

Animals, Freedom, and the Ethics of Veganism

Aaron Simmons

Abstract While moral arguments for vegetarianism have been explored in great depth, the arguments for veganism seem less clear. Although many animals used for milk and eggs are forced to live miserable lives on factory farms, it's possible to raise animals as food resources on farms where the animals are treated more humanely and never slaughtered. Under more humane conditions, do we harm animals to use them for food? I argue that, even under humane conditions, using animals for food typically harms animals by restricting their freedom. My argument raises an important question about the extent to which animals are harmed when their freedom is restricted. On one view, it's possible to restrict animals' freedom without causing them harm so long as we don't make them suffer. This view underestimates the value of freedom for animals. Even if animals aren't made to suffer, restricting their freedom can harm them insofar as it deprives them of freely pursuing their enjoyments in life. My argument has implications for not only the ethics of using animals as food resources but also the ethics of other human uses of animals that involve restricting animals' freedom, such as using animals in zoos and circuses. I examine these implications and also consider what we should do with farm animals if we cease using them for food.

1 Introduction

While the ethical questions surrounding vegetarianism have been explored in great depth by philosophers, there has not been much philosophical examination of the ethics of veganism. Veganism is a form of vegetarianism in which one abstains from consuming not only meat but also other animal products including milk and eggs. Many vegans also refuse to wear or use various other animal products in their lives, including products made from leather, fur, wool, and down feathers. Is it

A. Simmons (✉)
Marywood University, Scranton, PA, USA
e-mail: asimmons@marywood.edu

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asimmons@marywood.edu

wrong to use animals for their milk or eggs? Does morality requires us to adopt a vegan lifestyle?

According to one standard moral argument for vegetarianism, we ought to be vegetarian because it is wrong to kill animals for food, particularly when we are capable of living long healthy lives on a vegetarian diet. However, it might seem less clear why we morally ought to be vegan. On the one hand, many of the animals that we use for milk and eggs are raised on 'factory farms' where the animals are forced to live miserable lives and are ultimately slaughtered for food. However, it is possible to raise and use animals for milk and eggs on free-range farms where the animals are treated more humanely and allowed to live out their natural lives, never being slaughtered for meat.¹ Is it still wrong to use animals as resources for food and material, even under more humane conditions in which we do not ultimately kill the animals? More precisely, putting aside the environmental and health consequences that may come with raising and using animals for food, do we do anything wrong to the animals insofar as we use them as our resources?

Typically, when we do something wrong to another being, it is because we *harm* that being in some way that is morally unjustified. So let us ask, does using animals as our resources, even under more humane conditions, harm them in some way? This question of harm is the focus of my chapter. I argue that using animals as food and material resources, even under more humane conditions, still typically harms animals insofar as such practices *restrict animals' freedom* in various ways. My argument raises an important question about the extent to which animals are harmed when their freedom is restricted. According to one view, it is possible to restrict animals' freedom without harming them so long as we do not make them suffer or kill them. I argue that this view underestimates the value of freedom for animals. Even if animals are not killed or made to suffer, restricting their freedom can harm them insofar as they are deprived, to some degree, of freely pursuing their various enjoyments in life. Additionally, I contend that we underestimate the extent to which our confinement of animals may cause them to suffer in more subtle ways, such as through boredom and depression. My argument has important implications for the ethics of using animals as our resources in a variety of contexts, including not only our use of animals for food and material but also, for example, our use of animals in zoos and circuses.

I conclude my chapter by addressing what we should do with farm animals if we were to cease using them as food resources. I argue that it is in domesticated animals' best interests that we continue to take care of them, rather than setting them free to fend for themselves. I also briefly consider whether we ought to restrict domesticated animals' freedom to reproduce, including to the point of driving their species to extinction.

¹To be clear, some free-range farms today still treat their animals in inhumane ways and the animals raised there are ultimately slaughtered for food. My point is just that we can imagine a free-range farm in which the animals are treated more humanely and allowed to live out their natural lives.

2 The Argument from Suffering and Death

According to a standard moral argument for vegetarianism, the practice of raising and killing animals for meat is unethical because it causes at least one of two significant harms to animals. First, most animals raised for meat are made to suffer in various horrible ways in industrialized factory farms. Second, even if animals are raised in more humane, less painful conditions, we harm the animals simply by prematurely ending their lives. Indeed, for many vegetarians, this is the most fundamental harm caused by the practice of raising animals for meat.

