

Chapter 12

The Vanishing Ethics of Husbandry



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Abstract The ethics of food production should include philosophical discussion of the condition or welfare of livestock, including for animals being raised in high volume, concentrated production systems (e.g. factory farms). Philosophers should aid producers and scientists in specifying conditions for improved welfare in these systems. An adequately non-ideal approach to this problem should recognize both the economic rationale for these systems as well as the way that they constrain opportunities for improving animal welfare. Recent philosophical work on animal ethics has been dominated by authors who not only neglect this imperative, but also defeat it by drawing on oversimplified and rhetorically overstated descriptions of the conditions in which factory farmed animals actually live. This feature of philosophical animal ethics reflects a form of structural narcissism in which adopting a morally correct attitude defeats actions that could actually improve the welfare of livestock in factory farms to a considerable degree.

12.1 Introduction

Bernard Rollin has argued that when university programs in animal husbandry began to relabel themselves as programs in animal science, there was an accompanying shift in ethics. The changeover occurred during the 1970s, as the agricultural sciences generally began to adopt a more positivist ethos (Johnson 1976). Rollin's claim is that while animal husbandry had both implied and encouraged an ethic of caring for livestock and consideration of their interests, the turn to science discouraged empathy and substituted a headlong pursuit of efficiency in its place (Rollin 2004). Husbandry had "vanished" from the curriculum of students training for animal agriculture, as well as in the organization of veterinary research. Rollin's thesis has been developed as a vehicle for both exploring and reforming practices in industrial animal production

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(Harfeld 2011). In this paper, I will explore a very different sense of vanishing. My focus will be on the way that husbandry ethics are missing from the discourse of philosophers working on animal issues.

For both Rollin and myself, husbandry ethics consists of norms and standards for the care of animals in livestock production settings. Such standards give rise to philosophical puzzles, conundrums and even paradox. The conceptual work needed to develop and implement husbandry ethics is especially important in the Anthropocene because climate change promises to exacerbate already-existing deficits of animal welfare in industrial production systems. The highly influential report *Livestock's Long Shadow* from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has been widely cited by philosophers and animal advocates for documenting how methane emissions from animal production contribute to the greenhouse effect. In this philosophical literature, the FAO report is often cited as a supporting argument for condemnation of industrial animal production and in support of ethical vegetarianism (Ilea 2009; De Bakker and Dagevos 2012). Yet the report itself argues for *more* use of intensive animal production systems owing to their greater efficiency of emissions per unit of consumable animal protein when compared to traditional pasture-based production (Steinfeld et al. 2006).

Both Rollin and I (as well as a handful of other philosophers such as Peter Sandøe and several contributors to this volume), have undertaken philosophical analyses of the challenges that attend a functional and practical ethics of husbandry. It is not as if there is absolutely *no* philosophical research on these questions. However, I contend that this work remains marginalized in mainstream academic philosophy. This chapter extends an argument made in my 2015 book, *From Field to Fork: Food Ethics for Everyone*. I compared three ways in which the ethics of livestock production might be structured differently. First, one can ask whether vegetarianism is ethically mandatory. This is an old question with a distinguished philosophical pedigree dating back to Ancient Greece. Second, one can ask whether industrial animal production is ethically acceptable. This question typically presumes a negative answer to the first, but acknowledges the potential for housing and treatment of livestock species that fails to respect animal interests in a morally significant way. A negative answer to this question might, then, lead to a third: How should industrial animal production be reformed to improve animal welfare? Almost all philosophers who have taken the trouble to ask have concluded that industrial animal production is *not* ethically acceptable, but very few have been interested in the third question. Their philosophical curiosity is satisfied by finding some alternative, morally acceptable source of meat, milk or eggs (Thompson 2015, 134–137).

This lacuna in the philosophical literature is how I will understand the vanishing ethic of husbandry. Why is it that philosophers who are interested in animal ethics are so incurious about what counts as improving the lives of livestock? Any defensible answer to this broad question would require consideration of many themes, some of which will have little philosophical relevance. A narrower thesis is explicitly normative: The approach that philosophers are taking to livestock exhibits a form of narcissism that deserves critique. This narcissism is not limited to philosophers, but reflects a broader cultural movement evident in other dietetic disciplines. While I will

touch briefly on this trend, my focus in this paper will be limited to the philosophical community, on the one hand, and to animals and animal products, on the other. In the concluding section, I will link it to emerging applications of extreme biotechnology that are attempting to decouple consciousness from meat production, entirely. This component of my argument will connect with my previous work on “the opposite of human enhancement” (Thompson 2008). I begin, however, with a frank (and probably unpopular) statement on the state of animals currently housed in industrial production systems.

12.2 Industrial Animal Production

Production of meat, milk and eggs—the primary food products derived from livestock—went through a dramatic transformation over the course of the twentieth century. Circa 1900, livestock farmers throughout the industrialized world raised their animals in comparative small groups on pasture, with occasional confined housing during inclement weather. By the year 2000, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or “factory farms” had displaced a large percentage of this extensive production. CAFOs amass much larger herds and flocks, often in large industrial barns, to facilitate mechanical delivery of feed and water, as well as automated milking, collection of eggs and herd or flock management, including manure disposal. A comprehensive overview of CAFO systems for each agricultural species would exceed the remit of the present essay, but a number of reasonable summaries are available (see Rollin 1995; Norwood and Lusk 2011; Mench 2018).

