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The Philosophy of Animal Activism

Exploring the Relationship Between Moral Theory and Animal Advocacy

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Abstract

Within the realm of animal advocacy, many normative assertions are made with the intention of facilitating behavioral change. These assertions contain bits and pieces of philosophical language, but never use normative frameworks in full. This raises the question – to what extent, if any, is normative theory necessary in order to perform animal advocacy? To address this question, I will be looking at the language of different advocacy organizations and identifying the three moral theories that are most present in their language. There is agreement amongst the three moral theories on the most egregious issues of animal use, but disagreement arises when looking at more complex cases. I argue that we should adopt a morally pluralist conception, not claiming that any single theory be the bearer of moral truth, and that these theories are still valid despite disagreement. Then I will be discussing the necessity of these frameworks to the practice of advocacy, and conclude that theory exists necessarily for activism to function, but activists themselves need not use or understand the entirety of the theory and its arguments. Then I propose that the principle of least harm can be used as a mid-level principle to help advocates bridge the gap between multiple moral theories and practice in order to effectively make use of these theories in a real-world setting. Finally, look at the distribution of responsibility between philosophers and activists and make recommendations for both in order to better facilitate understanding between the two specialized fields.

Contents

1. Introduction 4

2. The Main Theories Present 5

3. What Is Animal Advocacy? 8

4. Case Studies of Animal Advocacy Groups 10

5. How Do the Theories Support Activism? 13

6. Complex Instances of Animal Use 16

6.1 Industrial Agriculture 16

6.2 Pet Keeping 18

6.3 Medical Testing on Animals 19

6.4 Harvesting Honey from Bees 21

6.5 Conclusions from These Cases 22

7. Is A Normative Framework Necessary for Doing Animal Activism? 24

8. What Sort of Moral Reasoning Ought We to Use? 27

9. The Principle of Least Harm as a Method of Moral Reasoning 30

9.1 Contextualizing the usefulness of the principle within the complex cases of animal use 32

9.1.1 Industrial Agriculture 32

9.1.2 Pets 33

9.1.3 Medical Testing 34

9.1.4 Bees and honey 35

9.2 Concluding thoughts 36

10. The Principle of Least Harm and Activism 37

11. The Distribution of Responsibility 39

12. Recommendations 43

13. Conclusion 44

References 47

Bibliography 48

1. Introduction

Within the field of animal advocacy, there exist many organizations committed to bringing about their conception of a moral world for animals and humans. It seems, universally, that many organizations in this field disagree with the way animals are treated in our current factory farm system, and similarly view other instances of animal use unfavorably. A universal agreement suggests that these groups are approaching the problem from similar theoretical backgrounds. However, this is not clear, and the theoretical underpinnings of activism may not be cohesive or straight-forward.

Animal advocacy, as it will be discussed here, is awareness campaigns by various organizations with the goal of changing people's behavior towards a certain end. In this case, that end is the change or ceasing of animal use within society whether it be for food, entertainment, clothing, or research. Animal advocates are referred to as those individuals' representative of advocacy organizations who carry out such campaigns. Animal advocacy is, like many other movements dedicated to social change, attempting to make a new normative framework take hold in society. In order to do such advocacy, an alternative normative vision must exist that guides the behavior and rhetoric of the activists. This, then, is fundamentally a moral problem and activism is guided by moral principles.

It may be important here to draw a distinction between animal welfare organizations and animal advocacy organizations. The former attempt to create better conditions for animals within the current system – for example, bigger cages for egg-laying hens, no gestation crates for pigs, and so on. Animal advocacy organizations, as discussed here, will be referring to the abolishment of the mass production and use of animals as it currently exists. Though some animal advocacy organizations may advocate for changes to the animal production system that seem in line with animal welfare goals, it is important to distinguish between a means-to-an-end for animal advocacy groups and an end goal for animal welfare groups.

Looking at the rhetoric of the organizations themselves, we see a multitude of philosophical ideas together with no one ethical theory uniting them. It is not clear what, if any, normative framework is actually guiding the principles of animal advocates. Nonetheless,

advocacy is performed and sometimes change is achieved in favor of the advocate. The question then becomes – to what extent is the theory necessary for activism to be performed? Is a cohesive philosophical background essential for animal advocates to do their advocacy, or is merely the existence of a plurality of ideas enough for some movement to be made? Assuming for the purpose of this thesis that the claims of animal advocates can be morally justified, the problem becomes the framework by which they're justified, if one is necessary.

Within this thesis, I will be analyzing the rhetoric that can be found within different animal advocacy organizations. Perhaps a plurality of ideas is enough for the most pragmatic conception of activism, but when forced to deal with theoretical nuances, as are present in more complicated situations where humans interact with animals, a plurality of theories may be insufficient. I will then be looking at how the different ideas represented by these organizations would handle different, more complicated cases of animal use and relationships. This will be used to determine the necessity of theory within animal activism, and if it is necessary, the type of theory or theories best suited to deal with both simple and complicated problems.

2. The Main Theories Present

Within the analysis of the language used by animal advocacy organizations, we come across three main strains of moral theory – these being utilitarianism, deontological ethics, and care ethics. Each of these theories may not be clear in what their claims are simply from pulling words out of a website description, and so it is pertinent to outline what is being referred to when each theory is referenced and how the language of advocacy organizations evokes the central ideas of the theory.

Utilitarian ethics is guided by the principle that we should attempt to produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number. The basis is that sentient beings – that is, those animals (including humans) which have the ability to feel pleasure and pain, are naturally driven to seek out pleasure and avoid pain. The basis, then, for a normative framework on how we ought to behave is that to give pleasure is good and to dispense pain is bad. Utilitarianism can be simplified as,

> "…an ethical theory that defends that we should act in ways that bring about as much happiness as possible in the world. This theory defends the following three things:
>
> (1) What is good for individuals is that the amount of happiness (or satisfaction of desires) is as high as possible.
>
> (2) What is best overall is that the total sum of happiness be as high as possible.
>
> (3) We should act in ways that increase the total sum of happiness."

With this in mind, utilitarianism can become complicated in considering the different factors that contribute to happiness and add to pain. Some considerations of good may outweigh the pain they cause, if the sum total of good ends up being greater than the total of bad. In this sense, utilitarianism is flexible in that the different variables of a situation are the most salient in determining the moral outcome. Some suffering is permitted, as long as a greater good is achieved through it.

Deontological ethics are based on the moral value of those with moral considerations, and the duties and permissions those moral values impose. Contrary to utilitarianism, there are some moral wrongs that cannot be compensated by the amount of good they produced. Deontological ethics are the basis for rights – those duties that individuals possessing moral worth are afforded by other moral actors. These duties are rules to be followed – if something is moral it should be done, and if it is immoral it is impermissible. Tom Regan, a well-known proponent of the argument for rights-based considerations for animals, writes:

> "you and I, for example, do have value as individuals — what we'll call inherent value. To say we have such value is to say that we are something more than, something different from, mere receptacles. Moreover, to ensure that we do not pave the way for such injustices as slavery or sexual discrimination, we must believe that all who have inherent value have it equally, regardless of their sex, race, religion, birthplace and so on."

This gives us a clear picture of one kind of deontological idea being alluded to here – that animals are to be considered as having this inherent moral value themselves, and that, like in human rights, the value is assigned irrespective of the cognitive abilities of the animal or their

sentimental value to us. Though the field of deontological ethics is broader on its determinations of animal worth, the account given to us by Tom Regan is the most relevant and salient, and so will be used as the point of reference.

The ethics of care are harder to define as it often has less clear behavioral mandates. The most commonly conceived representation of care ethics is that our moral guidelines are based on the relationships we have with those around us. Moral agents are already involved in a multitude of interactions and situations where their behavior affects others, and vice versa. The ethics of care says that we ought to engage in these relationships in such a way that we're attentive of the needs of others and providing for those needs when possible. So, in this sense, the statement 'I don't care' is a behavioral claim as well as an attitude one. One definition, offered by Toronto and Fischer (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy), offers several sub-elements of care that can give a clearer picture on what the ethics of care finds as the most salient moral elements.

> "These sub-elements are: (1) attentiveness, a proclivity to become aware of need; (2) responsibility, a willingness to respond and take care of need; (3) competence, the skill of providing good and successful care; and (4) responsiveness, consideration of the position of others as they see it and recognition of the potential for abuse in care"

This moral theory, more than the preceding two, relies on our ability to be empathetic and compassionate as human beings. In order to understand the needs of others, we have to first recognize what needs might not be met and how that is affecting others.

It is important to note, too, that within the ethics of care animals are often considered the receivers of care but not the givers. That is to say, there is not a moral standard for reciprocity in those relationships where the receiver of care is not capable of returning it. The moral consideration care givers ought to have towards subjects of care is still applicable in these sorts of situations – that is, animals should be beings worth moral consideration, even though they cannot consider us in their behavior and are not moral agents as we are.

3. What Is Animal Advocacy?

Animal advocacy is a fairly broad fields representative of different belief sets and different methodologies used to accomplish goals. Even within the animal rights movement, there is a divide between action-oriented groups and more politically and corporate involved groups. Despite these differences though, the point of union comes when looking at the fundamental beliefs of all groups - the liberation of animals from human use, and the moral impermissibility of animal industry, whatever the form.

