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Eating Misery: The Moral Question of Factory Farming and the Struggle with Affected Ignorance

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Victoria Oh

Senior Thesis Spring 2014

Eating Misery:

The Moral Question of Factory Farming and the Struggle with Affected Ignorance

“As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out”-Alice Walker

Abstract

What moral responsibility do we have to the suffering that we cause to animals? Should we reconsider our socially accepted treatment of animals in agriculture? In this essay I attempt to explore those moral questions by comparing new agriculture to the past; quantitative data linking environmental concerns to animal agriculture; and the current policy and law relating to factory farming. Using this information I try to unpack our moral obligation to these animals in factory farms and our affected ignorance to the entire subject of the unethical treatment of animals in factory farms. I recommend that we need to transform our way of considering our moral obligation to animals and shift the entire system of animal agriculture away from factory farming.

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Introduction

The cruel methods used in factory farming are plaguing America. Billions of animals used for livestock are inclosed in unlit, poorly ventilated and tightly confined CAFOs. These animals spend the majority of their short and painful lives in great distress only to be brutally killed for the sake of seemingly cheap and quick meat. Currently, Americans' meat consumption is at a staggering high rate and only predicted to rise. This massive consumption of meat and the methods used in factory farming causes environmental damages, attributes to global warming and is seriously affecting human health. Even so the tragedy of factory farming is not widely discussed in media, at schools, in political sectors, or among peers. The lack of attention on factory farming is a product of affected ignorance, "the phenomenon of people choosing not to investigate whether some practice in which they participate might be immoral or rife with controversy" (Williams 371). Humans must move past their affected ignorance of factory farming and face the brutal truths. Factory farming is a moral question; it is a question that we must begin to answer without affected ignorance by facing our moral obligation to the just treatment of animals.



Chapter 1: History of Factory Farming in America

If you were asked to describe the land that your meat came from, I assume the majority of people would describe a red barn and large green grass pastures with roaming cows, pigs, and chickens and a classic looking farmer tending to the animals and land.. And a classic looking farmer tending to the animals and land. This traditional farm land is depicted on our food labels and shown in our commercials for our meat and animal by-products. However, these corporations are glossing over the truth about where our meat today actually comes from. Instead of the traditional depicted farm land, the majority of meat in America comes from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) and Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs), both of these are also known as factory farms. We have shifted our way of producing meat from an open range, grass-fed farming mechanism to large scale meat factories that cause excessive harm to the animals, meat-packing workers, consumers and the environment.

The U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines CAFOs and AFOs as, “Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) are agricultural operations where animals are kept and raised in confined situations. AFOs congregate animals, feed, manure and urine, dead animals, and production operations on a small land area. Feed is brought to the animals rather than the animals grazing or otherwise seeking feed in pastures, fields, or on rangeland”. Additionally, the EPA goes further to describe the CAFOs and AFOs as “...confine animals for at least 45 days in a 12-month period. There's no grass or other vegetation in the confinement area during the normal growing season” (epa.gov). However, EPA’s definition of the CAFO, the larger of the factory farms has additional standards in regards to the number of animals a CAFO generally has to be defined as such. By the EPA’s definition of the large CAFO, the threshold animals in concentrated animals are as follows: 1,000 or more cattle; 10,000 or more swine under 55 pounds; 82,000 or more laying hens; and 125,000 or more chickens other than laying hens. These definitions show how much of a stark difference from our traditional view of the farm that our meat comes from and how it is produced today.

Hidden from View

Inside the CAFOs, the animals are kept closely together, often unable to see the light of day or able to breathe fresh air, unable to walk outside or even eat their natural diet (fed mostly corn-based diets which I will expand on later in this chapter). The design of these factory farms are for the animals to reach their maximum growth rate in the shortest amount of time possible. Due to these tight confined areas, the animals are often covered in their own waste

causing the need for routinely administered antibiotics to avoid the spread of diseases, such as E. coli. Additionally, these animals are treated as a commodity, and their individual well-being is not taken into account.

So where did these factory farms come from? Why these concentrated factories that lead to disease and cruelty of the livestock? The main three reasons are: corn, fast food, and technological innovation.

Corn

The industrialization of corn causes a boom in the amount produced in America. We have gone from producing 4 billion bushels in 1970 to 10 billion bushels today. The majority of the corn that we produce, about 3 of every 5 kernels, does not go straight to people, but to American's factory farms. Corn is the foundation, the manna of the factory farm. (Pollan, "The Omnivore's Dilemma" 62-64). Raising livestock on a corn-based diet is cheap and makes for a quickly fattened animal. Additionally, a corn-based diet allows the flesh of cattle to marle well giving it the taste that Americans have come to crave.



Although cattle in factory farms are fed a corn-based diet, they are definitely not supposed to be. Back to our picture of the traditional farm - what do we imagine cattle grazing on? Not corn, but grass. Grass should be the primary diet for cattle, however cattle raised on a grass-fed diet grow too slowly for our high demand of beef. In "Power Steer", Michael Pollan states, "Cows raised on grass simply take longer to reach slaughter weight than cows raised on a richer diet, the modern meat industry has devoted itself to shortening a beef calves allotted time on Earth" (Pollan, "Power Steer" 94). Thanks to government subsidies, there is no other livestock fed that is quite as plentiful or cheap as side from corn. In comparison to grass, corn is making it possible for corporations (not farmers) to feed thousands of animals in factory farms on small areas of land, unlike a large grass pasture. In truth, factory farms may not have existed without the rise of industrialized corn.

