

Plans for today:

1. Announcements
 - new cards cycle
 - more on papers (& topics by Tuesday!)
 - questions for Huemer
 - last day of class plans
2. Final (and Main) Response to Causal Impotence Objection:
The Appeal to Thresholds
3. "V's Main Argument"

Ethical Vegetarianism

It is wrong to eat meat in the circumstances we normally actually face.

The Causal Impotence Objection:

P1. No individual decision whether to buy meat ever makes a difference to animal suffering.

P2. But an act of buying meat is wrong only if it contributes to animal suffering.

C. So, no acts of buying meat are wrong.

Last time we noted that V could and would give Deontological replies to this argument; these replies reject P2. (Case of "Retiring Killian"; cf. Utilitarianism)

Deontological Responses:

- it's wrong to benefit from the wrongdoing of others (even if you're not causing it)

But V thinks the Causal Impotence Objection can be answered even if Utilitarianism is true (P2 is a utilitarian-ish premise). So V argues that P1 can be rejected. This is the third and final response:

(iii) The Appeal to Thresholds (denies P1):

- Some (but admittedly not all) individual acts of buying meat do make a difference to animal suffering
- An act of buying meat does so whenever it (combined with acts of meat buying of others) surpasses a threshold of meat-industry sensitivity to demand. Such acts play a "straw-that-broke-the-camel's-back" role.

Why think that some individual acts of buying meat must make a difference to animal suffering?

Recall these claims:

V's case for Ethical Vegetarianism involves these two causal claims:

- GENERAL CAUSAL CLAIM: the buying of meat by the general public causes enormous animal suffering.
- INDIVIDUAL CAUSAL CLAIM: individual acts of buying meat contribute to animal suffering.

It seems that if no individual act of buying meat ever contributed to animal suffering, then the GENERAL CAUSAL CLAIM could not be true. But, assuming that there is indeed enormous suffering on factory farms then the GENERAL CAUSAL CLAIM seems obviously true.

Initial Problem for the Appeal to Thresholds:

Only a small fraction of acts of buying meat surpass a threshold.
(For the purposes of this discussion, let's say it's 1 in 100.)

So, though this is enough to make P1 false, we can reformulate the original objection in a way that makes a variant of that premise true and still makes trouble for Ethical Vegetarianism:

The Causal Impotence Objection Reformulated:

P1.* Only a small fraction of individual decisions whether to buy meat ever makes a difference to animal suffering.

P2. An act of buying meat is wrong only if it contributes to animal suffering.

C. So only a small fraction of acts of buying meat are wrong.

Response to the Causal Impotence Objection Reformulated (these are the remaining parts of the Appeal to Thresholds):

- First, note that

P2. An act of buying meat is wrong only if it contributes to animal suffering

was actually false all along. When an act (of whatever kind) has a chance of causing suffering, it is for that reason morally problematic. And it will be positively morally wrong if the act doesn't have enough else going for it.

- Example to illustrate: Russian Roulette on the Passersby

- To explain the wrongness here we need:

P2*. An act of buying meat is wrong only if it has a

big enough chance of contributing to enough suffering.

- Next, note that if only 1 in 100 acts of buying meat contributes to animal suffering, each of these acts will contribute 100 times the suffering that a single act would contribute if every act contributed.
 - Example to illustrate: "Killian on demand" vs. "Killian stocks up"
- Finally, note that we never know which acts of buying meat surpass a threshold. Thus, from our perspective, each act of buying meat has a 1% chance of being a trigger. (Cf. Killian stocks up.)
- It follows from the last two points that every act of buying meat has a 1% chance of causing as much suffering as buying 100 times as much meat (if every act of buying meat directly caused suffering).
- Thus, supposing that every act of buying meat would be wrong if every act of buying meat directly caused suffering (something that an advocate of Causal Impotence Objection has given us no reason to deny), then every actual act of buying meat (acts which have a 1% chance of causing 100 times as much suffering) is also wrong.
 - This is supposed to show that each act of buying meat "has a big enough chance of contributing to enough suffering," as P2* requires.

Back to the bigger picture:

The conclusion of the Argument from Pain and Suffering was about factory farms. In the above, we've been discussing how to go from that conclusion to a conclusion about individual behavior. We can condense these two bits of reasoning into the following argument:

V's Main Argument (cf. argument on p. 58):

- P1. Causing lots of suffering for trivial reasons is wrong.
- P2. Eating meat causes lots of suffering for trivial reasons.
- C. So, eating meat is wrong.

Comments? Questions? Objections?

Question: Assuming it's wrong to eat meat, would that make it ok to interfere with factory farms.