

## **Introduction**

In the last century, women's rights have become a widely debated issue and various feminist philosophies have developed to argue for the equal opportunity of woman in relation to men. From "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" by Wollstonecraft, to radical feminist arguments posed by Firestone, many ways of thinking about feminist issues have been presented and the importance of discussing gender issues has become apparent and prevalent in our society. However, almost no researchers on the topic think that gendered issues, more specifically feminist needs, have been fully addressed. Currently, females are still not offered the same employment opportunities, nor do they occupy many political positions. However, it seems to me that a more pressing female issue has surfaced, which requires our attention now. Consider this case: a dystopian society in which females are not only oppressed, but *used* and *deprived* of all experiences which render a life worth living. Imagine females harnessed as breeding machines for the use of men; producers of milk and offspring, having no use past their ability to produce for the personal ends of other beings. Imagine young females and adults alike, kept in confinement with no room to move, forcibly impregnated almost immediately after the resulting pregnancy, never allowed to spend personal time with the babies, which belong only to men. This is the reality of *billions* of non-human animals involved in the dairy and egg industries. Many feminists have likened the oppression of women to the oppression of non-human nature, claiming that the ways in which we dominate nature help explain and give insight into the ways in which women are oppressed by men and patriarchal structures. In this paper, I intend to argue that the oppression of non-human animals in the dairy and egg industries are essentially *feminist*

*and human-rights issues* since non-human animals are morally relevant to us, and treatment of a morally valued being is ethically impermissible. Thus, I will attempt to argue for the conclusion that the dairy and egg industries ought to be abolished altogether since they are inherently abusive, oppressive, and require the denial of bodily integrity to the beings involved.

### **Review of Past Literature**

According to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), factory dairy farming typically involves “repeated reimpregnation, short calving intervals, overproduction of milk, restrictive housing systems, poor nutrition, and physical disorders [that] impair the welfare of the animals in industrial dairy operations” (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries” 1). Since no mammal on earth produces milk without undergoing pregnancy first, dairy cows are forcibly impregnated and their first cycle of milk production begins at around “25 months of age” (“Cows in the Dairy Industry”). In 2001 and 2006, the average time between birth and reimpregnation of dairy cows was around 4 months, with milk production continuing through the subsequent pregnancy (“Cows in the Dairy Industry”). Aside from the “9.3 million” cows used for milk production (numbers from 2008), another “2.6 million” cows were slaughtered for meat (“Dairy Industry” 1). The HSUS study further details the treatment and welfare of animals involved in the dairy industry, noting that the life of the cow is so tiring and physically exhausting, that “to achieve a comparable high work rate a human would have to jog for about 6 hours a day, every day” (“Dairy Industry” 7). Although these cases and statistics seem extreme, even so-called humane dairy farms necessarily rely on the

impregnation of female cows for milk production and thus must impregnate dairy cows *non-consensually*.

Hens in the egg industry are generally kept in bad conditions, which severely lowers their quality of life. Hens in the massive scale agriculture industry are mainly kept in battery cages, which are around the size of a “letter-sized sheet of paper” (“Egg Industry Report”). This small space (around 67 square inches) does not even allow hens in the industry enough room to stand erect; they cannot turn around or perform regular acts such as flap their wings, peck the ground for food, or preen their feathers (“Egg Industry Report”). Thousands of hens occupy very small spaces in massive scale farms, since it allows for a maximum amount of production – even organic farms, which are typically thought to be more humane, keep their hens in uncomfortably close quarters, which deny them the right to perform the most basic acts (PETA). This large number of birds in small spaces often results in chickens pecking each other desperately, which is remedied by a practice called “debeaking”, in which the chickens’ beaks are burned or cut off, an extremely painful process for the animals (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries” 2). Of the “340 million egg-laying hens” in the egg industry, “280 million birds [produce] table eggs and 60 million [are] kept for breeding” (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries”). This means that while 280 million of these birds are simply producing non-fertilized eggs, an additional 60 million are impregnated repeatedly. Hens are also “force-molted...to induce another laying cycle”, a process which causes hens to lose “30-35% of their body weight” (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries”). After around “two years”, hens are taken out of the egg industry are killed or sent for slaughter (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries”). Usually after being submitted to the poor conditions and abuse of these

industries, hens can, and often do, develop diseases such as gait and osteoporosis (“Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries”). The HSUS’ report on the welfare of animals in the egg industry notes that although hens *do* naturally lay eggs, they are selectively bred in the egg industry to produce “more than 250 eggs per year”, which is more than 10 times the normal egg production of a healthy hen (“Selective Breeding of Egg Laying Hens”).

