

# *Positions on Moral Vegetarianism*

Bioethics & Animals (Spring 2013)

Laura Guidry-Grimes

# *Moral Vegetarianism*

- “the view that we, *at least those of us with access to adequate nonanimal food sources*, are morally required to be vegetarians” (DeGrazia 143, emphasis added)
  - Allows for degrees of responsibility, depending on one’s access to nonanimal food sources
- Can philosophers and non-philosophers of diverse values and beliefs come to accept a vegetarian lifestyle?



# Mapping of Animal Ethics

## □ Equal-Consideration Views (EC)

- Examples: utilitarianism, animal-rights theories
- Comparable interests given equal consideration

## □ Unequal-Consideration Views (UC)

- Examples: two-tier, sliding-scale
- Degree of moral status depends on (e.g.) personhood status, creature's complexity

## □ No-Consideration Views (NC)

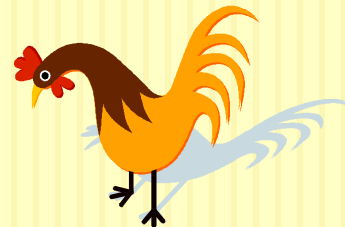
- Examples: Kantianism, contract theory
- Non-humans are only *indirectly* considerable.

plausible

implausible

# Goal: Broad Basis for MV

- If non-humans deserve *any* consideration, then we should adopt MV.
  - ▣ **Consideration:** “how much moral importance to attribute to animals’ interests in comparison with prudentially comparable human interests” (146)
- EC, UC, NC – judge “how important animal suffering is *in its own right*” (146)
  - ▣ Causing massive unnecessary harm to sentient animals is wrong—even if the tormentor is the last person on Earth.
  - ▣ So NC is unreasonable.



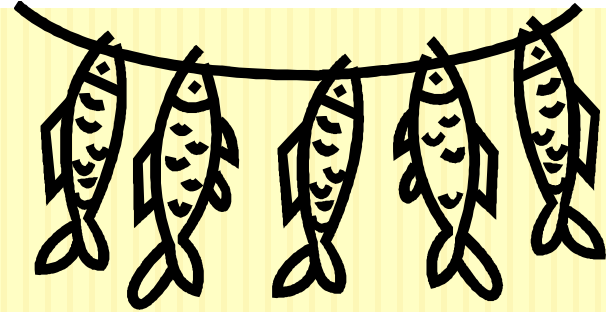
# Factory Farms



- Cause massive unnecessary harm
  - ▣ To billions of sentient creatures
  
- But is it really *unnecessary*? YES!
  - ▣ Nutritional alternatives
    - increasingly convenient to obtain
    - becoming more and more palatable
  
  - ▣ Economic costs to ending factory farms are one-time only.
  
  - ▣ Moral limits on what harms we can cause for the sake of profit, taste, convenience.

# *On Complicity*

“Try as we might to live well, we find ourselves connected to harms and wrongs, albeit by relations that fall outside the paradigm of individual, intentional wrongdoing.” –Christopher Kutz

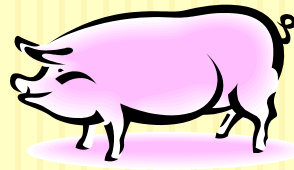


“many harms, wrongs, and injustices have no isolable perpetrator; they result from the participation of millions of people and institutions” –Iris Marion Young

When someone “endorses, promotes, or unduly benefits from norms and practices that are morally suspect” –Margaret Little

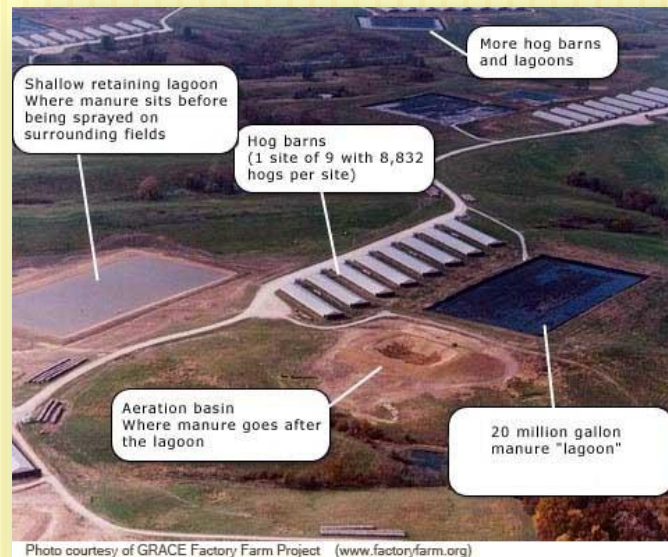
# *On Complicity*

- Can be obvious or subtle, intentional or unintentional, easy or difficult to avoid
- **Ways to be complicit:** (from Mellema 170-171)
  - ▣ Inducing or commanding others to harm
  - ▣ Counseling others to harm
  - ▣ Consenting to harm
  - ▣ Praising others who harm
  - ▣ Failing to prevent a harm
- **Duty:** *“Make every reasonable effort not to provide financial support to institutions or practices that cause extensive, unnecessary harm”* (DeGrazia 159)



# *Weak vs. Strong Theses*

- **Weak:** MV entails avoiding factory farmed meat.



- **Strong:** MV entails avoiding meat from all types of farms.





# *Strong Thesis*



- Traditional animal husbandry still causes nontrivial harms.
  - ▣ E.g., castration, dehorning without pain relief
  
- Is there a **harm of death**, even if the animal's life was worth living, and the slaughter was humane?
  - ▣ Theoretical disagreement:
    - Death as a harm for non-persons? No.
    - Death is equally harmful for all (sentient) animals.
    - ➡ ■ “other things being equal the harm of death varies roughly with the psychological complexity of the being in question” (161)

# *Asymmetry*

- No obligation to bring a creature into existence, even if that life would be worth living



- Obligation to not bring a creature into being if expect the life to not be worth living



# *Discussion Questions*

- Has DeGrazia successfully argued that moral vegetarianism is morally required if animals have any degree moral status?
- Is complicity really a type of moral wrongdoing? To what extent is someone responsible for being complicitous?
- DeGrazia prefers the strong thesis of MV, partially based on the harm of death. Do you agree that death, even if humane, can be a harm?

# *Additional Sources*

- Kutz, Christopher. *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Quote from page 1.
- Little, Margaret O. "Cosmetic Surgery, Suspect Norms, and the Ethics of Complicity" in *Enhancing Human Traits: Ethical and Social Implications*. Ed. E. Parens. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 1998. 162-176. Quote from p. 170.
- Mellema, Gregory. "Collective Responsibility and Qualifying Actions." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, XXX (2006): 168-175.
- Young, Iris Marion. "From Guilt to Solidarity." *Dissent* (Spring 2003): 39-44. Quote from page 41.
- *The True Food Network*: <http://truefoodnow.org/campaigns/factory-farming/>

*Questions? Comments?*