

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
April 23, 2015

Ethics and Animals

Peter Singer
Princeton University

Part I: Past

Buddhism: First Precept

- **“I will abstain from killing sentient beings.”**
- **“He dwells with his rod laid down, his knife laid down, scrupulous, merciful, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings.”**
- Oral tradition from Northern India, first written in the Pali Canon, from 29 BCE.

First Precept: Mahayana Version:

- **“As all Buddhas refrained from killing until the end of their lives, so I too will refrain from killing until the end of my life.”**

如諸佛盡壽不殺生，我某甲亦盡壽不殺生

Judaism: *Genesis*

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

The Greek Tradition: Aristotle

- **“Plants exist for the sake of animals, and brute beasts for the sake of man...” Aristotle, *Politics***

Thomas Aquinas

“It matters not how man behaves to animals, because God has subjected all things to man’s power.”

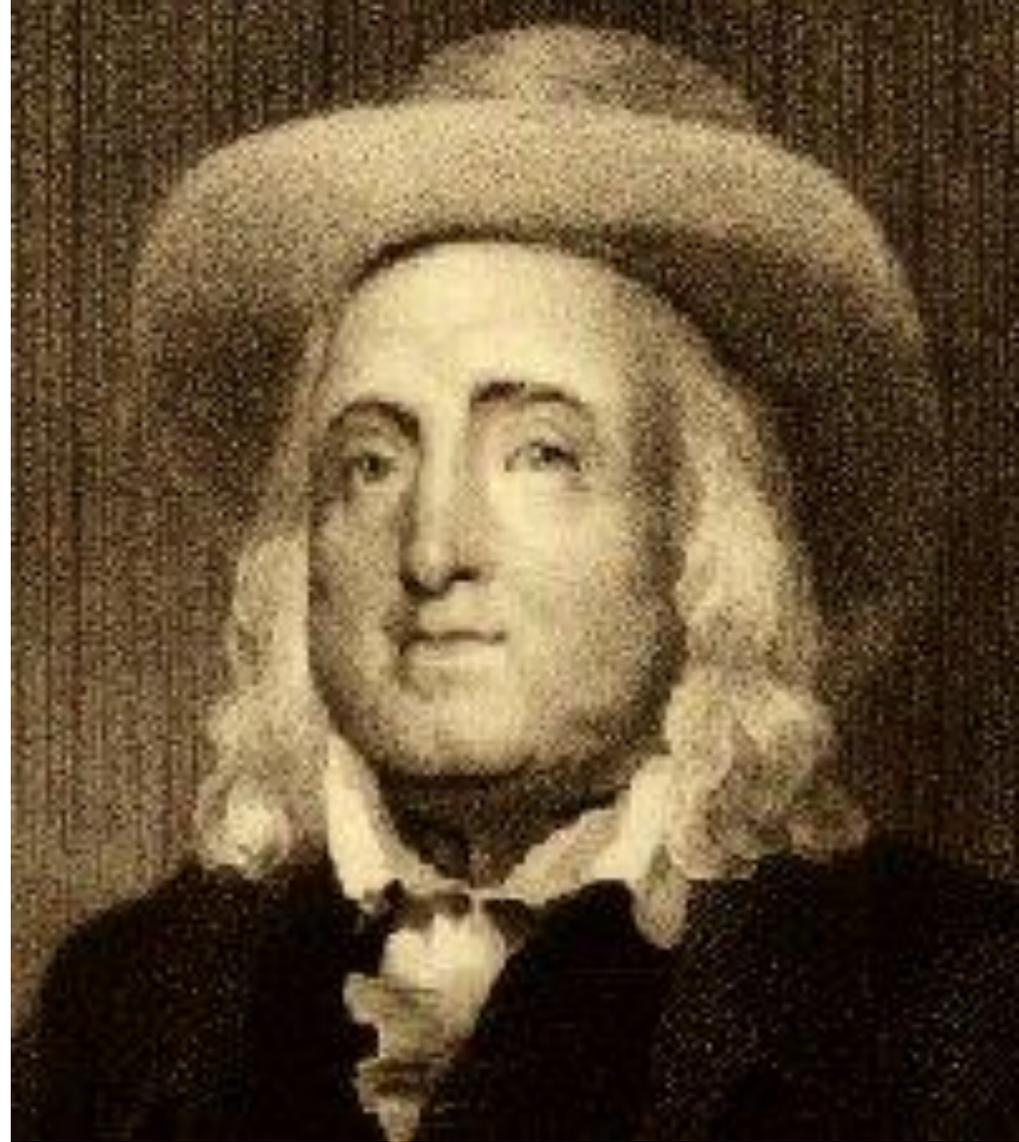
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