Although CAFOs pose both animal welfare and environmental challenges, they are not going away soon. Global demand for animal products is growing. Total global meat production increased from 71.36 million tons in 1961 to in 317.85 million tons in 2014 (Ritchie and Roser 2017). The FAO projects that “Between 1997/99 and 2030, annual meat consumption in developing countries is projected to increase from 25.5 to 37 kg per person, compared with an increase from 88 to 100 kg in industrial countries (FAO 2003). Comparable percentage growth in consumption of milk products and eggs is also predicted. Whatever the moral case for reducing or eliminating the consumption of animal products from one’s diet, the economic drivers for increasing production remain strong. Absent an almost unimaginable upsurge of political support for regulations that would constrain demand or regulate production, it would appear that livestock will continue to be produced for human consumption of animal products for the foreseeable future.

What is more, for reasons already foreshadowed, more and more of this production will occur in CAFOs. Although the capital costs for an intensive animal feeding facility are high, they are distributed over a large number of salable units. When the cost of production per unit of product is viewed over the usable life-span of these facilities, they are economically competitive. When combined with the feed, labor and management efficiencies of scale, as well as market advantages derived from being able to reliably supply a high volume of product, CAFOs are economically

attractive investments for producers who are focused solely on the monetary bottom line (Mench et al. 2008; Norwood and Lusk 2011). The original FAO report on climate impacts of livestock production argues CAFOs also limit the environmental impact of producing meat, milk and eggs when environmental costs are computed on a per unit basis (Steinfeld et al. 2006). As we move deeper into the Anthropocene, the case for using these industrial systems grows stronger, not weaker. Intensive animal feeding facilities introduce the potential for greater efficiencies in landscape impact from animal production (Capper 2012). Adjustment of feed rations in CAFOs facilitates additional means for limiting climate forcing emissions (Hristov et al. 2013). Cost efficiency coincides with environmental efficiency, yet the economic and environmental rationales for CAFOs appear to be on a collision course with animal welfare.

Authors from Ruth Harrison (1964) to Peter Singer (Singer and Mason 2007) have pilloried factory farming for neglecting animal interests. It is important to temper these criticisms by recognizing that for some producers, at least, improving animal husbandry was a motivation for moving toward more industrialized production methods, in the first place. Jim and Pamela Braun are Iowa hog farmers. They describe how up until 1969, pigs on their family farm had been raised in an extensive (e.g. open field) system. In an attempt to limit MMA (*mastitis metritis agalactia*) infections that were becoming difficult to control in their pasture-based farming system, Jim Braun's father shifted to a totally confined, indoor system. They report, "Each stall was its own self-contained sow hotel, with an automatic feeder, waterer and manure removal system. We farrowed year round, and the sows could not run from their shots, thereby helping to ensure the health and safety of the piglets" (Braun and Braun 1998, 40–41). The Brauns are not arguing for the welfare of their pigs in this article; they simply take that for granted. They go on to criticize vertical integration in the pork industry and the subsequent loss of control by family farmers that would allow them to make changes based on animal welfare.

Of course, it is possible that the Braun's decision was a mistake, especially when welfare impacts beyond MMA are included in the evaluation. My point is not to defend any particular model of industrial production, but only to show that some producers saw confinement systems as beneficial to their animals. As noted already, there is little doubt that CAFOs led to a dramatic change in the economics of livestock farming, just as the Braun's claim. While it might have been reasonable for an old-school animal producer to assert that their personal economic interests were (at least roughly) consonant with the health and well-being of their animals, that was largely because the animals themselves represented a large share of the farmer's total capital investment. The large barns, automated feeders, watering systems and mechanisms for manure disposal or retrieval of milk and eggs changed that. In many cases, maximizing return on investment in equipment required accepting the reduced yield in per-animal production of the salable commodity that accompanied rising rates of herd or flock morbidity and mortality (Norwood and Lusk 2011; Bennett and Thompson 2018). Indeed, recognition of the welfare deficits associated with CAFOs motivates the ethics of husbandry: How should we reform these systems?

12.3 Reforming Husbandry in Industrial Animal Production

The economic structure of animal production provides a clue to one of the most important philosophical features of husbandry ethics: In industrialized economies, husbandry ethics must be addressed collectively. An individual producer acting alone cannot adopt many of the changes that husbandry ethics recommends. The farming approach that maximizes capital returns will be the most competitive in a market economy. To the extent that animal products are pure commodities, with one example fully substitutable for another, price will be the dominant factor in consumer decision making, and the system that is most efficient in its utilization of capital will be the system that can offer products at the lowest price. Producers who fall too far short of this efficiency standard will not be able to recover the cost of their investments, and will eventually fail. Farmers must recover moneys expended on buildings and equipment just as much as they must recover the costs of feed and labor. As buildings and equipment become an ever-larger share of the livestock producer's expenditures, there is a downward spiral in which *only* producers who are willing to exploit animals remain in the industry.