There is an important distinction to be made, first, between animal advocacy and animal welfare. Welfare usually supports the use of animals in commercial settings but is concerned with making sure they are treated properly and the amount of suffering is minimized during their lives. If we can reduce the suffering of farm animals, animals used for experimentation, and so on, then we ought to. Animal advocacy takes a stricter approach – most animal advocates would consider animal welfare as one step in a process of reducing and eliminating our use of animals, not as the goal in itself. Welfare, in this way, arguably perpetuates the institution and normalization of animal use and this is unacceptable to rights activists (Svard, 2011). Depending on the theoretical leaning of the individual activist or perhaps collective approach of one organization, the final goal for activists may vary between total abolition of animal use or developing some sort of non-exploitive relationship with them. It rejects the idea that animal use is acceptable as long as we try to reduce suffering, and claims instead that animal use should be minimal or non-existent.

The fundamental difference, here, being that advocates acknowledge that there is an institution of animal use and harm and that, as long as this institution exists, harm towards animals will be perpetuated in one form or another. Though animals may live a fulfilling life, free of stress, the ultimate aim of such practices is fundamentally disagreeable to the type of activism that will be referred to here. Killing an animal arbitrarily is still a violation of those three theories which are most frequently referred to by the language of activists.

The general aim of advocacy is to raise awareness and disrupt these institutions that are found to be morally objectionable. Advocates take different approaches as well depending on

their own belief set - from the more conservative groups seeking to make economic and institutional change like Mercy for Animals, or the Animal Liberation Front which stages break-ins and frees animals from commercial operations.

An organization makes more changes that attempt to change society at the state and economic level – lobbying for restaurants to include more vegan options on their menu (Vegan Meatballs, 2015), or lobbying for ‘meatless Monday’ ordinances (Students Dine, 2017). These organizations believe that making vegan food options more accessible while educating the public on the different institutions of animal use is a way to better facilitate a world with less animal use. The main methodologies here are lobbying and education. Other organizations like Direct Action Everywhere and the “Animal Liberation Front” (not an official organization) attempt to use more direct methodologies in fighting for animal freedom. The ALF, as mentioned, breaks into commercial farms and frees the animals, often bringing them to animal sanctuaries. Organizations like Direct Action Everywhere hold protests at restaurants showing graphic images from factory farms while people eat. The goal of these types of organizations is to disrupt and replace the institutions – refusing to work with them and compromise their moral stance.

Although there is disagreement in the animal rights movement about which methodologies ought to be used, for the purpose of this paper, no judgement will be made about which type of activism is superior to one or another. The idea that there is a pluralism of beliefs in society is reflected in the approaches of animal advocacy as well as the individual beliefs of the activists. This conception of activism relies on pluralism in order to make sense, because otherwise the language of activists would be internally conflicting and inconsistent – and, indeed, the groups would be working against one another from within their own movement. It would become more of a problem of discovering the best ethical system from amongst those ideas rather than trying to unpack each idea as being independently valid, and seeing what their interactions are.

4. Case Studies of Animal Advocacy Groups

In this section I will be looking at the different types of arguments represented in various animal advocacy groups. These groups will include Mercy for Animals, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Farm Animal Rights Movement, and Direct Action Everywhere. These groups represent different approaches and types of argumentation within the animal rights movement. Some may have different reasonings for their activism, and some may have inconsistencies within their own rhetoric which will be addressed here. The purpose is to illustrate a clearer picture of the philosophical and moral underpinnings of the animal rights movement and to what extent philosophical theory is already in use.

The first group I will look at is Mercy for Animals. Within the first few lines of their "about" page we see some reference to philosophical argumentation. MFA claims that "We are committed to reducing the greatest amount of suffering for the largest number of animals." This strikes one as being clearly utilitarian thought, with the greatest amount of suffering reduced for the greatest number of animals. Following this line, we see "…and utilize a broad range of strategic approaches that seek to expose cruelty, prosecute abusers, and inspire consumers to make compassionate food choices." Here is present a different type of philosophical thought, with references to 'cruelty' and 'compassion.' Utilitarian ethics often do not deal with compassion but rather sentience – the capacity for an animal to feel pain gives it basic drives for pleasure and pain and, thus, moral qualification within a utilitarian system. The ability for that animal to pursue pleasure and avoid pain is enough consideration on its own to avoid harming them without necessity. There is no need for compassion in a utilitarian equation. The reference to compassion and cruelty seem to fall more into an ethic of care, where our moral duties and obligations arise out of our compassion towards others with whom we're engaged in relationships with. Asking someone to engage in a compassionate act towards an animal implies that the animal has more moral value than simply the ability to pursue its own pleasurable ends, but rather that the animal has some inherent value which our compassion can steer us towards respecting. There is a second mention of care here, "We show the public the harsh reality of factory farms and slaughterhouses to inspire people to care about farmed animals," which explicitly references care as the goal of their activism. Thus, it seems that Mercy for Animals has

both utilitarian and care ethics elements within its rhetoric.

The next group is the world-famous PETA. PETA's rhetoric is as obvious in its philosophical implications as Mercy for Animals. The language can still be broken down, though, and philosophical concepts applied. PETA writes on it's website about animals, "They are enslaved, beaten, and kept in chains to make them perform for humans' 'entertainment'; they are mutilated and confined to tiny cages so that we can kill them and eat them; they are burned, blinded, poisoned, and cut up alive in the name of 'science'; they are electrocuted, strangled, and skinned alive so that people can parade around in their coats; and worse." Although PETA does not make a definite normative claim here, it can still be seen that their language explicitly condemns any animal use whatsoever. This falls into a more deontological perspective, as animal rights would give this assertion its backbone. If animals have inalienable rights to their bodies and lives, no human use or exploitation is justifiable regardless of what the outcome or reasoning is.

PETA also employs the compassion angle, saying, "Animals are counting on compassionate people like you to give them a voice and be their heroes by learning about the issues they face and taking action." This, like MFA, references the compassion of the individual to make the 'right' choice regarding animal use. Compassion here is not necessary within the deontological framework that would support their prior claims about no animal use being justified. Rights do not require compassion in order to function as a moral system, as they impose duties on us to act accordingly regardless of how we feel about it. The main difference between PETA and MFA is PETA's use of deontological rhetoric. Both organizations reference the 'compassionate' individual, implying that care is a part of our treatment of animals in addition to the sampling of other philosophical theories.

The next organization is Farm Animal Rights Movement. Their website has some sparse detail about the values they represent, but some philosophical context can be found. Their website states. "FARM continues to affirm our vision of a society in which animals are no longer bred, used, or killed for food, and in 2007 updated our name to Farm Animal Rights Movement (from "Reform Movement") to emphasize this commitment (as opposed to supporting the continued use of animals, albeit less cruelly)." This seems to fit into a deontological framework, as, like PETA, it claims that animal lives are not for use. They don't reference compassion in

their values section, which seems to put FARM into the realm of their namesake. This is mentioned specifically, as well, that FARM does not want to be misconstrued as a welfare organization. For them, it is not about whether the animal is treated well while being used, but rather that they shouldn't be used at all. A rights framework is appropriate to support their values, as mentioned above, because rights would give animals a moral value that exists independently of human wants or needs.

The last organization to be looked at is Direct Action Everywhere. Their website contained the most explicit animal rights language, saying:

> "Protecting animals from violence requires a dramatic transformation in our legal and political system, including enshrining animal rights as a constitutional reality… We mean species equality. We mean legal protection of every feeling being's right to autonomy over their body. We mean legal personhood for nonhuman animals. We mean an end to human use of conscious, feeling animals for food, clothing, entertainment, research, or any other purpose that exploits nonhuman animals for human benefit. We mean a world where all animals' interests are honored, and where love, care, respect, and freedom are present."

This language explicitly states that they're for animal *rights* – legal protection for the autonomy of animals, which implies a moral equivalence to humans. They make no reference to compassion, in contrast to the above organizations, and plant themselves squarely in a deontological conception of animal activism. A moral framework is necessary for these kinds of claims, as they are making moral claims about the status of animals. Their position does not rely on compassion, as the duties they feel animals are entitled too are moral rules – failure to comply with them constitutes committing a moral offense.

What we see from taking a closer look at the rhetoric of animal advocacy organizations from their own website is that the ideas represented are philosophically inconsistent – multiple types of ideas are represented that may not necessarily be cohesive when put side by side. It leads one to believe one of several different possibilities – that activists themselves are not well educated on the different ideas that they're putting forth in their language, or that they hold multiple 'inconsistent' beliefs simultaneously and do not distinguish one as being the primary

bearer of moral truth. It may be, as well, that these things are not mutually exclusive – organizations may not be fully aware of the inconsistencies of different theories when blending them together, but may also be willing to accept inconsistency in favor of practicality.

Perhaps a deeper sense of the organizations beliefs can be gleaned from their specific approaches chosen and the way in which they present these ideas on a political, social, and economic level. The organizational methodologies can evince some of the more salient beliefs of an organization, even if, rhetorically, multiple ideas are present. This, however, would be a research topic of its own, and for the purpose of this paper, we will be using the language as a primary means of detecting moral value – though such research would indeed be valuable in better understanding the praxis of normative work.

5. How Do the Theories Support Activism?

In spite of a difference and variety of approaches and values within the movement, there still seems to be consensus on the most egregious forms of animal abuse and exploitation. There was present in the rhetoric, primarily, utilitarianism, deontological ethics, and ethics of care. A surface-level agreement can be found amongst all of these for the cases of animal abuse where the details are intuitively immoral. Though the different methodologies exist, each group is usually, at least, committed to the personal abstention from contributing financially to animal institutions. They also all raise awareness for the issues – and in the case of factory farming, for example, find it unanimously immoral.

