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Effective animal advocacy: effective altruism, the social economy, and the animal protection movement

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Abstract

Effective altruism is a conceptual approach and emerging social movement that uses data-driven reasoning to channel social economy resources toward philanthropic activities. Priority cause areas for effective altruists include global poverty, existential risks to humanity, and animal welfare. Indeed, a significant subset of the movement argues that animal factory farming, in particular, is a problem of great scope, one that is overly neglected and offers the potential for massive reductions in global suffering. This paper explores the philosophical and methodological tenets of these "effective animal advocates," offering empirical qualitative insight into their motivations and perspectives. The work also considers the implications of the effective altruists' entrance into the arena of animal advocacy, taking note of how various factions within both the effective altruist and animal protection movements have received their conceptual and practical interventions. The research highlights several potential contributions of the effective animal advocates, as their commitment to evaluate and amplify pragmatic solutions to the problems of animal suffering has the opportunity to shift institutional and consumer behaviors in ways the animal protection movement has struggled to do in the past. At the same time, key issues related to the community's research rigor and measurability biases, its lack of demographic diversity, and its tendency to valorize corporate-driven technological solutions open it up to criticism from internal and external detractors alike.

Keywords Effective altruism · Animal protection · Animal rights · Animal welfare · Factory farming · Social economy · Philanthropy · Agrifood movements · Social innovation · Social entrepreneurship

Abbreviations

ACE	Animal charity evaluators
EA	Effective altruism
EAs	Effective altruists
EAA	Effective animal advocacy
EAAs	Effective animal advocates
ITN	Importance, tractability, and neglectedness

Introduction

In the United States, we are a nation of self-identified "animal lovers," and there is some convincing data to support this claim. Approximately 65% of American homes include at least one companion animal as a member of their household, while 81% of surveyed US adults offer support for the animal protection movement's goal "to minimize and eventually eliminate all forms of animal cruelty and suffering" (Faunalytics 2016; Humane Society n.d.). These human-animal relationships have significant economic implications as well—the American public now spends over $70 billion on their pets annually, while nearly $2 billion more is spent on animal-related charities, shelters, and other advocacy activities (American Pet Products Association 2017; Broad 2017). Yet, as a variety of critics have noted, not all animals are granted the same level of care, compassion, and consideration (Singer 2002; Joy 2009). Notably, more than nine billion land animals are killed annually for food in the United States—nearly all of them within industrialized farm animal production facilities, commonly referred to as factory farms—and more than 46 billion sea animals are killed annually for direct US consumption (Sethu 2015). Collectively, purchasing these land and sea animals as food, combined with personal hunting and fishing-related expenses, amounts to upwards of $300 billion in spending per year (Herzog 2011).

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Agrifood scholars have granted significant attention to the economic, environmental, and cultural implications of meat production and consumption over time, documenting the processes through which meat has been solidified as a universally accepted aspect of contemporary Western society (Chiles and Fitzgerald 2017). Researchers have also explored efforts that challenge the status quo of animal food production, outlining the philosophical and pragmatic tenets of non-human animal protection advocates from across a wide spectrum, ranging from those who seek an end to all animal farming to those who seek more modest welfare improvement reforms (Munro 2012; Lusk 2011). Scholarship in this area is quick to note that, rather than taking aim at the inconsistencies of society's treatment of certain animals as friends and others as food, the mainstream animal protection movement has largely reinforced these contradictions. Charitable giving offers a case in point—despite the fact that farmed animals account for over 99% of animals used or killed by humans in the United States, a relatively small percentage of animal-related philanthropy focuses on this issue, with the majority of donations going to companion animal shelters instead (Animal Charity Evaluators n.d.).

The perceived irrationality of this allocation of resources has brought a new set of advocates into the animal protection movement—self-proclaimed "effective altruists." Effective altruism (EA) is a relatively new conceptual approach to charity and humanitarian action that advocates for "combining the heart and the head," applying data-driven techniques to assess the effectiveness of philanthropy and channel resources based on these cost-benefit analyses. Broadly speaking, the approach is one of several related initiatives within what Moulaert and Ailenei (2005) describe as the "social economy," a wide-ranging, hybrid landscape of social innovation and social entrepreneurship that advances social change through a mix of "market exchange, state intervention, (and) collective civil sector organisation based on social movements driven by solidarity and reciprocity" (p. 2049). Within this domain, effective altruists reflect key principles of what has been termed "philanthrocapitalism," conceptualized as a new way of doing philanthropy that takes business-thinking and evaluation techniques from the for-profit capitalist world in order to incubate and scale up effective social advocacy projects and programs (Bishop and Green 2009).

Inspired in part by the consequentialist writings of philosopher Peter Singer (1972), the effective altruists (EAs) are drawn to problems that are demonstrably large in scope, are relatively neglected by others, and are tractable in terms of the possibility to develop actionable solutions. To date, these prioritization criteria have led EAs to focus on projects in several key areas—including global poverty reduction, the prevention of existential risks to humanity, meta-effective altruism (that is, research into the effectiveness of effective altruism itself), and efforts to minimize animal suffering (Muehlhauser 2013). Indeed, members of this animal-focused subset of the effective altruism community—who often refer to themselves as effective animal advocates (EAAs)—argue that animal factory farming, in particular, represents an overly neglected problem of massive scope, one that offers the potential for massive (and quantifiable) improvements in global well-being.

