

Environmental Ethics

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Two approaches to environmental ethics

Anthropocentrism

- Nature is regarded as a resource for human purposes and ends – *instrumental value*
- Historically the dominant position (at least in the Western cultural area)
- Aristoteles, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant

Nonanthropocentrism

- Nature is regarded as an end in itself – *intrinsic value / inherent value*
- Historically marginal position (more dominant in the Eastern cultural area)
- Albert Schweitzer, Arne Næss, Aldo Leopold,

Approaches to environmental protection

Anthropocentric approaches

Non-anthropocentric approaches

Individualistic approaches, animal protection

Aristotelian, Stoic, Augustin, Thomas Aquinas, Kant

Extensionism on deontological or utilitarian grounds; biocentrism

Holistic approaches, environmental protection

Shallow ecology, for example sustainable development for future humans sake

Deep ecology, land ethics, eco-feminism, social ecology

- Moral status
- Much of the discussion within environmental ethics during the past 40 years has centered around a formulation offered by Kenneth Goodpaster (1978):

For all X and for all Y , X is ascribed moral status by Y if and only if X is F and Y is G.

- For all X and for all Y , X is ascribed moral status by Y if and only if X is \underline{F} and Y is \underline{G} .
- \underline{G} specify the conditions of being a moral agent, while \underline{F} specify the conditions for having moral status.
- Agreement that the conditions for \underline{G} should be separated (analytically) from the conditions for \underline{F} – not only moral agents have moral status.

- Who or what belongs to the group of beings which are ascribed moral status?
- Philosophers disagree about what factual properties (under F) are morally relevant for the ascription of moral status.
- **Moral status:** a status a being has if we as moral agents have direct moral duties towards it.

- *Moral status* = ‘To have moral status is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations. If an entity has moral status, then we may not treat it in just any way we please; we are morally obliged to give weight in our deliberations to its needs, interests, or well-being. Furthermore, we are morally obliged to do this not merely because protecting it may benefit ourselves or other persons, but because its needs have moral importance in their own right’ (Mary-Ann Warren. *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, (1997), Oxford: Oxford University Press).

- Kant's answer:
- For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X is a *rational person*.
- What is special about rational persons as possessors of moral status is their ability to make rational choices regarding their life, their autonomy – it's what gives them their dignity (as ends in themselves).

Beings whose existence depends, not on our will, but on nature, have nonetheless, if they are non-rational beings, only a relative value as a means and are consequently called *things*. Rational beings, on the other hand, are *called* persons because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves – that is, as something that ought not be used merely as a means – and consequently imposes to that extent a limit on all arbitrary treatment of them (and is an object of reverence (Kant, 1956: 2. 90-91)).

- Rational beings are fundamentally different from non-rational beings, because rational beings are *free*.
- Non-rational beings, like animals, behave as they do because of instincts and impulses that they are incapable of questioning and evaluating.
- Food example.
- Human beings are fundamentally different because they are always capable of raising the question whether they should act in a given way – and for this reason we must recognize that we are free and not simply determined to act by instincts and impulses.

- Critique of Kant's position:
- The threshold for moral status is set too high.
- Non-rational beings, including animals, are reduced to mere things with instrumental value for rational persons.
- Kant's answer: non-rational animals lack the ability for self-consciousness, and for that reason they should be denied moral status.
- They are only things with instrumental value, and moral agents have no direct duties towards them.

The fact that the human being can have the representation "I" raises him infinitely above all the other things on earth. By this he is a person... that is, a being altogether different in rank and dignity from things, such as irrational animals, with which one may deal and dispose at one's discretion (Kant 1968: 7. 127)

- Moral agents have only **indirect duties towards non-rational animals**:

If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practice kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men (Kant 1979: 240).

