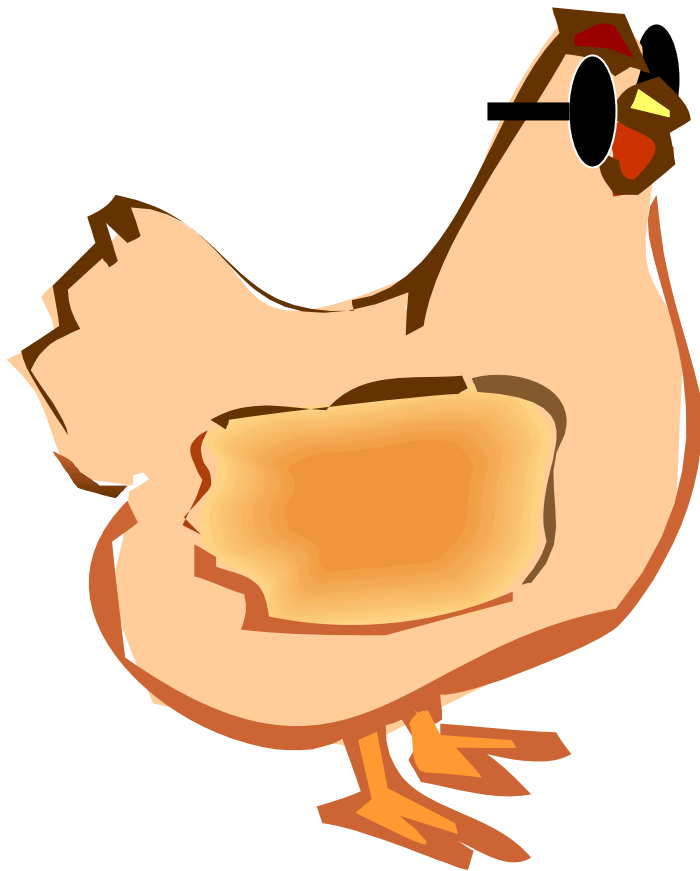


...Are Blind Chickens the Answer?