Drawing from multiple avenues of qualitative inquiry, this paper explores the philosophical and methodological tenets of effective animal advocacy in order to achieve two overlapping but distinct goals. The first aim is to offer insight into the stated motivations and perspectives of effective altruists, a growing but largely under-researched group of actors in animal advocacy and philanthropy. The second aim is to consider the implications of the effective altruists' entrance into the arena of animal advocacy, taking note of how various factions within the both the effective altruist and animal protection movements have received their conceptual and practical interventions. Fundamentally, this research contributes empirical detail to agrifood scholarship that explores the history and future of the animal protection movement, particularly in the domain of farmed animal advocacy. In addition, its engagement with theories of the social economy and philanthrocapitalism offers the field new conceptual language to understand how market-based logics intersect with volunteerism and non-profit action to shape contemporary social activism, in the animal protection movement and across the agrifood landscape. Ultimately, the research highlights several potential contributions of the EAAs, as their commitment to evaluate and amplify pragmatic solutions to the problems of animal suffering has the opportunity to shift institutional and consumer behaviors in ways the animal protection movement has struggled to do in the past. At the same time, key issues related to the community's research rigor and measurability biases, its lack of demographic diversity, and its tendency to valorize corporate-driven technological solutions open it up to criticism from internal and external detractors alike.

Method and analytical approach

The work that follows is grounded in multiple sources of qualitative data and is informed by an analytical approach that focuses on the narratives and networks that characterize the subjects and topics under study. The research process included a broad-based exploration of scholarly literature and community-created online materials in the areas of effective altruism and animal protection. In addition, I conducted two sets of 90-minute focus group interviews in New York City with 19 self-identified effective altruists interested in animal protection concerns, each of whom was recruited through online forums and offered modest monetary compensation for their participation. In the months that followed, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with approximately 25 key stakeholders within the effective animal advocacy community—this included staff and leadership from relevant organizations within the effective altruism and animal advocacy communities, active members at the intersection of these movements, as well as researchers and entrepreneurs familiar with its history and priorities. Most of these interviews were conducted in person in New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco or Berkeley, while phone or video chat interviews were conducted with other informants who were unable to meet in person. While effective altruism and animal advocacy are both global movements in scope, all but a few of my sample participants were living or working in the United States, and in large part I restrict my analysis to discussions of US-based dynamics. In addition, the research is informed by attendance and participant observation in a variety of effective altruism and animal advocacy meetings and events. The study period ranged from approximately August of 2016 to March of 2018.

Along with existing documents and multimedia materials, original notes and transcripts from the focus groups, interviews, and participant observation were analyzed through a qualitative analysis process informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2000) and the extended case method (Burawoy 1998). These reflexive models of qualitative social science recognize that researchers enter the field with existing frames of reference, aiming not for positivist objective categorization of those under study, but rather intersubjective knowledge production between researchers and the researched. I used iterative comparison to identify relevant moments of meaning and inductively code for primary themes, keeping those themes in conversation with scholarly theory and the implicit theory of the research participants. Notably, the analytical process was guided by an interest in identifying the key narratives and networks that characterize the effective animal advocacy approach. This perspectives emphasizes the importance of narrative storytelling as central to how communities construct internal group knowledge and articulate their worldview to others (Ball-Rokeach et al. 2001; Broad 2016a). Fundamentally, stories function to reveal how things work, describe what things are, and tell us what to do (Broad 2016b; Gerbner 1999). Further, this research recognizes that the network serves as a dominant structuring logic of social movements in the digital age (Castells 2012). The work ahead therefore aims to understand the stories told by those who consider themselves effective animal advocates (EAAs)—regarding the nature of the problems faced and the feasibility of potential solutions—as well as to explore how those narratives shape and are re-shaped by the multi-level networks that characterize their place in the social economy.

Effective altruism and the social economy

As leading EA thinker William MacAskill (2015) describes it, “Effective altruism is about asking, ‘How can I make the biggest difference I can?’ and using evidence and careful reasoning to try to find an answer” (p. 11). From a philosophical perspective, the story that effective altruists tell is that the best way to do good in the world is to take a scientific approach to philanthropy and career selection, using quantitative metrics of cost-effectiveness to evaluate and compare the impacts of specific projects and programs, all with an aim toward increasing happiness and decreasing suffering around the world. The term effective altruism was initially coined in late 2011, but by that point several organizations embodying the effective altruist approach had already been formed, while discussion about its overarching concerns had been ongoing for some time, particularly in online forums related to rationality and consequentialist philosophy (MacAskill 2014). As a movement, effective altruism consists of a host of networked relationships across the social economy, as they champion the use of private resources to produce public benefits, promoting a complement of non-profit, for-profit, foundation-led, and public–private enterprises to achieve their goals (Bernholz et al. 2013). Their work is implicitly and explicitly tied to the principles of philanthrocapitalism, as they bring a commitment to the types of quantitative cost-benefit analyses and measurement strategies that are common in the corporate world into the domain of philanthropy and career selection.

The intellectual and programmatic life of EA is anchored by a growing number of organizations and funding sources from across Silicon Valley and other strongholds of global finance and technology, at academic institutions such as Oxford and Princeton, and through thousands of individual donors who connect and collaborate in online forums and real-world meetups (Singer 2015). The charity evaluator GiveWell, founded in 2007 by two former investment analysts, is perhaps the most prominent EA-aligned organization, focused on vetting and recommending cost-effective and underfunded organizations. Its top charities for 2017 included the Against Malaria Foundation, which distributes insecticide-treated bed nets in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI), which supports programs that treat people for parasitic worm infections in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a demonstration of its growing impact, GiveWell indicates it moved over $91.6 million to recommended charities and added another $13.3 million in incubation grants in 2016, up from approximately $28 million in 2014 (GiveWell n.d.).