It may seem less clear how moral respect for animals requires us to adopt a vegan lifestyle since products such as milk and eggs can be obtained without killing animals. However, further investigation reveals that the same moral reasons for being vegetarian also support becoming vegan. Animals used to produce milk and eggs are commonly raised on factory farms and made to suffer in various ways. Cows are kept in small stalls, not allowed to freely move around. They are branded, tail-docked, or castrated without any painkillers. Cows suffer from health problems when they are forced into continuous birthing and lactation and given hormones to produce more milk than they naturally would. Baby calves can suffer if they are deprived of nutrients from their mothers' milk. Chickens used for eggs suffer when they are debeaked and crammed into small wire cages that restrict them from spreading their wings and moving freely. Mainstream dairy and egg industries are also closely linked with the meat industry. Many animals involved in the production of milk and eggs are ultimately slaughtered. This includes male cows and chickens, as well as female cows and chickens that outlive their usefulness in producing milk or eggs. So, support for the dairy and egg industries also typically supports the meat industry.

Opposition to human-inflicted animal suffering and death provides a strong argument in favor of becoming vegan. However, the argument has a limit. If using animals for their milk and eggs is wrong solely because the animals are made to suffer and killed in factory farms, then we do not wrong animals when we use them for food so long as we raise them in more humane conditions (e.g. keeping them in less restrictive spaces and refraining from physically injuring them) and we do not slaughter them when they outlive their usefulness to us. Assuming that it is possible to use animals for food under these improved conditions, the argument from suffering and death is a conditional argument for veganism. A similar conditional argument could be made in support of the use of animals in zoos and circuses: so long as the animals are not made to suffer or prematurely killed, we do nothing wrong to them when we use them for our entertainment. This sort of conditional argument stands in contrast to a more fundamental form of vegetarianism according to which no amount of improvements could justify the practice of killing animals for meat because it is wrong simply to kill animals for purposes of eating them.

Let us ask though whether there are any other ways in which we harm animals when we use them as resources for food (or use them in zoos and circuses) in ways

that do not require killing them. In particular, are the animals harmed in some more basic way that is more difficult to avoid and, thus, in some way that might give us a more fundamental reason to be vegan?

3 The Argument from Freedom

Even if they are not killed or made to suffer in factory farm-like conditions, using animals as resources for food and material can also harm them in another way: *by depriving them of their freedom*. Under some definitions of freedom, it might seem that animals are not capable of being free. Freedom is sometimes equated with autonomy, which involves directing one's own life according to values or a conception of the good life that one has reached through reflection and reasoning. Arguably, most if not all animals are incapable of having this kind of freedom since they lack the capacity to form a conception of the good life through reflection and reason. However, although this is an important sense of freedom for highly self-aware beings, there is another, more basic sense of freedom that is applicable to many animals. Freedom in this basic sense involves being able to do as one wants without being subject to external constraints on one's actions. So long as animals are capable of having desires, they are capable of having this kind of freedom.

Using animals as our resources for food, including for milk and eggs, typically involves restricting their freedom to some degree. In more extreme cases, farm animals may be kept in small cages or stalls. But even if farm animals are not kept in small cages or stalls, we still restrict their freedom to some degree insofar as we control their movements and behavior, making them do things to satisfy human desires rather than allowing them to live as they please. For example, even under more humane conditions, dairy cows are artificially impregnated and milked for human consumption. Allowed to live as they please, the cows might not reproduce at the times we want them to do so and, when they do reproduce, they would feed their baby calves with the milk they produce.

Suppose I am correct that using animals as our food resources will usually entail restricting their freedom to some degree. How do we harm animals when we deprive them of freedom? One way in which confinement can harm animals is by causing them to suffer. Keeping animals in cages, stalls, or other confined spaces in which they lack adequate room to move around, exercise, and roam may cause them to feel distressed, frustrated, afraid, and sad. If confined animals are unable to properly move around and exercise, this could also result in painful physical ailments for the animals. The specific type of confinement can also be the cause of suffering. For example, wire cages or cold, cement floors can cause physical discomfort and injury. However, suppose that when we confine animals to use them for food, we take care to minimize their suffering, such as by giving them ample room to move around and exercise and, in general, providing them with comfortable environments that do not lead to physical discomfort and injury. Do we harm animals in any other ways when we deprive them of their freedom?