In the development of thought about animal welfare/rights, the question has been raised: What if the animal is killed/treated humanely? Would humane treatment during the life of an animal justify its death or non-consensual captivity? While reports like HSUS’ shed light on industrial farming practices, some argue that particular forms of slaughter are humane and thus permissible because they involve “stunning” the animal first, in order to “render the animal insensible to pain” (HSUS). Additionally, many believe that the practices adopted by the organic agriculture industry and small-scale farmers are more humane and treat the animal well enough to be considered morally permissible. However, many philosophers have contended this idea, most notably Peter Singer, who claims that murder/torture/rape and the notion of something being humane are incoherent, due to the nature of such acts. These studies by both HSUS and FAO are extremely helpful, but ultimately *descriptive* accounts of the practices adopted by the dairy, egg, and meat industries. While these descriptive accounts provide interesting information, they do not attempt to make a normative claim about what we ought to do in response.

Another school of thought, which gives perspective to the debate on treatment of animals in farming systems, is the development of moral theory and rights theory. While many different philosophers have contemplated what it means to have moral value, or

what criteria a being would have to meet to qualify for moral consideration, these accounts all imply a normative theory: if something has moral value, then we ought to treat it in accordance with that value. This explains why we tend to think that murder is wrong: human-animals have been endowed (philosophers disagree as to what *bases* these rights, but there is little disagreement that humans *have* rights) with certain rights and moral values, namely the right to life, and murdering someone is a blatant disregard of this right and the moral value of the being. While many models of morality have been contemplated, very few seem to address the moral status of non-human animals and their place in moral considerations, but rather are anthropocentric and focus on moral issues between human persons.

Both Peter Singer and Tom Regan, two notable philosophers who have each written extensively on animal rights issues and ethical dilemmas. Singer confronts the debate about whether humans deserve higher moral consideration than any non-human animals and ultimately claims that any account for why humans deserve moral value (while non-human animals do not, or while theirs is consistently lower than humanity's) falls prey to arbitrary distinctions. Singer, in his essay, "A Utilitarian Defense of Animal Liberation" notes that we generally think of humans as morally dominant than all non-human animals because of our higher cognitive abilities. However, he points out that severely mentally handicapped humans as well as infants and sometimes seniors are a massive counterexample to the claim that humans are intellectually or cognitively superior to non-human animals ("Utilitarian Defense" 78). Singer attempts to argue that while cognitive faculties surely play *some* part in moral value, they can't alone account for human's alleged moral value over non-human animals ("Utilitarian Defense" 78).

Tom Regan, most notably in his essay, “The Radical Egalitarian Case for Animal Rights” claims that what is relevant is *sentience*, and that any being that is the “subject-of-a-life...a conscious creature having an individual welfare that has importance to [them] whatever [their] usefulness to others” has inherent value and thus deserves to have its interests and rights considered (Regan 87).

While philosophical thought on animal welfare/rights was developing, other work to establish women’s rights was being done by feminist philosophers. Although there are many different variations of feminism (socialist feminism, radical feminism, care-based feminism, etc.), they all seem whetted to the notion that women should be allowed equal treatment to men since they are relevantly similar to them and of equal moral value (all other things being equal). Feminism is a broad topic in philosophy and different types of feminists place the problem of the current gender system in various places: inequalities in the home, gender socialization in schools and in early childhood development, biological essentialisms, etc. However, many feminists believe that rights play an important role in feminist philosophy, specifically rights related to bodily integrity. Bodily integrity, as defined by the Wordsense.eu online dictionary, is “the right to physical autonomy and self-determination [in regards to one’s own body]” (“Bodily Integrity”) Helga Varden in particular argues that since we are conceptually identical to our bodies, when one violates our bodily integrity, they violate *us* in a deeper sense (Varden 37). This can be interpreted as meaning that our experience as an autonomous being is violated and undermined, and thus we are essentially harmed (Varden 37). She contrasts this deeper sort of harm with the harm of violating one’s right to another sort of property, namely a scarf – she claims that although it would be wrong to steal a scarf, it would not be as harmful or wrong as

violating someone's bodily integrity since one cannot be separated from their body and thus is related to it on a deeper level than other property (Varden 37).