Immanuel Kant

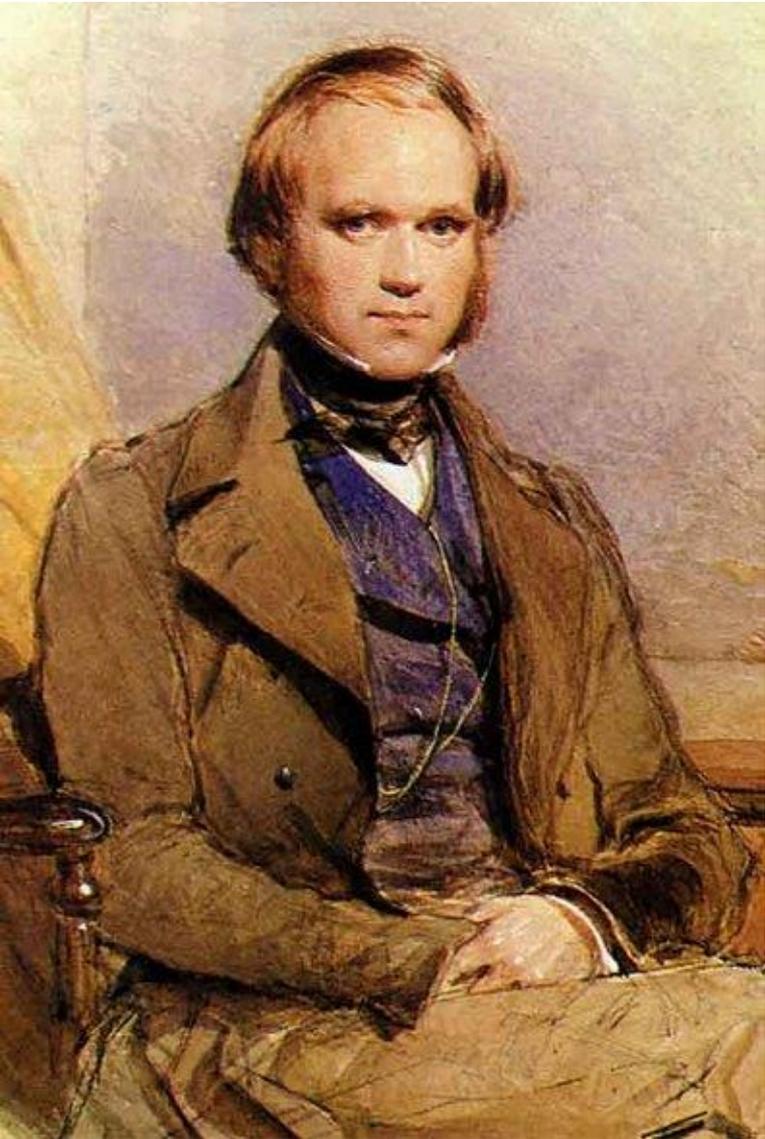
- **“So far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious, and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man.”**
Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*.

“The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?”