Fast Food

After World War II, Americans underwent a food revolution. With the rise in the fast food industry, came a higher demand for cheap meat. Americans started to shift away from a home cooked diet to a diet that consists of fast food, resulting in a need for meat to grow quickly and cheaply. In "Fast Food Nation", Eric Schlosser states, "In 1970 Americans spent 6 billion dollars on fast food; in 2000, they spent more than \$110 billion. Americans now spend more money on fast food than higher education..." (Schlosser, "Fast Food Nation" 8). Fast food is cheap, quick and has a uniform style that Americans have come to expect. These fundamental designs of the fast food industry have been transferred to the way that meat is produced. As I have stated, meat is being produced quicker and 'cheaper' than ever before. The uniformity of fast food also transfers to meat production, "McDonald's is the nation's largest purchaser of beef, pork and potatoes, and the second largest purchaser of chicken" (Schlosser, "Fast Food Nation" 4). Americans have come to expect a certain uniformity from their meat. Especially when it comes to fast food, our tastes have been designed so that we want every burger from McDonalds.

Antibiotics

From the stress of overcrowding and diseases that arise from factory farming, the use of antibiotics is now a fundamental tool used in raising livestock in America. In "Antibiotic Drug Abuse: CAFOs Are Squandering Vital Human Medicines," Horrigan states, "In North Carolina

alone, the estimated volume of antibiotics used to make food animals grow faster exceeds all U.S. use of antibiotics for human medicine. The result is an ever-increasing prevalence of antibiotic-resistant strains of disease causing organisms that erode the effectiveness of antibiotics in curing disease in humans” (Horrigan 254). Antibiotics are given to livestock regardless if they need it or not. A low dose of antibiotics has been found to accelerate growth by making the conversion of feed to weight gain more efficient. The wide use of antibiotics can have very serious consequences, like resistant strains of disease-causing organisms that cannot be treated with antibiotics.

Waste disposal from factory farms is the main source of antibiotic-resistant disease causing organisms entering into the environment. Runoff from factory farms has caused resistant E. coli in the groundwater used for drinking water in North Carolina, Maryland and Iowa. This groundwater provides drinking water to more than 97 percent of rural US populations. Likewise, antibiotics have been found in samples of groundwater near these factory farms (Horrigan 259).

GMO

Due to effects of concentrated farming, antibiotics and the consumers crave for uniformity corporate scientist are in the process of trying to obtain approval by the FDA for genetically modified animals. In “Genetically Engineered Farm Animals,” Hanson states, “Instead of changing the factory farm system to fit the physical and psychological needs of

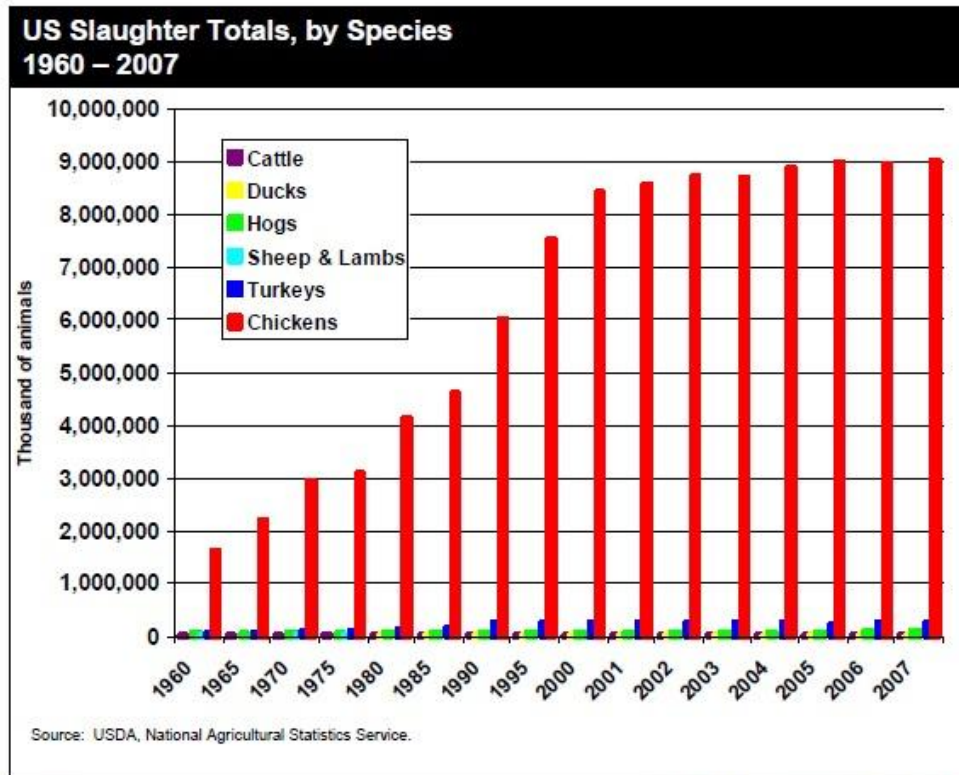
animals, the livestock industry is developing animals that are permanently altered at the genetic level to better fit the CAFO system..." (Hanson 273). These corporate scientist paid by large agribusinesses aim to redesign the biology of animals so that they may become more efficient 'products' to maximize the profit of these industries. To genetically engineer factory farm animals, scientist incorporate genes from other animals, bacteria and fungi through a process called transgenesis.

The Truth

The truth that I hope to unveil in these next few chapters aim to show the just how immoral factory farming really is. Likewise, how factory farming is not truly cheap, has harsh effect on the environment and on consumers.

Chapter 2: Quantitative Natural Science Data

Consumption of meat can be part of a balance diet. It contains proteins and vitamins and minerals that have the ability to aid in the growth and development process in a human. However, Americans are increasingly consuming meat causing affect on human health and climate change. Due to this large demand for meat products, the production of meat in America has only risen over the decades.