A more recently established form of feminism, ecofeminism, likens the oppression of women to the oppression of non-human nature. Carol J. Adams, one of the most cited ecofeminists, writes extensively on the sexualization of agriculture animals and likens the objectification of animals to the objectification of women, arguing that this perspective of both non-humans and humans as sexual objects allows us to disregard their rights and moral values (Adams 30-31). While Adams puts much emphasis on the sexualization of meat, she does not address specifically gendered issues in the dairy/egg industries such as the acceptance of a system which repeatedly impregnates billions of female animals every year and treats animals as breeding machines with no moral value or rights of their own. Although it seems that ecofeminists like Warren and Adams are on the right track with understanding oppression in relation to other oppression, they appear to miss a critical point: the literal enslavement and breaching of bodily integrity to billions of grieving mother cows and chickens in the dairy and egg industry.

It seems that all this past research aims to establish what sorts of beings deserve moral consideration or the extension of rights and why they deserve such treatment or consideration. While feminists tend to argue that men and women should be treated equally (or at least be equally morally considered) due to their relevant similarity, animal rights theorists argue that non-human animals deserve at least an extension of certain rights or consideration based on their relevant similarity also. Both of these schools of thought attempt to compare two groups and offer a normative account of their equal (or relevantly similar) treatment. It seems to me that these two ideologies could then be

synthesized to argue for the claim that the dairy and egg industries ought to be abolished. If one can make the claim that humans and non-human animals are relevantly morally similar, then it would seem that certain acts which are immoral to inflict on humans would be considered immoral to inflict on non-human animals as well. Since the practices adopted by the dairy/egg industries necessarily entail a disregard of moral value, breach of deserved bodily integrity, and harm to beings relevantly similar to us, it seems that we ought to think that they are immoral. Furthermore, since we believe that bodily integrity related to one's own reproductive system is central to women's rights - and granting that humans and animals are morally relevantly similar - we ought to think that the gendered issues within the dairy/egg industries are particularly worrisome also for those who take gendered and feminist issues seriously.

### **Morality and Non-Human Animals**

For brevity's sake, I want to make clear early on that any mention of "animals" refers to "non-human animals" and will not refer to human animals in any sense. There have been many lively debates about whether or not non-human animals deserve any moral consideration. Great philosophical thinkers have written on ethics, each proposing his or her own model of morality and how we ought to act accordingly. Although these developments in thought are interesting, I intend to focus in on just a few aspects of morality as proposed by specific philosophers. Immanuel Kant in the second formulation of the categorical imperative claims that it is a universal moral law that we "act [so that we] use humanity, whether in [our own person] or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means" (Kant 639). What this means is that it is morally impermissible to use any other person merely for our own uses without

treating them at the same time as an autonomous being worthy of moral consideration. It seems that this is a plausible moral law – it explains why it is wrong to harm others merely for your entertainment. The problem with acts such as these, according to Kant, is that you undermine their autonomy and rationality and thus harm them (Kant 639).

However, Kant believed that rationality and the exercise of rationality was the sole function of human life and also held that those beings, which are not capable of rationality, deserve no place in the realm of moral consideration. As I mentioned above, though, philosophers like Peter Singer, have argued that rationality can't be what justifies moral consideration of a being, since in that case we would not extend moral consideration to infants, mentally disabled or insane persons, or some elderly humans ("Utilitarian Defense" 78). Additionally, I think that Kant's theory would be aided by distinguishing between moral *agents* and *patients*. Moral *agents* are those beings that can comprehend and reflect on morality and thus are held to some moral obligations as a result of their direct involvement in the moral spectrum. Moral *patients* are beings such as infants or non-human animals, who are not able to observe or comprehend morality, and thus are not responsible for committing morally wrong acts. This distinction helps to explain why we think that harming others is wrong, but we do not blame infants for slapping their mother or father in the same way that we would blame an adult human for slapping another human. Additionally, this explains why beings that have no moral responsibilities or are not moral patients can still deserve moral consideration – just because a domesticated dog cannot understand morality, we generally think that it would be wrong not to extend moral consideration to it (e.g. consider its pain and pleasure,

consider its welfare and happiness, consider its quality of life, etc.) for its lack of understanding alone.

