

Philosophers Against Factory Farming

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Moving Beyond Meat in Philosophy: The How and Why

☐ philosophersagainstfactoryfarming ☐ Uncategorized ☐ January 13, 2018 January 14, 2018 ☐
8 Minutes

By **Tyler John and Carolina Flores**

Most philosophers believe that buying and consuming factory farmed meat is morally wrong.[1] Even the few philosophers who do not believe that eating factory farmed meat is wrong tend to believe that purchasing it is a mistake, and that it would be much better, indeed commendable, for us to not do so.[2] When graduate students launched a fundraiser to fight factory farming last month, 38 departments responded and raised over \$50,000.[3] Yet most philosophy departments and events continue to



purchase and serve factory farmed meat. Analyses of the prevalence of factory farming based on USDA data consistently show that very nearly 100% of animal products sold in the United States come from factory farms.[4] Decades of undercover investigations and lawsuits provide strong evidence that factory farmed animal products are routinely mislabeled as “humane.”[5] As such, **we can be virtually certain that the animal products purchased by philosophy departments and for philosophy events come from factory farms.**

We believe that the discipline can aspire to much better than this. There are many reasons for philosophy departments and events to eschew serving factory farmed animal products by **servicing all vegetarian or vegan food.** By following a few simple steps we can help the discipline better live up to its values and ideals.

The Why

Nonhuman Animals Have Moral Status

Philosophers widely accept that nonhuman animals have moral status, i.e., that what we do to them and whether their interests are promoted are of moral concern. Indeed, since Singer's *Animal Liberation*, many philosophers have come to endorse anti-speciesism about moral status: the idea that species membership is a morally irrelevant distinction, and human and nonhuman animals are moral equals. Industrial animal agriculture is at striking odds with even the weaker of these ideals, confining nonhuman animals in tiny cages for their entire lives and submitting them to standard industry practices like debeaking without anesthesia and forced molting before slaughtering them without compulsion or necessity. If nonhuman animals have moral status, then this practice is seriously morally wrong, and we have powerful moral reasons to refuse participation as individuals, disciplines, and institutions.

Animal Agriculture Has Huge Environmental and Human Costs

As [Kian told us earlier this month](https://philosophersagainstfactoryfarming.wordpress.com/2017/12/18/you-can-help-solve-climate-change-while-reducing-animal-suffering/)

(<https://philosophersagainstfactoryfarming.wordpress.com/2017/12/18/you-can-help-solve-climate-change-while-reducing-animal-suffering/>), animal agriculture “accounts for around 18%-25% of total greenhouse emissions,” which is approximately **equivalent to “the amount of greenhouse gases released from all transport emissions combined.”** Climate change from greenhouse gas emissions is going to drastically reshape our world, and it will hit the world's most vulnerable fastest and hardest, greatly undermining their food security. By foregoing meat and other animal products, philosophy departments can reduce the impact of these harms, supporting the poor and vulnerable.

Another impact of animal agriculture is its contribution to the production of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. 80% of antibiotics sold in the United States are used to increase the size of farmed animals, turning farms into what one *Scientific American* health journalist has called “disease factories”—sources of deadly microorganisms that are resistant to western medicine.[6] This has already become a large problem for U.S. hospitals and will continue to become a bigger problem as more of these drugs are used, quickly “unraveling our ability to cure bacterial infections.”[7]

Epistemic Reasons

Several recent cognitive dissonance studies show that **people who know that they will be eating meat attribute lower mentality and moral status to nonhuman animals than they otherwise would.**[8] This psychological refuge effect has been the basis for arguments from philosopher Bob Fischer that there are epistemic reasons to avoid eating animal products.[9] If we want to have as accurate beliefs about other animals as possible, especially in a discipline that works in part to understand human and nonhuman minds and moral and political obligations to human and nonhuman animals, then we should avoid serving animal products in professional contexts.

Creating a Supportive Community

Many philosophers are akratic in their consumption of animal products, thinking that they ought not eat animals and sometimes wishing that they didn't do so. But the main reason why so many philosophers eat animals is because it's so often the default choice. Everyone around us is doing it, making eating animals seem less morally serious and compelling us to take part due to our deep desires for kinship and belonging. **Making philosophy departments and events vegan or vegetarian is an excellent way to support each other in becoming the best versions of ourselves** by eliminating such social norms in these contexts and thereby eliminating obstacles and social pressures that hold us back from living out our values.