Paul B. Thompson

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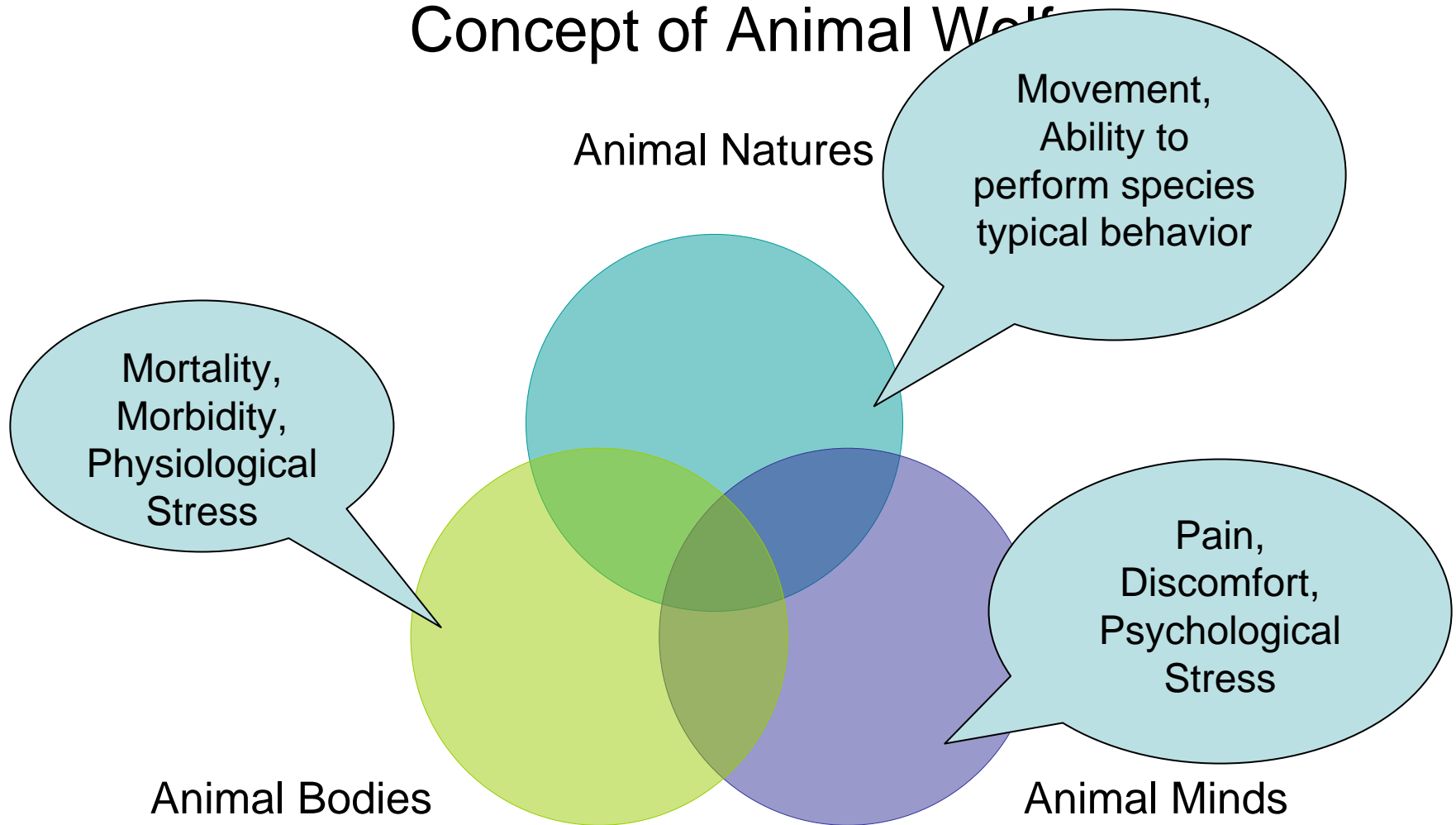
Blind Chickens:

Strategies for relieving stress or adverse impact on the welfare of birds in intensive production settings that use genetics to