The principle that allows us to see agreement between these theories, though, is not solely intuition, but the shared conception of each of these theories that committing some version of harm on another is to be avoided. The principle of least harm says that harm which is unnecessary is not morally permissible. This leaves room to argue about the term necessity, but as a general principle, wantonly committing acts of harm against other humans or animals is not morally permissible. The different theories being looked at here have different argumentative paths traveled in order to reach their own conclusion about an act, but each of the theories agree that harm without good cause is impermissible.

For utilitarians, the sentience of the animal is significant in that it determines the moral consideration of an animal. Animals killed for food or cosmetic testing are often killed unnecessarily – in the western world most people have access to plant-based alternatives to animal products, and thus the slaughter of animals is a matter of preference. A human's enjoyment of a steak does not outweigh the animal's utility by continuing living. Similarly, for cosmetics, cosmetics are of aesthetic value and ultimately unnecessary. To promote animal suffering for aesthetic value is morally objectionable at face value. Thus, the utilitarian finds both of these cases to be morally impermissible.

From a deontological perspective, animals would have rights based on some sort of inherent value. They would have a right to autonomy, life, and to pursue their natural behaviors free from human interference. Factory farming would undeniably violate a right to life and autonomy, as the animals are prohibited from leaving, and are killed once they've achieved their market value.

The ethics of care comes to the same conclusion as the other two – that killing animals for consumption when unnecessary is wrong. Instead of referring to the sentience or rights of an animal, though, it is more about being able to empathize with the pain of the animal and attempting to alleviate that pain through care. Care may come in two forms here – stewardship, and relationships. Both stewardship and having connections to animals would prohibit their killing unnecessarily.

In the case of activism, as is being discussed here, a pluralism of complimentary conclusions is unproblematic and enough to perform advocacy regardless of the advocate's own personal philosophical stance on the treatment of animals. That is why the 'values' of different animal advocacy organizations are representative of several different lines of philosophical argumentation, yet the overall message is coherent and actionable. There is a practical value here for organizations to be able to appeal to different lines of reasoning – after all, the main objective is to persuade people to change their behaviors in the direction of the ones being advocated for. And, thanks to the at least superficial agreement of different theories on the principle of least harm, though through different derivations, calling for an end to supporting such institutions as factory farming are not held for ransom by philosophical inconsistency.

The problems that arise, though, are when the cases of animal use become more complicated than such a perpetuator of widespread, unnecessary harm as factory farming. The nuances in different theories begin to appear when the cases are more specific and the ethical dilemma being addressed has more considerations than 'is harm taking place?' This becomes evident in the cases illustrated below, and raises the problem for advocates wishing for philosophical justification as to what the moral good to be achieved actually is. In the case of factory farming, such cases of standard animal treatment as tail docking, horn cutting, castration, debeaking, and other practices of convenience may have a financial value but are considered immoral by most accounts. These cases are at least clear in that often times alternatives exist for these practices and a failure to modify them despite the harm caused is unjustifiable.

There are cases, though, where the different theories do not come to such clear agreement. These cases, which will be discussed in more detail below, include agriculture, medical testing, keeping pets, and harvesting honey from bees. Each of these cases are less clear than the instances of factory farming or cosmetic testing – whether or not the practice itself causes harm, or what constitutes harm, and how necessary that harm may be opposed to how strong our moral considerations are in the case. Each case has different elements that may be more salient in one case and less in another – and this demands some flexibility in our thinking. The different theories give us different conclusions and different considerations on determining the moral status of cases such as these, and this is problematic for organizations that espouse these multiple strains of philosophical ideas because the 'correct' determination in each case may not be clear.

These sorts of considerations are important because the advocate seeks to create a world more in line with the ideals they believe in, but before one can prescribe a moral behavior to anyone else, they ought to have a foundation for why they believe that thing to be moral. Without a clear answer as to whether or not something is actually immoral, the advocate loses a strong position from which to argue from and, in a more cynical sense, is merely filling the already saturated modern web of information with more noise. The determination of the moral status of an act needs to be made before the act is advocated for or condemned, otherwise its meaningless from a moral perspective.

On the other hand, as mentioned, the complexity and nuances of different moral cases require flexibility in our thinking, and pluralism may be a more actionable approach than adhering rigidly to one particular theory and set of considerations. Pluralistic reasoning is less rhetorically strong than one firm stance, but also offers a greater number of possible solutions when addressing practical moral problems. This, then, may be a better approach for activists, because the philosophical inconsistency can be made rhetorically strong through the methodology, so having access to a greater flexibility of solutions is more desirable.

6. Complex Instances of Animal Use

As mentioned above, there are different cases of animal use that raise different considerations for each moral theory represented in the language of activists, and all come to different conclusions in each case. There may be some overlap amongst the theories in some cases, as we have seen, though it is also the case that these different theories give us contradictory behavioral prescriptions. The cases are as follows.

6.1 Industrial Agriculture

One of the main dilemmas experienced by those who choose to partake in as little cruelty as possible is to what extent are we able to in the current system of food production? The standard methodologies of mass food production still result in animal deaths regardless of whether or not they're killed explicitly for the purpose of feeding humans. Field animals are killed in the harvesting of plant crops, ecosystems must be disrupted in order to produce farm land, and the habitats of wild animals are occupied through this as well (Nass, 1971). It seems inevitable that our food choices still have some effect on the lives and wellbeing of animals even when choosing the option that does not intentionally lead to death.

A utilitarian perspective seems the most appealing here due to the nature of its seeming inevitability – our need to eat to survive trumps the field animals or wild animals' needs when it comes to industrial farming production. The utilitarian basic rule of thumb is applicable here – to cause the least amount of harm to the greatest number of being. Though harvesting of crops may

kill animals in the process, the food is still necessary for humans to survive, and to abstain from harvesting because it kills animals may cause a greater amount of human suffering than not doing so. Utilitarians are likely to weigh the interest of humans as being of greater moral significance than field mice – increasing the strength of the argument that to starve humans to avoid killing mice is morally impermissible. The suffering and death of these animals is far less and of less moral significance than the starving of human beings. The utilitarian perspective, then, would have us harvest crops at the cost of killing field animals, as it is a morally justified position to do so.

Rights based theory comes to a different conclusion than utilitarians would. A deontologist in the vein of Regan wouldn't find this acceptable as it violates the right to life that these animals possess. Field mice and other animals have inherent moral worth and it is impermissible to disregard that in favor of human interests. Field animal rights are just as inviolable as the rights of a cow or pig not to be slaughtered for food, so, we shouldn't justify doing the same thing less directly than in the former cases. We would have some moral duty with this view to prevent harm to these animals – perhaps a deontological account would obligate us to find alternatives to mass production and harvesting of grain. There may be a way to do this that does not require the disruption of a field ecosystem that we are not currently using.

Care ethics is, as well, a less clear answer, as it may suggest some ideal way to grow and harvest food that does not disrupt the lives of animals as they currently do. This is because of our identification of the needs of those animals and the desire to see them met. A care ethicist would consider the needs of those animals – the primary one being to continue living – but also the need for shelter, sustenance, and the ability to act naturally as an animal would. We are able to empathize with the deaths of these animals as being lives disrupted, and seek to avoid this harm. Care ethics may suggest we take an approach similar to that of the deontological approach – that there should be an alternative method which does not kill the animals in the way it does now. By avoiding this, we are insuring that we are properly caring for these animals in a morally justified way.

6.2 Pet Keeping

Pets are complicated because of the nuances they introduce into our relationships with animals. Animal rights advocates would likely not agree with the idea of 'pets' in general, because it does in some ways limit the freedom of the animal and creates a dependency. The inherent moral worth of the animal would demand that their lives are free for their own use and fulfilment of interests. The animal should be able to engage in its natural behaviors away from human influence or harm. The implications of this conclusion are complex, though. Many animals are dependent on humans, such as shelter animals. Humans have also expanded all over the globe and removed the natural habitats of many animals and bred companion animals into forms that might not be successful out on their own. This may create some sort of obligations from humans to animals to sustain their wellbeing. The rights obligations we must fulfill may require that we maintain and respect the moral worth of the animal without impinging on its freedom. A rights-based account would, firstly, require that we cease breeding pets for our own enjoyment, and to find or create environments where the existing animals are unrestricted.

A utilitarian would likely be able to say that the most good is done for companion animals by remaining our companions and that overhauling these environments wouldn't be realistic or effective. Many animals (though there is no way to concretely know) may be happy in the homes or places where they exist as pets. To remove them from these environments could be stressful and create suffering for the animal, and inserting it into an unfamiliar environment would likely have the same effect. Though this still maintains a problematic relationship with the animal from a rights perspective, the alternative may end up causing more harm than maintaining the problematic institution – and the goal being to cause the least amount of suffering for the greatest number would discourage us from disrupting a stable environment for these animals.

A clear answer isn't available from a care ethics perspective either – because we have entered into relationships with our companion animals, are able to identify and meet their needs, we have some moral obligation to continue fulfilling these needs. This is especially so because it often is the case (with the exception of outdoor cats) that our companion animals wouldn't be able to feed or survive on their own due to the human presence in much of the environment. To

abdicate the role of care in the interest of maintaining our companion animal's autonomy would be irresponsible. With a care ethics perspective, we are able to have ethically sound relationships with pets as long as we are identifying and meeting their needs – failure to do so would constitute an unethical situation, though this does not represent a condemnation of the entire idea of pet ownership. Our obligations from this position, then, are to continue in relationships where we're providing for the needs of our companions, and to only relinquish that relationship when we are unable to identify or provide for their needs. There also may not be a problem with breeding animals for pets, as long as we are able to meet the needs of those animals and care for them as well.