**Jeremy Bentham
1748-1832**



*Introduction to the Principles Of Morals
and Legislation*



**Man in his arrogance
thinks himself a great
work worthy of the
interposition of a
deity, more humble & I
believe truer to
consider him created
from animals.**

**Charles Darwin, Notebook B,
1837-8**

Darwin: *The Descent of Man*

... the lower animals, like man, manifestly feel pleasure and pain, happiness and misery. Happiness is never better exhibited than by young animals, such as puppies, kittens, lambs, etc., when playing together, like our own children.

The Descent of Man, (1871) ch.3.

a. Ethics

Part II: Present

Today's mainstream view

- We have duties to be kind to animals and to avoid being cruel to them. But we do not have to give the same weight to their interests that we give to human interests – even where the interests are similar.

The mainstream view (in English-speaking societies) condemns this:





**But not
this.**

Debeaking, or “beak trimming” is standard for laying hens and breeder hens in the egg and poultry industries. Chickens have very sensitive nerves in their beaks. No pain relief is used.

A Better View: Equal Consideration

- **Animals (vertebrates, at least) have interests. Why give less consideration to the interests of a being because it is not a member of our species?**
- **Equal Consideration of Interests – requires us to give equal weight to similar interests, irrespective of species.**

Rejecting Speciesism

- **Speciesism is a bias against other beings, simply because they are not members of our species.**
- **Like racism and sexism, speciesism gives lower moral status to an entire group, irrespective of individual characteristics.**
- **Like race and sex, species is, in itself, not morally relevant to moral status**

Consciousness

- Consciousness *is* relevant for moral status.
- Are some nonhuman animals conscious?
- *Evidence that they are:*
- Anatomical and physiological similarities with us
- Behavioral parallels in appropriate circumstances
- Shared evolutionary history

Which animals are conscious?

- Mammals and birds?
- Vertebrates?
- Some invertebrates, eg octopus?
- Crustacea, eg lobster, prawns, crabs?
- Insects?
- Clams, oysters?

And for those that are conscious, what is their consciousness like?

Equal consideration of interests does not assume that different beings have similar interests.



Open Questions (1)

- **Is painlessly killing animals wrong?
Even if they will be replaced by
other animals living good lives?**



Roger Scruton on killing animals

“There is a real distinction, for a human being, between timely and untimely death. To be ‘cut short’ before one’s time is a waste- even a tragedy...No such thoughts apply to domestic cattle. To be killed at thirty months is not intrinsically more tragic than to be killed at forty, fifty, or sixty.”

Roger Scruton, “The Conscientious Carnivore” in Steve Sapontzis, ed, *Food for Thought*

Open Questions (2)

- **What are the experiences of animals like?**
- **How do we weigh the pleasures and pains of chimpanzees, pigs, dogs, cows, chickens and fish against those of normal humans?**

Open Questions (3)

- **Should we try to reduce the suffering of wild animals? If so, how?**
- **Is there intrinsic value in nature that counts against our interference?**

b.

Mainstream Practice and Ethical progress

Number of vertebrate animals killed annually in research, worldwide: approximately 100 million.

Number of vertebrate land animals killed annually in food production worldwide: 60 billion (UN FAO estimate)

In other words, food production uses roughly 600 times more animals [*without including fish*].

How do these animals live?



(C) Diana Simpson 2004



Sow Stalls

- **1999 Banned in UK**
- **2001 EU gives notice of ban by 2013**
- **2002-8 Banned in Florida, Arizona, Oregon, Colorado, & California (with various phase-out periods)**
- **2013 EU ban comes into effect**
- **2015 California ban comes into effect.**





Laying Hen Cages

- **1999 EU gives notice of ban (in effect from 2012).**
- **2008 Banned in California (in effect from 1/1/2015)**
- **2009 Banned in Michigan**



Meat chickens

Less space per bird than a standard US quarto sheet of paper.

Fish

- Number of wild fish caught annually for human consumption: **1 – 2.7 trillion** [www.fishcount.org]
- By-catch not included in this figure
- There is strong evidence that fish do feel pain (See V. Braithwaite, *Do Fish Feel Pain?*)
- None of these fish were killed humanely.