According to philosopher Cochrane (2012), the answer is no. On Cochrane's view, most if not all animals have no "intrinsic interest" in liberty—that is, liberty is not good in itself for animals. Rather, he contends, animals have only an instrumental interest in liberty, meaning that liberty is good for them only as a means to providing them with other goods, particularly the avoidance of suffering. Because animals have no intrinsic interest in liberty, Cochrane argues that they are not necessarily harmed when they have their freedom curtailed. He suggests that it is possible to keep and use animals in zoos, circuses, research laboratories, and farms without causing them harm so long as we eliminate the aspects of confinement which cause the animals to suffer.

By contrast, Cochrane contends that people have an intrinsic interest in freedom. They have an intrinsic interest in governing their own lives without interference from others. Freedom is good for persons independently of whether it makes them happier or helps them avoid suffering. Even if a person's life in confinement is overall pleasurable, she has an interest in not being controlled and manipulated by others. Likewise, a person has an interest in making her own decisions, even if her choices might make her life less pleasurable. Cochrane explains that people have an intrinsic interest in freedom in virtue of being "autonomous agents" who are capable of framing, revising, and pursuing their own conceptions of the good. This requires, among other things, being able to reason and reflect on one's desires and to change them according to one's values. Because animals are not autonomous agents in this sense, they cannot have this intrinsic interest in freedom (idem, 6).²

I believe that Cochrane's argument underestimates the extent to which confinement (i.e. having one's freedom restricted) can harm animals. Even if animals are not made to suffer in obvious ways, confinement can still harm them *insofar as it prevents them from freely pursuing their various desires and enjoyments in life*, including their desires to roam, explore, and play in their environments as well as their desires to interact with other animals. Two points deserve emphasis here. First, animals may suffer in less physical, more emotional ways when deprived of their enjoyments, such as by experiencing depression, frustration, listlessness, or boredom. Cochrane's view underestimates the extent to which confinement may cause animals to suffer in these more subtle ways.

But even if animals are not made to suffer from confinement, they are still harmed insofar as they are prevented from doing basic things that they desire or would enjoy doing, such as exploring their environments and interacting with others. Not all harms must be experienced as bad by the one who is harmed. Consider the harm of death—or more specifically, the permanent annihilation of one's consciousness. Epicureans contend that death cannot be bad for the one who dies because all harm consists in the experience of suffering and, although one may suffer in the process of dying, death itself cannot cause one to suffer. However, as other philosophers have pointed out, this view of death fails to appreciate that death

²Cochrane allows that some animals may qualify as autonomous agents and, therefore, have an intrinsic interest in liberty.

can be bad for the one who dies simply in virtue of the fact that it permanently deprives one of the various goods of conscious life, including the pursuit of various enjoyments in life. Similarly, confinement can be bad for animals insofar as it deprives them of certain basic goods—the fulfillment of various enjoyments they have in life—regardless of whether the animals suffer as a result of this deprivation.

It might be objected at this point that although it is understandable how a being's death can be bad for it despite not causing it to suffer, it makes less sense to think that confinement can harm a being without making it suffer. When a being dies, there is a reason why it doesn't suffer: the conscious being no longer exists and is no longer capable of having any experiences. However, to confine animals does not annihilate their consciousness. So, if some particular instance of confinement is actually bad for animals, why wouldn't it cause them to suffer? In answer to this question, let me first emphasize, again, that we may not always know when animals are suffering in less obvious ways such as from boredom and depression. However, it is also the case that animals may not suffer because they are not aware that they are being deprived of goods. For example, cows that are being milked may not understand that they are being prevented from doing other things they would otherwise enjoy doing at that moment. The fact that they may not be aware that they are being deprived, to some degree, of living their lives as they please does not negate the fact that they are being deprived.

I do not wish to claim that we harm others whenever we deprive them of things that they desire. The concept of harm tends to be reserved for morally significant negative impacts that we make on an entity's welfare. Many instances of depriving others of things they want are not morally significant (and some deprivations may actually be good for a being). For instance, if I sit in someone's favorite seat on the bus, I prevent this person from satisfying a certain desire but, at least under normal circumstances, I do not thereby harm her. Similarly, if I deprive an animal of a treat that it would enjoy eating, I do not necessarily harm the animal. However, if I frequently or regularly prevent an animal from freely pursuing the things that it enjoys doing, then I am depriving the animal and negatively impacting its welfare in a way that is more cumulative and, thus, more morally significant.