There are several possible responses to this situation, each with respective strengths and weaknesses. First, collective action can take place at the level of the state by regulating production systems based on animal welfare. This approach has been taken throughout Europe. While it is philosophically satisfying, it suffers from three main problems. First, regulation does not necessarily entail compliance. Implementation of European rules has been slow and there is evidence that compliance is highly variable (see Thompson 2015, 154–156). Second, regulations tend to be quite inflexible, meaning that they can actually retard change in a production practice when new science and technology becomes available. When the replacement of poor systems requires large capital investments, farmers are deterred from taking action to improve welfare. The sheer cost of a new barn is itself a form of deterrence, but a producer must also be confident that these large investments will continue to comply with regulations throughout the useful life of the facility. The result is a vicious circle. Producers do not improve for fear that they will not comply with the rules, while regulators do not revise rules for fear that producers will be financially unable to comply. Finally, the existence of regulations may encourage moral complacency. Producers and consumers alike presume that once regulations are in place they no longer ask the compelling ethical questions implied by a husbandry ethic. There is thus some risk that a too strict regulatory environment can actually undercut the motivation for continued work on husbandry ethics.

Along with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, the United States relies almost exclusively on collective action taken by producers themselves. This has taken the form of husbandry guidelines and industry standards that voluntarily bar certain problematic practices. For example, the United Egg Producers, the principal trade organization for shell eggs in the U.S., has promoted a standard that ends forced

molting and institutes minimum space requirements for hens in the facilities operated by its members. Tail docking in pig and milk production has also been significantly curtailed, and there have been improvements in welfare prior to slaughter in processing facilities. Although these are voluntary standards, they have significantly improved the lives of many thousands of animals. Producer action does achieve substantial compliance and it has the advantage of flexibility. It is much easier to implement incremental changes when producers are directly involved. However, voluntarily developed standards are often quite low and some other American commodity groups have failed to take any kind of meaningful action at all (Mench et al. 2011). As such there is a continued need for documentation of remediable deficits in animal welfare—a key activity of husbandry ethics.

Finally, there is the potential for decommodification of animal products by enabling and encouraging consumers to choose meat, milk and egg based foods certified to meet higher standards of welfare. The popularity of this approach has grown in Europe and America alike, but there are two weaknesses. One is that in depending on consumer willingness to pay, the best that animal welfare certification can achieve is improvement for a subset of farmed animals. Ethical meat, milk and eggs appeal to niche markets. Commodity production standards will still apply in many production systems (Kehlbacher et al. 2012). Second, animal welfare labels are, in effect, marketing devices. They are subject to all of the distortions and obfuscations that we typically associate with advertising. This means that, on the one hand, consumers are skeptical that welfare claims are true, while on the other they can be misled by anthropomorphic images of animals used to promote these products. Inconsistency in the various schemes currently used to measure animal welfare may also undercut consumer confidence (Main et al. 2014).

Ethical inquiry into what actually improves the lives of farmed animals operates in the logical space circumscribed by these options, which are not necessarily exclusive of one another. Husbandry ethics must be open to the possibility that reform of CAFOs might call for doing away with them altogether. The arguments cited above notwithstanding, this possibility is reinforced when the environmental impact of CAFOs are taken into consideration (Ilea 2009; Fairlie 2010). Yet an honest concern for animal welfare should take note of the fact that millions of animals currently live in the CAFO environment, and that CAFO-like systems are rapidly displacing extensive animal production in Asia, Latin America and Africa (Thornton 2010). To the extent that improving the quality of life for these animals is a moral priority, there are compelling reasons to undertake husbandry ethics, even if these CAFOs cannot be ethically justified. This means that animal husbandry is a form of non-ideal ethics: Inquiry into the welfare of animals aims to make morally compelling improvements in quality of life. It does not presume that improvements in welfare justify the continuation of these systems, on either animal welfare or environmental grounds. This feature of the husbandry ethic holds for CAFOs and for more traditional, extensive systems alike. Many arguments for veganism, for example, hold that *no* form of animal agriculture is morally acceptable, but this does not logically vitiate the question of how the lives of animals living in these systems could be made better.

12.4 Philosophers and Animal Husbandry

Given the preceding discussion, one might think that there would be a robust philosophical discourse on how animal welfare could be improved in industrial systems. This discourse might probe when or under what circumstances practices that compromise animal welfare are truly unavoidable or unnecessary. It might investigate trade-offs between animal welfare deficits and benefits to humans, especially those on limited budgets. Most fundamentally, it would take up the deep philosophical questions that arise in drawing up diverse and sometimes logically contradictory indicators of welfare to make a justifiable evaluation of the comparative merits of alternative systems for improving welfare (Fraser 1999). Ethologists and veterinary researchers are accumulating a large body of empirical research on the condition of animals raised in CAFOs, and one might think that philosophers would take some interest in the value dimensions of this work.