Several effective altruist initiatives also exist under the banner of the UK-based umbrella organization Centre for Effective Altruism. Giving What We Can, for instance, was founded by philosopher Toby Ord in 2009 with a mission to evaluate charities and encourage people to make long-term donation commitments; 80,000 Hours was founded by William MacAskill and Benjamin Todd in 2011, focused on providing career advice to individuals seeking professions with high potential for social impact. For example, one of the effective altruist proposals that has garnered the most popular attention is the idea of "earning to give"—that is, rather than counseling individuals to seek a lower-paying job in a field generally recognized to promote social justice, effective altruists are often encouraged to seek out higher-paying jobs (in finance, for instance) and to donate significant portions of their salary to charities that have been evaluated as effective (MacAskill 2014).

Peter Singer's (2009) book *The Life You Can Save* helped to inspire Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz and his wife, former Wall Street Journal reporter Cari Tuna, to found the impact-focused private foundation Good Ventures in 2011. From there, GiveWell and Good Ventures collaborated to create the Open Philanthropy Project in 2014, which takes a more expansive approach to identify important and neglected problems in policy and society, offering large grants directly to organizations working on issues such as criminal justice reform, farm animal welfare, pandemic preparedness, and risks related to artificial intelligence. Effective altruists also gather in a variety of online spaces and at in-person events like Effective Altruism Global, a conference sponsored by the Centre of Effective Altruism that has brought hundreds and thousands of people together for panels and networking opportunities in cities such as San Francisco, Boston, and London.

In order to understand the demographics and perspectives of EA community members, an annual survey is conducted by the EA-aligned organization Rethink Charity (McGeoch and Hurford 2017). Notably, the findings show that the community has its largest presence in major US and UK cities, led by the San Francisco Bay Area and London. The vast majority of community members identify as white, male, non-religious, politically left or center left, and associate with either consequentialist or utilitarian philosophy. EAs tend to be young, with an average age in the late-20s, and as a whole reflect a high level of education, including a strong representation of backgrounds in computer science, mathematics, and philosophy. Donating money is a common practice, with the average respondent giving approximately 8% of their annual income to charity, including higher proportions reported by those engaged in "earning to give." A plurality of respondents cite global poverty as their top priority, alongside other priority areas that include meta-effective altruism, artificial intelligence, far future concerns, environmentalism, rationality, politics, and animal welfare.

Despite its relatively new presence within the philanthropic landscape, the concept of effective altruism has engendered significant discussion from the outside, with at least as many critics as new adherents. Berger and Penna (2013)—both nonprofit veterans affiliated with the independent charity evaluator Charity Navigator—went as far to call the movement "defective altruism," arguing that effective altruists engage in a strategy of "charitable imperialism" that could lead to the centralization of donations into the hands of experts and the demise of domestic, local, small-scale, artistic, and speculative charitable endeavors. This perspective echoes broader critiques of philanthrocapitalism in general, which is seen by many on the political left to lack democratic accountability, erode support for governmental spending, and be spearheaded by major donors who create the very social and economic inequalities that their philanthropy is meant to remedy (McGoey 2015).

Others have offered more sympathetic critiques, lauding EAs for their insights into the dangers of so-called "warm-glow giving" that benefits the donor more than the recipient, but also suggesting that several intended and unintended aspects of the EA approach could have negative consequences. Rubenstein (2016) argued, specifically, that EA's focus on technological and economic solutions, as well as its bias toward charitable activities that are easily measurable, makes the movement relatively inattentive to political advocacy, a blind-spot that could prevent the development of the types of initiatives that tackle the root causes of social problems and could prove the most cost-effective in the long-run. Further, Rubenstein raised concerns about what she called the "hidden curriculum" that is embedded into the EA movement, one which situates EAs as individualized, heroic (highly educated, white, male) rescuers who need not listen to those most affected by the issues they are trying to address and need not be angry about inequality and poverty.

The animal protection movement

Concern over the welfare of animals and abstention from the eating of animals have roots in antiquity, but organized animal protection movements emerged around the humane and antivivisection movements of the nineteenth century (Spencer 1995). In the United States and other developed Western nations, the broadly-defined animal protection movement was largely formed in a post-WWII revival period, as newly formed advocacy organizations pressured government and the private sector to institute basic regulations in areas related to wildlife protection, anti-fur, animal research, and companion animal overpopulation. The rise of other identity-oriented social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, together with the publication of Peter Singer's influential *Animal Liberation* and the media-savviness of animal testing activist Henry Spira, were some of the pivotal actions that helped usher in a groundswell of support for animal protection in both intellectual and grassroots circles. In addition to previous concerns related to wildlife and companion animals, issues related to the intensive farming of animals for food, cruelty to animals used for entertainment and sport, and the use of animals in laboratory testing and experimentation became central issues to those advocating on behalf of non-humans (Unti and Rowan 2001). Since that time, a suite of activist tactics have been employed to advance the interest of non-humans—from mass protests and civil disobedience, to vegetarian leafletting and provocative media outreach, to legislative lobbying and ballot referenda initiatives (Munro 2005).

Today, the animal protection movement itself is actually composed of an ideologically diverse set of activists, as proponents employ a complement of sometimes contrary strategies and philosophical perspectives. As mentioned previously, most people who express commitment to some form of animal protection still focus the majority of their attention on companion animals like dogs and cats, despite the outsized scale of suffering that is experienced by animals in other settings, particularly factory farming, not to mention the environmental concerns related to animal food production (Arcari 2017). This contradiction has long raised the ire of devoted animal rights activists who express a fundamental ethical commitment to advocate against *speciesism*, what Singer (2002) defined as a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interest of members of one's own species and against those of members of other species.