- Two possible interpretations:
 1. The last sentence suggests an empirical claim: that those who are cruel to animals are in fact more disposed to be cruel to humans.
 2. The previous sentence suggests a more plausible interpretation: one who is being cruel to animals displays a character flaw, and the person is destroying his own character.
- *Kant's point is that we only have indirect duties towards animals.*

- Bentham's answer:
- For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X is a *sentient being*.
- "the question is not, Can they reason? Nor, Can they talk? But, Can they suffer? (Bentham 1789: 17.283)

- Bentham is a hedonist utilitarian (pleasure is the only thing that has intrinsic value).
- All living beings capable of feeling pleasure and pain count morally and should have moral status – this includes several animals (although we're unsure how far down the animal kingdom it stretches).
- The principle of impartiality (everyone counts equally)

- Peter Singer is a contemporary representative for Bentham's view.
- For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if is a being with its own *interests*.
- That a being has interests means that it has a good of its own.
- Beings without interests don't count morally.

- Kant versus Bentham & Singer:
- Even though Kant's theory of moral status is narrower than the utilitarians' theory, his theory gives the possessors of moral status stronger moral protection.
- While the utilitarians open up for using animals and humans as means to human ends, Kant's theory rules out using (at least) humans in this way.

Peter Singer

- Takes historical liberation movements as a point of departure – black, women, homosexuals etc.
- A common denominator of these movements is a fight against discrimination / differential treatment on the basis of skin colour, sex and sexual orientation.
- *But exactly what kind of equality are these movements fighting for?*

Peter Singer

- A liberation movement seeks an expansion of our moral consciousness, and an extension of the fundamental moral principle of equal treatment.
- Not factual equality, but moral equality.
- The moral praxes of earlier times are viewed as a result of unjustified prejudices.

Peter Singer

- If we follow the same line of reasoning we discover a new liberation movement – **animal liberation**.
- Singer wants to apply the principle of equal treatment to our treatment of animals.
- Perhaps future generations will look back on us in wonder of how badly we treated animals?

Peter Singer

- **Scepticism:** the argument for equal treatment of men and women seems reasonable enough. Women have a right to vote because they are equally capable of making rational judgments as men are.
- But animals don't understand the importance of voting, so they cannot have a right to vote.
- **Ergo:** men and women are so similar that they should have equal rights, while humans and animals are so different that equal rights are not out of the question.

Peter Singer

- This argument doesn't work. Men and woman are also different, e.g. the right to abortion is an important issue for women, but since men cannot have an abortion it makes no sense to talk of the man's right to abortion.
- Equal treatment doesn't imply "treated equally" but rather "equal consideration (of interests)".

Peter Singer

- Bentham on the principle of equality: everyone is to count for one, and no one for more than one.
- This means that the interests of animals affected by our actions are to be given equal consideration, or the same moral weight, as the interests of any other animal or human being.

Peter Singer

- Bentham points to the ability to feel pleasure and pain (sentience) as the morally relevant property which grounds a being's claim to equal consideration.
- Sentience is a necessary condition for having *interests*.
- Distinction between a rock and a mouse.
- If a being doesn't have the capacity for sentience, there is nothing to take into account.
- Plants.

Peter Singer

If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience...is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin or colour? (Singer 1993:57-58).

Peter Singer

- Just as it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of skin colour or sex, it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of what species an individual belongs to (*speciesism*).
- We cannot morally justify treating a pig differently just because it is a pig.
- Most people are, according to Singer, guilty of speciesism.

Peter Singer

- Singer is a utilitarian and he judges the rightness of actions according to their consequences, and by comparing the value of the consequences.
- One problem for utilitarians is to compare the values of different consequences or outcomes (e.g. spending a night with the family or playing guitar with my friends on a pub for the first time)
- It's also difficult to compare joys and sorrows across different species.

Peter Singer

- However,
- The moral mathematics are quite simple regarding our treatment of animals: our praxis of using animals for food harms them more than it benefits us.
- Is the human joy of eating chicken more important than the suffering and harm we inflict on chickens as part of industrial food production?
- If we ask questions like these, and apply the principle of equal consideration of interests, it becomes apparant that our treatment of animals in many cases are morally unjustified.

Tom Regan

- Has developed a deontological animal ethics inspired by Kant.
- He has written *A Case for Animal Rights*.