Of course, some philosophers have done precisely that (Rollin 1995; Appleby et al. 2014). Yet in what follows I will take a more polemical turn, focusing on what I take to be the dominant strands of thinking by philosophers writing on the animals amongst us. There is, I submit, an archetypical mode of address toward industrial animal agriculture among mainstream philosophers. It consists of a few sentences (or a paragraph at most) reciting the horrific conditions in CAFOs, followed by a blanket statement of moral condemnation. This generally appears quite early in the analysis, from which the author moves on to consider their favored philosophical topic. For example, Alistair Norcross begins his widely read paper “Puppies, Pigs and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases,” by sketching the thought experiment of Fred, who tortures puppies in order to attain sensory pleasure in his consumption of chocolate. Norcross motivates the significance of this thought experiment with the following:

No decent person would even contemplate torturing puppies merely to enhance a gustatory experience. However, billions of animals endure intense suffering every year for precisely this end. Most of the chicken, veal, beef, and pork consumed in the US comes from intensive confinement facilities, in which the animals live cramped, stress-filled lives and endure unanaesthetized mutilations. (Norcross 2004, 230–231)

Norcross provides no peer-reviewed literature in support of these empirical claims, though he does reference several rabble-raising critiques of industrial agriculture. The rest of his article takes up a variety of well-known philosophical questions, including the extent to which “marginal cases” (e.g. humans suffering cognitive deficits of various kinds) challenge our intuitions. He makes no further references to practices in industrial agriculture beyond noting the 8 billion chickens slaughtered in 1998, calling them “the most cruelly treated of all animals raised for human consumption, with the possible exception of veal calves” (Norcross 2004, 232). He ends thusly: “I conclude that our intuitions that Fred’s behavior is morally impermissible are accurate. Furthermore, given that the behavior of those who knowingly support factory farming is morally indistinguishable, it follows that their behavior is also morally impermissible” (Norcross 2004, 244).

Norcross thus draws a moral conclusion that references animal agriculture while providing no discussion of any specific husbandry practice (whether in industrial *or* traditional extensive systems). His normative thesis is an attempt to shame his readers, who he has characterized as mindlessly supporting factory farming. He is, I submit, mobilizing intuitions widely shared about “factory farming”. One could undertake a critique of the broad claims that Norcross makes about the condition of animals in CAFOs,¹ but it is more important to stress that none of the ethical problems that actually arise in CAFOs really concern Norcross. His argument does not depend on whether opportunities available for ameliorating factory farming’s deleterious effects on an animal’s quality of life are required by regulation, adopted through producer cooperation or supported by consumers hoping to support more humane production systems. He is deploying a pre-existing intuition about the “torture” animals endure in these systems to stimulate interest in philosophical problems that have no bearing on an animal’s quality of life, at all.

It is easy to find instances of this archetype in the work of contemporary philosophers. Rosalind Hursthouse notes how Peter Singer’s *Animal Liberation* created awareness of “how horrible the factory farm conditions were” (Hursthouse 2011, 117) and then implies that anyone who is informed about animal ethics “knows, as I do, that in regularly eating commercially farmed meat we are being party to a huge amount of animal suffering” (Hursthouse 2011, 129). Yet Hursthouse’s interest lies in exploring how virtue theory compares with Singer’s utilitarianism in offering a philosophical analysis of animal ethics, and there is nothing in her discussion that takes up ways in which the suffering she notes could be reduced. Jeff McMahan motivates a consequentialist analysis of animal death with a single sentence on industrial agriculture: “An increasingly common view among morally reflective people is that, whereas factory farming is objectionable because of the suffering it inflicts on animals, it is permissible to eat animals if they are reared humanely and killed with little or no pain or terror” (McMahon 2016). It would rapidly become tedious to recite instance after instance in which this archetype occurs in the philosophical literature on animals. The point is not to suggest that these authors should be taking up husbandry questions in lieu of the philosophical issues that they do investigate. Rather, it is note how the irredeemable nature of factory farming is so thoroughly engrained in the philosophical literature that it can be cited in a passing comment and without support from any factual discussion the actual conditions that animals in these systems endure.

¹For example, unanesthetized surgical procedures (e.g. mutilations) are common in traditional animal production. This is not a practice that distinguishes production in CAFOs from all forms of livestock farming (or, indeed from things done to pets or mutilations that human parents practice on their children). Stress is also common in traditional systems, though as the empirical literature shows, stress is not always detrimental to welfare (Moberg 2000). CAFO production does involve crowding, but the ethology literature suggests that this is much less problematic for chickens (who have a flocking instinct) than it might be for humans. The lack of opportunities for perching and nesting, and the impact of a large flock size on feather pecking are almost certainly much more serious issues from the chicken’s perspective (Lay et al. 2011). In all these respects, the claims that Norcross makes to elicit the intuition of cruelty in factory farming are misleading or ill informed.