March 20, 2008

THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

The production of bovine, poultry, and pig meat has increased from 2006 to 2008 from 271.5 million tonnes to 280.9 million tonnes yearly (fao.org). To put this into perspective, 1 tonne is equivalent to 2,204.62 pounds. Likewise, from 1980 we have gone from slaughtering 4 billion animals annual, to 9.1 billion animals annual in 2013. This meat is consumed by Americans and traded to other nations. The U.S is the world's largest producer of poultry meat and second largest exporter of poultry meat globally. Likewise, the US cattle and beef industry is the largest grain fed-cattle industry in the world and the largest producer of beef globally

(usda.gov). In the United States, nearly 10 billion domesticated livestock (that consists of bovine, poultry and pig) are raised and slaughtered annually. The number of livestock slaughtered annually has doubled in America since 1980 and increased 10 times more than the amount of livestock we were slaughtering in 1940. Everyday these slaughterhouses kill a staggering: 7,000 calves, 130,000 cattle, 360,000 pigs, 24 million chickens per day in the United States alone (Imhoff). The global consumption of both meat and dairy products are predicted to double by the year 2050, per the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

Speed: Fast (Growing) Food

The life span of cattle raised for beef has dramatically reduced over the past few decades. Grass-fed cattle take too long to mature to slaughter age than cows fed on a corn-based diet. Just a few decades ago steers were not slaughtered until 4 or 5 years of age, now we slaughter steers at 14 to 16 months. Likewise, chickens are raised to grow larger and quicker than ever before. In the 1920s, it took 16 weeks to raise a chicken the slaughter weight maturity, 2.5 pounds. Today, chickens weight 5 pounds in just 6 weeks. Due to their oversized weight, these chickens cannot support their own weight, barely able to stand or walk, leading to their death from dehydration or hunger unable to reach their food or water. Unable to walk or stand, many chickens spend their entire lives laying in their own waste, causing open sores and infections. This can increase the risk of foodborne illnesses like salmonella. The average size of U.S. hog factory farms grew by 42 percent to 5,144 between 1997 and 2007. The average size of U.S. egg factory farms increased by half to 614,000 hens between 1997 and 2007.

Similar to the fast growth rate of livestock, the factory farm industries are growing exceedingly fast. The average size of U.S. hog factory farms grew by 42 percent to 5,144 between 1997 and 2007 and the average size of U.S. egg factory farms increased by half to 614,000 hens between 1997 and 2007. U.S. factory farms added 5,800 broiler chickens every hour. Currently, in the United States there are one billion broiler chickens — more than three birds for every person in the country (<http://truthaboutchicken.org/>).

Climate Change

Years ago when I first started to understand what global warming meant and how we are causing it, I learned about Bill McKibben, his writings on global warming and his number “350”. Scientists, like McKibben, have found that we must reduce the amount of CO₂ in our atmosphere from 400ppm to below 350 ppm to sustain human life on earth. McKibben started 350.org that sprung an entire global movement. Recently I’ve learned about a new number that McKibben has brought to our attention: 2° Celsius. Scientists have found that the increase in global temperature should be below 2° Celsius and if it was to rise above that 2 degree mark, we are will be face with very severe consequences.

Economists would refer to the harmful effects that factory farms have on the environment as externalities: the cost or benefit that affects a party who did not choose to withstand that cost or benefit. The damages to the environment from factory farms outweigh any illusions to industrialized farming as a cheaper solution to traditional animal farming. The

meat industry has an enormous environmental footprint. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the world's livestock contributes 18 percent of all annual greenhouse gas emissions. A more recent Worldwatch Institute study estimates that livestock could be responsible for as much as 50 percent of all climate changing emissions, causing meat production to become the number one cause of global warming. Both soil and water near factory farms are contaminated from fertilizers and pesticides. Greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide fill the atmosphere from factory farms (Imhoff 79). Hog, chicken and cattle waste has polluted 35,000 miles of rivers in 22 states and significantly contaminated groundwater in 17 states, according to the EPA. In 1995, Smithfield, a hog producer in Virginia spilled over 20 million gallons of manure waste showing a clear example of the damages that can ensue for factory farming. Pearce quotes Jonathan Safran Foer's comments on the destructive nature of CAFOs,

“Smithfield alone annually kills more hogs than the combined populations of New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Phoenix, Philadelphia, San Antonio, San Diego, Dallas, San Jose, Detroit, Jacksonville, Indianapolis, San Francisco, Columbus, Austin, Fort Worth and Memphis—some 31 million animals. According to conservative EPA figures, each hog produces two to four times as much shit as a person; in Smithfield's case, the number is about 281 pounds of shit for each American citizen. That means that Smithfield—a single legal entity— produces as much fecal waste as the entire human population of the states of California and Texas combined” (Pearce 445).

Additionally, the US Department of Agriculture estimates that factory farms generate more than \$500 million tons of waste per year, this is three times the amount of waste that Americans produce. Most CAFOs store this abundance of waste in massive lagoons that have the potential to overflow or seep into the groundwater. Restoration from factory farm runoff holds another huge price tag for the damages of factory farms. For example, the Chesapeake Bay is damaged from runoff waste from poultry and hog farms, the estimated at \$19 billion (Imhoff 64).



In McKibben's article "Global Warnings Terrifying New Math," he states "In so far, we've raised the average temperature of the planet just under 0.8 degrees Celsius, and that has caused far more damage than most scientists expected. A third of summer sea ice in the Arctic is gone, the oceans are 30 percent more acidic..." (rollingstone.com). We have seen the destruction that an increase in .8 degrees can do in environmental disasters like Sandy and

Katrina or severe droughts or flooding, loss of species, etc etc. If the temperature continues to rise at this rate, we will see a continuation and an increase in these very destructive natural disasters. Although organizations like McKibben's 350.org and other environmental movements have pushed some people to action or the scientific data on the rise in temperature by 2° Celsius or even the clear impactful devastation from Sandy, real change has yet to happen. McKibben argues that we cannot wait for people to change their habits and that environmental organizations have yet to lobby enough change into policy and are not changing big businesses to become more green. We have to start thinking about the fossil fuel industry as "public enemy number one" and that hopefully we can begin to lower our emissions greatly before reaching the two degrees mark.

Human Health Risks

Americans now consume more meat and poultry per capita today than ever before. Meat consumption has been linked to serious health risks such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. The annual cost to treat these diseases in the United States alone exceed \$33 billion. Likewise, obesity is a major health risk associated with the consumption of meat -- cardiovascular disease is now linked to significant intake of animal fats.