Tom Regan

- Critique of utilitarianism:
- Regards individuals merely as means and not as ends in themselves.
- According to utilitarianism, individuals (animals and humans) are only valuable insofar as they contribute to making the world a better place to live, i.e. insofar as they bring happiness into the world.
- The analogy with the cup

Tom Regan

- The principle of equal consideration of interests takes the *interests* as the ethically primary, and not the *individuals* with the interests.
- Regan thinks this gets it wrong: the reason the interests matter is because the individuals who possess the interests matter.
- Regan believes that values attach to the individuals, and not to their interests.

Tom Regan

- Regan's theory of inherent value (Postulate of Inherent Value): individuals have a value that is independent of their experiences and their value for others.
- Everything which has value has it to an *equal degree*, i.e. no ranking of values.
- The alternative – that values comes in degrees – is unacceptable because it is *perfectionist*.
- A perfectionist view claims that individuals' value depend on their virtues or abilities (which is outside of their control).
- Those with less value can be sacrificed to satisfy those with higher value, which is absurd.

Tom Regan

- Regan proposes that the ability to be “a subject for a life” should be the morally relevant criterion for ascribing moral status, and an equal inherent value and fundamental rights for those animals who fulfil this criterion.
- Those animals which are subjects for a life will typically have the capability for perception, memory and a sense of the future – but these are only *sufficient* and not *necessary* conditions for being subjects for a life.
- The difference between Singer and Regan here.
- According to Regan, all normal mammals of one year and older, and perhaps also birds, fulfil the subject for a life criterion.

Tom Regan

- Being a subject for a life requires: “beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference- and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and ... of their being the object of anyone else's interests” (*The Case for Animal Rights*, s 243)

Tom Regan

- The principle of respect: we should treat beings with inherent value with the respect that they are due (not treat them merely as means to our ends).
- This is a question of justice or fairness.
- We have both positive and negative duties towards animals who are subjects for a life.
- Regan appeals to the *principle of formal equality*, and claims that similar cases should be treated similarly, and that differential treatment requires a morally relevant difference.

Singer or Regan?

- Both Singer and Regan draw quite radical conclusions from their respective theories with regard to how we should treat animals.
- Vegetarianism, animal experimentation, circus, etc.
- They agree on several issues.
- Regan's theory is more stringent and gives better moral protection for the animals in question than Singer's utilitarian theory, which again is more inclusive than Regan's.

Singer or Regan?

- The important thing for Singer is maximizing preferences (pleasure and joys), and minimizing sorrow and pain.
- This gives a weaker protection of animals provided that they can be killed painlessly (e.g. what about conscientious meat-eating?).
- For Singer it can be morally permissible to kill a number of animals if doing so contributes to the overall welfare of all parties concerned.
- For Regan it is wrong to harm or kill animals even though doing so has great expected utility.
- What about animal rights?

Beyond Singer and Regan

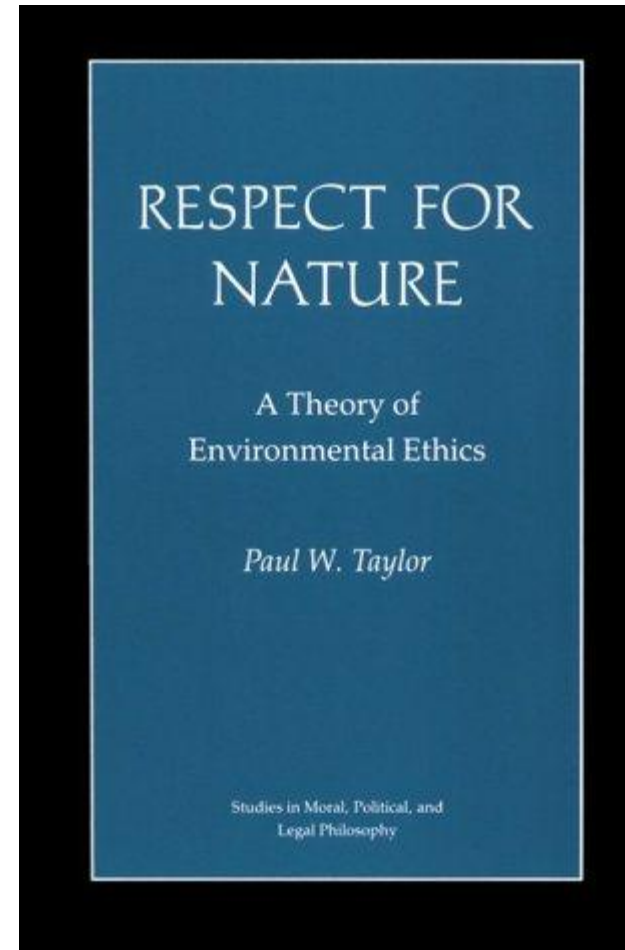
- A central task for environmental philosophers has been to expand the circle of moral status to include non-sentient living beings and also collective entities.
- But why should the circle be wider than that defended by Singer and Regan?
- Why should we care morally for plants and trees?

