



The Ethics of Eating Animals

- Central Questions:
 - (1) Is it generally wrong to eat animal products?
 - (2) Do we benefit the animals we eat by creating them?
 - (3) Would an 'ideal' form of humane omnivorism be permissible?



Lecture Plan

- (1) Some facts about animal agriculture
- (2) A basic argument for vegan(ish)ism
- (3) The logic of the larder argument
- (4) Humane omnivorism

Numbers of animals killed annually

Each year globally

- We kill around 70 billion domesticated land animals (about 90% of these are chickens)
- We kill between 51 and 167 billion farmed fish
- And we kill 1-2.7 trillion wild fish

By comparison, 108 million people were killed in all the wars in the 20th century. Approximately 117 billion humans have ever lived.

Faunalytics.org, Fishcount.org



Common practices that cause suffering

- Broiler chickens are raised in 'sheds' with 40-50 thousand individuals
- They are bred to grow unnaturally quickly, resulting in illness and deformity
- Ammonia concentration in the litter and atmosphere causes burns to legs, and damage to the respiratory system and eyes
- Egg laying hens routinely have their beaks trimmed w/out anaesthetic
- Male chicks are useless and are killed immediately, usually by maceration (grinding), suffocation, or exposure to high concentrations of CO₂



Typical age at death vs life expectancy





A basic argument for vegan(ish)ism

- Part 1: Wrongness of system
 - (1) It is generally wrong to inflict suffering and death on animals without very strong competing ethical considerations
 - (2) Animal agriculture inflicts massive suffering and death on animals
 - (3) There are no strong competing ethical considerations
 - (4) Therefore, animal agriculture is wrong

McPherson (2015)

Why would it be wrong to shock a dog?

Why should we avoid hammering our fingers?



Why is it wrong to cause premature death?

In the human case we might think this violates their rights, interferes with the victim's ability to autonomously pursue life projects, fails to show proper respect to them as persons etc.

It also deprives them of a valuable future. But this at least seems to apply in the animal case too

A basic argument for vegan(ish)ism part 2

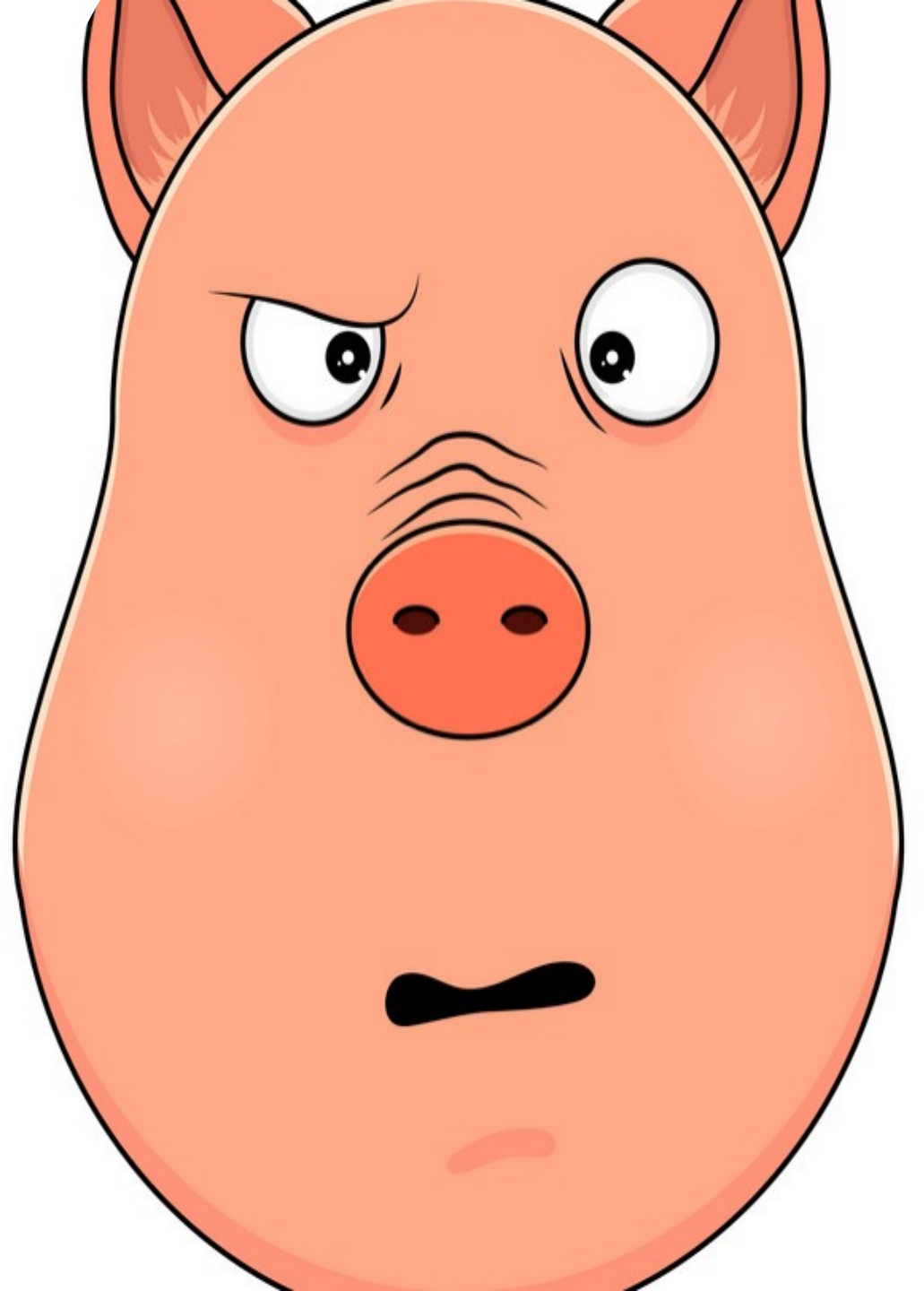
Two ways to bridge the gap
between badness of practice, and
badness of personal participation:

- (1) Causal Contribution: but perhaps we are causally impotent?
- (2) Complicity in a bad practice



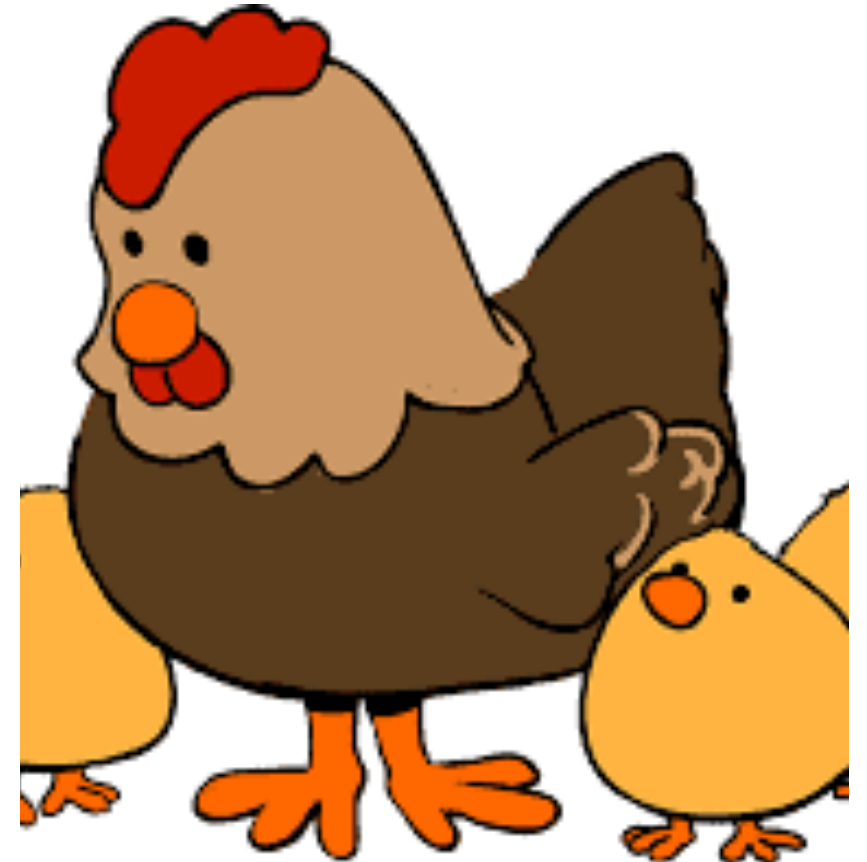
Logic of the Larder

- ‘The pig has a stronger interest than anyone in the demand for bacon. If all the world were Jewish, there would be no pigs at all.’ (Leslie Stephen 1896)
- (1) It is good for nonhuman animals to be born
 - (2) If we didn’t eat them, they wouldn’t be born
 - (3) Therefore, we should eat them



Conditions for LL to succeed

- C1. Bringing that animal into existence could be a benefit to that animal
- C2. The animal has/had a life worth living
- C3. The animal would not exist/have existed if not for the consumption of its meat, eggs, or milk
- C4. The animal will/would be replaced after her slaughter by another animal
- C5. The rearing of that animal does not prevent a greater number of animals with lives worth living from existing (or, more precisely, does not prevent a greater amount of moral value among other animals from existing)
- C6. The purchase of that animal's meat, eggs, or milk must produce more moral value than any alternative use of money





Happy mice farms?