From mad cow disease to E. coli, factory farms have proven to tremendously affect human health. In the United States, between 2007 and 2009, there were 25 recalls of 44 million pounds of beef due to E.coli O157: H7 (bacteria caused by animal manure). This recall costs the

beef industry \$1.9 billion. Estimated cost of E.coli O157: H7) in the United States annually has reached \$405 million (Imhoff 66). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that contaminated meat and poultry related infections make up to 3 million people per year, killing about 1,000.

Emissions from ammonia are another environmental damage created by factory farming. Livestock from CAFOs generate 75 percent of the ammonia emissions in the United States. Pasture raised animals produce 10 times less ammonia emissions than livestock from CAFOs. The EPA started to require a report on ammonia emissions from farms in 1980 once data was released that it was severely harmful to human health causing headache, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, diarrhea and shortness of breath. However, the EPA has then since relaxed their reporting and regulations on air emissions during the Bush administration.

Salmonella is another dangerous health risk of factory farming. In "Factory Farming and Human Health," Tim O'Brien states, "The type of Salmonella which most commonly infects chickens is Salmonella enteritidis, but there are several thousand other strains in all types of farm animals. As one might expect, the environments in which farm animals are confined can also be significantly contaminated. A survey of litter and dust samples from commercial turkeys in Canada, for example, found Salmonella at 86 per cent of flocks" (O'Brien 1). This is a staggering number, considering salmonella poisoning can cause severe illness in humans or even death. Salmonella can be transfer from animal to animal in factory farms through the air. In the very poorly ventilated and highly crowded poultry boilers that chickens are kept in

salmonella can easily spread from chicken to chicken. Additionally, the feed that is given to livestock has been found to contain salmonella which contaminates the animals. Additionally, Listeria a disease that can cause miscarriages, stillbirths, and serious illnesses in newborns is linked with factory farms. "Listeria monocytogenes has been found to contaminate up to 66 per cent of fresh and frozen chicken products. Other research has found the body surfaces of pigs to be contaminated by Listeria in 58 per cent of cases" (O'Brien 33).

We continue to cut costs in our factory farms to find a cheaper and quicker way to produce animals. Even though we know that feeding dead cows to live cows causes severe effects to both animal and human health we continue to do so. "In 1979, ahead of the BSE crisis, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution warned against the dangers of feeding dead farm animals to live ones, highlighting the possibility of recycling disease-causing agents." And yet, even now, more than twenty years after the warning from the Royal Commission, and more than ten years after the farming industry became aware that the BSE crisis was triggered by feeding dead animals back to live ones, we continue to make cannibals of farm animals. Poultry can still be fed with hydrolysed feather meal, and the 'off-cuts' and waste blood from poultry abattoirs" (O'Brien 31). The moral injustices of feeding one species of animal to the same species is an outrageous and disgusting act that I will always have a hard time understanding. Likewise, down cattle, which are cattle that are too sick or injured leaving them unable to walk, are linked to E. coli and salmonella poisoning in beef. Not only are these cattle abused by the workers by aggressively pulled by ropes or pushed by machinery into lots,

but they since they are unable to walk they are covered in a thick layer of their own waste. Even though these cattle are ill and coated in feces they are still sent to the slaughterhouse, increasing the chance of mature contaminating the beef.



Chapter 4: Policy and Law

CAFOs are regulated primarily by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). There are few national expectations and regulatory requirements while the state and local authorities are responsible for ensuring the national requirements are enforced. Of the two federal statutes that regulate the authorization of CAFOs, neither address the welfare of animals and are very lax on the regulation of environmental damages due to CAFOs. The Animal Welfare Act of 1996 that regulates the treatment of animals in research, transport and dealers, however it excludes livestock from

regulation. Even though methane from CAFOs affects climate change, the Clean Air Act does not regulate CAFOs. The two statutes that do regulate CAFOs are the Clean Water Act that monitors the amount of manure and waste water from CAFOs entering into public waterways; and the Humane Slaughter Act that is designed to decrease the suffering of livestock. However, chickens and other birds are not included in this act even though more than 9 billion chickens are killed yearly in the United States. Even worse, there are numerous reports that this Act severely under-enforced. "Indeed, the late Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) lamented the widespread violation of the Act in 2001: 'Federal law is being ignored. Animal cruelty abounds. It is sickening. It is infuriating. Barbaric treatment of helpless, defenseless creatures must not be tolerated even if these animals are being raised for food.'" (Pearce 440). There is a blindfold over the eyes of the EPA. They refused to see or face the unlawful treatment of animals that they are supposed to be regulating.

Antibiotic Use Policy

In 2003, The American Public Health Association (APHA) stated there is rising evidence that the antibiotics given to livestock are being transmitted to humans. Additionally they remarked that an estimated 25-75 percent of feed antibiotics pass unchanged into manure waste. As stated previously, this waste then has the potential to travel into public drinking water. The World Health Organization has stated they believe a termination or rapid phase out of antibiotics in livestock. However, antibiotics are still very prevalently used in the raising of livestock. Additionally, The Pew Commission on Industrial Farm Animal Production

recommended the United States phase out and then completely ban any growth-promoting substances in livestock animals

Chapter 5: Environmental Ethics



So far I have discussed the effects that factory farms has on human health and the environment, but the most horrendous injustice that is continually overlooked by the corporations and the consumers is the serve immoral treatment of animals in factory farms. Therefore, in this chapter I will cover the unjust treatment of animals in factory farms, why most are unaware of this injustice, different animal rights activists views on factory farms, the ethical equality between humans and nonhumans and the unethical treatment of factory farm workers.