Beyond Singer and Regan

- Singer and Regan (mistakenly) assumes that the "sentience" or "subject-for-a-life" criteria are necessary conditions for having moral status.
- Those who criticize their positions argue that this is just part of the story – the rest of the story is about the value of *life* as such.

Paul Taylor

- Biocentric position
- Individual living organisms should be ascribed moral status (inherent value) because they are teleological centres for life, with an inherent striving to realise their possibilities.
- All organisms have interests that are morally relevant.
- Biospherical egalitarianism (Albert Schweitzer`s reverence for life).
- Problems with how to solve conflicts of interests.



Redwood case

- You are the last human being, and you are soon going to die. When you are gone, the only life remaining will be plants, microorganisms, invertebrates. For some reason, the following thought runs through your head: Before I die, it would be nice to destroy the last remaining Redwood, just for fun. What, if anything, would be wrong with destroying that Redwood? Destroying it will not harm or hurt anyone, so what is the problem?



- If we believe it is wrong to destroy the redwood, the question becomes who or what we are doing wrong against?
- Since there's no humans or animals left, it must be the case that we're doing wrong to non-sentient living beings, and that these beings have some kind of moral status.

- For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X is a *living being*.
- Biocentrism (Taylor, Varner, Schweitzer, Goodpaster, Wetlesen).
- Not only sentient beings have "interests", but also plants etc. do.

1. For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X has interests.
2. A living being has interests of its own if and only if it is a living being.

Consequently,

3. For all X, X is ascribed moral status if and only if X is a living being.

- I. X has an interest in something (water, nutrition).
- II. Something (water, nutrition) is in X's interest.
- We can meaningfully speak of what's good for living beings without involving human interests.

- For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X has a *good of its own*.
- Taylor: beings which are teleological centres for life have moral status.

1. For all X, X is ascribed moral status (by a moral agent) if and only if X has a good of its own.
2. A being has a good of its own if and only if it is a living being.

Consequently,

3. For all X, X is ascribed moral status if and only if X is a living being.

- Singer's answer: without "sentience" there is nothing morally to take into account.
- Without "sentience" there is nothing which matters for the organism, and the sentience criterion is therefore well founded and correct.
- Comparison of car's interests and plant's interests.

- Problem for the biocentrist:
- Even though having interests or a good of its own is a necessary condition for moral status, it is not a sufficient condition.
- There are things we recognize as having interests, but which we don't believe should have moral status.
- Examples.

- "Y is good for X" doesn't automatically imply that Y should be promoted".
- This gap creates problems for environmental ethics.
- *How can we argue convincingly for the view that humans should care for the interests or goods of non-human beings?*

- A different perspective (virtue ethics):
- It may be more fruitful to look at the vices exhibited by the person who destroys the redwood.
- What is wrong with this person?
- The wish to destroy nature reflects a lack of virtues or character that we think highly of and worth having.

- ‘[t]he moral significance of preserving the natural environment is not entirely an issue of duties, rights and social utility, for a person’s attitude toward nature may be importantly connected with virtues or human excellences’ Hill Jr.
- ‘The notion that the forests should be preserved to avoid hurting the trees or because they have a right to life is not part of the widely shared moral consciousness, and for good reason’. Thomas Hill Jr. 1983: 213.