“There are many animals smaller than farm animals, who require smaller investments to house and feed. For instance, an adult mouse weighs around 30 g, while a chicken is around 67 times heavier, at 2 kg. Assuming the marginal costs of housing and feeding animals are roughly proportional to their weight, one could tend a colony of 67 mice for the same cost as tending a single chicken – less than a dollar per life-year. Thus, by eating beans rather than chicken, and investing our saved money in raising colonies of mice, we could create on the order of 50 times as many life-years per dollar invested”

“The Logic of the Larder’s argument for personal omnivory fails. If one wishes to increase the total population of happy animals in the world, one should likely adopt a (vegan) vegetarian diet and invest savings in colonies of mice, or other projects”

Humane Omnivorism/Benign Carnivorism

- A practice in which animals are bred and raised in humane conditions with overall good lives before being painlessly killed and eaten
- Some have no objection to this practice, though they object to factory farming because of the suffering it causes, though they don't object to killing animals

“If benign carnivorism enables these animals to have contented lives that they would otherwise not have had, it seems better for the animals as well as for the people who get to eat them. How, then, could such a practice be objectionable?”

McMahan (2008)

Suffering vs Death

It's clear that animal suffering is bad. Why might their deaths matter less?

- (1) Less wellbeing in their futures compared to human lives?
- (2) Less strongly connected to their future lives than humans are?



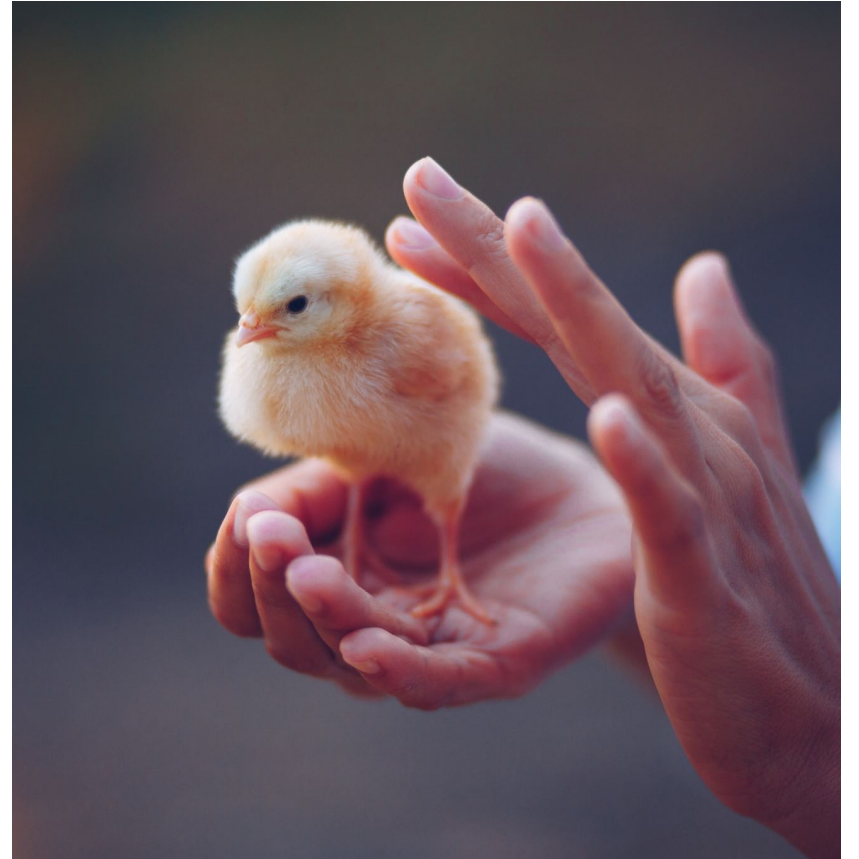
Animal lives must matter to some extent

- If animal suffering matters, then surely animal wellbeing matters too. But they must remain alive to enjoy positive wellbeing
- If animal lives didn't matter at all, then it would be irrational to allow an animal to undergo suffering in order to save their life



Better for some, and worse for none?

- Humans benefit from BC because they get to eat animals. The animals get to enjoy good lives which they wouldn't have otherwise had. This might be better for them (it certainly isn't worse for them) So, isn't the practice overall good?