6.3 Medical Testing on Animals

Medical testing is also an area where moral contention can arise between different perspectives. Coming from a utilitarian perspective, some animal testing may be morally permissible. This is because sentience, or the ability to feel pain, only gives animals equal moral consideration in moral problems. Their pleasure and pain are a factor in moral decision-making, but it does not prevent their use in all cases. The interests of the animal should be taken into account when making certain determinations about using them for testing. For instance, there may be a potential lifesaving drug for a disease, but the drug needs to be tested on animals before its deemed safe to test on humans. The potential suffering of the animal may be outweighed by the potential suffering of a human being. It may depend, as well, on specific considerations relevant to the health problem that requires medication to be tested. Some diseases have a greater impact on human life than others, and some are far more debilitating than others. The urgency for testing in cancer treatments may have a greater moral significance than, say, drug which reduce muscle soreness. The utilitarian would likely permit the use of testing in the case of cancer treatment – but may have a more dubious claim about the status of relieving mild pain. In this case, the utilitarian would permit the use of animals for testing in cases where there is great risk of suffering in the absence of treatment – though specific considerations for the problem may also determine that the animal suffering is greater.

In a deontological case, this would not be the same outcome. Animal rights would determine the animal to be an object of moral duties because of the inherent worth of the animal. If the animal had a right to bodily autonomy and life, then testing, which may well violate autonomy and life, would not be permitted. This is regardless to the good it might provide humans in the way of medical safety or experimental treatments, as well. Animals would have inherent worth, and testing on them would be a violation of that worth and a disregard to the value of their life. The Regan-inspired account of animal rights considers them of equal moral consideration to that of humans, and if testing on a human would be wrong, it would be the same for animals. The practical implications are that we are required to find an alternative which does not violate the inherent moral worth of animals – either different methodologies for testing drugs or for allowing human trials, in which consent can be gained from the individual undergoing the test; something which cannot be gained from animals at any point.

An ethics of care perspective is a little trickier to adopt. In one instance, it is arguably a neglect of care that we'd be purposely inflicting animals with certain drugs or conditions in order to benefit from them. This is, intuitively, not a caring relationship. It may be argued as well that as long as these animals have their needs met – such as food, shelter, space to move around in, etc., that the relationship is as caring as it could be in the certain circumstance. Whether or not one considers freedom from harm to be a need that ought to be attended to in a caring relationship is what would give ethics of care the grounds to condemn, or permit, animals as test subjects. Though, it again seems intuitive that freedom from harm is a need insofar as inflicting harm on another is not caring for them. The care ethics perspective, then, is likely to tell us that we cannot be in caring relationships with animals if those relationships are exploitive in any way – the implication here being that we should not use them for testing. This would require alternatives, as in the deontological case, such as using computer models or human test subjects where consent can be gained and the needs of the test subject more explicitly met – including ceasing the test if the individual expresses adverse effects.

6.4 Harvesting Honey from Bees

Bees and honey are often a misunderstood issue amongst animal advocates themselves, and once again, we arrive at different conclusions based on the approach we take to understand why the harvest of honey or containment of bees may be wrong.

From a utilitarian perspective, it is important to consider the weight that may be given to the sentience of bees. Bees may feel stressed or disturbed when humans attempt to collect their honey, but it is reasonable to expect a utilitarian to weigh the sentience of bees less strongly against the sentience of an animal with more cognitive complexity. Humans could, as well, gain nutritional or cultural value from honey and this has the potential to outweigh the distress of the bees. The honey can be replaced, as well, with a man-made sugar substance so that the bees don't starve. The amount of pleasure gained from this substitute versus the pleasure from the original honey is immeasurable, though, as such changes cannot be reliably measured in bees. These factors all give the utilitarian plausible ground to claim that the stress of the bees is not enough to outweigh the positive utility gained by humans for harvesting the honey, or equally so, that the bees do not suffer from having their honey taken, and the practice is permissible. Unless we are better able to understand whether bees suffer and to what extent they do by taking their honey, the utilitarian solution to this problem is unclear.

Deontological ethics would have an easier time, flatly denying that the use of bees for their honey production is morally permissible. Bees, like other animals, have their own natural drives and goals. Bee behavior exists independently of human uses for them, and thus, bees have rights as all other animals to perform their natural functions without imposition from humans or otherwise being disrupted. Bees having any amount of inherent moral worth at all would warrant that we are duty bound to respect the independence of bees in general. As a practical conclusion, we should not harvest honey from bees if we are to respect the moral worth of the bees themselves or their colony as a community – such an action would be infringing on their right to pursue their own interests as animals.

The ethics of care would also not advocate for the use of bees for their production of honey. The bees, in this case, would be the recipients of care as they cannot return it to humans.

Being in a relationship that is fundamentally exploitive of the bees would not be an acceptable care giver – care receiver relationship. Though the bees may be receiving care from the owner in that they provide the bees with space and a suitable location for their hive, the deprivation of the bee's honey – the primary food source for bees – would be inflicting harm, even if not directly. If the care ethicist identifies the need for bees to consume their own honey for health or other purposes, harvesting honey from them would be depriving them of that need. The care ethics position would require us to provide care for bees in other ways – perhaps by planting certain bushes or trees that improve the health and survivability of bees, or refraining from disrupting the environments in which bees exist in healthily. At the very least, it would reject human imposition as, again, a form of harm.

6.5 Conclusions from These Cases

The conclusions that begin to form from going over these examples of animal use in their relation to philosophical theory is that though each theory may agree on a surface level, the final conclusions drawn by each theory may be contradictory of one another, or agreeing but for different reasons. If conclusions cannot be reached that agree with one another from the positions identified within the language of the activists, then how is the determination made as to which position ought to be advocated for? As mentioned above, the conclusions for issues such as factory farming and cosmetic testing on animals do not encounter this problem as they're so-called "low hanging fruit." Our reactions to these practices are often visceral and emotional, especially when exposed to the imagery associated with them. The agreement of moral high theory is irrelevant – we 'know' what to do, in a general sense, when we see these things. The idea that binds the basic premises of these theories together is that of the least harm principle – or that we ought to do as little harm as necessary. Causing harm arbitrarily is morally objectionable to most people without referring to a moral theory that dictates it – and for the purpose of activism when considering the most egregious cases of harm this is sufficient.

The shaky ground is when it comes, again, to the more complicated cases of animal use. If no agreement is had between these theories, and the harm caused less clear or situationally

more complex, our moral intuitions alone about what we ought to do are insufficient for solving these problems. Though our moral intuitions may say something there is wrong, these may be misguided, and, if correct, lack a persuasive basis by which to convince others that what they're doing is wrong. As we've said, the work of advocates exists in a practical realm – the conclusions drawn by the different theories must have realistic procedures for seeing that the prescriptions of their theory are fulfilled. If no one is convinced of the conclusions we present, then the theory may get stuck as merely a concept.

On the other hand, the existence of multiple 'right' answers lead us to unstable ground, because advocating for something that may be morally wrong, according to one theory, but not to another, has no point of determination on which theory is correct. Advocates want to avoid giving prescriptions that result in the development or perpetuation of immoral behavior – it is against the very goal of advocacy. Being unable to determine conclusively, then, what the 'right' thing to do in these situations then puts us at risk of championing an immoral stance. On a practical level, this could ruin credibility for those positions which do produce moral good, if the immoral stance leads to destructive or harmful behavior. On a conceptual level, advocating for something immoral is itself immoral and counter-productive to the goals of advocates.

But can choosing one theory to advocate for remedy this? If the theory leads us to conclusions that some may find counter-intuitive, it could be rejected on the spot and would fail us as a device for bringing about morally good outcomes. Choosing one theory to advocate for locks us into only using certain considerations and methods for solving moral problems – which exacerbates the practical issue of convincing someone of the value of our conclusions. If the conclusions of each of these theories is not, independently, objectionable, then our only basis for rejecting them is that they do not agree with one another – and this rests on the assumption that there is, indeed, only one truly correct theory. Accepting one framework above others on this basis is question begging – we may be better off determining the value of each moral theory on its own merits.

7. Is A Normative Framework Necessary for Doing Animal Activism?

As mentioned above, the complications that become present when taking into account different ethical theories raise the question – is ethical theoretical justification necessary for activism? The answer here will be a yes and no. The degree to which activists use theory is minimal, but the necessity of the theory still exists. So, at the most basic level, ethical theoretical justification is necessary for the minimal amount of activism. In order to explore this claim, I will look at the current discourse of activism in the context of the ethical theories in the background, as well as consider the relevance of ethical pluralism.

Activism seems to rely on ethical theory at first glance, as the behavioral changes they advocate for are often normative – it is wrong to use animals unnecessarily for human benefit. Were one to adopt this position, a whole group of lifestyle changes come with it that require one to be conscious of their consumption. And these prescriptions do *seem* to have the support of moral frameworks. This is because the most egregious forms of animal abuse do not require thorough or detailed moral accounts to be condemnable – based on sentience, rights, care, or many other descriptions of animal moral status, this treatment is intuitively wrong.