- But how to explain our moral discomfort with regard to the careless destruction of the Redwood or other plants (if we leave aside the loss of these as resources for human beings and animals)?

- It is not because the interests of plants and trees are being harmed or neglected.
- Nor is it because it fails to treat plants and trees as ends in themselves.
- Finally, we do not explain our moral discomfort in this case by an appeal to the failure to respect the intrinsic or inherent value of plants and trees.
- ❖ *A better alternative is to argue that the willingness to engage in careless destruction of non-sentient nature reflects a lack of human character traits that we think highly of and consider to be worth having.*

- If we observe a person who is carelessly killing plants, and he asks ‘Why shouldn’t I kill these plants?’ it seems more fitting to ask him to reflect on the sort of person he is than to try to offer reasons why he should refrain from killing the plants.
- If we observe a person who is kicking a dog, and he asks ‘Why shouldn’t I kick this dog?’ it seems again appropriate to ask him to reflect on what kind of person he is to be doing this.
- We should also offer this person other reasons why he should refrain from kicking the dog, and these reasons would stem directly from the harm done to the dog. The main reason why he should not harm the dog is because the dog is a sentient being with moral status. It has moral status in virtue of possessing the morally relevant property of sentience.

Thomas Hill Jr.

- Virtue ethical position.
- Shifts focus from acts to agents.
- What kind of person do I want to be?
- What kind of human beings are indifferent towards nature?
- Humility.
- Question-begging?

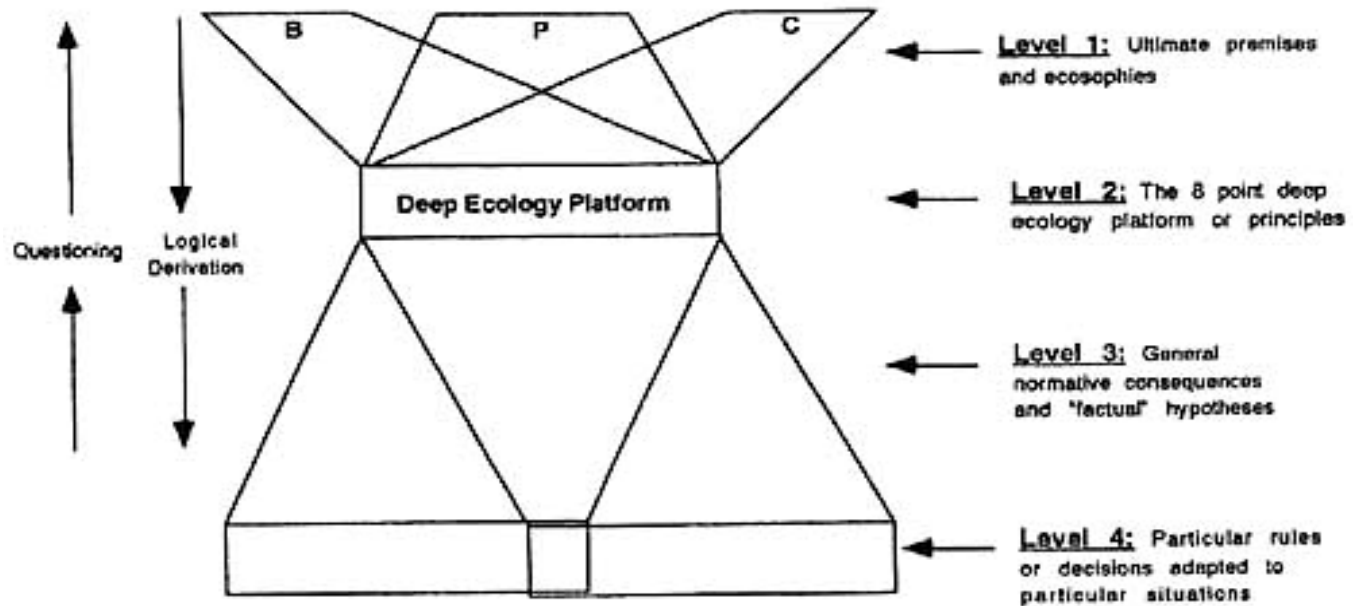
- Ecocentrism.
- Some philosophers think that neither the sentientists (Singer) nor the biocentrists (Taylor) learn lessons from ecology (“everything is connected”).
- We need a new ethics which focuses on the ecological wholes of which we are part.
- Leopold’s land ethic, Naess’ deep ecology.

