animal-based, intuitively understandable, and has direct prescriptive force in decision-making. But the concept also has certain limitations, especially that it is potentially complex and subjective and that it cannot include all ethically relevant concerns about farm animal welfare. Nevertheless, the paper concludes that the concept may become a useful addition to welfare dialogue, and finishes by identifying the core areas where further work is necessary.

Keywords: animal welfare, euthanasia, insentience, life worth avoiding, life worth living, quality of life