Affected Ignorance

From the abusive treatment of the animals to the health effects on the consumers to the injustices done to the workers to the damage it plays on the environment--factory farming would seemingly be an ethical debate spreading from every news station, a topic raised in every political debate, or a leading political movement. We need to consider why eating meat (and all that involves with it, e.g. factory farming) is not discussed in schools, the media and in daily conversations. It is interesting why some people roll their eyes when they hear that I am a 'vegan' or shun away from listening to the truth of where their meat comes from. I believe this lack of attention on the moral issue of factory farming is a product of 'affected ignorance'. In Nancy Williams' essay, "Affected Ignorance and Animal Suffering: Why Our Failure to Debate Factory Farming Puts Us at a Moral Risk," Williams presents the philosophical term affected ignorance as "the phenomenon of people choosing not to investigate whether some practice in which they participate might be immoral or rife with controversy" (371). This debate of affected ignorance examines the moral status of humans responsibility of an action that is socially accepted, but immoral. The complexity with affected ignorance is determining if the party can be blamed for the moral injustice when considering whether a lack to response is due to a refusal to consider the moral implications or an inability due to social norms. Williams argument is that affected ignorance is the reasoning behind the lack widespread public debate over the topic of the severe injustices of animal factory farming.

There are different forms of affected ignorance as it relates to factory farming. The first form is the failure of people to acknowledge the connection between their actions and the suffering that it may bring. In the case of factory farming, this relates to the action of consuming animal meat and animal by-products which may have very likely been a product of immense suffering. Another form of affected ignorance relates to the person or persons requesting to not be informed of the practice in question. This form of affected ignorance is an issue that I find myself faced with when attempting to discuss moral arguments related to animal rights or environmental injustices like global warming. It seem to be the case that the majority of people would prefer to not know more information or concrete facts relating to either of these moral issues because facing them seem to be too difficult. The third form of affected ignorance relates closely with the second and is simply the lack of questioning of people regarding a moral dilemma. This relates to factory farming by the peoples lack to question where their food comes from and if any suffering occurred in the process.

I believe it is fairly common for people to not consider where their meat comes from before arriving to the supermarket. It is almost too simple to go to a grocery store and pick up an item without considering where that food came from and how it may have affected other lives. Additionally it may be the case that many people still do or want to believe the same large green pasture lie of traditional animal farming without an immense amount of suffering. However, Williams states,

“Billions of animals are born, confined, biologically manipulated, transported and

ultimately slaughtered each year so that humans can consume them...In egg “factories,” for instance, hens are forced to live in battery cages stacked tier upon tier in huge warehouses. Confined seven to eight to a cage, they do not have enough room to turn around or spread their wings. To prevent stress-induced behaviors caused by such extreme confinement, such as cannibalism, hens are typically kept in semi-darkness and the ends of their sensitive beaks are cut off with hot blades without any anesthesia” (375).

This treatment of hens is a far cry from what I believe many people imagine as to where their eggs come from. The livelihood of cattle in factory farms is a similar grotesque situation for the animal. Williams continues, “Most beef cattle will spend their lives on huge feedlots, comprising of hundreds of acres and housing more than one hundred thousand animals. At slaughterhouses, where the average kill rate is 400 animals per hour, the assembly line is not necessarily stopped even if the animal remains alive after being stunned” (376). Even though the painful realities of factory farming occur to thousands of animals daily the absence of public exposure, discussion and/or outrage is shocking. Is it a mixture of laziness and moral apathy that drives people to continue to be blind? Or a weak will person that rather have affordable meat regardless of the treatment of animals? I agree with Williams argument that the answer to this question is that many people rather not acknowledge the moral injustices of factory farming that they rather render themselves ignorant of the entire situation.

The issue is not that people do not have any understanding at all of factory farming

methods, it is the ability want to know. "To know" is a very different sense of the word in regards to factory farming. People can claim that they do not know what goes on with factory farming, but it is likely that many people have a suspicion to what goes on with factory farming. Williams elaborates this, "So in one sense people know but in another they do not know, could not afford to know, for their own moral sake. This is the essence of affected ignorance: it is a kind of ignorance generated by what one already knows" (378). This form of affected ignorance can be related to the way many people ignored the Holocaust. Prisoners in the camp were forced to do physically hard labor on a daily basis, and torture or death were very common. By the end of the war 11 million people were murdered during the Holocaust. Although the camps were located not very far from main towns and the trains that harbored captive people ran through different towns, many that were not directly affected by the Holocaust preferred to not know what was exactly going on for a long time. They allowed the separation of Jewish people into ghettos, the movement of those people into concentration camps by the Nazis and the deaths of millions until the shocking truth was so extremely public that it could no longer be denied or unable to be known. Similar to the way that many people refuse to know what was in front of them during the time of the Holocaust, many people today lack the will to know what is exactly happening to the chickens being shipped off in trucks on the highway or to the process and treatment of the life of the cattle for the beef they are purchasing. Our society's affected ignorance towards the moral dilemma of factory farming must change in order to resolve the treatment of animals in factory farms. I fear if we continue to not know, not want to know, then

billions of animals will continue to be mistreated.

Moral Rights Theory

The philosopher and animal rights activist Tom Regan promotes a moral rights stance on the ethical treatment of animals. Regan's view of equality between animals and humans argues the 'rights theory'. The rights theory promotes the idea that actions are right if they respect and do not violate the basic rights of all effect and that all humans and every being have an inherent value. In 'The Case for Animal Rights' essay, Regan claims, "Inherent value, then, belongs equally to those who are the experiencing subjects of a life" (148). Therefore, in Regan's opinion, all animals should no longer be treated as resources that we humans use and abuse. We should view them as equals that deserve basic rights—like the right to life, bodily integrity, etc. Due to Regan's steadfast view on the equality of animals and humans, Regan believes the three following goals should be set forth for animal rights: "1. The total abolition of the use of animals in science, 2. the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture and 3. the total elimination of commercial and sport hunting and trapping" (143). Regan believes to do this, we cannot view animal rights by a case by case basis, however the entire system must change. Humans must take into account that all animals have inherent value, not merely the dogs, cats, the WWF panda, whales, etc. All animals must be considered equal and must receive rights. Again, the right to life is crucial in the way the we consider factory farming going forward. We need to consider if we have moral obligations to the animals that we are slaughtering at a tremendous rate daily.