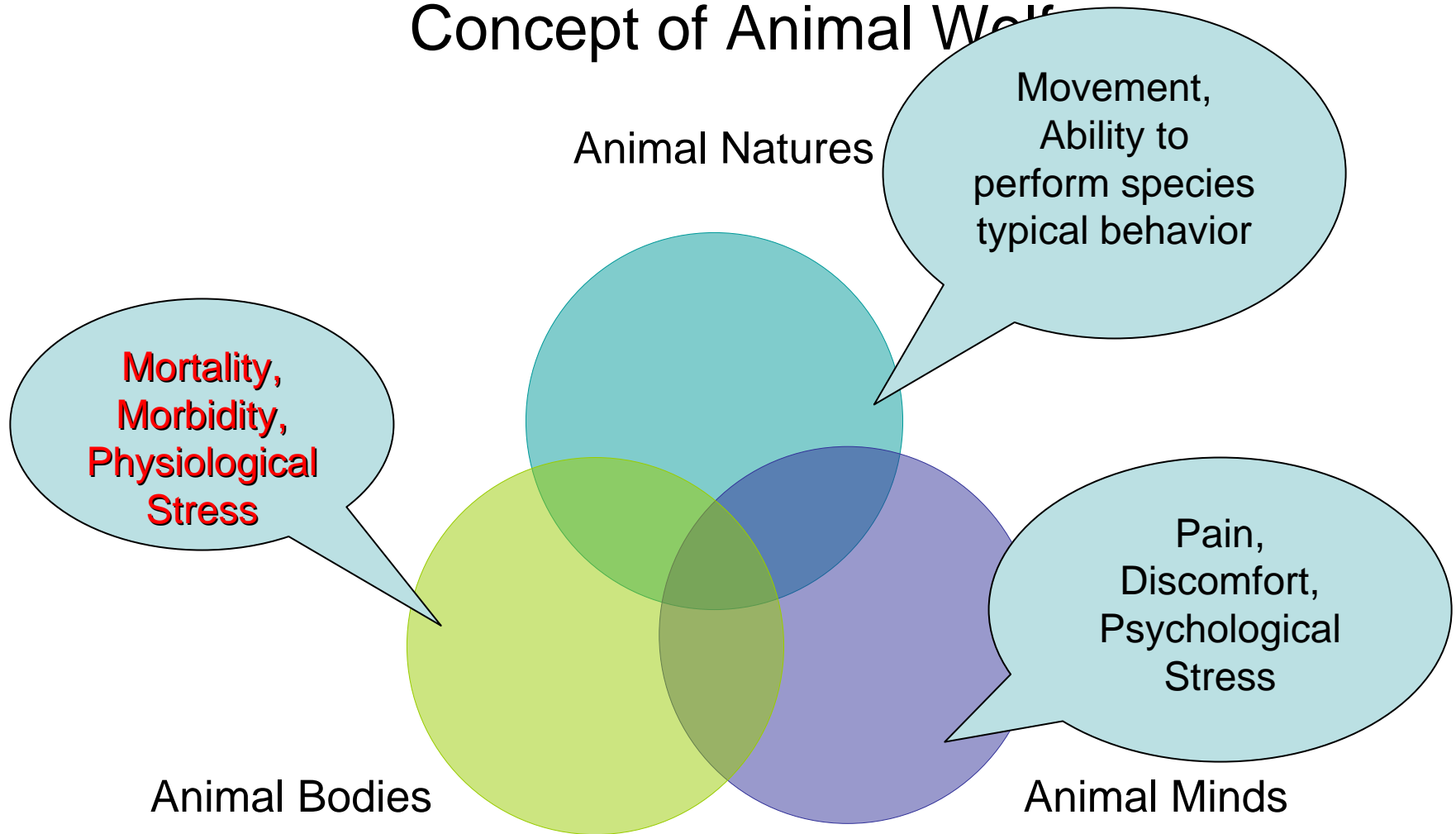
- a) reduce sensory capacity;
- b) eliminate behavioral drives;
- c) alter species-typical behavior.

- 1) The Ethical Rationale for Blind Chicken Strategies
- 2) Possible Ethical Problems with Blind Chickens
 - 1) Welfare Specification
 - 2) Public Perception: Communication
 - 3) Public Perception: Aretaic Objections
- 3) Responding to Ethical Problems
- 4) Possible Extensions of the Blind Chicken Problem