To cite just one more piece of evidence, *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics* includes some 35 essays on various topics, including 11 on practical questions. Although the *Handbook* is nearly 1000 pages long and putatively covers the full range of topics in animal ethics, no chapter takes up husbandry ethics. Three of the “practical question” chapters do mention livestock farming. Elizabeth Harmon uses my archetypal strategy, claiming blandly that “factory farming involves subjecting animals to intense suffering” (Harmon 2011, 727). She then moves on to her chief concern: arguing that killing animals is itself morally wrong. David DeGrazia includes a short discussion of harmful impacts on livestock in his article of animal confinement before concluding, “*I contend that wherever the term “factory farming” is properly applied the conditions of confinement are so intensive that they render the animals’ lives not worth living*” (DeGrazia 2011, 757; italics in the original). The only extended discussion of animal production in the *Oxford Handbook* occurs in a chapter entitled “Vegetarianism.” Here the extensive peer reviewed literature on the welfare of animals in contemporary livestock systems is ignored in favor of treatments intended to shock readers into support for vegan diets (Rachels 2011). The *Handbook* editors have not thought to include any treatment of the philosophical issues that arise in the practice of animal husbandry.

To sum up, a small cadre of philosophers *do* work alongside veterinarians, cognitive ethologists and animal producer groups to fashion better husbandry methods for confined *and* unconfined livestock production. Nevertheless, this topic is simply not on the radar screen of mainstream philosophers writing on animal issues. Most philosophers writing on animal issues hold university appointments and as such might be expected to rely on (or at least be informed about) studies by their peers in science. However, when philosophers do make empirical claims about industrial agriculture, they do not consult the extensive literature in peer-reviewed journals such as *Animal Welfare*, the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* or in animal science and veterinary outlets such as *Poultry Science* or *The Journal of Animal Science*. Instead, they rely exclusively on reports from journalists or animal activists.

12.5 Animal Husbandry and Animal Activism

The fact that philosophers ignore the peer-reviewed literature on animal welfare should not be taken to imply that what they say about welfare in CAFOs is false. The most frequently cited source in the “Vegetarianism,” article just discussed is Peter Singer and Jim Mason’s *The Ethics of What We Eat*. As far as I can tell, virtually everything that Singer and Mason say in this book is either true or was true at one time. Other philosophers have built their impressions of industrial agriculture by reading materials published by animal protection advocacy groups such as the Humane Society of the United States (see McPherson 2016). Much of what they say is also true because activist groups *do* generally rely on the peer-reviewed literature from animal welfare science in making their claims. Does this imply that philosophers who pass over detailed discussions of the conditions that obtain in CAFOs are justified

in doing so? I argue that it does not. There is a gap between the peer-reviewed literature crucial to husbandry ethics and the literature summaries that are prepared by animal protectionists. Philosophers should be more mindful of this gap than they typically are.

The empirical side of husbandry ethics involves documenting the state of welfare in animal production. There is now an extensive peer-reviewed literature on the welfare of livestock, and as noted, animal protection groups are avid consumers of this literature. However, there are important sources of implicit bias that emerge when the scientific findings are summarized in critiques of industrial production systems. First and most obviously, peer reviewed literature usually weighs both benefits and costs to welfare, while the summaries mention only costs. More subtly, welfare claims in scientific studies are qualified because the data are far from complete. In the scientific literature, classic Humean skepticism combines with lack of statistical power, leading scientists to inject a note of skepticism into all of their claims. There is also the fact that data from actual production environments is extremely scarce, and that producers may lack both the skill and the motivation to remedy this situation over the near term. Activist tracts report claims about the state of welfare in production systems as simple assertions. Accounts of harm to welfare are stripped of any qualification by noting offsetting benefits or acknowledgement of uncertainties. The critics are accurately reporting what the literature states, but unqualified declarative sentences imply both more certainty and more sweeping generality than one would find in the scientific literature.

Second, there are systemic availability biases in the scientific literature. We know quite a bit more about the welfare of animals in CAFOs than we do about the welfare of animals raised in traditional systems, simply because those systems are harder to study. This is because there are hundreds or thousands of small producers, requiring study methods that standardize and aggregate data. In contrast, one can collect data on thousands, tens and hundreds of thousands of animals from a single industrial farm. It is even more difficult when those small producers are in far-flung rural locals in Africa, Asia or Latin America, where travel distances, language barriers and field conditions make data collection expensive and difficult. Activists report findings on CAFOs because that is what gets studied, but it is at least logically possible that welfare on traditional farms and ranches is as bad or worse. The implication that CAFOs are the main problem is an artifact of reporting what we know and remaining silent about what we don't know. The inference that animals in CAFOs endure significantly more suffering than animals raised by small farmers may be plausible, but it is not supported by data.

