

Essays in Philosophy

ISSN 1526-0569

Volume 18, Issue 1 (2017)

Theory-neutral arguments for “effective animal advocacy”

Andrew Fisher
University of Cape Town

Essays Philos (2017)18:1 | DOI: 10.7710/1526-0569.1578
Correspondence: ajmfisher@gmail.com



© 2017 Fisher. This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Introduction¹

Animal advocacy is aimed at a range of practices that cause harm to sentient non-human animals, for example factory farming and experimentation on animals. The central aim of this essay is to present and defend an approach to animal advocacy which I shall call “effective animal advocacy” (“EAA”).² This approach is aligned with “effective altruism”, a global social movement characterised by the use of evidence and reason to discover the best ways to improve the world.³ Following this general principle, EAA emphasizes the use of the best available evidence and reason to discover the best ways of helping animals. The aim is to choose from available interventions such that advocates do the most good they can for animals. I will argue that EAA is a promising approach to animal advocacy, and worthy of support by animal activists.

I will begin by proposing some key principles of effective animal advocacy and presenting a *prima facie* case for this approach. One target audience for this essay is animal advocates who are “on board” with the core of EAA (as proposed), but who might have reservations about its broadly consequentialist “flavour”. I shall therefore address a family of anti-consequentialist objections to EAA. Central to my defence of EAA is the claim that it can be attached to various moral frameworks. In the final section I respond to a worry that this claim might render EAA practically useless for activists.

The *prima facie* case for effective animal advocacy

For the purposes of this essay, I propose the following schema as a summary of some key principles of EAA:

- a) Advocates aim to use evidence and reason to do the most good they can for animals.

¹ I am grateful to Dr. Greg Fried, Dr. Elisa Galgut, Professor David Benatar, Jessica du Toit, and an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

² I will use “activism” and “advocacy” interchangeably. I did not coin the term “effective animal advocacy”: references to “effective animal activism” have been made in the context of the “effective altruism” movement. In particular, “Animal Charity Evaluators”, a prominent charity within the “effective altruism” movement (and which I take as one exemplar of EAA), used to be named “Effective Animal Activism.” See also Luke Muehlhauser “Four Focus Areas of Effective Altruism” in Ryan Carey (ed) *The Effective Altruism Handbook* (Centre for Effective Altruism, 2015) 104: “*Effective animal altruists* are focused on reducing animal suffering in cost-effective ways.” [My emphasis].

³ Recent books on effective altruism written for a popular audience are Peter Singer *The Most Good You Can Do* (Yale University Press, 2015) and William Macaskill *Doing Good Better* (Random House, 2015).

- b) Advocates adjust their interventions based on the best available evidence for what works.
- c) All else equal, advocates prefer measures for which there is good evidence of causal effectiveness.
- d) All else equal, advocates prefer the most cost-effective measures.

This schema should be seen as a starting point for analysis, and not as a complete statement of EAA. I think there are at least four reasons to endorse EAA as a framework for animal advocacy.

The first reason is the case from practical rationality: given a clear goal (reducing animal suffering), finite resources (limited money and time), and a set of possible interventions aimed at achieving the goal, all else equal, it is good to optimise the use of resources with respect to the goal. That is, it is good to choose the intervention(s) such that the available resources take one as far as possible towards the intended goal. This argument assumes (plausibly) that there are objectively better and worse ways to go about achieving the stated goal; and that using evidence and reason is better than alternative methods for determining the better (or best) ways to achieve the goal. In the context of animal activism, if there is evidence available that a particular intervention from a range of possibilities (“A”) helps the most animals the greatest amount per unit of cost, and another intervention (“B”) helps significantly fewer animals much less per unit of cost, choosing “B” rather than “A” is a bad decision, both practically and morally. Going with “B” rather than “A” forgoes the opportunity of reducing significantly more animal suffering, so is both practically not the best use of available resources to achieve the intended goal, and morally worse than the alternative which spares more suffering. Insofar as this principle of practical rationality is sound, it is plausible that in order to optimise, activists need to discover (using the best available evidence and empirical methods) the likely consequences and relative cost-effectiveness of the various options available to them. Hence, EAA’s emphasis on evidence-based effectiveness seems to be consistent with practical rationality.