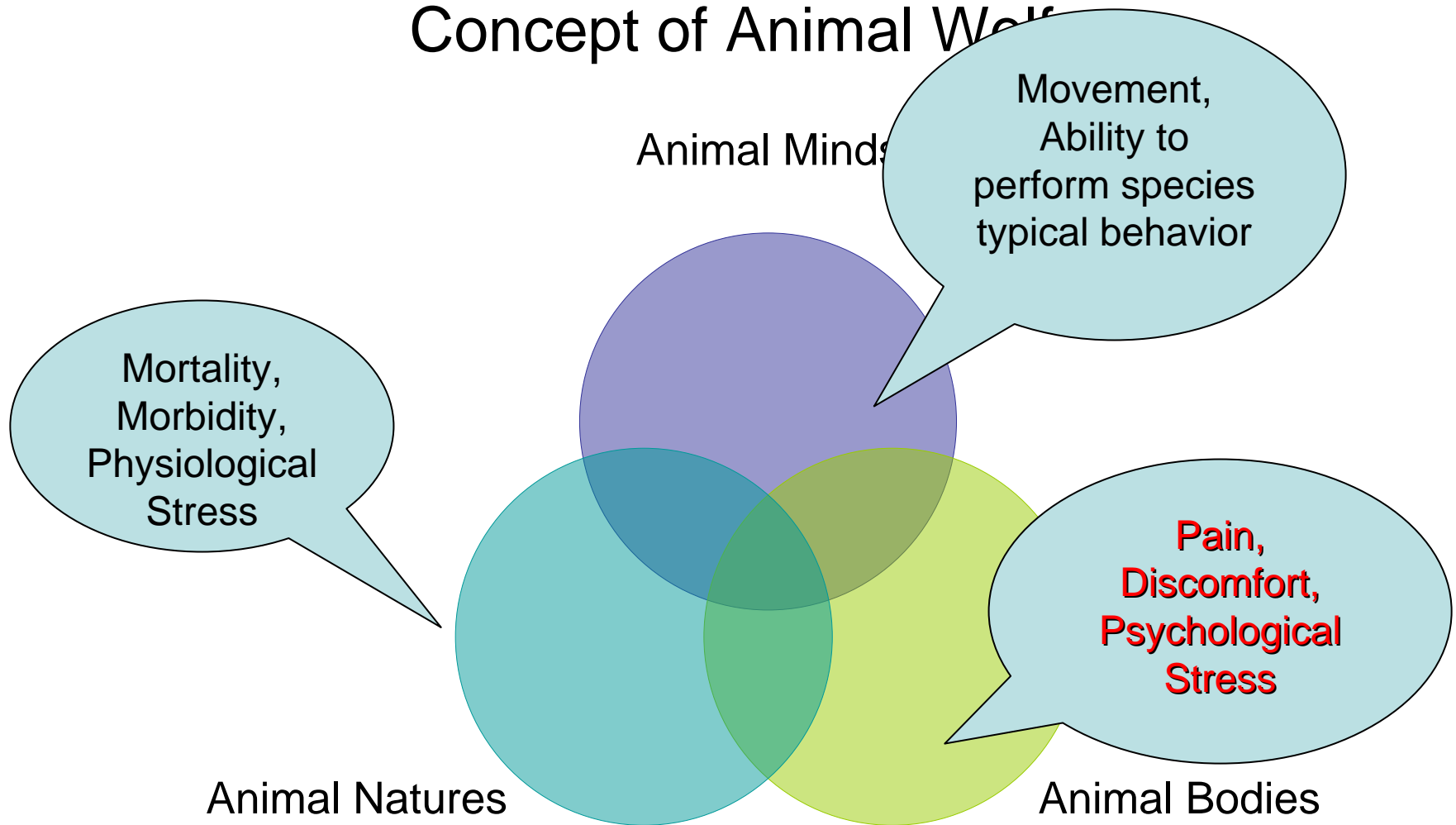
The Ethical Rationale for Blind Chicken Strategies: Concept of Animal Welfare



