Companion Animal Ethics
The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

UFAW, founded in 1926, is an internationally recognised, independent, scientific and educational animal welfare charity that promotes high standards of welfare for farm, companion, laboratory and captive wild animals, and for those animals with which we interact in the wild. It works to improve animals’ lives by:

- Funding and publishing developments in the science and technology that underpin advances in animal welfare;
- Promoting education in animal care and welfare;
- Providing information, organising meetings and publishing books, videos, articles, technical reports and the journal Animal Welfare;
- Providing expert advice to government departments and other bodies and helping to draft and amend laws and guidelines;
- Enlisting the energies of animal keepers, scientists, veterinarians, lawyers and others who care about animals.

Improvements in the care of animals are not now likely to come of their own accord, merely by wishing them: there must be research…and it is in sponsoring research of this kind, and making its results widely known, that UFAW performs one of its most valuable services.

Sir Peter Medawar CBE FRS, 8 May 1957
Nobel Laureate (1960), Chairman of the UFAW Scientific Advisory Committee (1951–1962)

UFAW relies on the generosity of the public through legacies and donations to carry out its work, improving the welfare of animals now and in the future. For further information about UFAW and how you can help promote and support its work, please contact us at the following address:

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare
The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN, UK
Tel: 01582 831818 Fax: 01582 831414 Website: www.ufaw.org.uk
Email: ufaw@ufaw.org.uk

UFAW’s aim regarding the UFAW/Wiley-Blackwell Animal Welfare book series is to promote interest and debate in the subject and to disseminate information relevant to improving the welfare of kept animals and of those harmed in the wild through human agency. The books in this series are the works of their authors, and the views they express do not necessarily reflect the views of UFAW.
Companion Animal Ethics

Peter Sandøe
Professor of Bioethics,
University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Sandra Corr
Reader in Veterinary Surgery,
University of Nottingham, UK

Clare Palmer
Professor of Philosophy,
Texas A&M University, USA

WILEY
## Contents

*Foreword*  
vi

*Acknowledgements*  
ix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 History of Companion Animals and the Companion Animal Sector</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Development and Role of the Veterinary and Other Professions in Relation to Companion Animals</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Human Attachment to Companion Animals</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Companion Animal Welfare</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Theories of Companion Animal Ethics</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Breeding and Acquiring Companion Animals</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Selective Breeding</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Feeding and the Problem of Obesity</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Companion Animal Training and Behavioural Problems</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Routine Neutering of Companion Animals</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Performing Convenience Surgery: Tail Docking, Ear Cropping, Debarking and Declawing</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Treating Sick Animals and End-of-Life Issues</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Unwanted and Unowned Companion Animals</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Ethics and Broader Impacts of Companion Animals</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Other Companions</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Companion Animals and the Future</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Index*  
269
Foreword

Humans have been domesticating animals and keeping some of them as companions for thousands of years. Over the past century, the industrialized Western world has seen a huge increase in the number of companion animals, especially dogs and cats; and this increase has been accompanied by a number of ethical and welfare issues specific to those companion animals. Those who keep animals as companions usually have no wish to harm the animals in their care, but the way we treat companion animals is, whether we like it or not, affected by both tradition and culture, and because humans and animals have for the most part evolved separately, compromises sometimes have to be struck between the best interests of the animal and those of the owner. So, how should individuals and society address these compromises? What ethical principles should we use to determine how to interact with companion animals? How do we decide what really matters and how we should treat companion animals? How do we decide whether new and sometimes painful or stressful treatments developed for humans should be used on companion animals? How do we deal with issues where a decision in the best interests of one companion animal impacts adversely on other animals whether in our control or in the wild?

The science of animal welfare has proven extraordinarily useful in providing the evidence to help us with such questions, but decisions on appropriate behaviour are ultimately dependent on society reaching a consensus on what should be done. This is where ethics helps make clear what the issues are, alerts us to the dangers of relying on custom and past behaviour and helps us to work through the implications of adopting a particular ethical position. This is the first book that has set out to provide a comprehensive ethical analysis of this topic, and the authors are admirably placed to guide the reader through this forest, being eminent and respected in the fields of both ethics and the science of animal welfare. We are very grateful to them for undertaking the task and for providing us with this excellent and very readable account combining a synthesis of the existing literature and the authors’ original perspectives on the issues. It will be an excellent addition to the UFAW/Wiley Series.

Robert Hubrecht

January 2015
Acknowledgements

In this book, we explore the important ethical questions and problems that arise as a result of humans keeping animals as companions who live with us in our homes. These ethical issues are not only important but also highly complex. To do justice to this complexity, we draw on a wide range of disciplines to underpin our arguments, including history, psychology, ethical and political theory, and the veterinary, behavioural and social sciences. In addition to incorporating a significant body of published research, we have also been greatly helped by our colleagues.

Four of these colleagues, Brenda Bonnett, Andrew Gardiner, Iben Meyer and James A. Serpell, have contributed so much, through advice and written input, to certain chapters that we have acknowledged them as co-authors of those chapters. We are immensely grateful for their contributions.

Many other friends and colleagues have given advice and/or have commented on specific chapters. In particular, we would like to thank Charlotte Reinhard Bjørnvad, Stine B. Christiansen, Lise Lotte Christensen, Björn Forkman, Merete Fredholm, Gail Golab, Ayoe Hoff, T. J. Kasperbauer, Sara Kondrup, Vibeke Knudsen, Helle Friis Proschowsky and Cecilie Agnete Thorslund. Special thanks are due to Geir Tveit for helping us to check the references and to Sara Kondrup for helping us make the index.