The second *prima facie* reason in favour of evidence-based effectiveness in animal advocacy is that the stakes are high for animals. Take factory farming as just one example of a human practice that causes animals to suffer. Billions of land animals are raised and killed for food annually,⁴ most of them on factory farms, and good evidence

⁴ As at 2009, an estimated 56 billion land animals were killed worldwide every year for food: Ilea R.C “Intensive livestock farming: global trends, increased environmental concerns, and ethical solutions” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 22 (2009): 153-167.

indicates that sentient factory-farmed animals experience a relatively high degree of suffering during their lifetimes. Those convinced that such animal suffering matters morally are likely to be convinced of both the relatively large scale of the problem and the urgency with which it should be addressed. Further, animal activists have limited resources with which to address the problem, a fact supported by the plausible claim that the cause of animals in industrial agriculture is relatively neglected and underfunded compared to other important causes. Even within the broader field of animal welfare issues, relatively little funding goes to helping animals in industrial agriculture; rather, issues affecting domestic animals, such as cats and dogs, tend to receive disproportionate attention from most animal welfare advocates and donors.⁵ Given the high stakes (the scale and urgency of the problem, combined with scarce resources) it makes sense for activists to do the best they can for animals with the available resources. In order to discover how to do this, it is necessary for them to pay careful attention to the best available evidence for impact and relative cost-effectiveness.

A third reason in favour of EAA refers to EAA's emphasis on cost-effectiveness, and is based on the claim that cost-effectiveness is a moral imperative in the context of animal advocacy. The moral importance of cost-effectiveness arises from the fact that cost-effectiveness varies significantly between different interventions. For (hypothetical) example, an activist who aims to reduce the suffering of chickens might choose to spend an entire budget on the rescue and veterinary care of a few chickens; or to distribute a video that causes many people to consume less chickens, such that a few hundred less chickens are raised on factory farms (and ultimately killed for human consumption). Given the variability of cost-effectiveness, moving scarce resources from the least effective intervention (or even the median intervention) to the most effective would produce many more times the benefit for animals. Ignoring cost-effectiveness in animal advocacy could therefore mean losing a significant portion of the value of a budget allocated to addressing (for example) factory farming; and failure to prioritise interventions could plausibly mean a significant number of additional deaths (or units of additional suffering, however measured) of animals that would not have otherwise occurred. If this is correct, then not only does it make sense as a matter of practical rationality to help more animals (and by a greater amount) instead of fewer animals (by a lesser amount); it is also morally problematic not to do so.⁶ In addition, there may be special motivations to be as effective as possible in the context of animal activism,

⁵ William Macaskill (2015) "The truth about animal charities, cats and dogs" *The Guardian* (19 November 2015).

⁶ This point is made in the context of global health in Toby Ord (2014) "The moral imperative towards cost-effectiveness" (Centre for Effective Altruism, 2014).

compared to other important causes focused on benefiting people. Since people are generally able to make progress and improve their situations on their own, but animals cannot improve their situations without activist intervention, there may be a special responsibility on animal activists to do the most good they can for animals, compared to doing the most good in the context of global health, or alleviating poverty, for example.

It might be objected that effectiveness is often difficult to measure; therefore it should not be prioritised as a standard for assessing interventions. However, the validity of the principle of effectiveness (*viz* all else equal, it is better to produce a larger benefit to animals than a smaller one) must be distinguished from the question of how to measure effectiveness. It might be hard to decide which intervention is best (in the sense of “most effective”), but the principle that activists should aim to discover which are best and favour the best interventions remains plausible. It is better to work on improving ways of measuring effectiveness rather than abandoning effectiveness as a strategy (provided of course that the problem of measurement is tractable).⁷

A fourth and final *prima facie* reason in favour of EAA is as follows: there is currently a large range of possible interventions against practices that cause animal suffering. For example, advocacy against factory farming ranges from legislative advocacy, to special issue welfare campaigns, to pro-vegan advocacy, to maintaining animal sanctuaries, to corporate outreach, to undercover investigations, to litigation against corporations enforcing animal welfare laws. Given such a wide range of viable options, it makes sense to have some standard for prioritising interventions. EAA provides a reasonable standard of prioritisation: given a set of alternatives, prioritise those for which there is the best available evidence of positive impact for animals, and which are relatively cost-effective.