Yet, even those who take seriously the crisis faced by animals who are raised for food can be at odds in terms of how the challenge should be framed and tackled—this internal movement conflict is often characterized as the distinction between animal rights abolitionism and animal welfare advocacy (Francione and Garner 2010). Animal rights abolitionists like the legal theorist Gary Francione argue that humans have no moral justification for using non-humans at all, and he urges advocates to focus their efforts on strict veganism combined with "creative, nonviolent education" as the primary strategy to build a grassroots political movement. By contrast, animal welfare advocates like the political philosopher Robert Garner concur that traditional animal protection policies have been limited in their impacts, but argue that such policies have the practical potential to be reformulated and used more effectively. The story these welfarists tell is that, even if abolition is a desirable long-term goal, regulation can be an important part of a diverse approach to solving the problem.

In assessing this landscape of animal activism, Munro (2012) argued that the animal protection movement is really characterized by not two, but three approaches—animal rights, animal welfare, and animal liberation. Animal liberationists espouse a Peter Singer-inspired consequentialist narrative that seeks "a balance between the interests of humans and other animals by advocating a pragmatic approach to our treatment of animals" (p. 171). They insist that what is best for the animals is not adherence to any particular ideological approach or strategic commitment—what is best for the animals is what can be proven to be best for the animals, grounded in evidence that suffering has actually been reduced. This language of pragmatic advocacy has been picked up by several key figures in the animal protection movement, many of whom have critiqued more ideologically-driven approaches as counterproductive. They have called instead for a focus on impact as the key metric of interest, suggesting that social psychological theory and quantitative evaluation should be used to develop and implement effective solutions for change (Ball and Friedrich 2009; Cooney 2014).

In recent years, this appeal to consequentialism, rationality, and scientific reasoning has brought effective altruists into the animal protection world (Fisher 2017). Animal Charity Evaluators was founded in 2012 as part of the EA organization 80,000 Hours, but incorporated as an independent non-profit in 2013. Its stated aim is to find and advocate for highly effective opportunities for improving the lives of animals—this is done through conducting evaluations of animal-focused charities and non-profit advocacy groups, providing charity recommendations to potential donors, conducting research on animal advocacy strategies, and providing advice for how to be the most effective animal advocate. The organization reports that it moved $3.5 million to recommended charities in 2016, up from $1.19 million in 2015 and $147,000 in 2014. Its "Top Charities" for 2017 included Animal Equality, an international organization that specializes in undercover investigations, grassroots, and corporate outreach; The Humane League, which runs a variety of farmed animal advocacy programs, including several aimed at changing the animal standards of corporations; and Good Food Institute, which advocates for groups developing high-tech alternatives to animal-based products using cellular agriculture and plant-based food science. Similarly, The EA-aligned Open Philanthropy Project has included farm animal welfare as one of its primary focus areas, and has awarded several significant grants to organizations focused on cage-free and international farmed animal welfare advocacy, to groups working on high-tech meat replacements, and to Animal Charity Evaluators (ACE) itself, among others.

The work of ACE and the Open Philanthropy Project has shaken up the networked landscape of the animal protection movement in several ways. Fundamentally, their emphasis on donating to organizations that focus on farmed animal issues has provided a direct challenge to well-funded local and national animal protection groups that focus on wildlife or companion animals. Further, their high-level of engagement in the social economy has provided a counter to a significant segment of the vegan advocacy movement—often driven by an abolitionist perspective—which has tended to operate on shoe-string budgets to support grassroots education and direct action protest (Wrenn 2016). Their work has also attempted to shift the narrative that has characterized the long-standing welfare and abolitionist debates, promoting instead a philosophy of rational pragmatism above all else.

At this stage, it is worthwhile to delve deeper into what, exactly, self-identified effective animal advocates (EAAs) believe about effective animal advocacy. What are the stated motivations, philosophical perspectives, and advocacy strategies that drive EAAs? What tensions and concerns do they identify? How does the work of EAAs relate to the broader movements for effective altruism and animal protection, respectively, and in what ways do EAAs distinguish themselves from either or both?

Qualitative research themes

In analyzing the stories EAAs tell about why and how they do what they do, consistent references were made by participants to what the EA movement refers to as the "Importance, Tractability, and Neglectedness" (ITN) framework, which is used to guide EAs toward cause areas that are deemed most worthy of their attention (EA Concepts n.d.). For the EAAs, animal welfare is an important issue given the scale of suffering that exists (particularly in factory farms), on account of the ability to reduce suffering if effective advocacy and technological strategies are pursued, and due to the level of neglect it receives in terms of both the financial and intellectual resources invested into the issue. Following the constructivist grounded theory approach and a process of iterative coding (Charmaz 2000), key insights from the qualitative research process were categorized within this ITN framework. The pages that follow highlight the defining characteristics of these themes as well as related tensions and ongoing debates, as summarized in Table 1. Interview respondents who are identified agreed to waive their right to anonymity, quotes collected through personal communication and original fieldwork are indicated as such, and respondents' language was in some cases lightly edited for clarity.

Importance

> "To me, the most important thing is just how much good are we doing for animals? It's weird, but I kind of think of that as a value in and of itself. Again it comes back to this thing of, it should be common sense, but I feel like in the animal movement at large it has traditionally not been common sense that we should try to do the most good for the most animals. Just instilling that value and saying that's what we really care about for making grants, renewing grants, everything. That's basically a single metric."—Lewis Bollard, Program Officer for Farm Animal Welfare, Open Philanthropy Project (Personal Communication)

> "If you count up the numbers and look at the badness of factory farming, and perhaps wild animal suffering, it adds up quite significantly."—Eitan Fischer, Founder of Animal Charity Evaluators (Personal Communication)

The EAAs are a hybrid of animal protection advocates and effective altruists. Some became engaged with the effective altruism community after having already been interested in non-human animal concerns, as they found that the effective altruism movement aligned with their existing analytical and advocacy perspectives. Others were engaged first in

Table 1 Thematic categories, characteristics, and tensions in effective animal advocacy