My argument assumes that it is generally good for animals to satisfy their various desires and that it is generally bad for them to have their desires thwarted. For animals to satisfy their desires, generally speaking, is good as a means to their living more enjoyable lives. To frequently inhibit them from pursuing their desires is generally bad for animals insofar as it deprives them of living more enjoyable lives. There will be some exceptions to this general rule. Animals, like people, sometimes desire things which are not good for them. For example, an animal that wants to run across a busy road will likely get hit by a car and, therefore, it is better for the animal to not act on its desire. However, I see no special reason to doubt that, in general, it is good for animals to have opportunities to satisfy their various desires or enjoyments.

My argument implies that freedom, generally, is instrumentally good for animals: freedom is good for animals as a means to their living more enjoyable lives. It is unclear to me whether some animals also have an intrinsic interest in freedom—

that is, whether freedom is good for animals independent of whether it helps them obtain other goods such as enjoyment and the avoidance of suffering. However, I am not convinced that it matters ultimately whether animals have an intrinsic interest in freedom. One might think that it matters on the following grounds: if animals' interest in freedom is merely instrumental, then it would be possible to confine animals for human use without harming them so long as we can confine them without making them suffer, whereas if animals have an intrinsic interest in freedom, then to confine them would harm them independent of whether they are made to suffer. However, this reasoning is short-sighted. As I have argued, freedom is good for animals not only because animals may suffer when confined, but also because freedom allows animals to experience greater enjoyment in life. Even if it is possible to confine animals for human use in ways that eliminate their suffering (which is itself questionable), they are still harmed insofar as they are deprived, to some degree, of experiencing more enjoyable lives.

The fact that animals' interests in freedom may only be instrumental does not detract from the moral significance of their interests. Instrumental interests can be significant interests. Indeed, they can be among a being's most important interests. Arguably, the interest in continued life—for both people and animals—is only an instrumental interest. Life is good only as a means to various valuable conscious experiences. If a being permanently loses the capacity for conscious experience, yet remains alive, life is no longer good for that being. Nevertheless, life is among the most important interests for persons and animals. Additionally, even if freedom is only instrumentally good for animals, it could always or usually have this instrumental worth for them, such that animals are always or usually harmed by confinement. Similarly, although life has merely instrumental value for us, it is usually if not always the case that we would be harmed instrumentally by death—that is, being killed usually if not always robs us of having valuable experiences ever again.

In response to my argument, it might be objected that confining animals for human use can be done in ways that do not prevent animals from satisfying their desires or enjoyments. Indeed, Cochrane makes this objection in response to the idea that animals need freedom in order to satisfy their desires. I am unconvinced by this objection, however. Animals confined to be used as human resources are typically controlled, restricted, and made to do things to satisfy human desires rather than their own desires. It seems inevitable that, to some extent, they will be prevented from living as they please. Furthermore, we may not be able to know many of the specific things that animals enjoy doing (or would enjoy doing) when allowed to be free and explore. It seems reasonable to think that individual animals will typically know their own desires and enjoyments better than we will, since they are the only ones who actually experience their desires. The fact that they belong to different species than us, with different physiologies, and are unable to clearly tell us through language what their desires are further supports the view that the animals are typically in the best position to know what things they desire to do in any given moment. Animals are more likely to have their desires satisfied if, in general, we just 'let them be' and allow them to be in control of their lives, to pursue whatever it is that they may desire and enjoy.

There is also something confusing and perhaps contradictory in Cochrane's claim that animals can lack freedom but still have their desires satisfied. Freedom, in the basic sense that is applicable to animals, means the ability to satisfy one's desires absent of external constraints. If animals used as resources are able to fully satisfy their various desires, then it would seem that they do not lack freedom in the relevant sense. On the other hand, if the animals lack freedom in the relevant sense, then by definition, they are prevented from pursuing their desires to some extent. My suggestion is that confined animals used as resources typically do lack freedom to some extent, meaning that they are unable to pursue some of their desires, even if we make their environments more humane such that they are able to satisfy more of their desires.