In response to this suggestion, some might worry that prioritising in this way risks excluding some potentially effective interventions, or alienating some activists inclined by training or temperament to non-prioritised kinds of actions by explicitly regarding their favoured activities as less worthwhile. What is required at this stage, some might argue, is innovation and a diversity of approaches. This is a fair point. Indeed, given that empirical research on effectiveness in animal advocacy is currently relatively underdeveloped, it is plausible that it will often be inconclusive what the most effective intervention is. It is also plausible that a diversity of approaches is helpful. However,

⁷ A similar point is made in the context of effective altruism more generally by Katja Grace “Estimation Is the Best We Have” in Ryan Carey (ed) *The Effective Altruism Handbook* (Centre for Effective Altruism, 2015) 40.

this does not mean that we should reject the ideal of testing interventions such that the most effective are prioritised. Where possible, we should prioritise interventions based on evidence of effectiveness; but where this is not possible, we should try new things (perhaps based on intuition or other non-evidence-based factors) with the aim of ultimately testing them for effectiveness. Moreover, we should not abandon evidence and reason altogether when generating and trying new interventions: given empirical uncertainty about effectiveness, activists should try new interventions that are plausible, or most likely to be effective, given the available evidence; provided that there are no good reasons to think a particular intervention will be counterproductive.

Anti-consequentialism

EAA prioritises evidence-based impact for animals and asks advocates to do the most good they can for animals. In this, EAA is broadly consequentialist in “flavour”. However, recall that my proposed schema of EAA should be understood as an incomplete statement of EAA, which could be completed in various ways. The schema does not depend upon or imply any particular moral theory. Accordingly, those who endorse EAA need not be committed to strict consequentialism *viz* the claim that the effects of measures for animals are the *only* considerations relevant to activism on animal-related issues. Taking consequences seriously (in the sense of stressing the importance of cause-effect thinking in advocacy and acknowledging that advocacy measures have impacts for animals that must be considered in order to choose responsibly between advocacy measures) is distinct from strict consequentialism. So too is prioritizing the impacts of a measure on animals when evaluating the measure. Insofar as EAA takes impacts seriously, or even prioritises impacts, it is not necessarily (strictly) consequentialist. It does not preclude non-consequential considerations. Since utilitarianism is a form of (strict) consequentialism, proponents of EAA are not necessarily committed to (any form of) utilitarianism. I do not take a stand on (a) whether EAA is (strictly) consequentialist or not, or (b) whether, if consequentialist, EAA is utilitarian or not, or c) if utilitarian, how to categorise EAA *vis a vis* different forms of utilitarianism.

Nevertheless, EAA clearly takes the consequences of interventions for animals seriously, and (I suggest) EAA *prioritises* impact for animals over other considerations. Although I do not aim to be exhaustive, here I consider some potential objections to EAA’s emphasis on consequences for animals. These objections can broadly be classed as anti-consequentialist objections, and most were originally framed as objections against utilitarianism.

Too demanding?

It might be argued that EAA demands too much of advocates relative to other approaches, in recommending that advocates do as much good as possible for animals. For example, potentially less demanding approaches might include those that recommend that advocates “do some good” or “do what’s easiest” or “focus on those nearest and dearest to them” or “focus on the issues they most care about and are especially motivated to address.”

There are a number of plausible responses to this objection. First, since EAA is not committed to consequentialism, nor to utilitarianism, EAA need not require advocacy efforts to be maximally effective.⁸ EAA could be interpreted as claiming that, all else equal, efforts which are likely to have a greater impact are better (and to be preferred) for those concerned to help animals. This seems reasonable and not “too demanding”.