Category	Defining characteristics	Tensions
Importance	Non-human animals are sentient beings, have the ability to suffer, and deserve serious consideration.	How best to quantify animal suffering and welfare improvement, particularly in light of EA movement skepticism?
	Industrial farm animal production causes massive harm to non-human animals and must be actively resisted.	Where does advocacy for fish and for wild animals fit into EAA strategy?
Tractability	Fiscal investment and strategic action must be guided by evidence-based analysis and not ideological commitments.	How to improve upon the methodological rigor of animal advocacy and avoid measurability bias concerns?
	Professionalization, market-based technological innovation, and institutional engagement are powerful forces for change.	What role should grassroots activism and acts of civil disobedience play in the EAA movement?
Neglectedness	The animal protection movement should think and act more like EAs in terms of their donation behavior and activism.	How to bridge philosophical and interpersonal gaps between EAs and animal protection activists and organizations?
	EAA has significant room for growth in terms of the visibility and strength of the movement as a whole.	How to handle debates in both the EA and animal protection movements regarding the value of diversity and inclusion?

effective altruism, and from there were influenced by peers in the effective altruist movement to take animal suffering seriously.

The story EAA respondents told began with a general commitment to a Peter Singer-informed consequentialist or utilitarian philosophy, driven by the belief that non-human animals are sentient beings who are capable of suffering and are therefore worthy of consideration. Indeed, concerns about suffering loom larger than all else for the EAAs, as they use mathematical calculations to estimate the number of animals who live and die in various settings, in concert with estimates of the quality of life of those animals, to quantitatively determine the scale of animal welfare concerns. Through this process, they point to industrialized factory farming processes as the largest source of human-caused suffering in relation to animals and therefore a top priority. A number of EAAs choose to follow a vegan diet as a way to decrease the suffering they cause directly, but others consider themselves semi-vegetarians or "reducetarians," sometimes eating small amounts of dairy, beef, or bivalves, and tending to abstain from poultry and eggs, the production of which they argue causes more suffering on account of the greater numbers of animals involved and the lower quality of life for animals in those conditions (Saja 2013). Increasingly, EAAs focus on efforts to make changes at institutional rather than merely individual levels (Sentience Institute 2018).

From the start of the EA movement, a significant portion of that broader community did not consider non-human animals to be morally relevant beings worthy of serious consideration at all, let alone significant philanthropic investment. The work of several devoted EAAs, combined with emerging scientific evidence of non-human animal consciousness (Muehlhauser 2017), swayed many EA community members that animals do matter, but as one focus group participant put it, animal welfare remains the "least respected of the most respected" EA cause areas. Respondents offered several reasons for this schism, including a simple difference in prioritization calculus; deeply embedded speciesism; "founder effects" that make EA groups in certain geographic areas more or less concerned with animal issues; as well as a perception that animal advocates tend to be less methodologically rigorous, overly emotional, and more deontological than utilitarian when outlining their case.

Indeed, there is significant internal debate about the process for measuring the scope of animal suffering, and in particular with regards to how much specific welfare improvements—moving to cage-free egg facilities or removing gestation crates for pigs, for instance—actually leads to better lives for those animals. Some in the EAA community also suggest a greater emphasis should be placed on reducing fish consumption given growing evidence related to the ability of fish to feel pain and the large number of aquatic animals who are killed by humans for food (Elder and Fischer 2017). There is also a growing interest in what EAAs refer to as "wild animal suffering." Initially proposed as a concern by a relatively small group of thinkers within the animal philosophical and global effective altruist communities (Tomasik 2009), the argument is grounded in the notion that there are vastly more animals living in the wild than living in factory farms, laboratories, or companion animal settings. There is a strong chance, these thinkers suggest, that suffering predominates in the lives of wild animals, and therefore EAAs should be interested in increasing concern for these issues with an aim toward developing future interventions that would improve well-being. Debates within the EAA community on these issues use quantitative estimates as best as they can, but the type of consensus that highlights the importance of factory farming as a priority cause area does not exist. As Chris Corliss, an EA organizer and donor to animal welfare causes, explained in a focus group, "There are people who are interested in the question, might insects, even if they each only have a little bit of suffering, outweigh the suffering of other animals? So how do you even analyze that question?" Ultimately, at this stage, EAA respondents tended to agree that the wild animal suffering issue is worth keeping in mind, but at this moment lacks the combination of public concern and actionable solutions that would make direct engagement tractable.

Tractability

> "You want to promote the best guesses, because even if you only think there's a 55 percent chance that your guess is correct—and the other option has a 45 percent chance, so there's barely a difference and you're not very confident—well, that's still a difference of millions of animals if you choose the right one over the wrong one."—Jacy Reese, Research Director of Sentience Institute (Personal Communication)

> "Effective altruism has reinforced the notion of how important it is to evaluate what we do and to try to be more effective and have a bigger impact with limited resources…Just as a company will be accountable to their investors or stakeholders, we should also be accountable for how we are using our resources in how it helps animals. To ourselves, to the animals, and to the people who support us."—Jose Valle, Co-Founder of Animal Equality (Personal Communication)

Once the overall importance of animal suffering issues have been established, EAAs turn their focus toward developing and implementing strategies that can make a difference. Here, again, they follow a consequentialist approach, telling a story that emphasizes a rational process of prioritizing demonstrable outcomes over value-driven attachments. In so doing, EAAs pride themselves on their willingness to be open to new ideas and approaches—so long as there are evidence-based reasons to take new ideas seriously. They insist that truly effective animal advocates exhibit a willingness to change their path if a previous strategy is shown to be ineffective, and they collectively express a commitment to "doing their homework" in order to see what organizations and approaches have proven themselves able to actually reduce the amount of animal suffering in the world. "Maybe that's what makes an effective animal activist," David Coman-Hidy, the president of The Humane League, suggested during a focus group discussion. "Someone who doesn't feel like they need to express any kind of belief. It's just like a scoreboard—like we need points on a scoreboard."

