

Virtual handout 1: Fracking and Factory Farming. Ethical or unethical?

Utilitarian and Kantian analyses

1. Factory farming/ fracking: a Utilitarian analysis

Utilitarianism identifies the right thing to do as being an action that causes the greatest good for the greatest number of people. What does this mean? The theory needs to be introduced in detail.

Key ethical issues on these topics: cheap food, immediately available energy versus environmental/animal welfare

A. Who are we taking into account when we are talking about 'the greatest number'? Factory farming as we know provides cheap food for a much bigger group of people than conventional forms of farming. Fracking provides income, jobs, and more immediately available energy to groups needing energy in society (most of us).

i. do we have evidence of these benefits? For example the job creation/Treasury income argument re fracking; the meat consumption argument in factory farming - do people need to eat as much meat as they do, what would happen to food supply if we relied exclusively on other forms of farming ?

ii. who has been left out of this calculation? If you included societies globally, or future generations- how would that affect the argument? Why would you include/not include?

B. How are we evaluating the level of pleasure v pain with regard to these benefits? How do we compare economic with non economic value? Access to meat versus access to sufficient food sources? The higher pleasures of eating good food and the pleasure of having enough to eat? The impact of increased numbers of hurricanes and typhoons with the availability of potentially cheap energy?

C. How are we evaluating in terms of short term and long term consequences, and based on what evidence? Would you argue that the short term requirement to eat outweighs longer term environmental costs? To eat what?

D. How likely are these long and short term consequences- again based on what evidence? Could it be argued that in the short term we know that we are going to run out of energy/food, and longer term climate effects are less certain? Are they?

E. Both of these topics raise the issue of moral consideration- who/what can be taken into account when evaluating an action in Western ethics. For instance does the pain of animals count in the evaluation of pleasure and pain? If so- why? How does environmental damage count as 'pain' except in relation to human beings?

Having addressed all these issues do fracking/factory farming create the greatest good for the greatest number of people? If yes: they are ethical from a utilitarian position. If no: they are unethical from a utilitarian position.

2. Fracking/factory farming- Kantian analysis

Kantian ethics look at the act (eg the actions that contribute to factory farming) and asks do I have a duty to act in this way?

How can you tell that you have a duty? Again the theory needs to be introduced in detail- referring to three key ideas that constitute ways of identifying a duty that must categorically be followed.

A. Referencing Velasquez 2012: you should ask: is this action **universalizable**? Could everybody act in this way without disrupting society? (Note this has equivalence to Crane and Matten maxim 1). The usual question to illustrate Kant's idea is that of lying. Could everybody lie/refuse to tell the truth without disrupting society. The usual response is 'no'. If everyone could lie how could there be a society at all, because there could be no trust.

Similarly - could all societies/companies/farms adopt fracking/factory farming without disrupting society? What reason/evidence do you have?

a. If no, let's assume that you have evidence that fracking and factory farming both disrupt society (in different ways) and thus fail the universalizability test- then you need go no further. Neither action is justifiable from a Kantian point of view.

b. If yes then a Kantian analysis would say that fracking and factory farming are universalizable. The action passes the first element of the Kantian test. Move on to the next element of the test.

B. the reason (s)for action must be one(s) that the person deciding on the action would accept as a reason for being treated in the same way. **Reversibility**. (Note this has equivalence to Crane and Matten Maxim 3).

Again referring to lying/refusing to tell the truth: Jill decides not to tell the truth about something. Would her reason for doing so be acceptable to her, if the situation were reversed, and she was the person being lied to?

So- Jill decides to be employed in fracking and eat factory farmed food. Would she accept the reasons for doing so if other people undertook these activities? Based on what reason/evidence?

If no, if as a rational person trying to identify right from wrong, she would not accept these reasons then the actions fail the second element of Kant's test. Because even though universalizable, the reasons do not establish actions that we should undertake. So again neither action is justifiable from a Kantian point of view.

If yes- then what about respect?

C. does this action treat people/others as means to an end, rather than end in themselves? Does it lack **respect**?

So- in terms of lying, lying to rational people is not treating them with respect, because in valuing them as rational, as human beings, as valuable in themselves, they need to be told the truth.

Fracking/farming and respect. This is an interesting discussion in terms of Kant. An initial position might be/could be that both fracking and factory farming DO respect HUMAN BEINGS by meeting their energy and food rights and because that is what they would freely and rationally choose. If that is the case then a Kantian analysis CANNOT oppose either fracking or factory farming as unethical on this basis. If at this point you have three 'yeses' with regard to universalizability, reversibility and respect: then both fracking and factory farming are ethical from a Kantian point of view.

But- is it respectful of human beings as consumers/workers to enable them to condone or enact cruelty against animals by producing cheaper food? Is it respectful of consumers/workers as human beings to assume that they have no concerns about cruelty? Or in the case of energy, assume that consumers/workers have no concerns about the environment? How persuasive are these arguments? If persuasive then both factory farming and fracking fail the final element of the test-respect.

If not yet persuasive how about this approach: we know that Kant did not see animals/ecological systems as valuable as human beings because they lack rationality. But that does not mean that he felt that we should not respect them at all, that they were not worthy of any moral consideration. As a result we should still accord them a degree of respect and adopt practices that respect animals in terms of adequate treatment/ecological systems in terms of capacity to sustain themselves, and that respects humans in supporting them to live in a society that does not adopt cruel practices/environmental degradation. If you are persuaded by this argument then neither factory farming nor fracking pass Kant's test of a categorical duty because they lack respect and cannot be actions that we have a responsibility to accept. In other words they are unethical.