



## Analysis

## Ethics and the choice of animal advocacy campaigns

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines how different ethical positions view various types of animal advocacy campaigns concerning a product made using animals as an input. The ethical positions represent common company, society, and animal advocate viewpoints. We adopt an industrial economics approach, modelling a market with a monopolistic supplier and subject to consumer-oriented, technological, collaborative, and direct action campaigns. We determine whether the ethical positions support or oppose each campaign, and in what conditions. We find that animal welfare and rights goals are simultaneously satisfied by three campaigns: negotiation, targeted direct action, and awareness raising that condemns low welfare standards.

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## 1. Introduction

Groups advocating animal welfare or rights often try to alter how animals are used in the production of goods and services including food (Compassion in World Farming, 2014), clothing (Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade, 2014), and entertainment (League against Cruel Sports, 2014). The campaigns available for advocacy groups are many, as they can act on demand, supply, or regulation of those products. For example, the Vegan Society urges people to avoid animal products entirely, while the Animal Liberation Front engages in direct action against producers and suppliers, and Animal Defenders International presses governments to introduce bans on animal use.

There are also many different ethical positions for evaluating such campaigns. Clearly, there are differences between the interests of the advocacy groups and producers, but there can also be clashes with consumer and society viewpoints. Among animal advocates as well there can be disagreements about objectives, with some groups such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and Compassion in World Farming (CIWF) primarily pursuing welfare reforms rather than abolition of animal use and others such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and the Animal Liberation Front working towards full abolition. Even if animal advocates agree on long term goals, disagreements among animal advocates often extend to the campaign methods they employ, such as whether pressing for short term animal welfare gains is consistent with long term abolition of animal use (Francione, 1996; Singer, 2008; FARM, 2013).

The questions addressed in this paper are as follows. How do markets respond to different animal advocacy campaigns? How do different ethical positions view each type of campaign? What campaigns attract broad support while allowing advocates to work towards their objectives, and when are disagreements most acute?

We answer these questions through several modelling steps. We start by representing six ethical positions in terms of which quantity or quantities they use to evaluate outcomes in a market for a good that uses animals in production. The ethical positions represent common company, society, and animal advocate viewpoints. Next, algebraic expressions for the ethically relevant quantities are derived in terms of market inputs. Then seven campaigns are characterised in terms of what inputs they change, and the value attached to each campaign by each ethical position is calculated by differentiation or discrete differencing of the ethically relevant quantities with respect to the campaign inputs. The campaigns are either consumer oriented, technologically oriented, collaborative with companies, or direct action.

Our study helps animal advocates in providing clarity on the effect of their campaigns, and guidance in their choices. For advocates motivated by animal rights aims, we find campaigns that work towards these aims while also achieving improvements in welfare, and the design and conditions required to achieve the goals simultaneously. In doing so, we address the concerns of abolitionist animal rights writers including Dunayer (2004) and Francione (1996) that some welfare enhancing reforms can offer no gains for animal rights, or even hinder them.

There are some papers that have anticipated our economic analysis of human use of animals. Blackorby and Donaldson (1992) employ models based on optimisation of combined human and animal utility functions to address welfare and use of research and food animals. Bennett (1995) adopts marginal value analysis to discuss efficient consumption of livestock products when welfare is taken into account, and

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its private and public implications. Frank (2006) examines changes in a consumer's utility when information is disclosed about animal welfare. We depart from these authors in our extended comparison of the effect of different campaigns from various ethical perspectives.

Section 2 describes common ethical positions on animal use, Section 3 describes and solves the model, Section 4 looks at how campaigns are assessed by each ethical position, and Section 5 concludes.

## 2. Ethical Positions on Animal Use

In this section we present six ethical positions on the merits of animal advocacy campaigns. We take ethics to mean the principles used in determining whether actions should be taken, when those principles describe whose interests are given importance and in what form. The first two ethical positions relate to standard economic assumptions about the behaviour of companies (which we term “company interests”) and consumers (“consumer interests”), and the third allows for general public concerns about animal welfare (“public concern”). The fourth ethical position takes animal welfare as the basis for its ethics (“animal welfare”), while the fifth (“logic of the larder”) takes a modified welfarist position which asserts bringing animals into existence is beneficial. The final position uses animal rights as a foundation for its judgement (“animal rights”).

### 2.1. Company Interests

A default assumption in economics on the operation of businesses is that they operate only to maximise profits. Our first ethical position is an amoral one (with respect to animal welfare) that justifies such behaviour. Its only criterion for supporting or opposing a campaign for changing animal use by companies is whether profits are increased by it. Animal welfare and rights are irrelevant. As globally the majority of farm animals are raised for commercial gain, profit maximisation is arguably the main motivation behind animal rearing.