About 4 years have passed since we made the first outline for the book. Since then, working on the book has taken up a significant part of our time. While it has been enjoyable, it was also at times a struggle, due to conflicting commitments. Much of the work has been conducted at odd hours, in evenings, on weekends and during vacations; this has been a strain on our family and friends, and we are grateful for their patience.

Finally, Peter would like to thank the Department of Food and Resource Economics at the University of Copenhagen for financial and other kinds of support that, among other things, enabled him to go to University of Pennsylvania for two research visits; he
would also like to thank James A. Serpell for hosting him during these visits. Clare would like to thank Texas A&M University for a Faculty Development Leave in Autumn 2012 that allowed her some time to work on the book. Sandra would like to thank Professor Christopher Wathes (OBE) for encouraging and developing her interest in ethics.

Peter Sandøe
Sandra Corr
Clare Palmer
Companion animals can be a source of pleasure, fun, exercise, comfort, fascination and consolation. Choosing to live with animal companions can be life enriching, even when it comes with some expense and inconvenience. Most of those who live with animal companions believe this to be a two-way relationship: as well as being fed and cared for, the animal companions also derive pleasure, satisfaction and comfort from living with people.

This seems, therefore, to be a win–win situation: what is good for people is also good for the animals; the animals are cared for, and they help to create human happiness. Put like this, there does not seem to be much need for a book on companion animal ethics. But things are not that simple. For instance, it is not always clear what is good for animal companions, and what is good for animals may be in conflict with what is good for the people with whom they live. Animal companions can also be the source of very different human responses than pleasure and consolation, such as anxiety, fear or distress. So, there is a need for ethical reflection regarding our relationship with companion animals.

In this short introductory chapter, we first elaborate on why we think there is a need for ethical reflection about companion animals and then explain our ethical approach. In the following section, we will try to explain what we mean by ‘companion’ animals and
why we have chosen to focus on them, rather than on the wider group of pet animals. Finally, we will briefly outline the structure of the book.

**1.2 Companion Animal Ethics**

Even those who are well informed about veterinary and animal science and who have kept animals as companions for many years are sometimes unsure about what is in the best interests of their animals. Those without such knowledge and experience may be even more uncertain. For example, someone may be doubtful as to whether neutering is in the best interests of their male dog or whether their cat should be let out to roam. To complicate matters, popular ideas about companion animals’ interests may not reflect the findings of current behavioural and veterinary research.

People may also find it difficult to balance potentially conflicting concerns for the well-being of their animals. If a dog or a cat is seriously ill, for example, due to a malignant type of cancer, an owner may find it difficult to weigh the interest of the animal in living (and their own desire for the animal to remain alive) against a concern to prevent their companion from suffering. This may lead to a dilemma between continuing veterinary treatment and euthanasing the animal. The owner may ask the vet for advice, but she or he may have similar doubts.

In other cases, different people may have strong and conflicting views about the significance of companion animals and how we should treat them. These conflicting views are often rooted in different ideas about animals’ moral status, whether there is something special about companion animal species and what we do and do not owe to them. For example, some people consider painlessly killing stray and feral cats and dogs to be ethically unproblematic. Others claim that healthy dogs and cats have a right to life, whether owned or not. Similarly, some people see no moral problem in docking dogs’ tails to make their appearance meet breed standards, whereas others find tail docking a morally unacceptable violation of the dog’s bodily integrity.

Thus, living with companion animals gives rise to uncertainties about what is in the animals’ best interests, moral dilemmas in weighing different human and animal well-being concerns and ethical disagreements concerning the moral significance and appropriate treatment of companion animals. These uncertainties, dilemmas and disagreements are the subject of this book (Figure I.1).

Despite the millions of cats, dogs and other animals kept as companions around the world, the ethical aspects of this unique relationship have not previously been the subject of a comprehensive ethical analysis. As a result, although the ideas of animal welfare and the approaches to ethics that we discuss here are well established, the present book breaks new ground. In particular, previous work on animal ethics has tended to focus on higher-level theoretical questions, rather than on the more practical ethical issues that arise from our day-to-day engagement with the animals in our homes.

We believe that thinking through some of these everyday ethical issues—issues that can be incredibly important in individual animal lives, as well as our own human lives—is a critical step in developing and applying animal ethics. Partly because much of this material is new and cannot be taken for granted, and also for practical reasons of space,
we have been selective in terms of the topics and frameworks we discuss. Consequently, there are omissions and places where we are, of necessity, somewhat brief. However, we hope that what is included will provide a useful resource and a starting point for future work.

This book, unlike many in the field of animal ethics, does not advocate any particular ethical position, beyond the widely accepted idea that the lives and experiences of sentient animals should count for something in our ethical decision making. We take a pluralist perspective, presenting a variety of approaches to human and animal welfare, to animal ethics and to particular ethical problems raised by companion animals. Although we, as the authors of this book, have our own (often divergent) views, we have attempted to present the arguments in a balanced way, though there may be places where we have not always succeeded in putting our sympathies to one side. We hope to show that at least some disputes about our ethical relations with companion animals may flow from different understandings of animal welfare or different approaches to ethics, but that – considered from those perspectives – they are at least comprehensible and rational.