The How

Fortunately, moving the discipline towards better norms in this area isn't difficult, and all of us can participate. Here are some practical tips.

Start Small

Disciplinary norms take time to shift, even in individual departments, and many departments and conferences may not be open to going vegetarian or vegan overnight. Fortunately, we can make some progress on shifting these norms in small and incremental ways.

At Rutgers, we've worked on normalizing vegetarian and vegan meals and denormalizing animal-based meals by:

- **organizing vegetarian and vegan events** – for example, vegan grad student potlucks at our house once or twice a semester. In addition to getting people together and helping strengthen the department community, the food is always delicious, which we hope encourages people to cook and eat more vegan food.
- **volunteering to take over department tasks and reading groups involving catering**, and have used these as opportunities to cater vegetarian and vegan food for the department. This has worked very well, in part because we successfully identified excellent and inexpensive vegan catering options and tried to cater to people's taste preferences as much as possible. The result has been that **department members like our catering more than they liked department catering previously**, because we've made more of an effort to provide tasty and nutritious food. As a result, we've had no complaints about these changes and only positive feedback.
- **encouraging other grad students in charge of catering to order vegetarian or vegan meals**

In some cases, it may make sense to start more incrementally still, by ordering only a small amount of animal-based food as a stepping stone to more ethical catering.

Consider identifying vegetarian and veg-friendly restaurants for department meals and get-togethers. Such restaurants also tend to be more inclusive, having more options that are suitable for philosophers who eat vegetarian, vegan, Kosher, or Halal. Here are some suggestions:

- Local Mediterranean and Middle Eastern restaurants
- South Asian restaurants (Indian, Pakistani)
- Japanese, Chinese, Korean restaurants
- Ethiopian restaurants
- Vegetarian and vegan restaurants
- Veggie pizza
- Mexican, Tex-Mex, Chipotle burrito boxes and spreads
- Vegetarian sandwiches

Cover Everyone's Dietary Needs

Be sure to order food that is accommodating to people who have dietary needs, for example because they are gluten-sensitive, have other food allergies, or who have eating disorders or face food anxiety around certain choices. With planning, going vegetarian or vegan shouldn't make this any harder than usual – in fact, restaurants who cater vegetarian or vegan food are often especially alert to other food restrictions.

Make sure that you consider gluten, nut, and soy-free options, as well as Kosher and Halal options, depending on department needs. In addition, ask about such situations up front and solicit feedback on food, including the option of giving private (and even anonymous) feedback over email.

Ensuring that everyone has enough of the right kind of food to eat is an issue of transitional justice: it is a moral requirement to do right by other humans and it is pragmatically important in gaining support for transitions to more just food practices.

Lobby Sympathetic Faculty

Moving from small and incremental norm-shifting work to pushing for department- and event-wide policies, it can be highly valuable to have the support of faculty members who can go to bat for you in department meetings and beyond. If a faculty member is sympathetic to the move (perhaps they donated in the Philosophers Against Factory Farming fundraiser!) or are simply supportive of the interests of their grad students, try mentioning to them that it you and other department members are interested in trying to move the department towards vegetarian food policies.

Talk to Your Chair

The department chair often has great influence over department food policy, and scheduling a meeting with them about department food may be the most efficient way to change department policy. They may change it immediately, may be resistant, or may seek wider input before changing policy, but a supportive chair should at least be open to discussing such changes, and it is therefore worth seeking a conversation. If you can get another faculty member to support you in this conversation, all the better! If that fails, or if preferred, you can:

Try a Vote

We know that, frequently, department deliberations are not fair and democratic. Often times, the loudest and most outspoken department members hold the most sway, while introverted and socially marginalized department members have little say. Graduate students frequently have far less power than faculty members, even where decisions affect everyone equally. This can make it difficult to push for democratic change within departments and institutions.

Nonetheless, there are numerous advantages to democratic decision-making: it can be a powerful way to empower group members, build a sense of community and shared values, and yield more stable and persistent norms than would otherwise exist. So, in environments where thoughtful and democratic decision-making seems like a real possibility, pushing for such a vote can be an excellent way forward.

Thank you to everyone working in support of this discipline-wide endeavor. It is through all of your hard work that we will see ourselves into better and more just disciplinary norms and practices. And feel free to email us (at tyler.john@rutgers.edu (<mailto:tyler.john@rutgers.edu>)) and carolina.flores@rutgers.edu (<mailto:carolina.flores@rutgers.edu>)) if you have any questions or suggestions!