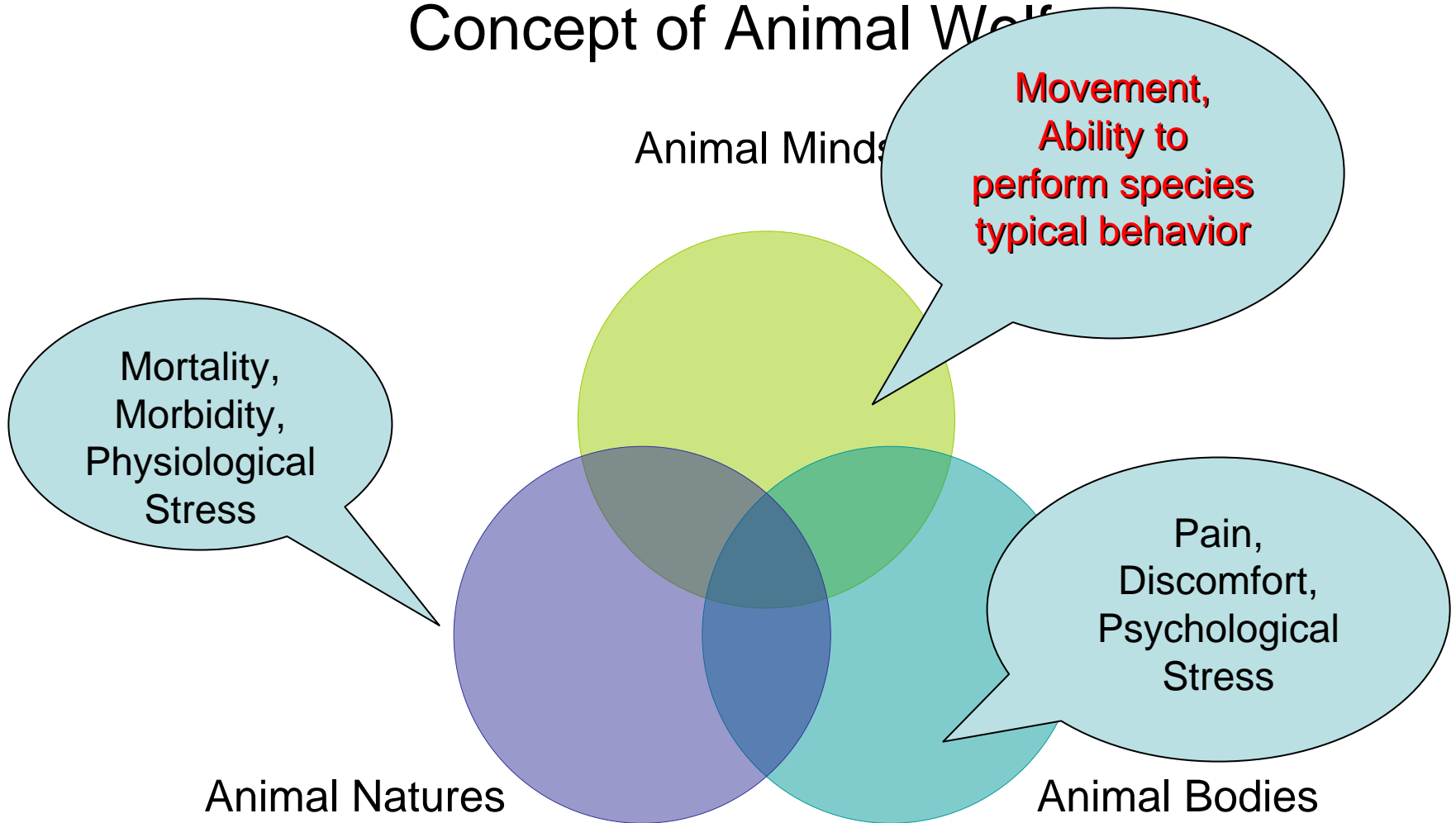
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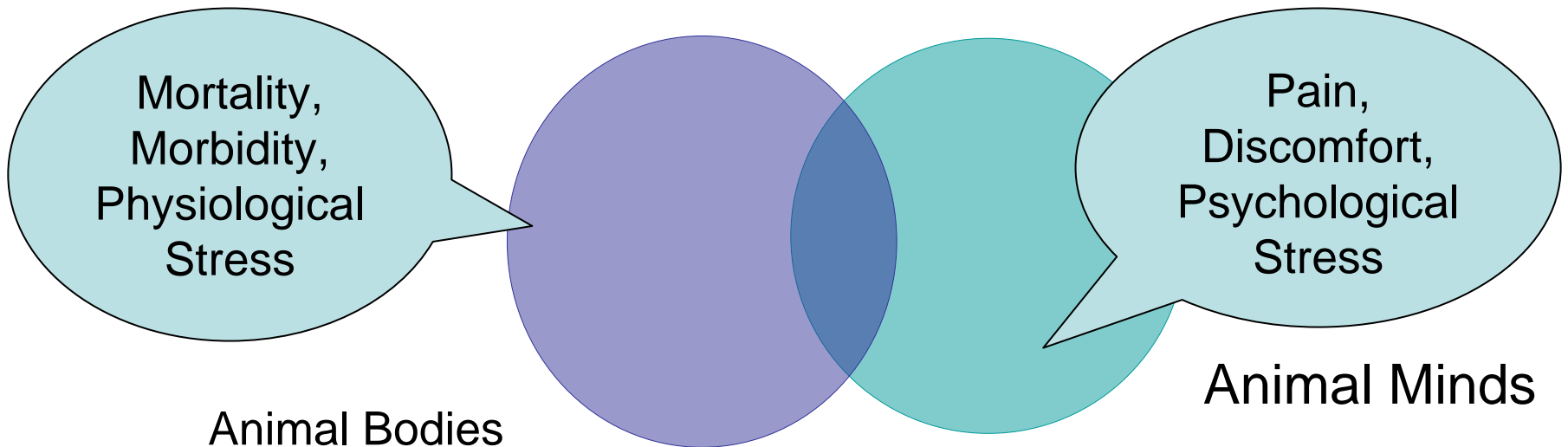