To summarize the main points of my argument so far, I've suggested that using animals as our food resources usually involves, in various ways, restricting their freedom—that is, their ability to act on their desires without external constraints. To restrict animals' freedom harms animals by making them suffer in both obvious ways and more subtle ways such as depression and boredom. But regardless of whether animals are made to suffer, to restrict their freedom also harms them simply by preventing them from fulfilling their various desires or enjoyments in life. It follows that using animals as our food resources usually causes harm to them by depriving them of their freedom.

Supposing that my argument is correct, it remains an open question whether it is ethical to use animals as food resources. However, if we assume that it is generally wrong to intentionally cause harm to others, then we should conclude that it is usually wrong to use animals as our food resources. On this view—let us call it *the freedom-respecting view*—we should treat animals not as our resources but rather as free individuals, generally allowing them to control their own lives and live as they please. Note, however, that it could be ethical, on this view, to restrict animals' freedom when doing so is necessary to protect their welfare, such as preventing animals from running across busy roads.

I take this argument to be a central reason why we ought to adopt a vegan lifestyle, a lifestyle in which one abstains from using animals as food resources. It is, I would argue, a more fundamental reason for being vegan than the argument from suffering. For it suggests that even if we improve the conditions of farm animals, such that they are not made to suffer or killed when they outlive their usefulness, raising animals to use as food resources is still wrong. It is wrong insofar as it harms animals by restricting their freedom in various ways for human benefit, rather than allowing them the freedom to lead their own lives. This argument suggests that there is something fundamentally harmful about using animals as food resources. In this sense, it is similar to the argument that it is fundamentally harmful and wrong to kill animals for meat, even if they are raised and killed without being made to suffer. However, the harm caused to animals by restricting their freedom in the process of using them as food resources is, in general, significantly less than the harm caused to them when we kill them for meat, for death permanently prevents animals from pursuing all of their enjoyments in life, whereas the same is not true of confinement. It also should be pointed out that there may be

some food products or materials from animals that we could obtain and use without harming animals by killing them, making them suffer, or restricting their freedom. For example, it seems possible to collect and use leftover animal manure for purposes of fertilizer without necessarily harming animals. Also, if hens lay eggs that do not hatch and the hens have no other use for them, it may be ethical for us to use these leftover, unwanted eggs.

In closing this section, let me address one final challenge to the idea that it is usually wrong for humans to use animals as their resources. In a recent article, Wayne (2013) defends the practice of using domesticated animals for their products or labor on the grounds that it is essential to incorporating them as participants in the human community, something which is beneficial for both animals and their human caretakers. Domesticated animals struggle to meet their own basic survival needs and, thus, they benefit from having relationships with human caretakers. In exchange, humans benefit from the products, labor, and affections that the animals can provide us. Wayne also questions how valuable freedom from human interference can be for domesticated animals given their dependence on humans for their survival and well-being. Her implication seems to be that domesticated animals are better off if included as participants in human communities, which includes providing food and labor to those communities, rather than being separated from them.

I am in agreement that domesticated animals, due to their dependent state, are generally better off being taken care of by human beings. However, it is unclear why we should think that the animals must serve as our resources, contributing their labor or products, as a condition of their receiving our caretaking. One might argue that beneficial relationships should be governed by a principle of fairness or reciprocity. However, especially since human beings are responsible for domesticating animals, I would propose that we owe it to the animals to take care of them without expecting any sort of beneficial return for ourselves. Assuming that we do take care of the animals independent of whether they give anything back to us, it is unclear how animals benefit when we use them for their products or labor, especially when it is not the case that they are voluntarily offering their services to us. To the contrary, I've suggested in my argument that using domesticated animals as our resources typically harms them to some degree, insofar as we prevent them to some degree from pursuing their own enjoyments or interests in life.

4 Farm Animals in a Vegan World

In a well-known article in environmental ethics, J. Baird Callicott suggests that the idea of "liberating" domesticated farm animals is meaningless and a practical impossibility. It is meaningless, he argues, because domesticated animals are not capable of living on their own. In contrast to wild animals being held captive, domesticated animals "have been bred to docility, tractability, stupidity, and dependency" (Callicott 1980, 331). Callicott further asks us to consider the practical consequences of liberating farm animals. If we simply release farm animals into the

wild, many of them will starve or freeze to death. Some of these animals, he suggests, might be able to survive and recover some of their former wild selves, but then they would be competing for food and living space with other indigenous wildlife (*idem*, 331). This could be bad ecologically. Perhaps instead of setting farm animals loose into the wild, we could continue to house and feed them on farms without killing or using them for food. However, as these animals, free from natural predation, breed and increase their populations, more and more land use would be required to house the animals as well as to produce food for them (in addition to the plant food required to feed a vegan human population). This option also appears bad from an ecological standpoint. One final option would be to continue housing and feeding farm animals but not allow them to breed, ultimately driving them into extinction. Callicott suggests that this choice would be “ironic” since we’d be eliminating the very species that we are trying to protect and benefit by “liberating” them.