In order to make a normative claim about the treatment of animals, the organizations must refer to some sort of ethical principle, even if it's not a thorough framework, in order to guide their behavioral recommendations. These ethical snippets are what give us rhetorical lines as "reduce the most suffering for the greatest number of animals" or "caring" about animals. Though even care may seem like a visceral response when seeing animal suffering, it compels us to act in certain ways in reference to our treatment of animals, and these compulsions are the basis of moral consideration.

There still exists the problem though, looked at in the more detailed cases of animal use, of what happens when two theories with intuitively acceptable premises lead one to different conclusions on appropriate animal use.

Moral pluralism becomes important to look at in these instances as a philosophical alternative to being hamstrung by conflicting theories. For the purpose of this paper, pluralism will be referred to as the idea that multiple conflicting accounts of solutions to moral problems may all be morally permissible, or that "the plurality of morally significant values is not subject to a complete rational ordering" (Wolf, 1972). Moral pluralism is the claim that though different moral theories may have different lines of argumentation and different conclusions to those arguments, no one theory is objectively correct. Two different conclusions to a moral problem may be valid and permissible – one is not wrong simply because it is in conflict with another.

Pluralism is important to look at because, as has been said, society is empirically pluralist. A multitude of different ideas are around from different sources representative of different arguments. Especially in the modern world with the ease of communication and the intersection of different cultural and social traditions and beliefs, discerning one 'correct' belief from amongst all of these may be an unending process. Though society is pluralistic in beliefs, this does not necessarily tell us anything about why moral pluralism is relevant to include along side it. Somewhat intuitively, accepting a multitude of moral beliefs as being valid is a way to cope with the number and complexity of belief sets – instead of attempting to siphon out one moral 'truth,' each belief is, instead, evaluated on its own soundness and validity. This helps us in the case of animal activism as well because, though their rhetoric and methods do not adhere strictly to one theory, it is still necessary that their actions be justified *somehow*. Moral pluralism, then, has both practical value for activists while still maintaining some level of moral value.

This is not to use a version of moral pluralism that says anything goes – though some theories may produce conclusions that disagree with other theories, this does not mean that each theory presented has to be treated with the same level of validity or respect, but more so that moral problems may have multiple salient variables that, at an intuitive level, do not cause problems. Susan Wolf, in her paper on different levels of pluralism, shares this sentiment, writing, "Different parties to the disagreement may be focusing on different, independently significant values, and, since there is no decision procedure for balancing these values, any attempt by one party to claim priority over the other will simply beg the question" (Wolf, 790).

Referring to the utilitarian idea that animals can feel pain and therefore pain should not be needlessly inflicted is not in conflict with the deontological view that animals have their own drives and desires that should be respected, or the care ethics view that we ought to care for the needs of others – the easing of pain considered a need. In the cases looked at above, between food production, pets/ companion animals, the collection of honey, and animal medical testing, these compatible premises lead to different, conflicting conclusions. In order to have a consistent moral framework that still satisfies the activist's need for a basic moral premise, we must follow the basic premises to their logical conclusions.

When considering pets, a utilitarian and deontologist both agree that animals deserve consideration to varying degrees. This, so far, is a satisfactory premise for the activist in order to promote animals as having more valuable lives than previously conceived. The deontological position would assert that 'ownership' of an animal is a violation of its autonomy, while the utilitarian would measure the pleasure the animal gained from the relationship with the human, and vice versa. In order to do advocacy, though, the utilitarian and deontological starting points are sufficient to establish the base value of the animal and the consistency of their fundamental premises when extrapolated on is not necessarily pertinent.

What pluralism can inform on this conversation is that the conclusions of these debates may simply be indeterminate. Both premises given are fairly basic and, for the purpose of activism, not a point of contention. Both can exist simultaneously for the purpose of the activist and still the same practical end is achieved – that is, the influence in behavior designed to lessen animal suffering. Pluralism, as it is understood here, is the acknowledgement that different values – or starting points for ethical theories – are all relevant in our moral considerations. There is not one determining value for pluralists that ought to guide all of our behavior, but instead several morally relevant factors, and the application of one over another will not necessarily leave you with a right and wrong answer.

By taking an inside-out approach to understanding the underlying values of animal activists, it becomes clear that it is easier to draw philosophical meaning from certain keywords than it would be to pull one philosophical framework out of the language consistently. That is to say, the process of understanding the philosophical values in these words is more descriptive of

the way people actually feel rather than using one 'correct' theory to evaluate the statements of activists.

Based on all of this, it does not seem necessary that animal activists use one ethical framework form start to finish – that is, their conclusions may be based on the premises of one framework or another. These frameworks still need to exist, though, because the conclusions drawn even on a basic level must have some level of sound argumentation to back them up, instead of relying on unfounded beliefs or arguments. The case we look at here though can be compared to any motorist and their car – though they may know how to drive the car and use it to get from point A to B, they do not necessarily know all of the inner workings of the engine. Of course, if the engine was broken or faulty, the car would not bring them anywhere, so it must be functioning in order for the mechanism to perform fully. Activists don't necessarily know the full complexity of the moral theories they're using – but they still should use them, and the theories still function independent of the understanding of the activist.

8. What Sort of Moral Reasoning Ought We to Use?

Given that a single ethical framework need not be used or understood fully in order to do effective activism, the question becomes what form philosophy takes in the realm of activism or 'applied ethics.' There is clearly philosophical language in the ways that activists address the issues, and there is certainly a moral underpinning of the problems that fuels the passion of the activists. It seems, though, that the philosophy becomes a tool for describing our moral intuitions more so than it is a set of rules and beliefs from one framework that have to be followed in order to achieve a morally desirable outcome, or one that is 'good.' Certainly, humans have certain visceral reactions to seeing the suffering of animals and, for better or worse, we anthropomorphize their emotions into reactions we understand and identify with. The desire to end this suffering is one shared by many – and the multitude of philosophical ideas that reveal themselves within the language show that. We find a pluralistic conception of premises to be appealing because each one does justice to the moral intuition that to needlessly inflict suffering is wrong. Whether it be because the animal suffers at all or because their life has intrinsic value,

both premises support our belief and allow us enough grounds to justify taking action in order to rectify the intuitively uncomfortable scenario.

The problem that arises in attempting to apply one 'correct' philosophical theory to the work of activists is that the pragmatic value of the theory takes on more weight than it otherwise would on the philosopher's desk. In order to be an applicable set of guidelines, the conclusions must be practical and actionable. The main purpose of advocacy is to create change and, in order for this to be successful, the arguments and rhetoric must be persuasive. Though an ethical framework should not rely too strongly on any one element of human experience as activist's arguments often do with emotion, the framework still ought to appeal to the moral intuitions of individuals.

The philosopher Richard Norman can offer some insight as to the role philosophy has in practical applications. Norman believes that applied ethics ought to be a more descriptive and analytical process of uncovering implicit philosophical meaning in everyday language. He claims that our non-philosophized belief sets are the building blocks for an applied ethicist to identify and solve moral problems. He writes, "If a theory yields practical conclusions which are radically in conflict with some of our most deep-seated moral beliefs, then so much the worse, it would seem, for our pre-theoretical moral beliefs – the theory trumps them" (Norman, 2000). A theory ought not to lead us to counter-intuitive conclusions or radically different ends than we would otherwise consider. Theories, in this sense, become detached from the reality of actual belief systems of the humans attempting to address the problems. In this case, activists attempting to improve the lives of animals through their rhetoric rely on their moral intuitions, for the most part, and back these up with the fundamental premises of different moral theories.

This is not to say, though, that we ought to rely entirely on intuitions in order to solve problems of direction within activism. It does say, though, that the conclusions we come to about the moral status of different practices can be partially derived from the discourse about solving these problems itself, and not from relying on the prescriptions of a single high theory about the optimal outcome. This is evinced, as mentioned, by the language used within activism itself. The lines of argumentation that would allude to high theory are absent from the 'values' sections of the various animal activism websites. Aside from, perhaps, the organization Direct Action

Everywhere, who believes definitively in a deontological conception of animal rights, the different moral theories mentioned are just small portions from the whole, used to draw a connection to moral understanding without diving into the details of the theory.

Norman is reflective of this as well, writing, “If the resolution of moral conflicts about abortion, or euthanasia, has to await the resolution of disputes between utilitarianism, rights-based theories, and their other theoretical competitors, there is little hope of progress towards agreed answers” (Norman, 9). This is both descriptive of the field of advocacy and their methodologies as well as speculative about the pitfalls of adhering to one high-theory. Activists cannot wait on the singular moral truth if it means having each high theory and their advocates hash it out until the end – this would be an unreasonable demand for any moral actor. Activists, then, must rely on a pluralism of moral truths in order to operate in a value-pluralist society.

This is referential to the practical value that is necessary of a moral theory if it is to enter into the societal setting as a theory useful to activists. The conflict Norman refers to is one often heard amongst non-philosophers when hearing about philosophy. There exists the stereotype that philosophy is just about asking questions – that the inconclusive nature of the discourse renders it inherently useless in the modern world. After all, if one cannot provide conclusive answers or solutions to problems after deliberation on the problem, why bother? This perspective, though, is indirectly a criticism of the inconclusiveness of high theories when compared with one another. Conclusions may be had, but it lacks consensus and the comfort of certainty we get through disciplines such as science (though ‘truth’ in science is equally as impermanent due to the ever-changing nature of information through scientific discovery). In order for a philosophical theory to be used start-to-finish, the discomfort about conflicting accounts of what is right and wrong would need to be remedied.