Part III: Future

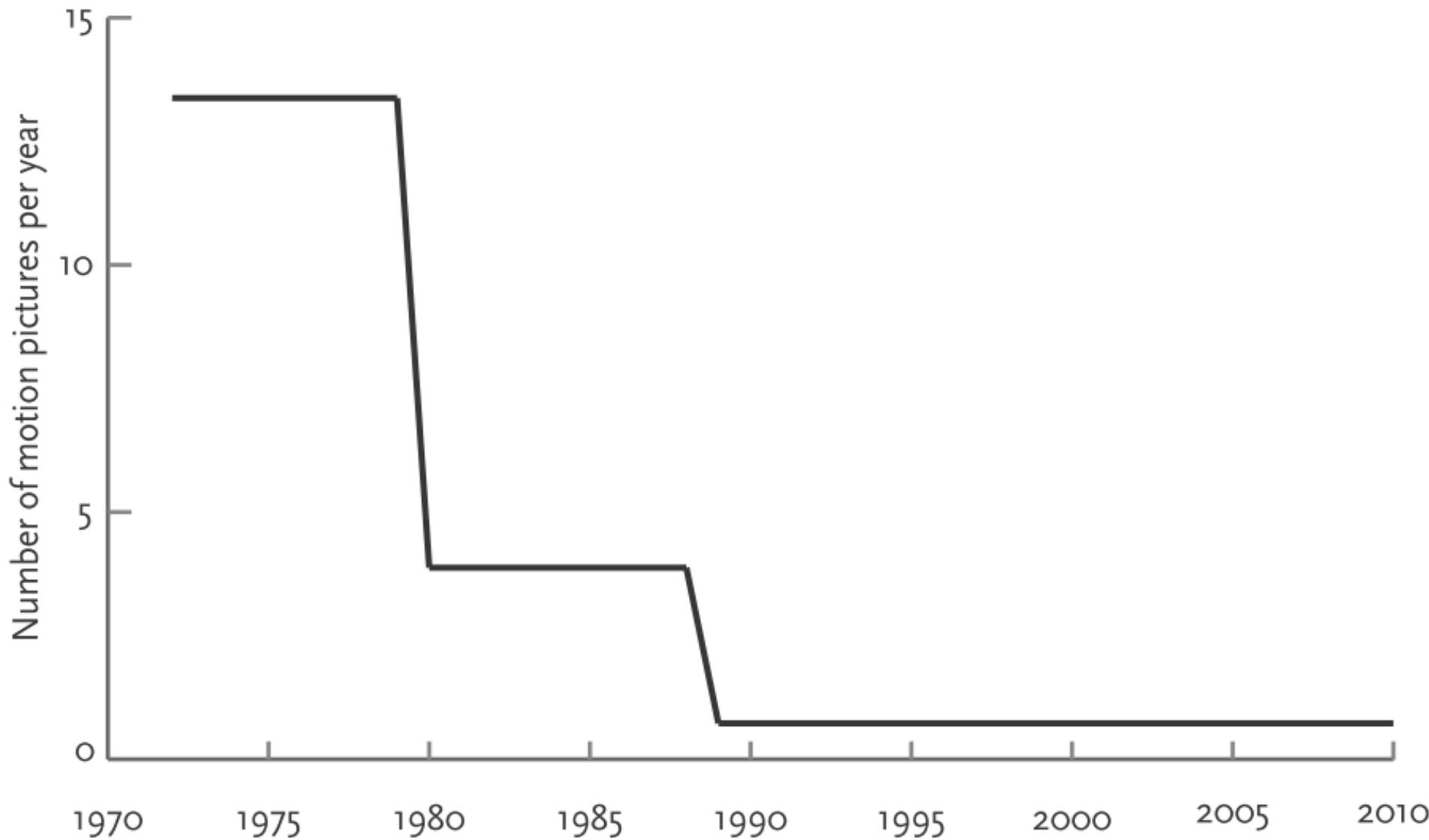


FIGURE 7–27. Number of motion pictures per year in which animals were harmed, 1972–2010

Source: American Humane Association, 2010.