Animals have become our resources to use and abuse as we see fit. The large food corporations claim that the methods used in factory farming are cheaper method than traditional animal farming. Regardless if factory farming is cheaper or not, it does not justify the immorality of the harsh treatment of animals in factory farms. As Regan states, "A good end does not justify an evil means" (147). The end in this quotes refers to the promoted "cheapness" of factory farming, however it can not be justified by the harsh treatment of animals in factory farms. Regan describes the fundamental wrong to factory farming is not the suffering, the death, the exploitation or deprivation, but the fundamental wrong is the way our system work - treating animals as our resources. Once we view them as such the rest of the injustices will follow. Regan goes further to argue,

"But a little straw, more space and a few companions won't eliminate - won't even touch - the basic wrong that attaches to our viewing and treating these animals as our resources. A veal calf killed to be eaten after living in close confinement is viewed and treated in this way: but so, too, is another who is raised (as they say) 'more humanely'. To right the wrong of our treatment of farm animals requires more than making rearing methods 'more humane'; it requires the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture" (147).

Regardless the improvement of some farms or advancements made to better the lives of livestock Regan believes they are still being treated as resources, which is morally wrong. I think Regan has a strong argument for the use of animals in agriculture. That once we begin to

look at others as resources we can easily exploit them for our own needs, disregarding their welfare.

To move away from our view of animals as resources we need to have a better understanding of their individual worth. Regan attempts to show the value of worth of every individual by the term inherent value, “suppose we consider that you and I, for example, do have value as individuals — what we'll call inherent value. To say we have such value is to say that we are something more than, something different from, mere receptacles. Moreover...we must believe that all who have inherent value have it equally, regardless of their sex, race, religion, birthplace and so on” (148). By viewing all individuals as having inherent value we can start to reshape our thinking of the inequality of animals as our resources. Inherent value is equal among every being that is a subject of life, meaning they feel pleasure and pain, have desires and needs and experiences. I believe that we must use this ‘rights theory’ so that every creature is taken into consideration as a being that deserves the right to live.

Liberation

Many of us can agree that modern society has gone to great lengths to overcome the crippling struggles against discrimination, particularly in regards to race and sex. In Peter Singer's, ‘Animal Liberation’, Singer proclaims that although slavery is banned in America we have yet to liberate all sentient creatures that are discriminated upon. As I have stated, this is true in regards to animals in the food industries, the discrimination in this case is the unjust

treatment of animals as commodities. Singer cries for the liberation of animals, a movement that calls for an “expansion of our moral horizons, so that practices that were previously regarded as natural and inevitable are now seen as intolerable”(135). He is claiming that for humans to expand on our moral horizons in regards to non-humans, we can no longer regard the exploitation of other non-humans as a natural or inevitable happenings we must see it as a continuation in the struggle for justice and liberation for all. In doing so, we must reevaluate our attitude towards consuming meat, factory farms, experimentation on non-humans for human benefit, along with any other forms of exploitation of non-humans. But, before humans can begin to grapple with the exploitation of non-humans, and how those exploitations are injustices we must try to understand the equality between humans and animals. Singer continues his essay by tackling the argument that humans and some animals are equal. His argument is stemmed from Jeremy Bentham’s philosophy on equality of humans to non-humans, “The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, Can they suffer”? (136). In other words, Singer and Bentham are claiming equality is present between humans and non-humans regardless of the lack of verbal language or any other human characteristic in regards to the equality of suffering. Singer continues that if we lack response to the suffering of an animal merely because it is non-human, then we are contributing to speciesism (much like racism).

I think the majority of Singer’s essay on the need for animal liberation can be used to consider the moral implications of factory farming. My only issue is the line that he draws

between non-sentient and sentient creatures and his utilitarianism view. Singer uses utilitarianism that weighs out a scale of pleasure versus pain to come to a solution to a moral action in question. The use of utilitarianism can be problematic. In some ways it can even be used against the rights of animals. If the killing of 5 animals saved the lives of 10 thousand humans, Singer would argue that this would be a just action since it weighs out more pleasure over pain. However, since factory farm animals are sentient creatures and their suffering outweighs the pleasure of eating meat consumed from a factory farm we can use this argument to break down the moral obligation to factory farming. It should be stated that I believe in the rights for all beings, a true justice for all, without weighing the pleasure and pain scale of all that are affected. Therefore, I side with Regan over Singer in the approach, but arguments are just. Regardless of any issues I may have with Singer's argument; I still support him and believe he can help to liberate animals from the crippling suffering of factory farming.

Moral Obligation to Climate Change

We have discussed there is a well defined link between climate changed and factory farming. Additionally, we may have a moral obligation to animals, but what about our moral obligation to the environment? Are we morally responsible to act on global warming? In "It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Obligations" Walter Sinnott-Armstrong argues we do not have any moral principle that holds us morally responsible for global warming. Sinnott uses an example of if we do or do not have the moral obligation to go on a joyride with a gas guzzling car. He breaks down this argument of the gas guzzling car by presenting it with

different moral principles: “actual act principles, internal principles and collective principles”.

Each principle that Sinnott goes through he cannot find any reason that we should be morally obligated to stopping global warming. Sinnott does not disagree that there should not be a moral principle, but he finds there is none that justifies our moral obligation, therefore we do not know if an act like driving a gas guzzling car is morally wrong.

I disagree with Sinnott. I believe that we do have an obligation to the environment as we do to the well-being of animals. Sinnott continues his essay by explaining the indirect harm principle and why it is not a viable principle in regards to our moral responsibility not to drive a gas guzzling car, “This principle would explain why it is morally wrong to drive a gas guzzler just for fun if this act led to other harmful acts. One problem here is that my acts are not that influential. People like to see themselves as more influential than they really are. On a realistic view, however, it is unlikely that anyone would drive wastefully if I did and would not if I did not” (300). I disagree with Sinnott statement here entirely. To say that his act is not influential is incorrect. All sort of different circumstances could arise from his act of a Sunday drive in his car. For example, he could tell his friends of his nice driving and they may want to do the same as him or others could see him driving, looking relaxed, listening to music and desire is then created for the other person to want to go for a joyride. In any case, I am trying to show that his drive can be very influential in regards to desire and our want to experience the pleasure that others are experiencing. Additionally, I am strong believer in the concept that our choices in our

daily lives affects supply and demand. If we think about this in terms of factory farming, we can link our daily actions to choosing to buy meat as influential on the system to continue to producing meat or restaurants to continue buying and selling it. Although the indirect harm principle may not work for every aspect of our moral responsibility, I do think it is vital for us to remember the importance of our choices in our daily lives and impact of our influence. This is especially true for our obligation to protecting the environment and to the well-being of animals.