Arne Næss

- Deep ecology
- "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary" (1973).
- holistic / ecocentric position
- Happiness consist of Self-realization in the form of an understanding and joyful activity. At the deepest level, this is an activity where one understands oneself as a participant in the unfolding of all life on earth. Such an understanding gives motivation to have moral concern for all living beings.
- "small-self" versus "Large-Self"



The Apron diagram



Examples of kinds of fundamental premises:
B = Buddhist
C = Christian
P = Philosophical (e.g. Spinozist or Whiteheadian)

The deep ecological platform

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires a smaller human population.
5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change will be mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between bigness and greatness.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes.

Is there a future for deep ecology?

- Too radical position – *are there any deep ecologists left?*
- In need of revision – *how can the theory be improved?*
- Presupposes premises which very few accept (e.g. intrinsic / inherent value, smaller population)

Contemporary issues in environmental ethics

- Animal ethics
 - What do we owe to animals?
 - What is permissible use of animals for human purposes?
 - Human interests versus nonhuman interests – which interests should be given most weight?

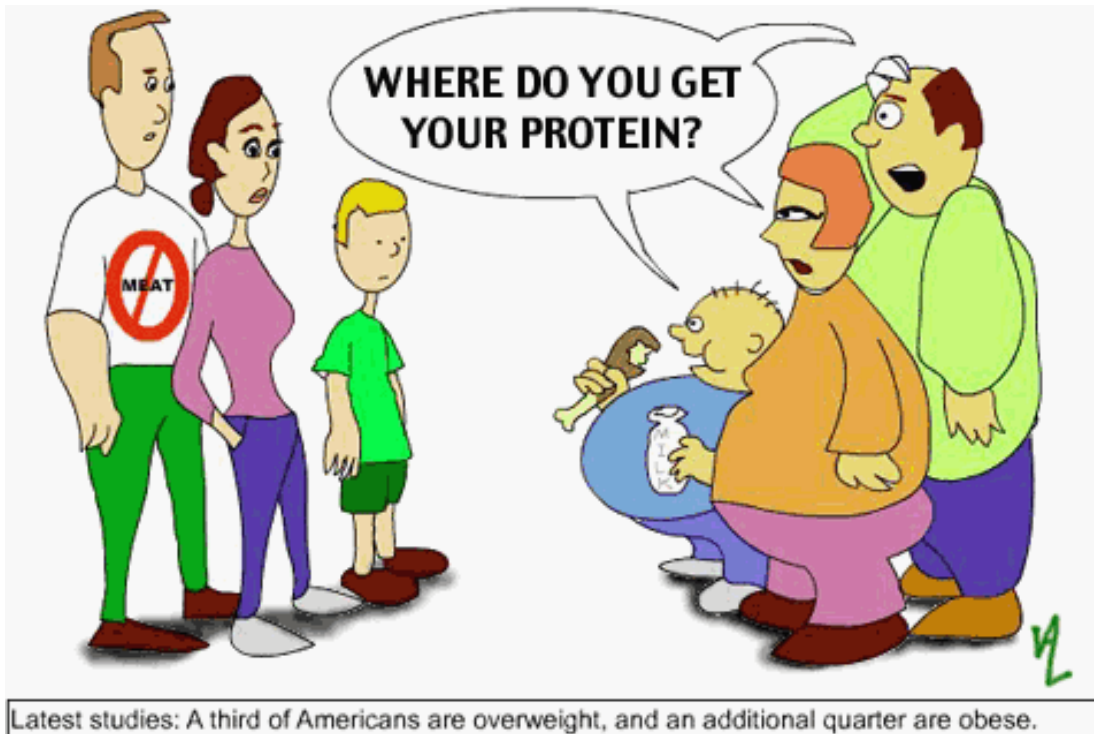


Is today's meat production morally defensible?