From Steven Pinker, *Better Angels of Our Nature*.

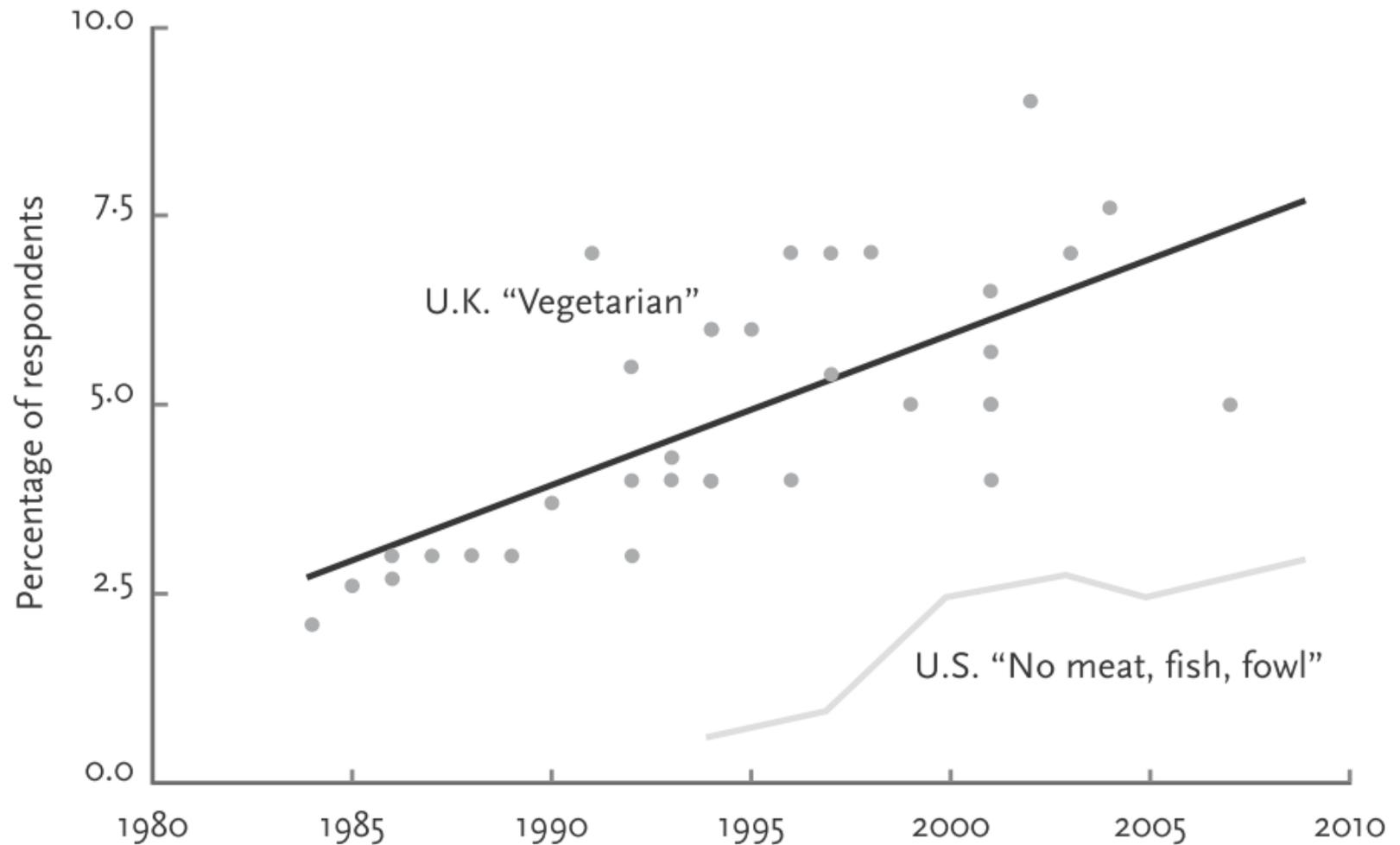


FIGURE 7–28. Vegetarianism in the