This narrative of clear-eyed, non-ideological empiricism permeates the EAA community. In focus groups and interviews, participants expressed that the long-standing debate between so-called welfarist and abolitionist approaches was little more than a distraction. Many did see value in certain types of welfare reforms, particularly when those reforms have an effect on large-scale practices in the animal production or food service industries. Several conceptualized themselves as abolitionists at heart who see some welfare reforms as a valuable step toward that ultimate goal. "Welfarism does not preclude abolitionism," Kelly Witwicki, Executive Director of the EA-aligned Sentience Institute, explained to me in an interview. "I think, more than anything, it's not taking a hard stance on any of these things. It's saying, hey, here's the evidence, there's a reasonable chance that welfare reforms put us more toward the end of animal farming than away from it, so let's do those." Addressing this tension in a blog post, ACE director Jon Bockman (2015) insisted that the question of whether the movement should only promote welfare reforms or only preach abolition was the fundamentally wrong question, adding, "Ultimately, I ignore ideology and try to do what's best for animals."

The question of what the evidence demonstrates is actually best for animals, however, is one of the most contentious aspects of EAA, and the movement's utilitarian calculus has drawn significant criticism from across the broader animal protection world. "Animals aren't numbers; they are individuals," PETA founder Ingrid Newkirk (2016) argued at the Animal Rights National Conference. "People who use and abuse animals reduce them to numbers—but we should not!" In a widely distributed and contentious blog post, Nathan (2016) pilloried ACE and several of its recommended charities, as well as the Open Philanthropy Project and the animal-focused research website Faunalytics, for methodological flaws in their research on the effectiveness of leafletting, online ads, and corporate agreements. Such critics have deemed the work of EAAs to be pseudo-science, have called for more rigorous standards of peer review, and have insisted that claims related to the effectiveness of advocacy strategies should be supported on the basis of randomized control trials (Taft 2016).

In response to these critiques, EAA respondents acknowledged that a high level of uncertainty does exist regarding how reliable and actionable the evidence for effective animal advocacy actually is. Particularly in the early days of the EAA community, they noted, studies with poor research methods were conducted and publicized as demonstrating the viability of particular outreach tactics like leafletting. Several talked of cringing when they thought back to the faulty methods of those projects, but remained optimistic that the strategy of consistently updating perspectives once new and better information is available proves the empirical rigor of the community. Others were less sure, concerned that word of this "updating" would be slow to reach animal advocates, and convinced that they would be better off taking their time to concentrate on conducting fewer but methodologically rigorous studies rather than relying on the work of hobbyist social scientists at advocacy organizations.

Related, some expressed misgivings about the "measurability bias" of EAA, which might push organizations to focus on easily captured short-term metrics—like the reach of leafletting tactics and tailored online ads—at the expense of considering larger-scale movement-building activities and long-term legal approaches that operate non-linearly. In an interview with me, Zach Groff, an EA-oriented researcher and animal activist, pointed to a few useful quantitative studies and get-out-the-vote projects from which EAAs could draw to guide their advocacy. He argued, however, that "sociological studies and histories are the best evidence we have on effective activism at the moment," adding, "but that is not the dominant view in EA."

A running thread through this debate was the high value that EAAs tend to place on professionalization. "We're not going to make it with just all kinds of people in the street telling other people to go vegan one by one," Tobias Leenaert, author of *How to Create a Vegan World*, described in a personal communication. "That's not the way it's going to work. We have to be very strategic and very institutionalized about this. Very professional. Professional is the new radical." EAAs were clear to point out that most of them did not fit the stereotypical profile of an animal rights activist at all, up to the point that they rejected the term activist in favor of advocate as an identifier. Sam Bankman-Fried, a focus group participant engaged in earning to give, was one of several who expressed concern about acts of provocative protest that characterize certain elements of animal activism. "If corporate outreach goes badly it'll be really ineffective and not get anything done, which is a waste of funds, but I think it's a lot less likely to bring down everything else." Others remained more open to such approaches—if civil disobedience organizations can show good evidence of impact, some argued, then the tactics should be considered effective.

This professionalized posture has come under fire from a number of grassroots-oriented and abolitionist-minded researchers and activists, who have argued that this stance does more to promote the growth of non-profits aligned with groups like Animal Charity Evaluators than it does to create a world without animal exploitation (Wrenn 2016). They insist that recommended EAA charities are almost universally welfarist in their approach and are bullish about the technological and corporate partnership opportunities of the social economy, whereas abolitionist organizations with a more grassroots style and long-term orientation to social change have not been given high marks (Nathan 2016). To such critics, the EAAs are naïve about the dangers of corporate co-optation and are too heavily invested in an incomplete narrative of world history in which technological solutions are able to swiftly fix the structural dynamics of social and environmental injustice.

In direct opposition to this perspective, EAA respondents were almost universal in a belief that engagement with the structures of the market—particularly through strategies that shift corporate behavior, encourage philanthropic giving and impact investing, or provide consumers with animal-free food alternatives—represent the most tractable and potentially transformative avenues for change. “I guess I’m a bit skeptical that even the best advocacy campaign is going to be able to convince most people to stop eating animals in the long-run,” Robert Wiblin, Director of Research at 80,000 Hours, explained to me in an interview. “But with technology, I suspect it’s probably quite likely that we can eventually produce products that taste like meat and have similar nutrition as meat…You could easily see that halving meat consumption and precipitating a pretty wide change in attitudes.” A lingering concern, however, is whether there is enough fiscal and intellectual capital available at this stage to prompt the transformations they see as necessary.

