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## **How happy is your pet? The problem of subjectivity in the assessment of companion animal welfare**

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### **Abstract**

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*The ability to evaluate the welfare of non-human animals accurately and objectively is influenced by a variety of factors including the nature of our relationships with them. Subjective biases in the perception of an animal's quality of life can have either positive or negative consequences for its welfare and are likely to be particularly exaggerated in the case of companion animals, such as dogs, cats and other pet species, with which people tend to form strong anthropomorphic, attachment-based relationships. The consequences of these subjective biases are likely to be further exacerbated by the fact that many of the physical and behavioural attributes that humans find appealing, and have selected for, in companion animals, are inherently detrimental to their welfare. Using a range of examples, this paper explores some of the complex ways in which anthropomorphism and subjectivity can cloud our ability to make reliable judgements concerning the welfare of companion animals, even in the face of seemingly obvious and overt indicators of pain and suffering.*

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, anthropomorphism, companion animals, health, pets, subjectivity