United States and United Kingdom, 1984–2009

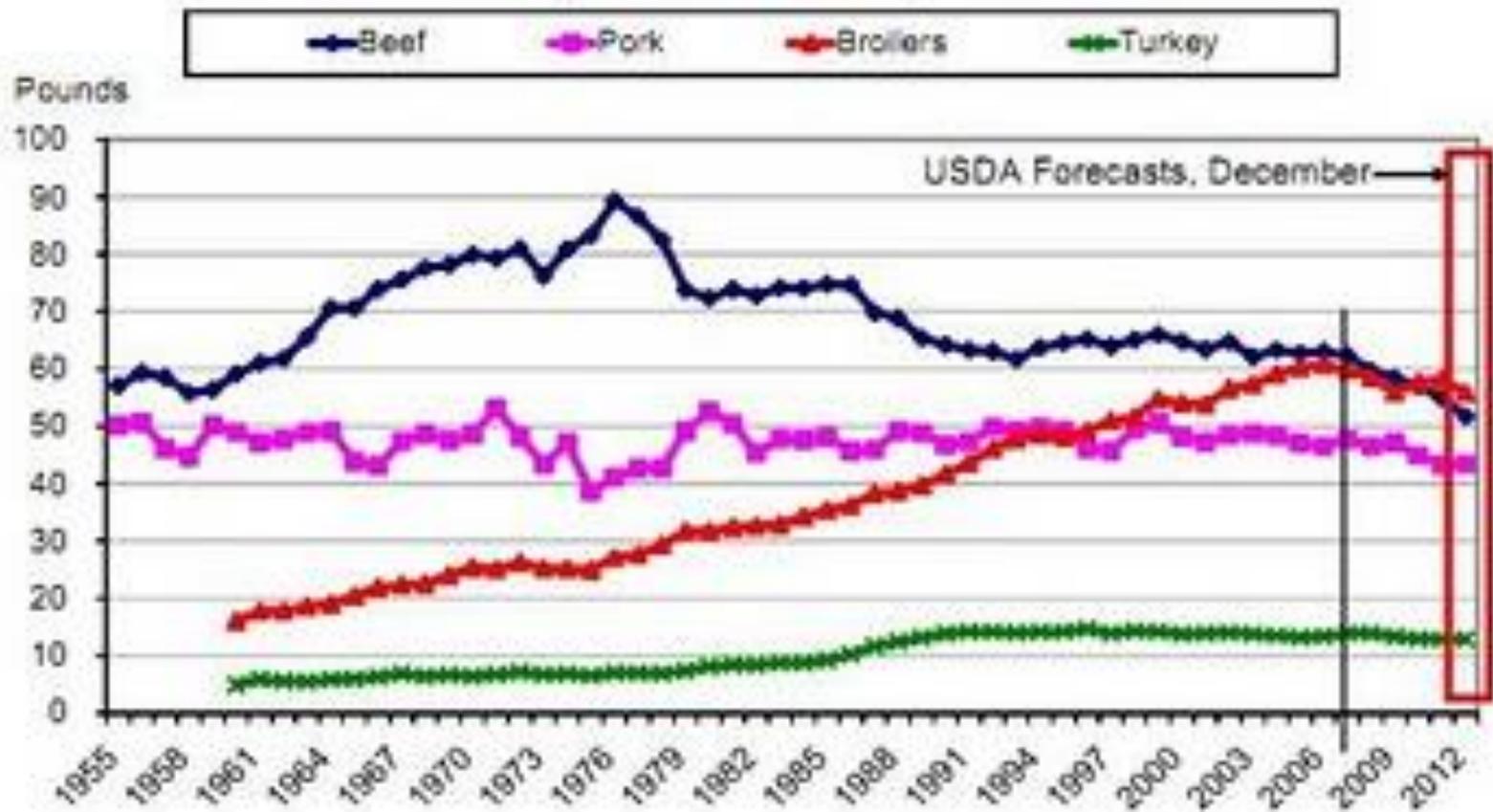
Increase in Vegetarianism, UK and US, 1984-2009