Endnotes

[1] An informal recent poll on the Leiter Reports provides evidence of this (<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2017/12/reader-opinions-of-factory-farming.html> (<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2017/12/reader-opinions-of-factory-farming.html>)); according to a survey conducted by survey company Ipsos Group in collaboration with Sentience Institute, half of ordinary Americans believe that factory farming is not only wrong but should be legally banned, and we should expect philosophers' attitudes to be less conservative (<https://www.sentienceinstitute.org/animal-farming-attitudes-survey-2017> (<https://www.sentienceinstitute.org/animal-farming-attitudes-survey-2017>)); moreover, a systematic review of the ethics literature from John Rossi and Samuel Garner finds the following: "Many critiques of Industrial Farm Animal Production (IFAP) have been offered from common-morality, rights-based, utilitarian, virtue-based, feminist and sustainability perspectives, and correspondingly very few defenses of IFAP appear to have been made... What defenses of IFAP can be found are often vague, non-systematic, and premised on highly problematic arguments... The preceding discussion demonstrates not only that IFAP is morally indefensible, but furthermore that this conclusion is significantly overdetermined. The conclusion that IFAP is morally indefensible can be reached via multiple lines of argument touching upon multiple areas of concern." Rossi, John and Samuel A. Garner, "Industrial Farm Animal Production: A Comprehensive Moral Critique," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 27 (3):479-522 (2014).

[2] E.g., Elizabeth Harman, "Morally Permissible Moral Mistakes," *Ethics* 126 (3): 366-393 (2014). The convergence of philosophers' views on these points is seriously striking. More philosophers agree that we have decisive practical reasons to avoid eating factory farmed meat than agree on the existence of the external world!

[3] <https://www.crowdrise.com/PhilosophersAgainstFactoryFarming> (<https://www.crowdrise.com/PhilosophersAgainstFactoryFarming>).

[4] https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iUpRFOPmAE5IO4hO4PyS4MP_kHzkuM-soqAyVNQcJc/edit#gid=0

(https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iUpRFOPmAE5IO4hO4PyS4MP_kHzkuM_-soqAyVNQcJc/edit#gid=0) (definition of factory farm includes Large CAFO and upper half of Medium CAFO: https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/sector_table.pdf (https://www3.epa.gov/npdes/pubs/sector_table.pdf))

[5] In one of the most striking of these investigations, advocacy group Direct Action Everywhere found that Diestel Turkey Ranch, which has received Whole Foods' highest rating for animal welfare, in fact operates a showcase farm which is heavily promoted in their marketing but does not raise any animals for sale – the farm is “nothing more than a prop.” (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/11/24/whole-foods-thanksgiving-turkeys-endure-horrific-conditions-at-calif-farm-animal-rights-activists-say/?utm_term=.2cd5e2163b81) Meanwhile, the farms Diestel Ranch does use to raise and supply turkeys to Whole Foods are conventional factory farms, with Diestel Ranch's own records showing up to 7% of birds dying every week due to disease and neglect.

[6] <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-drug-resistant-bacteria-travel-from-the-farm-to-your-table/> (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-drug-resistant-bacteria-travel-from-the-farm-to-your-table/>); <http://consumersunion.org/news/the-overuse-of-antibiotics-in-food-animals-threatens-public-health-2/> (<http://consumersunion.org/news/the-overuse-of-antibiotics-in-food-animals-threatens-public-health-2/>).

[7] *ibid.*

[8] Bastian, B., S. Loughnan, N. Haslam, and H. Radke. “Don't Mind Meat? The Denial of Mind to Animals Used For Human Consumption.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38 (2012): 247-256; Bratanova, B., S. Loughnan, and B. Bastian. “The Effect of Categorization as Food on the Perceived Moral Standing of Animals.” *Appetite* 57 (2011): 193-196; Loughnan, S., N. Haslam, and B. Bastian. “The Role of Meat Consumption in the Denial of Moral Status and Mind to Meat Animals.” *Appetite* 55 (2010): 156-159.

[9] Fischer, Bob, “An Epistemic Argument for Veganism” (unpublished).



Gut Doctor "I Beg Americans To Throw Out This Vegetable Now"

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