Neglectedness

> “I think encouraging people in the animal protection movement to become effective animal advocates is much more effective than encouraging non-vegans to become vegan.”—Michael Dello-Iacovo, Former Acting CEO of Effective Altruism Australia and current PhD Candidate at the University of New South Wales (Personal Communication)

> “Besides just moving money and highlighting how much new money we’re bringing in, part of our mission that I want to get better at is upping the game of everybody. That’s a vision I’ve always had. Everything we’re doing is not just to move money to a couple of charities. It’s lessons.”—Jon Bockman, Executive Director of Animal Charity Evaluators (Personal Communication)

If one recognizes that a large amount of suffering exists and believes that there are tractable ways to reduce that suffering, the next logical question is whether there are currently enough resources being invested to do so. For the EAAs, the story they tell is that big gaps remain, and therefore they make significant efforts to raise the profile of their concerns and devote time and money toward advancing effective solutions. This comes in multiple forms, including attempts to convince other members of the animal protection movement to follow their approach, to promote financial donations to charities and initiatives aligned with EAA, to encourage EAAs to pursue high-impact research projects and careers, and to grow the power of the EAA movement as a whole.

The most salient issue of neglectedness concerns the lack of attention and philanthropic support that farmed animal issues receive compared to other animal protection concerns, particularly those related to companion animals. In many ways, discomfort with this level of neglect is second only to the overall scale of animal suffering as a driver for the action of the EAA respondents. Initial returns have shown some promise—growing levels of donations have come in from effective altruists who had not previously donated to the animal cause area, from animal advocates who either donated their money elsewhere or did not previously donate at all, and from the largesse of the Open Philanthropy Project. The effective altruism movement has also begun to have some influence on private sector investments in food technology, as at least one impact investor told me he would not have funded a new startup in seafood alternatives if it were not for the work of EAAs who emphasized the scale of fish suffering.

With that said, participants consistently articulated a desire to get more self-professed animal lovers to “think like an EA,” and to recognize that farmed animals are equally worthy of their consideration. Indeed, groups like ACE have called upon some of the more well-established animal protection organizations—like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Humane Society of the United States—to expand and deepen their engagement on farmed animal advocacy and outreach. This has not always proven to be an easy task, in part because the social and organizational networks of EAs and animal protection activists are vastly different: “There is just no way that PETA reps are going to the EA hangouts and making friends with everyone,” one focus group participant remarked.

A key pathway toward bridging these gaps, several participants suggested, is improving the methodological rigor of social science research on animal advocacy techniques. Cognizant of previous mistakes, a number of EAAs have forged research collaborations between professional academics and advocacy organizations—from The Humane League’s “Humane League Labs” to Animal Charity Evaluators’

"Animal Advocacy Research Fund." Related, EAAs consistently expressed support for speculative and future-oriented basic research that could offer major dividends in the decades and generations ahead. What can be done to get more people involved in the emerging science of cellular agriculture and in helping bring more plant-based animal alternatives to market? Through what pathways could we promote a more general ethic of anti-speciesism through society, such that wild animal suffering might someday be taken seriously and addressed as a legitimate concern? How might legal rights for animals be secured through court-based or legislative actions?

Others expressed interest in building the EA and EAA movements generally, such that it could become a more substantive force in culture and politics. One of the biggest obstacles to doing so, several participants recognized, is the lack of racial, gender, and educational diversity that characterizes EAA, a multi-layered problem at the intersection of the movement's two primary foundations. Indeed, the EA community in general has quickly gained a reputation as lacking an inclusive culture, while the animal protection community has long been critiqued for being disconnected from the interests and concerns of low-income communities and communities of color, as well as for having male-dominated leadership despite the fact that rank-and-file animal advocates are more likely to be female (Harper 2010; Wrenn 2016). It is in this area that tensions between the goals of effective altruism and of animal protection are perhaps most stark. In fact, there is significant debate within the effective altruism community as to whether it would benefit from being a mass movement at all, since it could plausibly achieve many of its aims by focusing exclusively on the recruitment of elite members of society who could use their financial and intellectual capital as a force for consequentialist change. Animal protection, on the other hand, does aim to shift societal values and practices at a broader scale, meaning that most EAAs see value in increasing the diversity of its membership. As one former employee at an ACE-recommended charity put it, the EA movement lacks much of an outreach strategy in general, making targeted outreach toward diverse communities even more of an afterthought. "It's fairly insular, it's fairly white male dominated," she explained to me in an interview, "It's just something that not too many are thinking deeply about."

The EAA community is seen by many to continue to reinforce these multi-layered movement dynamics, and in an ACE blog post on the topic, Bockman (2016) stated, "It is true that the leadership of our recommended charities do not feature as much diversity as we would like, in terms of gender or race," adding, "We will not be able to solve this problem overnight, but we will make sincere efforts to address it so that we can both expand our movement and address patterns of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression existing within it." This interest in increasing diversity and inclusion has received some pushback from certain members within EA, who have written off these concerns as an unempirical distraction from the consequentialist task at hand. Other EAs and EAAs see active diversity initiatives as not only the morally right thing to do, but also as offering a more effective path to achieve the movement's goals in the years ahead.

Discussion and conclusion

In November of 2016, a group of several hundred animal protection advocates—researchers, non-profit leaders, technologists, donors, and others—gathered at Princeton University for the first ever Symposium on Multidisciplinary Research in Effective Animal Advocacy. Opening keynotes from Princeton's Peter Singer and ACE's Jon Bockman were followed by 2 days' worth of panels, a number of which featured individuals with close ties to the EAA community or who spoke directly to the traditional psychological and scientific research concerns of EAA. Others, however, provided opposing perspectives—including PETA director Jessica Sandler, who called into question the factory farming focus of EAAs—or offered sympathetic critiques—including Zach Groff, who argued that more attention should be paid to the effectiveness of social movement building.