### 2.2. Consumer Interests

Economic modelling of markets commonly assumes that consumers maximise their own welfare (or utility) in choosing to buy a good or not. Our second ethical position justifies the behaviour, and evaluates the merits of a campaign solely in terms of whether consumer utility is increased. The position is not inconsistent with concern about animal welfare, as consumers may consider it when they are making their decisions. When consumers allow for animal welfare in making their decisions, they may trade-off animal welfare against other preferences such as taste or social conformity. For example, Frank (2006) presents a model in which animal discomfort reduces human utility and can be offset by utility derived from consumption, while Bennett (1995) finds conditions for optimal consumer choices under different welfare valuations. However, the role of actual welfare levels in influencing their decisions is diminished by the high rates of consumer uncertainty and misperception (Labelling Matters, 2014). In Section 3.1, we discuss how these factors alter our results.

### 2.3. Animal Welfare

Our next ethical position assesses campaigns in terms of their effect on animal welfare alone. The position may be supported by welfarists who see welfare as the main objective of reform, or by animal rights advocates who see welfare reforms as an intermediate or more achievable outcome. Midgley (2008) presents a welfarist position, arguing that society accepts the death of food animals, but not the welfare consequences of intensive farming. She says that humanitarians and farmers can work together for welfare gains. Similar welfarist calls for reform and inclusion of ethical concerns in animal use are made in Fraser

(1999) and Rollin (1990). Singer (2008) starts from a rights position, but argues that even if abandonment of animal use in agriculture is an advocate's aim, they should support welfare improvements as abandonment will happen very slowly. The animal welfare position has a strong influence on applied animal advocacy, through the work of welfarist groups such as the RSPCA and groups with ultimate animal rights aims such as PETA.

### 2.4. Public Concern

The next ethical position we describe is one in which campaigns are evaluated in terms of their effect on buyer utility, and additionally on separate animal welfare. Thus, there is the potential for the campaign's effect on animal welfare to be considered twice, once in the buyer's utility function (if welfare enters it) and again by direct evaluation. There are a number of reasons why such an ethical position might be influential. As Cowen (2006) and Fearing and Matheny (2007) note, an externality arises as animal lovers suffer disutility from the poor treatment of animals in a market transaction in which they do not participate. Thus, products in which animals are badly treated are typically underpriced under a conventional externality argument, and an ethical position which allows for animal welfare twice may reflect social preferences more closely than market pricing. Such externalities, as well as other causes including insufficient consumer information, a sense that individual behaviour has no aggregate effect, or inertia, may result in a gap between the preferences of citizens and what they can achieve through individual purchases. The social preferences may become institutionally recognised or enforced by government, who may moreover choose to recognise animal welfare as an explicit social good independently of buyer preferences. Blackorby and Donaldson (1992) specify social value functions in which human and animal utilities are combined.

### 2.5. Logic of the Larder

The ethical position termed the “logic of the larder” (Salt, 1914) proposes that animals derive a benefit from living, independently of any happiness or pain experienced during life. So animals can enjoy a positive benefit from being created for production purposes even if their lives are miserable. The idea has long provenance, with Salt (1914) criticising versions of the position proposed in the 19th Century. Recent economic models have allowed for the possibility of animals deriving positive value from existence, among alternative positions. The models then consider that animals would be better not being born if the sum of their happiness from existence and welfare after birth is negative. In Cowen (2006), humans can choose a minimal standard of animal welfare after birth, below which the animals' lives are considered not worth living. Blackorby and Donaldson (1992) present a formal mathematical model where minimum lifetime welfare thresholds can be specified for animals and humans. Farm Animal Welfare Council (2009) recognises that life may have intrinsic worth to the animal, but note disagreements about how existence should be valued. They instead adopt a welfarist position, basing their assessment of animal use on lifetime welfare components. Relative to a logic of the larder position, their viewpoint puts higher demands on acceptable welfare standards and may recommend euthanising an animal with low quality of life when the logic of the larder would not.

### 2.6. Animal Rights

Our sixth ethical position evaluates campaigns in terms of the extent of animal use in production. If a campaign reduces the extent of animal use, it is viewed favourably. Regan (1986) and Francione (1996) both propose that no matter how well animals are treated, animals should not be used as resources for human purposes. Regan (1986) asserts that animals have a right to respect for their independent value as

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