As old as philosophical discourse is, this need seems neither realistic nor possible. Philosophy, then, for the purpose of activism, likely will not rely on the application of one high-theory in order to guide their day-to-day operations and campaigns. This is because, in the field of advocacy, the most effective programs are the ones used, while ineffective ones are abandoned. Having established that the methods and beliefs of activists are at least partly reliant on the existence of full moral theories, if an effective campaign can be morally justified, it will

be adopted. The appeal of moral pluralism, in opposition to high theory, is that the methods can be molded to the beliefs and values of a number of different types of people and social or cultural groups. Stubborn insistence on the truth of one theory may have the value of moral purity, but in real-world scenarios being uncompromising is a hinderance.

9. The Principle of Least Harm as a Method of Moral Reasoning

As our discussion of high theory has elucidated, there are complications when trying to use it in practice, within an empirically pluralist society. If moral high theory is not an accessible means for activists to procure a moral prescription, though, we are left then with several other problems – the claim that moral situations can *only* be solved relevant to their own specific factors, or that any principle or value that guides our actions has to be accepted in the vein of moral relativism. The principle of least harm helps us to avoid some of the pitfalls that may afflict other sets of reasoning. By rejecting that one specific theory is uniquely right in identifying a morally acceptable course of action, it may seem that we are left with either particularism or relativism. The principle avoids both of these claims by virtue of its two, and only, morally significant claims. The idea that *harm* may be considered something sentient beings are universally averse to is not a controversial claim. Most moral high theory deals, in some way, with the avoidance of harm – whether it be avoiding it one's self or not inflicting it upon others.

Our primarily focused moral high theories in this paper can all be said to follow this reasoning, at least. Utilitarianism, being concerned with the seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain, easily fits into the conception of harm as something bad. Rights based theories do, as well, as most of the actions that violate the rights of a creature constitute, in some way, harm to that individual that they have a right to avoid. Care ethics are chiefly concerned with avoiding harm to others – with empathy being an important mechanism of this moral reasoning, care ethics acknowledges pain, identifies with it, and seeks to reduce it. In very simple terms, the avoidance of harm is generally agreed upon between our conflicting high theories to be a fundamental principle.

This, then, avoids the crudest version of moral relativism – that being, that whatever we believe to be moral is based on our own personal beliefs and experiences and are not subject to an objective ordering. Harm is recognized, agreed upon as bad, and sought to be avoided. This also avoids the problem that might come with being overly-particularistic. Particularism may claim that only the specific, salient variables of a situation are worth consideration in determining a moral outcome. As we've determined, harm can be seen as a generally agreed-upon, consistently bad factor in a situation. The general idea of harm being bad can be applied across a wide variety of instances, and does not depend on the particular elements of one situation to be considered a general principle.

The second portion of the principle is what appeals to the ideas of particularism and pluralism – the necessity of the thing being done. Necessity, here, is a factor that could be very much contentious depending on the situation to which it is applied. It gives us room, though, to address the morally salient elements of a situation and consider the circumstances in which it is taking place – avoiding the gridlock of deciding which moral high theory ought to be applied in all instances of a case, and squeezing the situations into those parameters. Necessity can take into account whether or not moral agents in a situation are even able to perform an action, as one cannot reasonably be expected to act morally if the action required is impossible or at too great a cost to the actor. We would not expect someone to sacrifice their own life if it meant upholding moral purity.

The principle of least harm, then, seems to be a way to avoid getting stuck searching for the correct answer as moral high theory prescribes, but avoids the pitfalls of a crude form of relativism or limiting our reasoning to specifics only. The principle also allows us to bridge the gap between a moral pluralism position of validating multiple ethical theories, and the practical applications that demand action. The principle of least harm implicitly refers to the idea of mid-level principles; mid-level principles, as Diekman articulates,

"bridge between fundamental ethical principles and specific moral problems. They are denoted as principles, because one should abide by them in general. However, their 'mid-level' status allows for some flexibility; different principles may need to be balanced out against each other if circumstances lead to their mutual conflict" (2013)

The function of the principle of least harm in this argument is just the same – the ability to bridge between the more complex and complete ethical frameworks – that exist necessarily for activism to be possible – and the practical problems that activists often address without training in philosophical theory. Flexibility is required to address the specificity and, often, incomplete information we have about problems, while maintaining our ability to act in some way.

The language of activists already seems to evoke the moral intuition that the principle of least harm uses as a basis – that the harm we do to animals should be the least it can be necessarily – Mill, the first one to articulate the principle, contends that the prevention of harm is the only limit to liberty (Mill, 1859). We have some philosophical basis for the prevention of harm being a legitimate argument for the restriction of certain behaviors.

Before going into different applications of the principle of least harm, it should first be looked at in terms of its constituent pieces. The main premise, as mentioned, is that harm ought not to be done – this being the principle that unites the bases of high theories. The second portion is that the harm must not be done unnecessarily - this brings about a debate as to what is necessary in any given situation rather than one over abstract principles or rules. The necessity of harm can be determined by those individuals wielding the principle on the spot. It will be analyzed, following, how using a mid-level device such as this can be used to address some of the complex problems illustrated above.

9.1 Contextualizing the usefulness of the principle within the complex cases of animal use

9.1.1 Industrial Agriculture

Concerning the production of foodstuffs for human consumption, there is currently no model of harvesting which spares animal lives. Though many of the high theories maintain that killing an animal is wrong (explicitly in rights theories and consequentially in utilitarian theories, and indirectly in care ethics), it is not realistic to maintain that one cannot consume foods which result in animal deaths. The extreme example might show that growing your own self-sustaining

permacultural system can achieve this, but this is not accessible to many in the modern world and especially in developing nations. When grain is being harvested in industrial farming situations, animals living within the fields often die due to the harvesting vehicles and machinery. On the other hand, though, consuming a diet of animals directly requires both the harvesting of grain for the animals to consume, and the death of the animal itself for consumption. Since cows (assumedly) consume more plant matter in the course of their adult development than a human being, it stands to reason that one method produces more death than the other.

In the situation where abstaining from industrially produced plant food means starvation, it is not reasonable to expect that individuals choose a course of action in which they do not contribute to any animal death whatsoever - to do so would mean martyrdom. In this case, the question of the moral choice comes down to the necessity of the action – it is necessary that we consume food to live, and it is inevitable that our food production causes some death. The least harm that can be produced, then, is to consume plants.

9.1.2 Pets

In the case of pets, some context is required to understand the relationship between humans and the domestic animals we've created. To a certain extent, many of the domestic animals that exist now are dependent on humans for their wellbeing and survival. In some instances, such as cats, this is not the case, the majority of other domesticated animals now live dependently on human beings. The dilemma that arises out of this, then, is how our relationship with pets ought to be approached that takes their dependency into account as well as their moral status. As we saw, all three main moral theories referred to also gave pets some sort of moral status – it is not a sufficient answer to simply say we should release all domestic and companion animals into the wild and see what happens. Humans have also influenced their natural habitats and, potentially, eliminated some such that these animals wouldn't be able to return to a setting that is natural to them anyways.

There also exists the problem, especially concerning dogs, that human beings breed them so prolifically that many dogs cannot find homes and are put to death as a result. The animals that exist within our institutions are dependent on us for homes and care, and the necessity of killing an animal because we bred too many is a contentious point. The principle of least harm can be used to address the dilemma here – that we cannot just 'get rid' of companion and domestic animals, even though our relationship with them can sometimes be morally problematic. The consideration then becomes whether or not we're harming the animals by perpetuating our domestic relationships, and if that harm is necessary.

Because releasing them into the wild may be more harmful to the animal than keeping them in a relationship with us, it would seem that this route is crossed off early. The necessity of releasing our animals and causing short-term harm in order to achieve a situation that is at least theoretically uncompromised seems counter-intuitive. We have some obligation, then, to care for them and to sustain their wellbeing. If release causes more harm than good, and the relationships we have with them bring about a higher state of well-being to the animal, then the principle of least harm seems to point us towards maintaining the relationships we have with our domestic animals.

Of course, when it comes to the issue of over-breeding as an institutional factor of domestic animal life, the principle does not demand that we maintain the system as it currently is. The harm caused by over-breeding is not a necessary one – no great tide of suffering would come if animal shelters were not over-capacity. We then would seem to have some moral push to reduce the harm we do to animals by way of our ownership and dominion over their bodies, but still need to take care of the animals that have been brought into a system that they cannot be extracted from without causing more harm than good.

9.1.3 Medical Testing

In the case of animal use for medicinal testing, the crucial component is the necessity of the process. The differentiation that exists between medicine and cosmetics is that the testing of cosmetics on animals is unnecessary – and thus our reaction to it easier to understand and

maintain as a moral position. The testing for medical purposes, though, comes with a different condition in terms of necessity. In some cases of medical testing, the drugs produced are able to save human lives or cure debilitating diseases. The harm done to the animals, in these cases, may be justified based on their necessity to save human lives. The final determination though, in this case, may need to be made by the institutions doing the testing or the individuals consuming the treatments. In many cases, the individuals do not have much of a choice when it comes to accepting medication that involved animal testing. If given the choice to suffer and potentially die, or alleviate that suffering and contribute to animal testing, likely our intuition says that we ought to take the medicine anyways. This, then, is necessary in order to maintain human wellbeing. It is important to note though that in this case necessity is an anthropocentric determination – that is, it relies on human beings having a greater moral status than animals in order to justify the necessity of sacrifice of one for another. Activists may still see this as unnecessary, in principle, and advocate for alternative methods to using animals for the testing.