The symposium provided a useful opportunity to examine the narratives and networks that have come to characterize EAA in its early years, the key contours of which have been outlined in detail in the pages above. As a subset of the larger effective altruism community, the gathering reflected its demographic and organizational ties, bringing together a growing number of highly-educated, philanthropically-minded, majority white, mostly young people with careers in areas that include finance, technology, academia, and the non-profit sector. Layered on top of that network were aligned dynamics within the animal protection community, which brought more women into the conversation, but otherwise maintained its demographic character, particularly through the inclusion of individuals associated with the professionalized sector of animal advocacy.

In terms of narrative substance, the gathering eschewed deeply held ideological debates in favor of a process-oriented discussion that emphasized ways to effectively reduce animal suffering. Meanwhile, the inclusion of several dissenting voices in the program demonstrated a general openness to some outside perspectives. If there was one thing above all else that EAAs hoped to communicate, perhaps, it was that the animal protection community should follow the lead of effective altruism by embracing an ethic of evaluation. From there, social economy resources could be directed toward those groups most able to demonstrate that substantive progress was being made to improve the lives of animals, no matter the tactical pathway to progress.

Drawing from multiple forms of empirical qualitative inquiry, this paper has outlined the primary principles and substantive tensions that characterize the EAAs at the time of this writing. Guided by the ITN framework and a consequentialist perspective, the dominant narrative of the community argues that they must seek out opportunities to reduce animal suffering and improve animal well-being to the greatest extent possible. Emerging at a moment in which the social economy has taken root, they believe that privately acquired capital can be put in service of their social advocacy goals, as they call for investments in effective non-profit advocacy initiatives, encourage institutionalized public–private partnerships, and advance for-profit social enterprises in food technology. Inspired by the example of philanthrocapitalists who have helped to set the agenda in global health and development, they instill principles of cost-benefit analysis into their agenda, prioritize projects that are able to deliver measurable returns, and trumpet scientific initiatives that might be able to shift market behavior more quickly and efficiently than would public education programs.

The litany of internal and external critiques levied against EAA—related to issues that include its priority-setting, research rigor, corporate interaction, diversity and inclusion—demonstrate its multi-layered complexity. The EAA movement's place within the social economy means that it is influenced by myriad forces and perspectives from across the philanthropic, non-profit, for-profit, advocacy, and food technology worlds. Its position as an emerging approach at the intersection of the already existing animal protection and effective altruism movements means that the narrative construction of its identity, as well as the networked structure of its membership, are evolving and inherently contentious. This makes for a sometimes contradictory mix of priorities and approaches that are difficult to navigate, but this hybridity is also central to the EAA community's claim that it can be a driving force for transformative change in the domain of animal protection.

While the primary aim of this paper has been empirical description, a few brief remarks regarding the overall value and limitations of the EAA approach are worthwhile. Drawing from the evidence that has been unfolded throughout this paper, one can certainly be concerned that the types of critiques set forth by Rubenstein (2016)—including the EA movement's bias toward easily measurable, technological, and economic solutions, as well as its "hidden curriculum" that positions adherents as above-the-fray rescuers—will permeate the animal movement as the EAAs gain strength. Indeed, despite consistent claims that their approach is a fundamentally non-ideological one, several themes speak to the constructed nature of the EAA community's own norms. Notably, the purported philosophical and tactical neutrality EAAs use to situate themselves above long-standing epistemic debates between welfarist and abolitionist approaches can rightly be described as an ideological choice, as can the community's generally positive view of philanthrocapitalist engagement in the social economy. Further, the extent to which EAAs continue to place faith in highly uncertain methods of impact evaluation—and to recommend that advocates take action based on those results—speaks to a worldview that valorizes a particular type of relationship between scientific knowledge and activism. From a practical perspective, these ideological decisions lead to a default bias against systems-oriented political advocacy and radical grassroots organizing, privileging instead the work of professionalized organizations that have the financial and intellectual resources available to meet the audit-oriented expectations of the community. With that said, it is also important to recognize that conversations about these tensions do take place within the EAA movement itself, that some EAAs are investing resources into examining social movement history and theory, and that taking a serious account of these critiques is considered by many to be central to the empirical approach that binds the community together.

For scholars interested in agrifood systems, perhaps the biggest takeaway of this research is that the EAAs are likely to be an increasingly noticeable force in the animal protection movement in the years ahead, particularly in the arena of anti-factory farm advocacy and in the promotion of animal food replacement technologies. "Most of what EA is doing is just throwing millions of dollars and tons of talented young people into the animal movement," Jacy Reese of Sentience Institute remarked to me in an interview. Whether it be effective altruists who get involved in animal protection or animal activists who embrace effective altruism, their collective financial and intellectual resources will make the ITN framework a more prominent structuring narrative in the future of animal advocacy. Related, interaction with the networks of the social economy, as well as with the logics and techniques of philanthrocapitalism, are likely to become firmly embedded as normal and necessary aspects of animal advocacy in the years ahead. These insights are useful for agrifood researchers with expertise beyond the animal protection world as well, as the case study demonstrates how social economy actors and philanthrocapitalist perspectives can quickly become integrated into movement arenas that only a few years before were relatively untouched. Future research will be required in order to assess how these narratives and networks evolve over time, to determine what influence effective altruists have on the animal protection movement, and to explore what influence animal advocates have on effective altruism. Agrifood scholars interested in the future of animal protection should continue to interrogate whether some of the EAA community's more glaring tensions prove to be fixable challenges, or rather irreconcilable differences, in the movement's quest to do what is best for the largest number of animals.

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