Second, even if EAA is interpreted as utilitarian in the sense of *requiring* that advocates “do the most good they can” for animals (and as discouraging efforts which do not meet this standard), this need not imply that EAA is unreasonably demanding. Although it is an objection to classic utilitarianism that it requires people to maximise utility when it would seem intuitive that this is not a requirement, but a moral option (neither required nor prohibited), utilitarians have given various plausible responses.

Some have denied that demandingness is a sufficient reason for rejecting utilitarianism and affirmed that utilitarianism imposes demanding but reasonable obligations.⁹ More generally, an appeal to a common moral view (that “doing the most good” is too demanding) cannot be decisive: history is full of examples of common moral views, which were shown to be false by philosophical argument and evidence.

⁸ I am not taking a stand on (a) whether EAA is utilitarian or (b) if so, what form of utilitarianism it takes. Therefore, I am not taking a stand on whether EAA should be interpreted as requiring “satisficing” rather than maximising utility for animals (promoting measures that yield “good enough” consequences for animals, even if not “the most good you can do”). Note, however, that *if* EAA were formulated as requiring “satisficing” rather than maximising benefits for animals (or minimizing suffering), *then* it would be less demanding and may seem correspondingly more reasonable. Alternatively, EAA could be interpreted as requiring that i) measures have “enough of an impact” (above a threshold of impact) and that (ii) from the set of measures that cross the threshold, the highest-impact measures should be pursued. This may also seem less demanding and more reasonable than a straightforward “maximising” requirement.

⁹ For example, Peter Unger *Living High and Letting Die* (Oxford University Press, 1996).

Others have taken a pluralist approach, tempering consequentialist with non-consequentialist considerations.¹⁰ Still others have sought to modify consequentialism such that it generates less demanding obligations. For example, on a “satisficing” view of consequentialism, rather than a maximising view, it is not morally wrong to fail to “do the most good” if one does “enough good.”¹¹ Alternatively, according to progressive consequentialism, a right action is one with consequences that improve the world, such that moral agents are required to act in such a way as to increase value in the world (i.e. to leave the world better than we found it).¹²

Clearly there are various routes utilitarian EAAs could take to the conclusion that EAA is not unreasonably demanding. In particular, they could argue that it need not be morally wrong to fail to “do the most good” for animals. For example, both satisficing and progressive consequentialisms imply that, in the context of animal activism, activists may devote some resources to measures that do not maximise overall benefits for animals. There are of course various objections and responses to each of the above arguments. The point is that utilitarian EAAs can mount plausible responses to the “too demanding” objection, such that the objection is not fatal to EAA as an approach. Since EAAs need not be utilitarians, it is even easier for non-utilitarian EAAs to withstand the “too demanding” objection.

Could EAA require injustice?

A disadvantage of classic utilitarianism is that it is possible that an action which maximises overall utility requires the agent to violate individual rights or otherwise do something morally repugnant. For example, utilitarianism can yield the morally repugnant conclusion that an innocent person should be framed and punished in order to avoid the greater evil of mob violence.¹³ Suitably constructed, other examples show that there are some circumstances in which the utilitarian answer to what one ought to do (in the example) involves the morally repugnant violation of individual rights.

¹⁰ For a particularly clear example of such a pluralist approach, see Jonathan Glover *Causing Death and Saving Lives* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

¹¹ See Michael Slote and Philip Pettit “Satisficing Consequentialism” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volumes* Vol. 58 (1984) 139-163; 165-176. For recent objections see Ben Bradley “Against Satisficing Consequentialism” *Utilitas* 18(2) (2006): 97-108.

¹² Robert Elliot and Dale Jamieson “Progressive Consequentialism” *Philosophical Perspectives* Vol. 23 (2009) 241-251 at 244-245.

¹³ Smart, JJC & Williams, Bernard *Utilitarianism: for and against* (Cambridge University Press, 1973) 69-70, citing HJ McCloskey “A note on utilitarian punishment” *Mind* 72 (1963) 599.