Noting these challenges, it seems that Kant's argument could be better by being synthesized with a distinction about moral patients. His categorical imperative could be reconstructed to assert that we must treat any *moral patient* always as an end and never merely as a means. It is important to note that although moral patients cannot be held morally accountable for any of their behaviors, they are still "conscious and sentient [and can experience pleasure and pain]" (Regan 83). Granting the points made in this section, one can see that animals are relevantly similar to other moral patients to which we extend moral considerations and thus, we ought to extend moral considerations to animals.

If one has been following along with my arguments thus far and granted the above points, they will have granted that animals deserve similar moral consideration to that of humans due to their relevant similarity. However, there are surely considerations that we offer to humans but not animals. For example, we would never consider a dog's right to enter into a marriage, be awarded the liberty of free speech, or its opportunity for education. This is simply because of the type of being that a dog is – there are certainly discrepancies between how we ought to *treat* humans and animals, but perhaps fewer between how we ought to *consider* humans and animals morally. Animals in the animal agriculture industry are similar to humans in the sense that they feel pain and pleasure and are capable of being harmed due to pain and deprivation of pleasure ("Do Animals Feel Pain?" 2). It seems like, then, a breach of violation of bodily integrity to an animal in the animal agriculture industry would be morally impermissible for the same reasons that a violation of a human's bodily integrity would be impermissible. Additionally, it seems

that a violation of bodily integrity in the human case is only a violation if consent isn't given. If I consent to your seeing my naked body, then it doesn't seem like anything harmful or morally wrong has happened if you then see my naked body (assuming I am able to give consent and no one else would be harmed in the process). However, an animal can *never* give any sort of consent. Thus, it seems like any bodily violation or use of any animal would be morally wrong. This becomes particularly worrisome when one considers the gendered issues within the dairy and egg industries.

### **A Feminist Perspective on the Dairy and Egg Industries**

As we have seen from past research, nearly all the animals involved in the dairy and egg industries are female, used specifically for their female bodies to produce for the demands of humans. There are a few exceptions, mainly male animals which produce semen to continue the process of insemination, pregnancy, birth, production, etc. However, we have also noted that all these instances of pregnancy are non-consensual and therefore a violation of bodily integrity - in this case, rape. Reproductive rights are difficult to discuss in terms of animals since reproductive rights imply debates about abortions, types of reproduction, relationships in which reproduction is permissible, and other issues that are irrelevant to animals. However, it seems that what reproductive rights are most essentially based in are autonomy and bodily integrity. For example, abortion debates at the base of it seem to be concerned with under which conditions a woman may do something to her body, and under which conditions others may *impose* on her bodily integrity and autonomy by coercing or otherwise forcing her to use her body in a certain way. Cows in the dairy industry are forcibly impregnated with no possibility of consent and forced to produce much more milk and under much more strenuous

conditions than normal. If cows and humans can both feel pains and pleasures, and are both capable of reproducing in these similar ways, then it seems like it would be impermissible to rape, enslave, and harm one in terms of its reproduction, while we think that those acts would be horrendous to the other. Additionally, this violation of bodily integrity seems to contradict our reconstruction of Kant's categorical imperative, which requires that we always treat morally relevant beings as morally relevant and not merely a means to our own pleasures. When we use cows in the dairy industry for milk and cheese, we violently breach their bodily rights.

Some may ask: But what of humane farms? There are some farms across the world where animals are not raped/abused and are allowed to walk free on lots of land and their welfare is very much more considered. Are those instances of animal agriculture morally permissible? To answer I would say that in either case - the industrial *or* humane farm - we still are breaching the requirements of our restated categorical imperative. People generally think that stealing is wrong, but it seems like there could be degrees of the wrongness of stealing. For example, it would be wrong for me to steal a painting from your house just because I thought it looked nice. It's wrong because that item is not my property and the owner of the property did not give their consent to my taking it. However, it seems like it would be more wrong for me to steal something that was intended and possibly *necessary* for another being's happiness or survival. For example, if you had no means of providing yourself with food for survival and I took your only amount of food, it seems like I did something more morally wrong than if I stole your painting. This is the relevant case of the dairy cow and her calf. Even on the humane farm, the dairy cow is used for her body and reproductive system and her calves are