Comparative and noncomparative goods

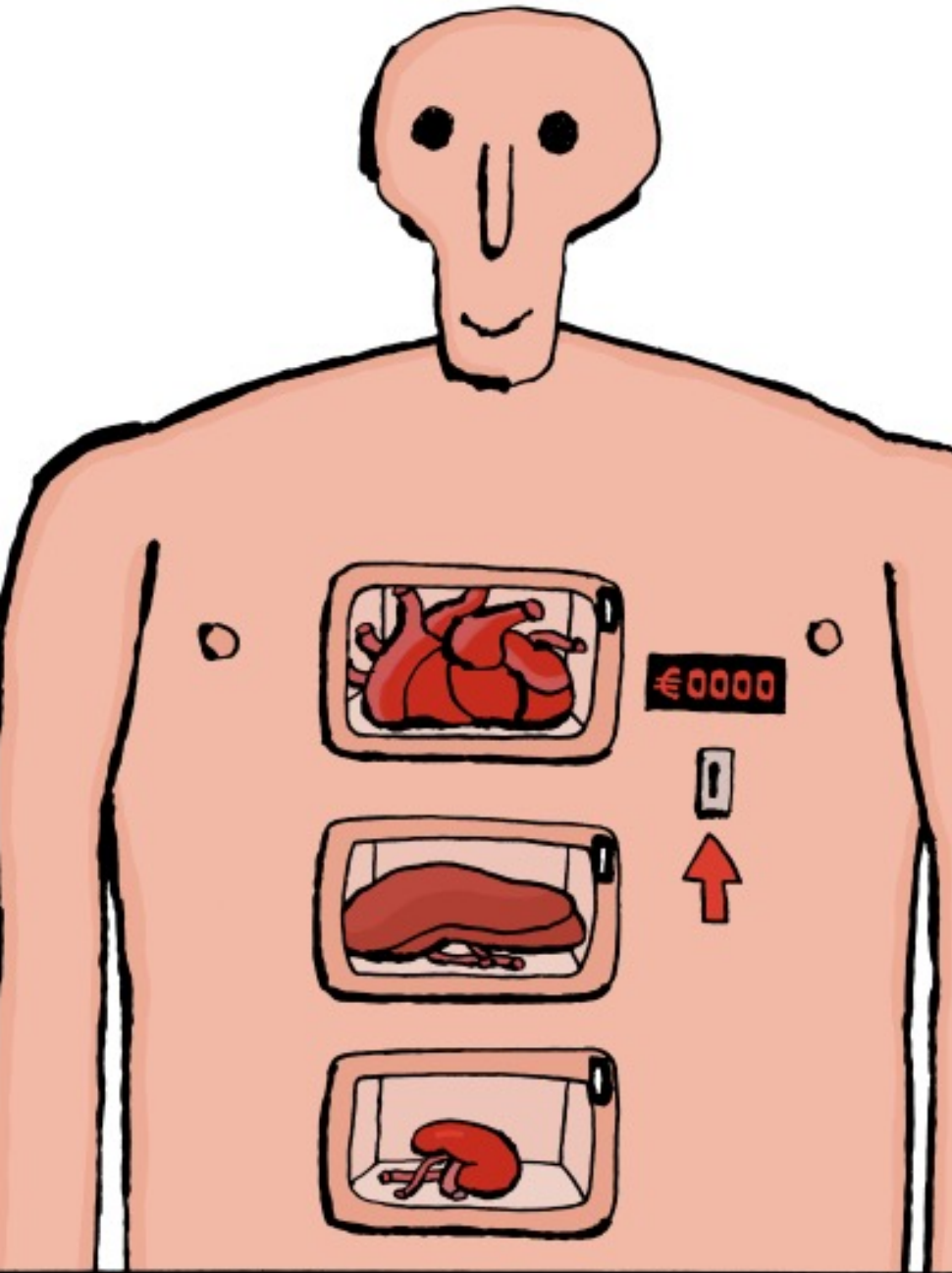
- Better and worse are comparative terms – they compare the condition of an individual in two different states of the world
- But BC involves creating individuals – the individual only exists in one of the two states of the world. Being created is neither better or worse for them – there is no ‘them’ to compare with in the world in which they haven’t been created!



Being created can't be better or worse – but it can be good or bad

- It can be noncomparatively good or bad for an animal to be created, depending on whether he has a good life. If BC creates animals with good lives, then it can be good for animals to be created.





A permissible practice?

- If BC creates happy animals, is it a permissible practice?
- A comparable practice involving humans would be impermissible. What's the difference?
- Humans have rights that prohibit being used in such ways. Do animals have similar rights?

Weighing interests



- Human interests in killing animal

The difference in taste pleasure between the meat dish and the plant-based one

- Animal interest in living

All the pleasurable experiences he will have for the rest of his life

At the point at which we are deciding whether to kill the animal it seems clear that the human interests are outweighed by the animal's interests.

The fact that we created the animal solely to kill him makes no difference

Bundling creation and killing?

- What if we genetically edit animals so that they automatically drop dead at a certain point without us having to kill them?
- What about a similar practice involving people?