EAA is not necessarily utilitarian, let alone consequentialist; but it could nevertheless be objected that EAA might sometimes require (or permit) advocates to commit analogous injustices. For example, it might be the case that promoting “humane” meat as an alternative to factory-farmed meat violates the rights of humanely reared animals not to be killed and used for food, even if doing so is “for the greater good” of animals.¹⁴ This would be the case if the measure significantly decreases demand for factory farmed animal products but new humanely reared animals are brought into existence and killed as a result of the measure. Here we have a possible situation of EAA requiring injustice. There does seem to be something objectionable about sacrificing some “happy” animals for the “greater good”, since it is repugnant that some “happy” animals are raised and killed as a result of the measure.

In response, I do not think this possibility is fatal to EAA. There are a number of plausible defences. A defender of EAA committed to consequentialism could “bite the bullet” and accept that such measures are justified as the “lesser of two evils.”¹⁵ Although it is repugnant that some “happy” animals will be raised and killed as a result of the measure (and a proponent of EAA is likely to be unhappy about this), this may be more than offset by the reduction in the number of animals raised and killed (in worse conditions) in factory farms; in which case the measure is plausibly justified. This judgment can be supported by noticing that the anti-consequentialist conclusion is comparably unpalatable: namely, that in some circumstances, non-consequentialist considerations of justice dictate that one must choose “the greater misery...perhaps the very much greater misery...”¹⁶ This seems to me to be a comparable injustice, such that the anti-consequentialist alternative is no less likely to require injustices. This response might satisfy many, but those with strong deontological commitments are likely to be unconvinced.

Given this, there are possible responses for a defender of EAA who remains committed to consequentialism, but does not agree that sacrificing some animals for the sake

¹⁴ This example assumes that such animals have these rights, which is controversial. I do not take a stand on this here.

¹⁵ See for example JJC Smart *Utilitarianism* 71.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 72.

of the greater good is acceptable.¹⁷ One option would be to take an agent-relative approach to consequentialism, which would be consistent with the judgment that sacrificing some for the greater good is not acceptable. On an agent-neutral approach, the world with the sacrifice of “happy” animals is compared with the world without such sacrifice, from the point of view of an objective observer. If the world with the sacrifice is better overall for animals from this point of view, then consequentialism requires activists to make the sacrifice, despite its moral repugnancy. However, on an agent-relative account, it could be legitimate for an observer to judge that the world with the sacrifice is better (since it contains fewer killings of animals overall), while it is also legitimate for the activist(s) making the decision (the agents) to judge that the world with the sacrifice is worse (because *their* actions lead to the killing of “happy” animals). On this view of consequentialism, an act is morally wrong if and only if the act’s consequences include less overall value from the perspective of the agent. Thus, if the world with the sacrifice is worse from the perspective of the activists, agent-relative consequentialism implies that it would be wrong for activists to promote measures which lead to the sacrifice of some “happy” animals for the “greater good” of animals. The point is that it is possible for a proponent of EAA to be consequentialist and still resist the conclusion that such sacrifices are acceptable.

I have not taken a stand on whether EAA is committed to consequentialism. Indeed, proponents of EAA could be, but need not be, consequentialists. Given this, another response becomes available. A supporter of EAA might respond that, although EAA prioritises consequences for animals over other considerations, non-consequentialist considerations “kick in” at a certain point. One of these points might be where a particular measure involves the sacrifice of some animals for the greater good of animals overall. If so, it could plausibly be argued that advocates should generally “do the most good” for animals, but not use any measures that are likely to directly result in new animals being raised and killed for food, even if such measures yield the best overall benefits for such animals. Specifically, it would follow that EAAs should not promote “humane” meat or “conscientious omnivorism” as an alternative to factory-farmed meat, even if doing so yields significant net benefits to animals. I would be happy with this conclusion, since I think that raising and killing even “happy” animals is wrong and should not be promoted.

¹⁷ For general discussion of agent-relative consequentialism, see Douglas Portmore “Can consequentialism be reconciled with our common-sense moral intuitions?” *Philosophical Studies* Vol. 91 (1998) 1-19; Douglas Portmore “Can an Act-Consequentialist Theory Be Agent-Relative?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 38(4) (2001) 363-377; Douglas Portmore “Position-Relative Consequentialism, Agent-Centred Options, and Supererogation” *Ethics* Vol. 113 (2003) 303-332.

