

Ethical perspectives on modifying animals

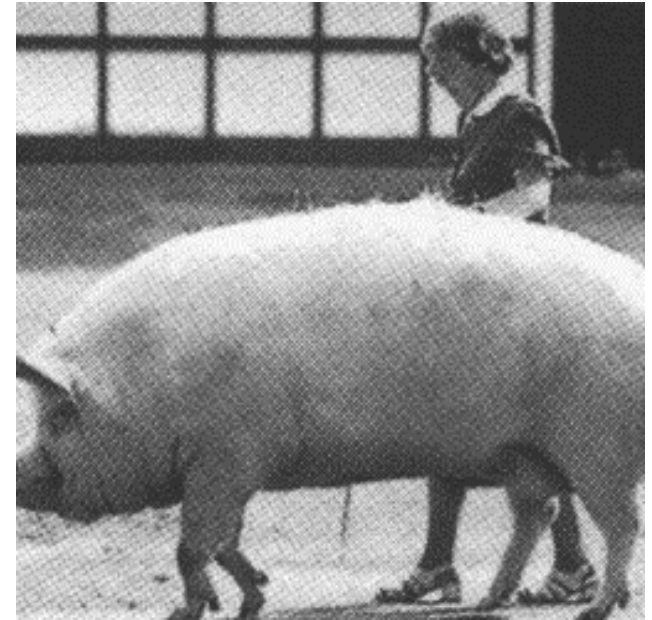
Beyond welfare arguments

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Beltsville Pigs

- Agricultural Research Service at Beltsville, Maryland
- Human growth hormone
- Better food conversion rate
- Arthritis, lung problems
- Experiment terminated



Criticism: welfare understood too narrowly

- Brambell's five freedoms do not constitute welfare, but only the necessary conditions for welfare
- Welfare is more than what you can objectively measure
- Over the course of the whole life
- Enjoyment, achievement, good relationships

- 1) Freedom from hunger and thirst
- 2) Discomfort or pain
- 3) Injury or disease
- 4) Fear and distress
- 5) Freedom to express normal behaviour

However....

- Genetic modification does not necessarily interfere with welfare in the broader sense either
- And still, there are moral qualms
- Welfare/ well-being > subjective experiences
- Many moral discussions not about how the animals experience it, but how humans experience it
- They are about our worldviews and our view of the good life
- Objections beyond welfare



Arguments/ objections beyond welfare

4 clusters:

- 1) Violates integrity
- 2) Instrumentalizes animals
- 3) Amounts to playing God
- 4) Is unnatural



What to make of these arguments?

Less consensus

Traced to worldviews/ notions of the good life

Important to discuss them publicly

Violation of integrity

- 1) The wholeness and intactness of the animal
- 2) Its species-specific balance,
- 3) The capacity to sustain itself in an environment suitable to the species

- Rutgers, L. J. E., & Heeger, F. R. (1999). "Inherent worth and respect for animal integrity", in M. Dol et al.(Eds.), *Recognizing the intrinsic value of animals: Beyond animal welfare*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Bovenkerk, B., Brom, F. W. A., & van den Bergh, B. J. (2002). Brave new birds: The use of 'Animal Integrity' in animal ethics. *The Hastings Center Report*, 32(1), 16.

Integrity

- Seems to refer to a biological norm
- But primarily refers to the intention behind the interference
- Refers to a 'species-typical' norm
- The 'cowness of the cow'
- Ideal image
- Hard to justify theoretically
- Appeals to intuition that we should not 'tamper' with animal genomes
- Used in practice



Instrumentalisation

- Cluster of objections: objectification, commodification, alienation, de-animalisation
- Two general meanings:

Treating as an object <> Turning into an object



- J. Bos, B. Bovenkerk, P. Feindt & Y. van Dam, 2018, 'The Quantified Animal: Precision Livestock Farming and the Ethical Implications of Objectification in *Food Ethics* 2: 77-92