Source: UK: Vegetarian Society, US: Vegetarian Resource Center

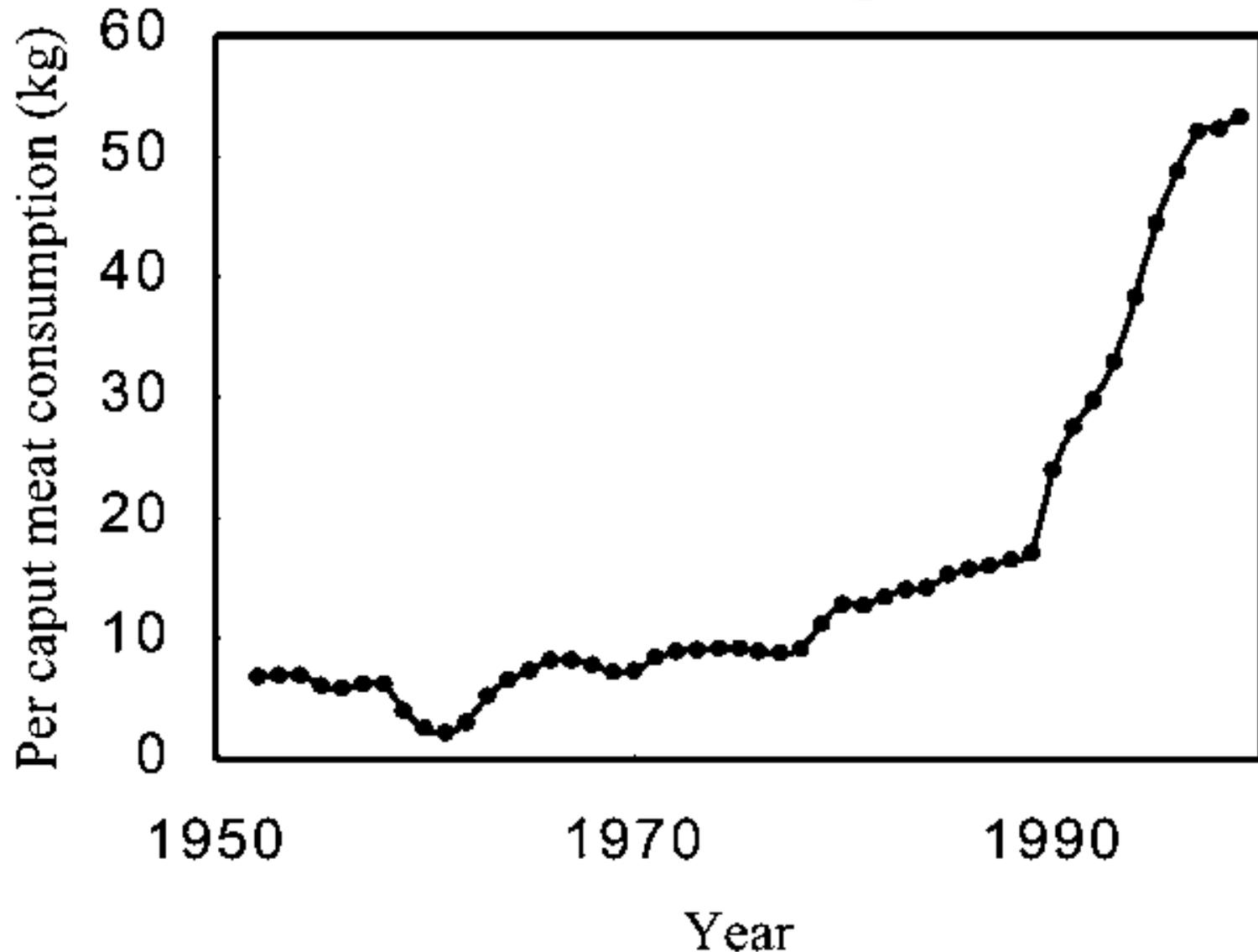
Compiled by Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*.