In sum, it is not clear to what extent EAA would recommend measures which require significant injustices (as an empirical matter); at least, there is insufficient evidence to support the view that EAA requires injustices as a matter of course. Nevertheless, it remains a possibility that EAA might require injustices, and this is objectionable. However, I have argued that this possibility is not fatal to EAA, since plausible responses can be given, whether EAA is committed to consequentialism or not.

Could EAA require violence?

Unlike animal abolitionism, which categorically rejects the use of violence, it is not clear whether proponents of EAA would endorse violence in certain circumstances.¹⁸

In the absence of a categorical prohibition, it is possible that EAA is consistent with the use of mild forms of violence (such as damage to property on factory farms) if this is *inter alia* likely to significantly help animals and be relatively cost-effective. Whether this is the case depends in part on how violence is understood. There are good reasons to condemn violence understood narrowly as intentional harm to life and limb, or threats of such harm (including intimidation or harassment). The reason is that such violence imposes direct and significant harms on persons and so are *prima facie* morally prohibited, according to all plausible ethical theories. It is less obvious that violence understood as, say, damage to property or economic sabotage of factory farms should be categorically rejected, especially if it prevents significant harms to animals (a morally worthy goal).

Let us assume for the purposes of argument a rather broad definition of violence, which includes not only direct physical violence against life and limb (including threats of such violence), but also intentional attacks on property, either to cause economic damage or to instil fear, or both. Given this broad definition, it is possible that some activism against factory farming counts as “violent”. For example, “open rescues” or undercover investigations might be accompanied by damage to property on factory farms.¹⁹ Even so, such violence by animal advocates seems to be rare. In particular, it is important to note that the more severe forms of violence (threats of severe violence, intimidation, harassment) are rarely practiced by animal advocates; rather, they seem to be a hallmark of a small group of extremist activists against vivisection. Further, insofar

¹⁸ For a statement of animal abolitionism see for example Gary Francione *Animals as Persons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ See for example Pelle Strindlund “Butchers’ knives into pruning hooks: civil disobedience for animals” in Peter Singer (ed) *In Defense of Animals: the Second Wave* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) 167-173.

as animal advocates damage property, it is plausible that most actual acts of damage to property by these activists are not primarily intended to instil fear, but rather to prevent harm to animals (by sabotaging equipment used to inflict harm, or by disrupting the ordinary business activities of enterprises that harm animals). So as an empirical matter, it seems that violence (broadly construed) by animal advocates is rare.

I am not aware of any evidence-based evaluations of the use of violence. It is plausible that uses of violence (such as attacks on property) are generally likely to be ineffective in helping animals because i) they make animal advocates appear radical and therefore deter potential supporters or ii) they invite backlash by, for example, factory farmers and lawmakers; or iii) insofar as they are illegal and attract legal sanctions, they are not likely to be relatively cost-effective. However, these are speculations; and it remains nevertheless possible that EAA might be consistent with violence in particular cases, where there is some evidence that it is relatively cost-effective and likely to have overall benefits for animals.

Given this possibility, the responses by defenders of EAA would be similar to those against the claim that EAA might require injustices. A defender of EAA could “bite the bullet” and accept that violent measures are justified as the “lesser of two evils.” Although it is repugnant that some property damage occurs, this might be more than offset by animal lives saved or the reduction in suffering of animals, in which case the use of violence is plausibly justified. This is supported by the following thought: assuming that animal advocates do not engage in severe forms of violence such as threats, intimidation, harassment, or direct physical violence against people, economic damage to the animal industry (caused by property damage) could plausibly be outweighed by protections of the vital interests of animals not to suffer and to continue to live.