The Commons

Common use and common failure. In "The Tragedy of the Commons", Garrett Hardin expresses, "Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit - in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes the freedom of the commons" (Hardin) Hardin is elaborating on his example of the commons by the means of sheep herders and a pasture. All the herders are allowed to use the pasture for their sheep. However, due to acting independently in their own self interest the common use of the pasture is overrun and unable to sustain. I believe another example of the commons could be the mass production of livestock. It is a 'resource' that we deplete for our own self-interest without the consideration of the implications of our actions.

The Tragedy of the Commons concept that Hardin discussed surrounded the issue of overpopulation. Though overpopulation is a huge issue that must be addressed, I will only

discuss uses the concept in regards to general environmental crisis, like the use of animals in factory farms and it's impact on the environment. We simply cannot sustain ourselves on the use of the commons. Hardin is right. As stated earlier, on McKibben's global crisis of an increase in temperature by 2 degree we can deduct that we will fail if we continue to increase global warming. I agree that we need to halt all activities that are harming the planet as soon as possible.

The Workers

The workers in factory farms suffer from the mental exertion of having to repeat the same brutalizing actions countless times every day. At least 25 percent of CAFO workers experience respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis and occupational asthma. "In early 2008, an unknown neurological illness began afflicting employees at a factory run by Quality Pork Processors in Minnesota, which slaughters 1,900 pigs a day. The diseased workers suffered burning sensations and numbness as well as weakness in the arm and legs" (Imhoff 71).

The majority of factory farm workers today are undocumented migrants from Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala (Pearce 447). Factory farms have a high turnover rate which benefits the large factory farm companies by not supplying their employee with benefits. In *Fast Food Nation*, Schlosser argues that working in the meatpacking industry is the most dangerous job in America based on reported injuries (Schlosser 172). It has been reported that factory farm workers suffer injuries that include: amputation from industrial machinery; forced uninterrupted

labor resulting in the workers urinating and defecating on their clothing when refused to stop the processing line; death (Pearce 447). The emotional torment upon the repetitive brutal slaughtering action takes a severe toll on the worker. In James I. Pearce article 'A Brave New Jungle: Factory Farming and Advocacy in the Twenty-First Century' he presents an account of a slaughterhouse worker,

“When you’re standing there night after night, digging that knife into these hogs, and they’re fighting you, kicking at you, squealing, trying to bite you - doing whatever they can to try to get away from you - after a while you just don’t give a shit....You become emotionally dead...And you get just as sadistic as the company itself. When I was sticking down there, I was a sadistic person” (Pearce 447).

The lack of medical benefits to the workers, and the emotional strain on their mental health, as well as the strain on their physical health is only another section to the moral question of factory farming. Does our moral obligation extend to not only the animals but to the workers? I believe that this argument goes hand in hand with the ethical moral obligation that we have to the animals in factory farms. Both the human workers and the animals in factory farms are severely affected mentally and physically by the sheer unethical practices of factory farming. The only solution that I can see to benefit the ethical treatment of both animals and the workers is a complete shift in our way we consider the treatment of animals and the system that we place them in.

Corporations

In a crisis, it is hard not to point fingers and try to find the appropriate party responsible. In regards to pollution, global warming, and animal abuse who's to blame? The people, the workers, the media or the corporations? In "Why Shouldn't Corporations Be Socially Responsible?", Christopher Stone presents the responsibility side to corporations. In particular, "The Promissory Argument, The Agency Argument, The Role Argument, and "The Polestar Argument". The polestar argument is, "if the managers act in such a fashion as to maximize profits-if they act as though they had promised the shareholders they would do so-then it will be best for all of us" (573). The polestar argument is only concerned for the profits of the shareholders (the people who hold stock in the company). In the case of factory farms, the shareholders of the meat corporations are only concerned with the profit of the meat and not with the animals or with the workers. Managers (the people whos manage the way the company is ran) are to only act for the shareholders regardless of their moral judgement on an issues. Stone explains that this is not because moral issues are not worthy of concern, but that it is not the manager's duty to consider them, but to only consider the shareholders.

In other words, this sickening idea of only caring about turning a profit without any moral judgements is a huge driving force behind factory farming. Companies like Smithfield, Tyson, and Perdue have managers that act solely in the consideration of the shareholders and the animals, workers and us are punished for this. Stone discusses the complications that arise when a manager does not make decisions based solely on turning a profit like losing their job or severely harming the company. But, to not take into consideration of the moral implications of

your decisions, even as a CEO (and possibly, especially as a CEO) is terrifying to me. We need companies that take responsibility in their actions, that consider hard moral judgements when making decisions for the corporation. I think that in turn, these companies could see a higher profits from consumers seeking to purchase from corporations that are actively trying to move towards the more ethical moral choice instead of solely trying to turn a profit. But we need more consumers that are willing to rise the demand for the more ethical choice.

Chapter 5: Recommendations



To effectively solve the ethical dilemma of factory farming we must alter our current policy and law to adequately integrate the rights of animals. However, we cannot merely change policy, we must change the way that we consider our ethical obligation to animals and the system we place them in.

Policy Change

First and foremost, we need to ban the use of all CAFOs in America. The unethical implications and the damage to the environment and human health are very obvious reasons to ban the use of CAFOs. If the consumption of meat is to continue it must be on a much lower scale on open land where the animals are allowed to live and way freely on grassy fields. For this to be practical, people must lower their consumption of meat by a significant amount.

