

Plans for today:

1. Announcements

- still waiting on paper topics from a few of you; if you are struggling to find one, let's Zoom about it
- questions for Huemer
- FCQs in a few minutes
- Exam #6 was distributed; it's due Sunday
- Last day of class plans: remnants from today and/or sharing paper topic/thesis/argument

2. Humane Farming: "Eating Animals the Nice Way"

Humane Farming: "Eating Animals the Nice Way" (McMahan 2008)

The Cautionary Principle:

If an action (i) has a pretty good chance of being wrong, (ii) you have no moral reasons to do it, and (iii) you can refrain from doing it without unreasonable personal cost, then you shouldn't do it.

Some preliminaries:

- Let's assume that the only moral reasons in play are those that relate to the treatment of animals
- Let's assume that "humane farming" is possible:
  - animals live good lives
  - and are killed painlessly
  - don't need to assume totally pain-free lives
  - they get to live a good portion of their lifespan
- Let's assume that there are people who, with some regularity, would get more pleasure from a meal with meat than they would get from a vegetarian meal

Our question:

Given these assumptions, is humane farming morally permissible?

Let's begin by noting these important facts about humane farming:

- it is good for those who like meat (they don't have to eat vegetarian all the time),
- it's good overall for the animals (they get good lives out of it and would otherwise not have gotten to exist at all), and
- it's worse for no one (again, ignoring externalities like resource use, pandemics, etc.)

A Pareto Argument in Favor of Humane Farming:

P1. If a practice/institution would be good for some and bad for no one, then it is at least morally permissible. ("Pareto principle")

P2. Humane farming would be good for some and bad for no one.

C. Therefore, humane farming is morally permissible.

When a thing is good for some and bad for no one, it is called a "Pareto improvement" after the 19th c. Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto.

(Note that a utilitarian would agree with the Pareto principle at least in cases in which the only two options are (i) the act that is the Pareto improvement and (ii) not acting at all.)

A possible counterexample to the Pareto principle:

The Organ Harvest:

- Imagine that the world's population has reached a point at which people have agreed to adopt a policy of replacement — that is, people may have a child only when someone dies, so that total population does not increase.
- Suppose further that there is a chronic shortage of donor organs and that many people continue to die for lack of an organ transplant.
- Suppose that people thus agree to allow a certain number of people to be born above the limit, provided that they will be painlessly killed at the age of 50 in order to make their organs available for transplantation.

POLL:

Is the Organ Harvest scheme morally permissible:

Yes: 2

No: 10