The idea of liberating domesticated farm animals is not meaningless, provided that we have a reasonable understanding of what “liberation” entails for farm animals. Liberation for farm animals need not entail setting farm animals free into the wild. As I understand it, liberation for farm animals means freeing farm animals from human exploitation, particularly in ways that are harmful to the animals. Nevertheless, Callicott’s remarks raise an important question of what we should do with farm animals if we cease to use them as our food resources. Upon first glance, it does not seem ethical to set domesticated animals free to fend for themselves in the wild or on the streets in cities. Because they are domesticated, they are less able to fend for themselves, such as by finding food, making shelters, and defending themselves against predators. Many of these animals probably would not be able to survive on their own.

Rather than setting farm animals free to fend for themselves, perhaps we ought to continue to care for them due to their dependent state. Because human beings are responsible for domesticating these animal species, we incur a special moral responsibility to help them meet their basic needs. If we continue to take care of farm animals, they should be given ample space outdoors to move about, exercise, play, and socialize; their living spaces indoors should not be too restrictive; and we should not continue to treat them as our resources. This option might be impractical given the sheer amount of farm animals that would need to be housed and taken care of. Additionally, as Callicott points out, it also seems impractical and potentially disastrous ecologically to allow farm animals to continue breeding freely. This would leave us with two other options: either (1) we could prevent farm animals from breeding at all, which would ultimately lead to the extinction of these species or (2) we could significantly limit the breeding of farm animals, such that they would not be driven to extinction but also would not be allowed to become too populous. This latter option is currently the strategy used with cats and dogs in the United States: many animal welfare organizations emphasize the importance of spaying and neutering cats and dogs in attempt to control their population levels. We can imagine a similar option being used for farm animals like cows, pigs, and chickens.

Contrary to Callicott, I do not believe it would be “ironic” or self-contradictory to drive domesticated farm animal species into extinction by not allowing them to reproduce. As I understand it, the basic goal of liberating animals from human exploitation is to promote the welfare of existing individual animals or to protect them from human-caused harm. To allow farm animals to live out the rest of their lives under the protection of humans, but not allow them to reproduce, does not contradict this goal so long as we treat the existing individuals respectfully. Arguably, animals that have yet to come into existence do not have any interests or rights to come into existence. However, there may be other reasons to continue the existence of farm animal species. In particular, many people learn to empathize with and feel compassion for animals by interacting with domesticated animals and becoming familiar with their personalities and inner emotional lives. This can happen through the relationships we have with companion animals like cats and dogs or by spending time with farm animals on farm sanctuaries. Without domesticated animals, future human generations lose these important opportunities to develop their emotional and moral sensitivity to animals.

Still, the prospect of limiting animals’ reproduction has its own moral problems. There are different means by which we can try to control animal reproduction, neutering being one of them. The practice of neutering animals is problematic since it requires inflicting some harm on animals. David Boonin details the harms imposed on cats and dogs when they are “fixed.”

[They] must be confined and taken to the vet, placed in unfamiliar surroundings, exposed to a frightening environment. Most animals who go through such procedures will surely experience a great deal of anxiety if not outright fear and terror. In addition, [they] must either be given a general anesthesia, which can cause a variety of adverse reactions and in some cases even death, or suffer a tremendous amount of physical pain during the procedure. The procedure itself exposes [them] to non-negligible risks of various infections and of complications that can arise from incomplete removal of the organs or from excessive bleeding. And when the procedure is over, [they] will suffer from a general disorientation as well as nausea and physical discomfort, lasting in some cases for several days (Boonin 2003).

Additionally, it may be thought that neutering animals harms them simply by restricting their reproductive freedom, frustrating their desires to have sex and reproduce. Indeed, it might seem contradictory to defend veganism by appeal to animals’ interest in freedom but then also propose that we ought to restrict domesticated animals’ freedom to reproduce. If it is wrong to use animals as food resources because doing so restricts their freedom, why isn’t it also wrong to restrict animals’ reproductive freedom?