What is more, activists are trying to motivate change, and producers are trying to forestall it. Both have a tendency to cherry pick such data as *is* available. Ethological studies have made enormous progress since Thomas Nagel speculated that we can't really know what it is like to be a bat in the 1970s (Nagel 1974). Experimental studies have done much to reveal what conditions, needs or amenities appear to be of most importance to animals of different species (Mench 1998). Animal welfare science is replete with studies quantifying maladies from bone breakage to mortality, and the activists love to cite it. But behavioral and physiological studies have also given

us strong reason to think that chickens are much more concerned with perches than with crowding, and to suspect (here we're less sure) that pigs are less stressed by confinement than by worries about whether the boss pig will get their food (discussed in Thompson 2015). Where husbandry ethics sees a puzzle in such findings, the activist looks for findings that will help the campaign. What gets reported are claims about injury, pain and stress, but difficult questions about how to limit injury, relieve pain or limit stress are omitted.

Finally, welfare scientists often (I would say generally) care about animals and hope that their work will have uptake among animal producers. When they are able to identify a cost-effective method for improving the condition of animals, they want producers to use it. Especially when producer organizations are in the lead on encouraging change (as in the U.S.) there is thus an incentive to adopt a posture of working with them to encourage change. Even when welfare scientists work with state agencies, they will be dealing with ministries and departments organized for the governance of agricultural production. Officials in these agencies will have little interest in campaigns designed to put livestock farmers out of business. With a few important exceptions, activist organizations have taken a political stance of opposing the interests of animal producers, especially in the United States. Organizations (such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) advocating vegetarianism of any kind are acting in direct opposition to producers' economic interests. At the same time, animal welfare scientists are aware that they need pressure from activist groups to incentivize change by producers. The tension that emerges as advocates of husbandry ethics (as I'm now claiming that many animal welfare scientists are) try to occupy a middle ground between producers and advocates can be seen in the rhetoric. At one juncture standards for animal welfare are weakened in hopes that producers can be enticed to adopt them, while at another juncture they are overstated in hopes of increasing pressure for political or market reform.

There is a philosophical complement to these observations. It is that cognizance of the implicit biases and tensions of working to improve animal welfare should become part of animal ethics itself. An ethic that sides with activists is just as problematic as one that sides entirely with producers, who have their own reasons for resisting change. Mainstream philosophers who adopt the archetypical approach seem to be unaware of this problem. A philosopher should aim to expose and articulate what makes husbandry reform intellectually and politically challenging. Once this work is done, it may be possible to articulate the case for or against a particular practice, or to encourage the average consumer to pay more attention to one set of welfare product claims, over and against another. The mainstream philosophical community seems to lack any appreciation of this context. They may be selling the animals who live in these systems short, as a result.

12.6 The Eclipse of Husbandry and the Rise of Narcissism

Following the analysis from my 2015 book, I interpret the literature in animal ethics as preoccupied with one of two dietary questions. Either one should be a vegetarian (probably a vegan) or failing that, one should avoid eating meat, milk or eggs from industrial farms. Nothing that I have said in this paper can be construed as a rebuttal to either of these dietary claims. I have simply not engaged them. Instead, I have argued that preoccupation with these dietary questions has prevented mainstream philosophers from engaging questions that could lead to significant improvement in millions of animal lives. Unlike David DeGrazia, I believe that the lives of animals in CAFOs *are* worth living, but like the majority of animal welfare scientists contributing empirical findings for husbandry ethics, I believe that their lives could be significantly better than they currently are.²

In light of this, I hope it will not be considered too impolite for me to suggest that there is a thread of narcissism in mainstream animal ethics. Narcissism is, of course, a philosophical and psychological phenomenon with a complex history, influenced significantly by the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. The term has been used to critique forms of absorption with the self that frustrate both social attachment and political engagement, but this should not imply that all forms of self-reflection have these outcomes (Gendlen 1987). Richard Rorty wrote that narcissism is simply a pejorative way of observing that our situated humanity pervades all of our observations, going on to claim that he was proud to be a narcissist (Rorty 1979). Given my professed affiliation with pragmatism, Rorty's statement might be taken as indicative. Yet Jeffery Stout insists that even given this position, Rorty can (and should) maintain a commitment to the potential for objective truth. Our situatedness is neither an excuse for adopting infeasible views nor does it make all viewpoints equally narcissistic (Stout 2007). My sentiments are with Stout. Rather than taking a deeper dive into the philosophical literature on narcissism, my approach will be to offer a series of characterizations that emerge directly from the subject at hand.

A strong claim of narcissism might go like this: At bottom, mainstream animal ethics is less about the animals than it is clean hands. There are indications of this strong narcissism in the philosophical literature. Norcross writes that the ethical issue is one of not "supporting" the torture of animals, not about undertaking actions that would make them better off. This might be taken to mean that a person's attitude

²Indeed, many of the ills DeGrazia notes in the lead-up to his sweeping conclusion have been targeted by husbandry ethics. When bone-strength characteristics are included in the index of traits used by poultry breeders, problems decrease, but leg problems increase with selection based on fast growth (González-Cerón et al. 2015). It is also possible to reduce injuries through feed additives and behavioral management. It is an open question whether reforms could ever make factory farming ethically defensible on quality of life grounds. Nevertheless, there are measurable improvements that can be and have been made. DeGrazia does not do enough to show that we should simply dismiss opportunities to improve the welfare of these animals on the ground that their lives are not worth living, (see Thompson 2020). The argument might be persuasive to someone who is wondering about their own "support" of livestock farming, but it is irrelevant to the question of whether and how systems should be changed.

to torture is more important from the moral perspective than the effects of torture. Yet strong narcissism overstates the case. Dietetic ethics intersects with economic markets, and it is quite reasonable for a vegetarian to think that their refusal of animal foods lowers the demand curve for these products, reducing a farmer's incentive to produce them (see Norwood and Lusk 2011). This is a more reasonable interpretation of what Norcross means by support. As previously stated, I have no desire to argue against the dietetic approach to animal ethics. My claim is only that it is seriously incomplete, and that animals themselves are the losers.