Applying the principle of least harm in this situation gives us a more approachable and intuitive solution than were we to rely on the exclusivity of one moral high theory. Animal activism, as has been said, is concerned with making change and this necessitates a practical element to the conclusions it accepts. Though, for example, a deontological theory may require us to reject animal testing because it is a violation of the autonomy of the animal, it is not realistic that someone should reject a life-saving treatment to preserve the purity of their principles. It is similarly not morally objectionable at face value that one would choose their own life over what their moral theory requires of them.

9.1.4 Bees and honey

The case of bees and honey production seems to be a more straightforward one than before when applying the principle of least harm. The moral salience, in this case, relies on one's determination on the bee's ability to suffer. As mentioned in the section above, the harvesting of bee honey requires that the honey be replaced by a sugary substance in order to keep the bees alive – the honey is their food source. The necessity of this, though, is much clearer, as it is not

necessary for humans to consume honey. There exist alternatives in the modern world, such as maple syrup and agave nectar, if one requires a sweetener. Any harm caused to the bees in order to collect their honey seems morally objectionable – we do not need it, and even minimal harm in this conception loses its justification; the harm becomes arbitrary.

The argument over this case becomes, then, whether or not one acknowledges the bee's ability to suffer. If one does not believe the bees are harmed by this process or that the sugar substitute to their food is insufficient, the case of necessity is no longer relevant as there is no harm being caused. Of course, this helps to clarify the problem many activists and others have establishing the moral status of consuming honey – they are unsure as to whether any harm is being caused. For the case of the activist, applying the principle of least harm clears up the case because those committed to treating animals morally are likely those who believe bees suffer as a result of being used. For others, though, this is less clear, thus the confusion on the use of bees.

9.2 Concluding thoughts

The use of the principle of least harm is reminiscent of utilitarianism in that they are both consequentialist conceptions of morality. The difference here being that some actions may be permissible under utilitarianism that are not under the application of this decision device. Utilitarianism may hold that, in certain instances, unnecessary harm may be caused but that the interests of one group have a greater moral weight than those of the other, and so the harm is not morally significant enough to warrant abstention. The application of the principle of least harm contends that *any* instance where harm is inflicted without a need for it is wrong – it does not matter if the interests of the inflictor have a much greater moral weight than the one the harm is inflicted upon.

The principle, used in the way it has been illustrated, is an important tool for bridging the gap between philosophy and practice. It functions well in a value pluralist society – due to its ability to access different morally salient details of a situation and, yet, is still based on a universally agreeable conception of harm being something to avoid. As mentioned, this has

practical value as it can appeal to the different belief sets of the people in society and is, thus, persuasive – while maintaining the moral value of sound moral frameworks.

10. The Principle of Least Harm and Activism

Though the principle we've illustrated seems to be a powerful tool in making moral diagnoses and better understanding our own institutions, it is not enough on its own to provide imperatives to society about their behavior. Because activists work in the public sphere, their intuitions are not enough, and using the principle of least harm functions very well in individual situations, but without any substantial background, functions the same as intuitions. Moral high theory and fully fleshed-out conceptions of ethics are not used by activists in their fullest sense because they're impractical – you will not often see an animal activist holding up a protest sign that says "the categorical imperative demands that we respect animals." This is an obvious conclusion to anyone who isn't a philosopher, as that type of reasoning is not part of their day-to-day discourse and understanding.

Especially in modern society, everyone has an opinion on different issues and these opinions are easily disseminated across social media platforms. These beliefs, though, may be based on fallacies, outdated or incorrect information, full of gaps in their reasoning, or completely removed from reality. We wouldn't likely see this type of discourse as being beacons of moral truth – and we ought not to accept the personal reasoning as individuals as a basis for our understanding.

There is a greater weight and significance when moral prescriptions are handed out by activists to the larger population, because if these beliefs were, hypothetically, destructive, much more harm would be achieved than good. The misinformed decisions of a majority can have lasting consequences on a society, usually for the worse. Radical or unfounded beliefs from a minority can be destructive as well, as evinced by different cults or fringe cultural movements or religions claiming some sort of objective truth. Intuitionism and assertions may be fine for someone making life choices based on their own experiences, but their experiences do not need

to be accepted, and often should not, as a metric by which to measure the behavior, or recommend the future course, of a society.

The principle of least harm, then, needs the background of moral theory. In order to evoke the language of utilitarianism, deontology, and ethics of care, there needs to exist the system and the conversation in the first place. These theories are ones that have existed for, often, centuries, in one form or another, and have been discussed and critiqued and developed by a number of individuals and academic. The reason they're accepted as having moral heft is because of this – they've been determined, to the best of our ability, to be the soundest accounts of moral reasoning we've achieved thus far. So, to contend that animal activism does not rely on these theories at all would be a mistake. The claim is merely that they do not engage them with much depth. It is enough for the activist to have a loose idea of these theories, or even the vocabulary that lets them articulate certain concepts that are salient to them.

The principle of least harm as we've established is not being claimed as a standalone fix-all for moral problems that activists may encounter. Rather, it is a device by which important concepts and premises of well-established ethical theories are evoked. The moral reasoning that may be salient in one moral problem, using the principle of least harm, may give you a conclusion that is clearly utilitarian. Similarly, you may arrive at deontological or care ethics conclusions using the same methodology of reasoning.

In considering whether or not to use animals for medical testing, one may consider the necessity of saving human lives to be worth the suffering inflicted – here we have a conclusion arrived at using this method that is clearly within utilitarianism. If we consider consuming animals for food, necessity may say that we do not need to do this to survive, so any suffering inflicted upon animals for this purpose is unacceptable. This conclusion brings out deontological theories, as it evokes the intrinsic worth of animals and refuses that a choice to harm can be morally permitted. Similarly, if one were to draw the conclusion that pets are acceptable because the animals we've brought into the world still depend on us for their care, then the principles of care ethics come forth, and the determination we make is based on care.

The reasons we accept the conclusions a tool like this gives us is both because they're intuitive and accessible to activists, but also because they're drawn from existing moral

frameworks. If we were to arrive at a conclusion that was intuitive but perhaps unsubstantiated or shaky, this conclusion would not be enough to take it into a public environment. Using such a simple method is just a way for laypeople to access philosophically sound ideas and reasoning without spending years studying philosophy and ethics and learning how to reason like a philosopher to the fullest extent. Activists, as we've seen, only use moral language superficially, and may use a reasoning tool like the principle of least harm in order to access the ideas on moral theory that exist already and apply those ideas to real-world moral problems

11. The Distribution of Responsibility

If activists only distribute moral theories while philosophers produce them, it raises the question as to who has what responsibility within the realm of producing and distributing moral ideas. Philosophers, then, seem to be the ones who produce these moral systems and check them for flaws over long periods of time, reconsidering and rewriting as new arguments come to light. As has been argued, philosophical theory must exist necessarily in order for activism to be justified and persuasive – and this is theoretically and practically functional through a morally pluralistic conception of values and ideas. Activists, then, must have some relationship with philosophical theory, while philosophers must have some relationship with the types of problems their moral theories address. This raises the questions: what responsibility to activists have to engage with the academic process of theory building, and what responsibility to philosophers have to disseminate their theories amongst a population? Both the fields of activism and philosophy have become fairly specialized and require their own set of skills and training in order to perform them competently, and so we cannot reasonably expect, simply, for activists to assume the duties of philosophers on top of their own and vice versa.

Traditional philosophy does not necessarily have this problem – the study of ontology, for example, is one not easily taken into an applied setting. Debating about whether or not the things we see and feel really exist, to what degree, and how we conceptualize their different components are often challenging and interesting discourse for philosophers but not one that has an impact on much else. People within society do not surround their decision-making with

questions of existence – the belief that things exist is implicit, and decisions are made from that starting point. Moral philosophy does not have the status, though, of being content on a desk or in a dissertation. Moral philosophy is explicitly concerned with the behavior of moral agents – people in society – and the impact that their decision has on some theoretical or practical level. Actions have outcomes, and these outcomes can be either bad or good. If a tremendous amount of time and energy is spent discussing which outcomes of our actions are the most desirable, and this never leaves the academic bubble, it may seem to become ultimately arbitrary.

Moral philosophy, then, has some onus attached to it that ought to have some impact on the way people behave in order to achieve a moral society. It is insufficient, as a relationship, that philosophers only work on philosophy and activists only build belief systems on intuition and then preach them to others. There exists a certain distribution of moral labor in terms of devising and implementing moral systems.

The way it has been presented, thus far, is the way it functions the best. The actual work of activists is often demanding – interacting with people, educating themselves on the different issues, and the emotional impact that often comes along with seeing injustice and trying to rectify it is taxing. The goal of the activist is to make change – but to do that, the information as to be approachable, persuasive, and interesting. This is its own discourse in itself – and coming up with more sophisticated ways to get their message across is a time-consuming process as well.

Activists have approached the problem of harming animals in economic, cultural, and social settings in a multitude of ways – from the creation of documentaries to the establishment and organization of conventions on the grander scale, to leafleting on the street attempting to engage passerby in a conversation about these issues (Singer, 2000). In order to do this, activists need to educate themselves as well on the most up-to-date empirical information on commercial and small-scale farming practices, industry regulations for animal use, and different facets of other systems of animal use in order to frame their message against correct empirical information (Singer, 2000). Being wrong about something or seeming to lack the knowledge can be detrimental to the spread of their message – especially when it is one that challenges the fundamental beliefs of individuals or the norms of a society. People are more likely to brush it aside as radical nonsense and stay complicit in their own habits. Because of this, the demand for

correct, relevant, and persuasive information is integral to having a successful interaction within the public sphere.