Arguably, it is sometimes ethical to restrict another being’s freedom when doing so is in the best interests of that being (e.g. preventing a child from playing in a busy street). However, to restrict the freedom of a farm animal to reproduce would not be done for the good of the animal; rather, it would be done to control the population level of the species. Nevertheless, controlling the reproduction of domesticated animals could be justified on the grounds that it is necessary to prevent animals from endangering the welfare of their offspring. If domesticated

animals are allowed to freely reproduce, they will create more animals than we can take care of. As a result, many animals would be left to fend for themselves and could suffer and die from starvation or an inability to meet other basic needs. Now, animals are not morally responsible for their actions and they do not intend to endanger their offspring. Still, we are sometimes justified in preventing them from doing things that would harm or endanger the welfare of others, even if it requires that we cause some harm to them.

Although neutering animals deprives them of the freedom to have sex and reproduce, it is also questionable how much animals are truly harmed if they can no longer have sex or reproduce. Arguably, animals do not actually desire to reproduce because they lack the concept of reproduction. They desire to have sex for pleasure and reproduction is the unintended, unforeseen result of this. To neuter animals, then, initially thwarts their desire to have sex, but it does so by eliminating that desire. So, it is not as if the animals go on wanting something that we do not allow them to have. And, in some cases, if neutering animals eliminates the ability to reproduce but not the desire to have sex, then the animals are not prevented at all from having something they want, since it was never their desire to reproduce in the first place.

The most serious harms potentially inflicted by neutering seem to be those described by Boonin, including the physical pain that can result from the procedure or from complications that arise from the procedure. Whether it is ethical to neuter domesticated animals to control their population levels will depend, in part, on the likelihood and frequency of the harms to neutered animals, as well as how serious or significant those harms are in comparison to the harms that offspring would suffer if domesticated animals are free to reproduce and we are unable to take care of all of the offspring.

One final option for dealing with domesticated animals in a vegan world would be to painlessly kill all of the animals and simply end the moral problems associated with domesticated animals. However, I find that I cannot endorse this option. Arguably, to permanently end the life of another conscious being who possesses various enjoyments in life is one of the worst harms that we can inflict on another being. It is true that there are some cases in which a conscious being is better off being killed than continuing to live, but typically those cases involve beings whose lives are so irreversibly miserable as to not be worth living. I do not think it could be reasonably argued that all or even most domesticated animals' lives are so irreversibly miserable as to not be worth living.

In closing, let me add that although it may be ethical to neuter domesticated animals to control overpopulation problems, it does not follow that it is ethical to do the same to wild animals. Domesticated animals are dependent on us for their survival and health, and we have a special responsibility to take care of them. If stray domesticated animals suffer and die because there are too many of them to be taken care of and they cannot fend for themselves, we are partly responsible for their plight. So, we have a special responsibility to take steps to reduce the number of domesticated animals that must suffer. By contrast, wild animals are more capable of fending for themselves. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, to adopt a

widespread policy of intervening in the wild to prevent wild animals from suffering and dying would likely cause ecological problems that would harm many more beings (see Simmons 2009).

5 Conclusion

If using animals as our resources for food and material somehow wrongs the animals, it must be because it harms them in some way. The most obvious and perhaps most serious harm to animals when we use them as resources consists in the suffering and death we inflict on animals raised on factory farms. However, even under more humane conditions, using animals as our resources can harm them insofar as we control them and restrict their freedom in order to satisfy our wants. To restrict animals' freedom can harm them not only by causing them to suffer, but also insofar as we deprive them of goods: the goods of living their lives as they please and freely pursuing their enjoyments in life. In the remainder of this chapter, I considered what we should do with farm animals if we were to cease using them as our resources. None of the options are morally unproblematic and it is unclear what the morally best option is. Setting farm animals free to fend for themselves avoids the potential harms imposed on animals by trying to control their reproduction, but does so at the cost of potentially sending animals to live miserable lives on their own in which they are incapable of fending for themselves. On the other hand, we could continue to take care of farm animals while limiting their abilities to reproduce, but this option may run into practical obstacles of providing enough land and resources to millions of farm animals for the duration of their natural lives. Additionally, it may require causing physical harm to animals through a mass neutering effort, harms that cannot be justified on the grounds that it is in those animals' best interests.

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