denied the milk, which is essential to their health and early development, just as with human babies (Amaral-Phillips 2-6). Thus, even the humane farm involves undermining the autonomy and moral value of a being when a calf or cow is deprived of something necessary to its health or survival. This to me seems to be a feminist issue, especially in lieu of ecofeminism, which claims that there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature (which includes animals) (Warren 594). The literal enslavement of millions of animals per year for the use of their reproductive systems seems wrong, particularly considering the moral standing of animals and our considerations on these issues in relations to human women. Those committed to the right of bodily integrity of human women are now faced with a considerable problem if they also enjoy milk, cheese, yogurt, or the like. Could contributing to a system, which harnesses beings for human uses with no regard to the autonomy, rights, and pain of the beings involved, be morally inconsistent for feminists? Is this a form of contributing to, or supporting, the patriarchy? Dairy is not the only thing at stake here, for the egg industry falls prey to similar challenges.

The egg industry, like the dairy industry, relies on female animals to continue production. A chicken's egg, like any other female animals' egg, is the product of the menstrual/reproductive cycle. The egg industry on a massive scale seems to meet the same objections that the dairy farm does. In order to continue production, hens are kept without their consent and used as breeding machines to produce eggs for the use of humans. This use of animals seems to contradict the restated categorical imperative, since we cannot receive consent from chickens or hens in the industry and we extend to them with little moral consideration. The egg industry also appears to violate bodily integrity

of the hens involved, since they do not have access to their offspring nor do they have a choice in their own reproduction, but are forced to reproduce and produce eggs.

Thus, anyone concerned with gendered issues between humans ought not support the dairy or egg industries. If one were to hold that any violation of bodily integrity including rape was wrong, then they must also hold that the dairy industry is inherently wrong as well and ought to be abolished. Additionally, if anyone were to hold that it is wrong to harm or use a being that is capable of experiencing harms/benefits, then they would also be required to hold that the egg industry is wrong since it treats the morally valuable beings involved as mere tools for our own pleasures, and not as autonomous morally valuable beings. Therefore, anyone who thinks that consent, rape, or bodily integrity are key feminist issues, ought to think that these industries are morally impermissible to support and ought to be abolished.

### **Limits to My Arguments/Call for Further Research**

It is worth noticing that I accepted a humane farm objection in the case of the dairy industry, but not in the case of the egg industry. I do this because it seems as though the dairy industry could not be justified based on the necessary conditions for producing dairy and the deprivations suffered by offering humans said dairy rather than needy calves. However, there are cases in which it seems that the egg industry could be justified. The distinction lies in what is necessary for a flourishing, happy, pleasurable life. In the case of the dairy cow, it seems that the life of the calf could be considerably worse if it did not get the nutrients from its mother's milk in the early stages of its development. However, a chicken's egg (when unfertilized) has no potential to bring benefits or harms to the chicken itself or any others (all other things being equal) – it is

merely an object with no moral value and no potential to become sentient or capable of feeling pain. Granting this, it seems that there could be instances in which eating eggs or owning chickens for egg production could be permissible. If one were to acquire a hen in an ethical fashion (say, rescue it from a factory farm) and allow it the freedom to wander freely and pursue a pleasurable life, while also collecting its eggs for which it has no use, it seems that this could be morally permissible.

In addition, I have argued exclusively for the abolishment of the dairy and egg industries based on feminist and human rights issues within them. However, there may be many other industries or practices which violate animals in similar ways to those that I have argued for here. For example, although there are no obvious gendered issues involved with the practice of keeping animals in zoos, it seems to undermine their autonomy and moral value, which is required in my restatement of the categorical imperative. An interesting question I'd like to raise to readers would be this: what other sorts of institutions or practices would be considered morally impermissible after considering my formulation about what makes an act right or wrong in regard to non-human animals?

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the dairy and egg industries oppress and dominate animals in ways that are conceptually similar to our domination and oppression of women in a patriarchal system. Furthermore, the dairy and egg industries oppress animals in gendered ways, showing more than a conceptual, but a literal link between gendered issues and animal rights within these industries. Therefore, the egg and dairy industries ought to be abolished because they are inconsistent with human rights.

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