Americans are eating less meat

U.S. MEAT & POULTRY CONSUMPTION, PER CAPITA, BONELESS, BY SPECIES



Chinese are eating more meat



Source: **GuoTingshuang and Yang Zhenhai**, Ministry of Agriculture, China
<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y1936E/y1936e05.htm>

Factory Farming: Feeding the World?

- Globally, about 35% of grain fed to animals, including 70% of US grain.
- Soybeans and fishmeal are also fed to animals.
- It takes 6 kgs of feed protein, on average, to produce 1 kg of meat protein

New Diseases from Factory Farms



Hong Kong January 2014, chickens culled to prevent spread of H7N9 bird flu

What about fish?

- **Wild-caught fish**

- Lack of humane killing
- Killing in itself
- Sustainability

- **Aquaculture**

Pain and suffering during raising

Lack of humane killing

Killing in itself

Where does the food come from? Sustainability for carnivorous species

So what about farms on which animals are well-treated?



The most perplexing ethical issue....

- Is a short life, followed by a humane death, better than no life at all?

A Utilitarian answer...

- Perhaps it is, at least in theory...
- But in practice, there are problems.

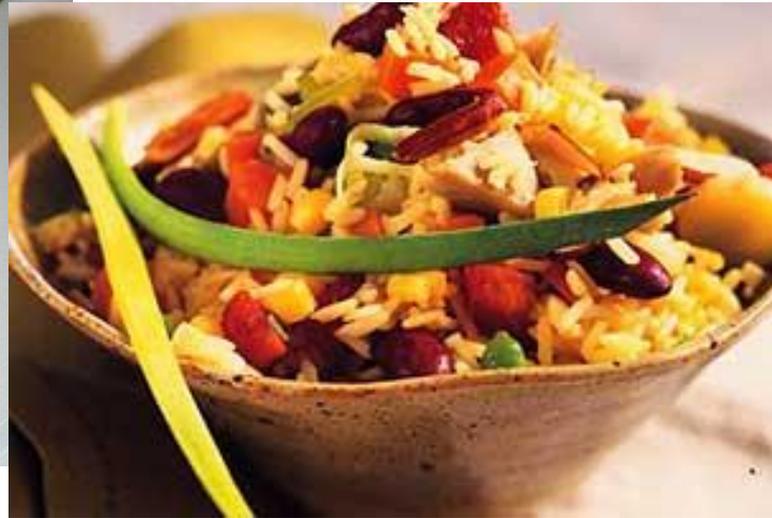
1. Slaughter

- Slaughterhouses are under constant pressure to kill as many animals as possible in a short time. Often regulations prevent even humane farmers from slaughtering their cattle on the farm.

2. Maintaining standards

- In a commercial system, there is always pressure to reduce costs. If animals are still things to be bred, raised and sold, it is hard to imagine that the highest standards will be maintained.

3. Diet & Your Carbon Footprint



Average U.S. consumer switching from a typical American diet to a vegan diet with the same number of calories saves 1.5 tons of carbon per year.

[Eshel, G. and P. A. Martin, 2006: Diet, energy and global warming, *Earth Interactions*, in press.]

UN Food and Agriculture Organization Report

- “the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO₂ equivalent – 18 percent – than transport.”
- *FAO, Livestock's Long Shadow, 2006*





Grass Doesn't Help!

Grass-fed cattle lead better lives. But they are at least *50% more* carbon-intensive than grain-fed cattle.

Nathan Pelletier, “Neither Fish Nor Fowl — Planning Dinner Around the Carbon Intensity of Protein Sources.” American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting, Chicago (Feb. 15, 2009).

So are there any
ethical animal foods?

Maybe this...



But there is an
easy,
dilemma-free
alternative...





Download from
Download.com



Download from
Download.com