Alternatively, since EAA does not preclude non-consequentialist factors, a supporter of EAA might respond that a non-consequentialist principle of non-violence trumps evidence of impact (where these conflict). If so, EAAs could consistently argue that advocates should generally “do the most good” for animals, but not use violence, even if violence yields the best overall benefits for such animals in a particular case. The theoretical possibility of the use of violence by proponents of EAA is not fatal to EAA as a general approach to animal advocacy.

Moral theory and practical guidance for animal advocates

My responses to anti-consequentialist objections depend in part on the claim that EAA can be separated from classical consequentialism (and more generally that it can be

attached to many moral frameworks). It might be objected that this leaves EAA practically useless for activists, because EAA cannot yield practical recommendations until it is settled which moral framework it should be attached to.²⁰

In response, I think it is plausible that EAA can give practical guidance to activists without first settling the moral framework question.²¹ This is because I think EAA will often recommend similar methods regardless of the moral framework to which it is attached. Although there would of course be some differences, there would be sufficient overlap in practical recommendations to provide useful guidance.

Take for example a specific recommendation to activists against factory farming which (I suggest) flows from EAA: advocates should focus on getting consumers to first reduce their consumption of chickens, then caged eggs, and then pigs. Some farm animals are kept in considerably worse conditions than others: quantitative estimates of farm animal welfare in the United States suggest that the worst-off farmed animals are broiler chickens, layer hens and pigs.²² Given this, and considering the amount of harm done per meal or per calorie consumed (for example, more chickens are killed in the typical American diet than beef cows or dairy cows, because chickens are so much smaller), it is plausible that the most effective way to cut animal suffering out of one’s diet is to stop eating chicken, then eggs, then pork, since this reduces the worst suffering for the most animals for the longest time.²³ Other practical recommendations flow from EAA might include the use of evidence-based and cost-effective leafleting, online advertisements and undercover videos to get consumers to cease or reduce their consumption of factory-farmed animal products.

These practical recommendations seem consistent with a commitment to consequentialism, at least insofar as they are thought to have the best consequences for factory-farmed animals. They are also plausibly consistent with broadly deontological commitments. For example, Gary Francione’s animal abolitionism is based on the right of sentient animals not to be used by humans as mere property.²⁴ In practice abolition-

²⁰ My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

²¹ I also suspect EAA could generate useful recommendations for activists without being attached to any moral framework at all; though I do not pursue this line of inquiry here.

²² Norwood & Lusk *Compassion, by the Pound: the Economics of Farm Animal Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 227-229.

²³ William Macaskill (2015) “Why eating eggs causes more suffering than eating beef” *Vox* (31 July 2015).

²⁴ Gary Francione *Animals as Persons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

ism recommends nonviolent grassroots vegan advocacy and education. The extent to which the above EAA-based recommendations in fact support the eventual abolition of human uses of animals as mere property is an empirical matter which I do not have the space to address adequately here. Nevertheless, the practical guidance from EAA is plausibly consistent with the deontological commitments of abolitionists, at least insofar as there is evidence that these methods promote the right of sentient animals not to be used as property, as well as the eventual abolition of such uses.

Finally, the EAA-based recommendations seem consistent with the virtue ethics perspective. From this perspective, the virtuous activist against factory farming would presumably be motivated by benevolence towards animals, and be genuinely concerned with improving their lot. Plausibly, this foundational virtue is consistent with being disposed to reduce the suffering of factory-farmed animals as effectively as possible using evidence and reason; and therefore consistent with EAA's recommended methods.

If it is true that EAA will often recommend similar methods regardless of which moral framework it is attached to (as suggested by the above illustrations) then EAA can be useful to activists notwithstanding that it can be attached to many moral frameworks (and in particular can be divorced from consequentialism).

Conclusion

I have presented “effective animal advocacy” as a reasonable approach to advocacy for those motivated to help animals, and defended it against objections. If my arguments are reasonable, the upshot is that animal activists have good reasons to align themselves with the EAA framework. In particular, they have good reasons to aim to do the most good they can for animals. Practically, in the context of activism against factory farming for example, this would include pursuing pro-vegan campaigns and doing so as effectively as possible, by way of (*inter alia*) evidence-based and cost-effective leafleting, online advertisements and undercover videos.