There is, as mentioned above, an emotional cost to doing activist work. Often times, the ways that animal abuse is captured in industry is brutal video imagery. Seeing these kinds of things are part of the education process for attempting to make institutional change, and activists have to subject themselves to this in some form or another, at some point, in order to become familiar with the problems they're advocating against and the context that these problems occur. This is reasonably considered to be emotional labor and takes its own sort of dedication and energy in addition to all of the organizational and educational aspects of animal activism. The community around activists needs to be fairly strong in order for individuals to not experience emotional burnout. This increases the demandingness of doing animal advocacy – it requires both strategic planning in order to have effective campaigns, as well as emotional investment of dealing with a taxing subject area.

The role and responsibility of the activist is to formulate empirical information into their moral arguments in a way that is practical and persuasive to people who have, likely, little knowledge of industries of animal use or of the moral arguments that support abstention of animal use. The main focus and energy is in the day-to-day operations of these organizations and presenting their perspective as effectively as possible, often at the cost of their emotional investment as well as the reasonable expectation of time.

Philosophers, in their respective area, spend many hours and often times careers developing and contributing to certain ideas that they are passionate about. Reading, writing, drafting papers, debating ideas with other philosophers, editing, reevaluating their ideas, while maintaining academic and personal integrity is a full-time job. In order to do this type of work, individuals have to spend many years studying philosophy or a similar discipline in order to understand how the discourse works. The type of thinking that philosophy demands is one that can be developed and honed over time, and the vocabulary needed in order to understand arguments and the background of certain ideas requires study as well. Like any field of study, one cannot just walk in off the street and expect to understand philosophically dense texts. Perhaps applied ethics would be more approachable due to the practical component, but

normative theories and moral frameworks are often complicated, multi-layered, and contain language not otherwise used outside of an academic setting.

It takes its own kind of training and understanding in order to contribute to a philosophical debate, and understand the nuances that come with different theories, and the disagreements between each theory. Though many of them, as we've established, may look like they're all complimentary on a basic level, digging deeper reveals that there are different premises that are underpinning them that are incompatible.

Understanding these complexities and contributing to the debate while simultaneously performing the tasks outlined above that activists are responsible for is not a reasonable expectation for anyone. In the same vein, requiring activists to study philosophical texts and stay up to date with the latest argumentation in the philosophical realm in addition to their campaigning is not reasonable either. Each has their own responsibilities within their own realm of expertise and understanding. The relationship to figure out, then, is how the flow of information is facilitated between the two groups. These two types of work are very different but rely on each other inextricably. There must exist a point of compromise between the two worlds in order for information to flow correctly from one to the other.

The connection manifests itself in the effort of both sides engaging in the activities of the other. In order to do moral philosophy in an applied sense, philosophers need to have some idea of the conditions of animals and ways that they're used in a society, and activists are often responsible for bringing this information to the fore. As Klaver writes,

"…to realize the place of the philosopher: not the ivory tower of the distanced generalist, nor the enclosed space of the specialized intellectual, but the position of someone who, embedded in her or his world, contributes to opening up different possibilities of being in that world by transcending its specific particularities" (Klaver, 1995).

Philosophers must be engaged in the world around them, minimally, in order to produce relevant moral claims. Activists need some way to access these ideas, and the responsibility is then on philosophers to formulate them in a way that non-academics can understand and turn into persuasive arguments. A good example is Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation* (1975).

Singer is a philosopher and works as an academic by profession – he is credited with having brought utilitarianism to the mainstream through his book on animals. Many activists read this book and are inspired to begin working in animal advocacy. Singer's book is based on utilitarian principles, but is written in a way that does not intimidate people the way traditional philosophy does. The activists, then, are engaging in philosophical work and enhancing their understanding of *why* they feel it's important to do what they do.

The intersection of fields is small but it exists necessarily. Activists have a responsibility to educate themselves basically in ethical theory, but not a responsibility to delve into the nuances and conflicts of different moral frameworks. Philosophers, too, have their responsibility to produce and refine ideas, but also to engage in empirical information and make this information at least superficially accessible to activists. There, of course, are those individuals who are engaged in both fields of work, such as philosophers who take their understanding and are inspired to become an activist, or an activist thirsty for understanding on why they believe what they believe studying philosophy to increase their depth of understanding. These individuals exist and are valuable to both areas, especially so in bridging the gap of information. Each individual involved in these areas is not responsible to do this to this extent, but are responsible to a minimal extent in order to facilitate a conversation.

12. Recommendations

Though the ways that philosophy and activism relate to one another have been attempted to be fleshed out fully in this paper, the importance of this perspective has yet to be argued for explicitly. Namely, what sort of consequences does this conception of the relationship between normative discourse and activism have, and what kinds of considerations does it bring to the fore?

Firstly, there is hope that this will encourage both activists and philosophers to become more engaged with each other's realm of understanding. Though it has been made clear that there is not an expectation or responsibility for one to take on the workload of the other, it still helps to facilitate a dialogue when both parties are not ignorant of what the other one does. The

communication between both realms is essential in order for either one to achieve its purpose – the dissemination of moral ideas and their coming to fruition within people. As mentioned above, delving more deeply into the background information is a good way to make sure there is some level of understanding between the different fields.

Philosophical thinking has benefits for activists, as well, independent of their relationship with philosophers. Perhaps there could exist some sort of philosophical training as part of an activists training, so that they become more aware of the types of arguments that support their assertions? At least within the realm of activism, there are certain biases and lines of fallacious thinking. Though becoming an animal activist often requires that one challenges their own basic assumptions about the relationship we have with animals, it does not mean that the newfound beliefs are free from flaws. Understanding philosophical thinking could help to remove faulty reasoning from within the activist community and from individual activists. The same spirit that goes into making sure all of their factual claims are true applies to the completeness of their reasoning, and in order to break the conception that animal activists are just "preaching personal beliefs" like religious figures, there is ideally some rigor to the reasons themselves.

On the other side of the coin, it may be important to give ethicists some push to consider the practical value and implications of their work in philosophy. Philosophy is often regarded in the modern world as being irrelevant – too consumed with problems of its own making that have no impact on the outside world. It would do well for philosophy to push beyond the ivory tower and engage more with the consequences their theories may have and the important questions they raise for different problems – instead of being seen as indeterminate, and ultimately, irrelevant to "real life" concerns.

13. Conclusion

As we have seen, activists call on a myriad of different language to describe their moral intuition that harming animals is wrong – without any one theory coming to the fore as the defining moral guideline for enacting change. What we must consider, then, is that there is no one theory broad enough to encompass all of this moral language that is still specific enough to

give us moral prescriptions. Instead, the best we can do is rely on a moral 'tool' to provide us with guidance – taking into account both the specific, morally salient factors in a situation and yet still attempting to adhere to a general principle that all of the moral language on animal advocacy websites seems to evoke. There may yet still be a moral high theory that can guide us to appropriate conclusions – the problems of the world are not put on hold, though, while we debate the merits of one theory versus another, and moral decisions still must be made in the absence of a definitive moral truth.

This gives us the working solution that philosophical theory is necessary in order for activists to do their work, while simultaneously not relying on the details of the theory in order to accomplish it. Without the theory to ground the assertions being made by activists, the work of animal advocacy would be reduced to preaching, which would remove any onus for anyone not affected by emotional appeals to change their behavior. Without activism to espouse the conclusions drawn up by complex moral theories, philosophical theory would be as useful as any other musty tome on a shelf. The two must work together in order to achieve some favorable end – without either one delving entirely into the world of the other. The favorable end, in this case, is already imbedded into the advocacy itself, which is to get people to stop harming animals when that harm can be avoided.

The conclusion we come to, then, for the sake of practicality, without renouncing any form of moral principle, is a common-denominator approach that allows us some guidance without being paralyzed by indecision. This approach evokes Occam's razor – the simpler we can formulate moral decision-making, the more accessible and effective it will be to activists. This approach, like all other moral theories, is subject to challenges and pitfalls. Moral high theory, undoubtedly, will continued to be debated amongst academics as to which attains the elusive moral 'truth.' And if one ever manages to definitely achieve it, we can reconsider the way we act and redirect our energies to this good.

Society remains pluralistic in an empirical sense, though, and our philosophical problem solving and activism must acknowledge that only using one approach or one set of values is likely to run into both cultural barriers and individual refusal to accept new views or arguments. Being able to adapt our arguments to different groups is an advantage, while still maintaining the

core principle at the center – stopping unnecessary harm. This is a necessary consideration in order to make real-world progress.

The aim of activism is not to achieve ideological purity or thorough philosophical consistency, but rather to make some kind of social change. Whether this consists of lessening people's consumption of animals or a decrease in avoidable medical testing, any movement towards the ultimate goal of eliminating unnecessary harm to animals is desirable. This is achieved by individuals not trained in philosophy, who are not seeking to have the objectively 'right' answer, but rather to do the best they can do. The goal of this paper has been to create a picture of the relationship between the two fields. Though it may seem obvious at first, because activists are concerned with doing the 'right' thing in the same way that moral theory attempts to give us the 'right' actions, nuances appear that make it less clear what the interactions are and how they can be improved.

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