Efforts to promote human gustatory satisfaction by displacing the experience of an animal entirely exhibit a more nuanced sense of narcissism. This was the problem considered in my "blind chicken" scenario (Thompson 2008). It is exceedingly unlikely that blind chickens actually have better welfare than sighted ones. My point was to bring our discomfort with extreme genetic manipulation as a solution to animal welfare problems into the foreground (see also Thompson 2010). While most of the response to this paper has suggest that I was not forceful enough in articulating objections to genetic transformation (see Ferrari 2012; Bos et al. 2018), some have argued that the lack of realism in the blind chicken thought experiment disguises the insight that what matters really is welfare, after all (Sandøe et al. 2014). In the decade since my paper was published, the totally insentient animal organism has become a reality and the mainstream animal ethicists love it. A growing literature documents the enthusiasm for cellular production of animal products, eliminating animal minds entirely (Chiles 2013; Welin 2013). Concerns that manipulation of stem cells and genetically engineered heme and other biologics might stimulate concern about the extreme instrumentalization of food have been raised (Thompson 2014), but there is little evidence that they will quell animal advocates' excitement over the prospects of eating a meat product that did not come from a sentient being.

Are proponents of cellular protein production advocating on behalf of animals? If one truly thinks that the lives lived by livestock today are not worth living, it is feasible to think that future generations of human beings will be doing a favor to future animals by not bringing them into existence at all. Claire Palmer called attention to paradoxical elements in my original analysis of animal disenchantment by interpreting it as an instance of the non-identity problem. As described initially by Derek Parfit, the problem is a radical discontinuity between the identity of the individuals being harmed (or benefited) and the identity of the individuals that actually eventuate, given the intervention under discussion (Palmer 2011). In the original example, a genetic intervention leads to an animal that suffers less (perhaps because of a reduced capacity for pain) than the one that would have resulted if the intervention had not taken place. But there is a problem in thinking that one is either benefiting the animal that does not come into existence, or harming the one that does. In the case of cellular meats, it is potentially millions of animals that never come into existence, but if Palmer is correct in claiming that we would be making a metaphysical error to think that we are benefiting the animals that *do not* come into existence, what possible benefit could there actually be? The most straightforward answer that I can see is that people who eat cellular meat are benefiting themselves.

They are satisfying a gustatory desire, while assuring themselves that they are not “supporting” the suffering endured by livestock being raised in confined settings.

There are also environmental reasons for not eating meat, but here, too, the interests of animals that never exist do not really come into play. Expanding the outlook on dietary ideals into environmental ethics does not resolve the problem of narcissism with respect to animal interests. Broadening even further, Christina Van Dyke has reviewed a number of emerging food practices advocated under the heading of “food ethics”. Her focus has been on the analogy between dietetics and traditional forms of spiritual askesis, or ascetic practice. Like traditional religious spirituality, these practices combine social formation and personal redemption, albeit defined in terms of health, when we are talking food. Van Dyke argues that on any philosophically secular account, these dietetic regimes qualify as genuine spiritual practices. However, like the spiritual practices of religious extremists, dietetics become pathological when absorption with one’s individualistic salvation overwhelms the social aspect of spirituality and the pursuit of conviviality (Van Dyke 2018). In other words, dietetics cease to function as properly ethical practices of spirituality when they become narcissistic.

Donna Haraway has written convincingly on the role of interspecies relationships in framing normative networks. She has characterized thinking that one is doing a creature a favor by making sure it never exists as a form of exterminism, linking it to genocide (Haraway 2008). Haraway does not mention cellular meat, but she is targeting what she characterizes as extreme vegan views that would call for the total elimination of animal production. Her claim here is a little vague. She is clearly claiming that human-animal relationships are constitutive of moral situatedness. This claim might be developed through a feminist care ethics that emphasizes the maintenance of interdependencies and network bonds (see Noddings 2013). However, the meaning of Haraway’s reference to genocide is less straightforward. She seems to imply that in thinking that food animals would have been better off not to have existed at all, the extreme animal ethicists arrogate to themselves a standpoint capable of determining the ultimate value of another being’s life. Deciding who should live and who should never be born is genocidal exterminism, even if it is not yet genocide, because it is only a half-step away from deciding who should live and who should die.