We must begin the regulate the amount of animals that we are allowed to slaughter annually. This number would have to be severely lower than the amount of animals that we currently slaughter. In doing so, the regulation of the amount of animals that are allowed to be slaughtered annual would most likely decrease the amount of methane greenhouse gases that are released into the atmosphere, as well as decrease the runoff created by factory farms. This policy would have to be a highly regulated federal law. Even a cap and trade system would be an interesting new turn for the meat industry. Like fossil fuel emissions that are destructive to the environment, a law could be enacted that allowed corporations to trade among themselves. The incentive would need to be some form of tax break or another form of money based incentive.

Additionally, Humane Slaughter Act must include all livestock that are slaughtered in factory farms, including all chickens. As stated above, this act must be highly enforced and regulated. There must be nationally enforcement of this act, the state and county should not be

involved in the regulation as they may not enforce the monitoring of the act in effort to raise the profit of their state. Likewise, we must protect the rights of the workers in factory farms. Instead of low-wage and no medical benefit jobs, the meat packing industry workers must be paid fairly and respected with medical benefits and a safe work environment.

Consumption

In “Involuntary Simplicity: Changing Dysfunctional Habits of Consumption”, Guy Claxton discusses the consumption habits of humans and the impact that it has on our environment. Claxton discusses his topics of, “Voluntary Simplicity, traps, the trap of competitive needs, and getting out of jail”... Claxton quotes the concepts coined by Elgin, “changes in personal lifestyle are vital for planetary well-being and has persuasively shown how such changes can be construed not as sacrifice but as joyous reorientation of life away from having and towards being”. This sentiment expressed by Elgin is the foundation of what our reorientation of considering factory farms. It is our change in behavior that will protect and save our planet, and us. We must move toward the following ethical decisions: consider the rights of animals and in turn lower or eliminate our consumption of meat.

But as Claxton expresses, this is much easier said than done. Claxton continues, “One wants, and one wants not to want; the problem is how to translate the wanting not to want into not wanting”. For example, we all know smoking is wrong, because of this some smokers want to stop. Even though all the facts are there and the want to quit is there, the continuation of the

problem continues. The smoker continues to smoke even though he/she does not want to smoke and knows that it is bad for them. So the issues here, is how do we find the willpower to change? To overcome the traps that are instilled in us from such a young age? Claxton refers to the way we consume as a drug addiction, and I agree. We use and abuse the environment and animals to get our fix of the feel good feeling of convenience. Convenience, what a devil within itself. The convenience of quick and cheap meat is, as stated, what drives the meat industry. Just like smokers, the want is there, the facts are there but we all still find it very hard to break the habit. Consumers must quit their addiction to this brutal convenience. In turn, as Claxton expresses, this does not have to be a sacrifice, but a joyous reorientation of life. We can take pleasure in the fact knowing that we are respecting the rights of animals, living a healthier lifestyle and protecting the environment. We need to see the facts for what they are and really act on bettering the planet by reshaping who we are and how we consume.

Diet and Alternatives

So what can be done about the meat eaters? In 'Meat and Morality: Alternatives to Factory Farming', Evelyn B. Pluhar gives three alternatives to consuming meat: vegetarianism (or veganism), humane farming or in-vitro meat. Humane farming still fails to respect the basic moral rights of the animals involved. I am not wholly against in-vitro meat but I am not exactly in favor of it either. As a vegan, I would not consume it since it is an animal byproduct, but it could possibly be a sufficient alternative for a meat-eater or even vegetarians that are willing to consume byproducts of animals. My two main concerns with in-vitro meat is the cost (about

\$333,175.00) and any potential harm that may be done to animals when extracting the cells. If I could have it my way, I would prefer that we halt our consumption of meat and animal by-products entirely. Although, I think a more practical decision for our country (in relation to the heavy addiction we have for meat) is to move towards a humane farming system and a lower consumption of meat.

While changing our production of meat to a humane one, many of us should consider a vegan and vegetarian diet when appropriate. I understand that there are few that are able to switch to this diet due to health or religious reasons, however it is a very viable transformation for the majority of us. Contrary to a very popular belief that a vegetarian diet is more expensive and harder to obtain (i.e. shopping for food or going out to restaurants) than a diet that contains meat it is not. Consumers must consider the long term costs of consuming meat. Sure, you can spend \$1 at McDonalds for a hamburger, but the long term health cost will weigh out any potential savings you think you are keeping by purchasing that cheaply produced hamburger. As a once meat-eater, now vegan, I can bear witness that I have saved money in my medical health alone. Additionally, living in NYC (and similarly in any major city) there are vast options that vegans and vegetarians have as sources of meals. Not only can you go to your local green market and purchase high quality delicious produce, but you can easily search online to find numerous vegetarian and/or vegan restaurants that range from low and high price ranges. I suffer no moral or convenience struggle when finding my meal for the day. This same convenience needs to span to smaller cities and towns across America, so that they too may have access to convenient vegan and vegetarian options.

It may be the case that the correct moral solution may not satisfy the majority, at least not at first. But, as stated above, in regards to Claxton's article, we will eventually find joy in our reorientation of thinking.

Reorientation of Thinking: The Shift Away from Affected Ignorance

Regan states, "People must change their beliefs before they change their habits" (Regan). Our belief system must shift, we must regard all humans and animals equally, practice the rights theory, and remind ourselves that every being has inherent value. It is through this understanding that, that we can finally begin the to take genuine action against the plight of animals. "Because we have viewed other animals through the myopic lens of our self-importance, we have misperceived who and what they are. Because we have repeated our ignorance, one to the other, we have mistaken it for knowledge" (Regan). Our affected ignorance has drown us in a pond of self-created knowledge of the truths behind factory farming throughout the years. Before we can truly enact and strongly regulate policies that will protect and promote the rights of animals we must shift our way of thinking about our moral obligation towards animals and the rights that animals have.

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