- Chicken, pig, cow, sheep
- Clash of moral, economic and aesthetic considerations
- Is it more problematic to eat some animals than others?
- Why?



Should we become vegetarians?



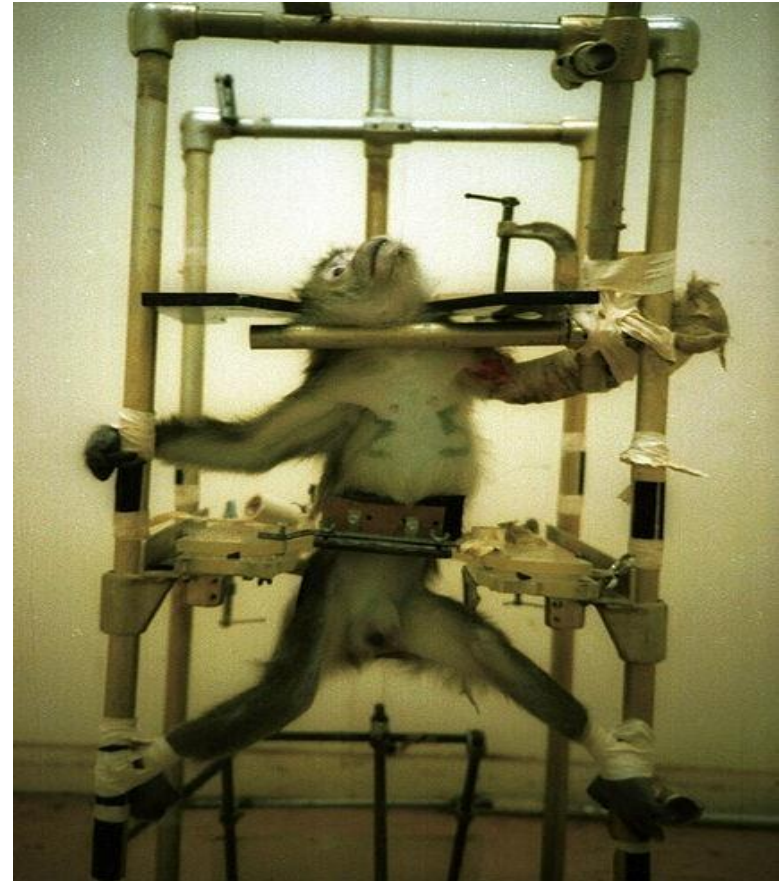
Is fur breeding morally defensible?

- In Norway there exist around 400 fur farms, and approximately 600 people work in the industry.
- Most farmers have fur breeding as a second income. In addition, they are subsidised by 50 mill. tax money per year.
- Do we need fur? And even if we did, would fur breeding still be morally defensible?



Is animal experimentation morally defensible?

- Scientists proclaim that animal experimentation is necessary in order to produce medicines (for humans)
- If it is necessary, then at least we have a duty to cause as little harm and damage to these animals as possible, and make sure that they suffer unnecessary.
- Norge must follow *the three R`s* – **Reduction** (reduce the number of animals used for experimentation), **Refinement** (improve methods so that less animals are being used), **Replacement** (replace methods with alternatives to animal experimentation).



Are circus and bullfighting morally defensible?

- Examples of cases where human non-vital interests are given more weight than animal vital interests?
- Circus without animals?
- Cultural versus moral norms
- Increased resistance against bullfighting



What about other types of animal care – dogs, cats (so-called pets)?

- Is it morally problematic in any way to keep animals locked in cages?
- What about dogs in a leash?
- Can we be sure that these animals enjoy good lives?



Environmental pragmatism

- Environmental ethics is currently not living up to its promise of providing a philosophical contribution to the resolution of environmental problems.
- If environmental philosophers spend most of their time debating non-anthropocentric forms of value theory, they will arguably never be able to make a contribution to the resolution of environmental problems, which was the initial goal of this discipline of applied ethics.
- Environmental ethics should therefore be more policy-oriented, but how can it achieve this goal?