The Ethical Rationale for Blind Chicken Strategies: Concept of Animal Welfare



Blind Chicken Strategies

- reduce sensory capacity;
- eliminate behavioral drives;
- alter species-typical behavior.



Possible Ethical Problems with Blind Chickens: Welfare Specification

Animal Natures

Thesis

Need for movement and expressing genetic drives are important to the extent that an individual actually experiences these needs.

If they do not help an animal cope with its environment, simply *having* a need does not contribute to welfare

- reduce sensory capacity;
- eliminate behavioral drives;
- alter species-typical behavior.

Possible Ethical Problems with Blind Chickens: Welfare Specification

Animal Natures

Anti-Thesis
Possession of species-typical genetic drives and behavioral abilities is a fundamental component of animal natures.



Animals that lack such drives and abilities are “worse off” than conspecifics that have them.

- reduce sensory capacities
- eliminate behavioral drives
- alter species-typical behavior.

Public Perception

There's a strain of chickens that are blind, and this was not produced through biotechnology. It was actually an accident that got developed into a particular strain of chickens. Now blind chickens, it turns out, don't mind being crowded together so much as normal chickens do. And so one suggestion is that, 'Well, we ought to shift over to all blind chickens as a solution to our animal welfare problems that are associated with crowding in the poultry industry.' Is this permissible on animal welfare grounds?

Here, we have what I think is a real philosophical conundrum. If you think that it's the welfare of the individual animal that really matters here, how the animals are doing, then it would be more humane to have these blind chickens. On the other hand, almost everybody that you ask thinks this is an absolutely horrendous thing to do.

Paul Thompson quoted by David Kastenbaum, Morning Edition, December 4, 2001. Transcript available online at www.npr.org

Public Perception: Communication

You advocate *blinding* chickens!?!

It will prove to be very difficult to explain the case in favor of “blind chickens” to the general public, let alone to animal protection groups.

Public Perception Aretaic Objections

The ethical issue does not consist in harm to the animal, but in the moral character of the agent.

You advocate *blinding* chickens!?!

It may appear that animal scientists and the poultry industry are willing to do anything to protect profits. Animal Natures are seen by them simply as a means to this end, having no intrinsic value.

Responding to Ethical Problems

- Open debate, publicly conducted is critical.
 - Reach consensus on substantive issues...
 - Demonstrate moral seriousness with regard to animal welfare...
- *NOT* just for philosophers!
 - “Back-benchers” will be seen as foot-draggers and reprobates

Goal of demonstrating moral seriousness will not be achieved.

Possible Extensions of the Blind Chicken Problem

- Genetic selection based on temperament
 - Even though existing differences between breeds are considerable...
- Genetic engineering of all kinds
 - Possibly even in response to correction of genetic disease
- All responses to production disease

End

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