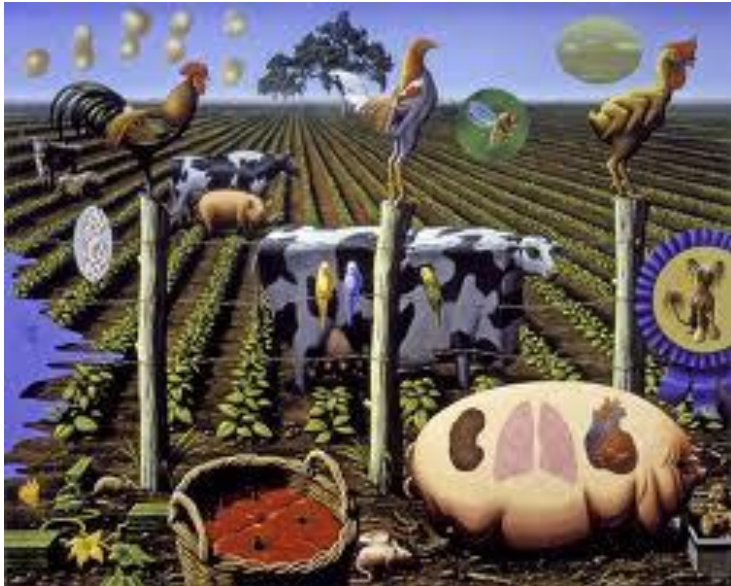
Instrumentalisation

- Treating *as if* an animal is an object leads to a denial of its own interests or its nature
- Turning *into* an object (whether intentionally or not) means that the animal is treated solely as an instrument for our use or that it is in fact turned (partly) into an artefact
- The animals become 'living parts of machinery'
- Adapted to fit into our production systems



Instrumentalisation

- Should we adapt the animal to the farm or the farm to the animal?
- Their own subjectivity or autonomy is denied and they are not seen as individuals but as replaceable



De-animalisation

- Production animals are taken out of their own evolutionary and environmental context and reduced to a 'production unit' or artefact
- There is room for few other capabilities and behaviours than 'giving off-spring, producing milk, and dying'
- Virtue ethical argument
- We need experience of animals and their complex behavior to build practical wisdom and moral character
- Current conditions in livestock production are detrimental to our grasping the 'animalness' of animals

Harfeld, J. et al, 2016. Seeing the animal: On the ethical implications of De-animalization in intensive animal production systems. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 29 (3): 407–423

Playing God

- Rejects intervention in the order of the creation
- Expresses an intuition that certain boundaries should not be crossed by humans
- Usually not meant as a religious argument
- Proper role of human beings within nature or vis-a`-vis technology
- Rejects pretension of control and almightiness
- Human *hubris*
- Life cannot be manufactured



Brom, F. W. A. (1997). *Onherstelbaar verbeterd (irreparably improved)*. Assen:

Unnaturalness

- Idea that certain natural boundaries (p.e. between species) have been crossed
- Response that there are no species boundaries on genome level miss the point
- Point is not that it would never happen in nature but interfering itself is deemed unnatural



B. Bovenkerk and H. Nijland, 2017, 'The Pedigree Dog Breeding Debate in Ethics and Practice: Beyond Welfare Arguments', in *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 30 (3): 387-412

Unnaturalness

- By adapting animals we are turning them into something unnatural > an artefact
- Naturalistic fallacy?
- We should not take nature as guide to our moral actions
- Can be misused for political reasons
- Do we find something bad because it is unnatural, or unnatural because we find it bad?

Unnaturalness

- Still, argument keeps popping up
- Expresses deeply felt intuition
- Underlying views on nature and our relation to animals
- Rejection of instrumental vision on nature and animals
- Showed respect for evolutionary processes
- Not a hard and fast criterion to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable actions



What is the upshot of these arguments?

- Based on how we view animals, how we view the human-animal-nature relationship and more broadly on what we see as a good life
- Integrity & instrumentalisation > based on intrinsic value of animals and views about ideal animal
- Playing God & naturalness > express view on the more modest role of humans vis-a-vis nature
- Broader conceptions of the good life



Rule versus life-ethical theories

- **Rule-ethical theories** aim to formulate impartial rules that enable peaceful and just cohabitation between individuals
- Based on commonly held moral views
- In **life-ethical theories** discussion about the good life are central:
 - Less consensus
 - Based on fundamental values on which people differ
 - Do not provide clear rules for action
- Tend to be relegated to the private sphere > problematic

Public debate

- By only taking rule-ethical principles seriously, many important values and meanings that people attach to life and the world around them are disregarded
- Arguments beyond welfare should be the subject of public debate
- Broad reflection on what kind of world we want to live in