This reading of the desire for cellular meat is narcissistic in that one elevates oneself to a Godlike standpoint to decide the fate of other creatures. One might, of course, claim that livestock breeders have themselves taken on that role long, long ago. There is certainly a germ of truth in this worry. On this view, the problem with advanced breeding, including stem cell technologies, gene editing and cellular techniques is that they exacerbate a germinal trope that was, indeed, present in conventional breeding, but that was held in check by the limitations of technique. Breeders did pursue self-regarding roles in selecting which animals would reproduce. Yet breeders were unable to sever themselves from relational responsibilities to the progeny that resulted from their activity, and this limitation had a morally salvific socializing effect. It blocked the complete instrumentalization of the animal, and situated the breeder’s instrumental goal within a situated network calling for

attentiveness to animal needs. The imperative of husbandry, of a moral regard for the animal itself, thus also blocks total realization of the narcissistic instinct present in all self-interested action.

Advocacy for cellular production of animal proteins does not fully satisfy the conditions of genocidal exterminism outlined by Haraway. Yet when this advocacy is coupled with the archetypal caricature of family farming that I have critique above, the resulting dismissal of husbandry ethics in CAFOs alleviates the need for empathy or attention to the animal's experience. There is, then, a kind of *cultural narcissism* that emerges throughout the scholarly practice of philosophy. The repetition of the archetype and the subsequent failure to actually consider the condition in which animals live reproduces (if not also encouraging) a pattern of normative practice. The lives of animals in factory farms are repetitively characterized as involving extreme suffering, so much so that in DeGrazia's words, their lives are not worth living. Engaging substantively with this suffering is taken to be both pointless, and even problematic from a moral perspective. Animal suffering in CAFOs engages no philosophical interest, because the lives of these animals are without value. It would be better if these animals did not exist; we should pursue strategies that eliminate them. With no value, these lives cannot generate any ethical response other than disengagement of one's self from the nexus in which these worthless lives are embroiled. Individual philosophers may not *feel* like they are ignoring the interests of animals, and might take umbrage at the suggestion that they do not care about how animals actually fare in factory farms. Yet by ignoring the questions of ethical husbandry, they replicate a pattern of disengagement that can be observed in other forms of structural injustice. Our overweening concern with our own consumption reinforce institutions that militate against improving the lot of the animals themselves.

12.7 Conclusion

I have tried to sketch the contours of an argument that would hold mainstream philosophers accountable in part for the lack of movement toward improving the condition of animals living in industrial production systems. Those who do discuss these systems fall prey to implicit biases associated with activism for animal causes. A non-ideal theory would excuse activists for using whatever tools are available to motivate change, at least insofar as they resist outright falsehoods (after all, that's what activists do). But non-ideal theory would hold that, like animal welfare scientists themselves, those who occupy the social position of a philosopher or a scholar have a duty to present a more nuanced and complex account any controversy on which they report (see Pielke 2007). In making this case, I have emphasized a set of questions that emerge *within* husbandry ethics: the need to address collective action, the trade-offs between distinct welfare indicators, the matter of how far our ability to reform a system is really constrained. I have gestured at an archetype that I find too commonplace with most philosophers who have taken up animal ethics, and I

have gone on to illustrate how this archetype oversimplifies the tasks of husbandry ethics, even when the claims it makes about industrial agriculture are strictly true.

The archetype conjoins with philosophers' penchant for relying on activist reports for their empirical understanding of what happens on industrial farms. Although activist reports are often factually accurate, they overstate what is known about the condition of animals in CAFOs in two ethically significant respects. First, by simply listing known welfare deficits, they fail to contextualize these deficits within a larger and comprehensive understanding of animal welfare, one that would include not only comparative discussions of traditional farming and wildlife, but that would also acknowledge what we *do not* know about how animals fare in all of these settings. Second, they fail to convey what ethologists and veterinary specialists *have* learned about ways in which the welfare of animals may depend on features that livestock species do not share with human beings. While anthropomorphism has its place, these statements promote a pernicious form of anthropomorphism that fails to respect ethically important differences in animal lives.

As an interest in the ethics of husbandry has vanished from the philosophical discourse, it is almost certainly disappearing from the consciousness of the average person woefully disconnected from the production of food. It is, thus, not surprising that radical responses to the suffering of animals in these systems advocate disappearance of the animals themselves. I argue that this mode of thought exhibits narcissism in several forms. In the extreme, it is a concern for *my* involvement that erases interest in what might be done for the animals themselves. It emerges more subtly in the view that biotechnology could resolve the factory farm issue by doing away with animal consciousness altogether. This thought conjoins with Christina Van Dyke's analysis of dietetic spirituality and finds further reinforcement in Donna Haraway's discussions of genocidal exterminism. In the end, however, a more modest *structural* form of narcissism may be the most appropriate diagnosis. Here narcissism is a reflection of the cultural institutions that block understanding, leaving us to think that monitoring of our own personal conduct is a morally adequate response to circumstances of structural injustice. This view of narcissism as a cultural form owes more to Nietzsche than to Freud. In contrast, some serious philosophical dialog with people who are trying to mitigate the suffering in factory farms is a better estimate of what the profession of philosophy owes to the animals in our midst.

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