

Christopher Schlottmann and Jeff Sebo. *Food, Animals, and the Environment: An Ethical Approach*. Routledge 2019. 256 pp. \$150.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781138801110); \$39.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781138801127).

Food, Animals, and the Environment: An Ethical Approach, by Christopher Schlottmann and Jeff Sebo, is a clearly written, accessible introduction to a variety of topics and issues in food ethics. Though a textbook, *Food, Animals, and the Environment* (which I'll henceforth refer to as *FAE*) does more than just explain concepts, arguments, and facts – it also makes a significant contribution to an established but still developing field. Food ethics is an interdisciplinary area that lies at the intersection between animal ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, and political philosophy (among other areas). Although other books have been written about it, many of them are anthologies, and thus they lack the systematicity of a single or co-authored text. Furthermore, none of the non-anthological books that have so far been published bring together the particular array of topics and issues covered in *FAE*. Schlottmann and Sebo thus contribute to the development of food ethics by incorporating these topics and issues into a single book, and by doing such a great job of showing how they're related to one another.

Though *FAE*'s chapters aren't explicitly divided into subsections, it's appropriate to think of them as falling under three main groupings. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 provide the theoretical and conceptual background needed to evaluate issues in food ethics. In addition to the most prominent theories in normative ethics (35-45), topics covered by these chapter include the concept of naturalness (11-17), methodology and the use of thought experiments in moral theory (30-5), and different accounts of moral status and their implications for the scope of the moral community (49-57). Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are largely (but not entirely) empirical – they provide information about the different ways agriculture impacts animals, the environment, and human beings; as well as a comparison of the impacts that different agricultural systems have, e.g., industrial agriculture, organic agriculture, and plant-based agriculture. And chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 each respectively cover different, but closely related applied ethical topics – specifically the ethics of food production, food consumption, legal food activism, and illegal food activism.

Though the chapters preceding Chapter 8 are valuable in part because they provide background material that's helpful for assessing the applied ethical issues covered in the third part of the book, the authors correctly note that the different parts can be read independently of one another. They note that '...Chapters 2, 3, and 4 can serve as an introduction to moral theory and moral status...[and] Chapters 5, 6, and 7 can serve as an introduction to industrial and non-industrial food systems' (5). Similarly, the applied ethical chapters in the third part of the book can be read on their own, particularly by readers who already possess some familiarity with moral theory and the impacts of different food systems.

One of *FAE*'s virtues is its commitment to helping readers intelligently formulate their own opinions. When approaching a given issue, the authors usually proceed by identifying the main positions available and the considerations relevant to deciding between them. Considerations often discussed include (but are not exhausted by) the major normative ethical theories canvassed in the first section of the book (Utilitarianism, Kantianism, etc), and whether some of them would likely support one side of the issue while others would likely support the other side. Of particular note, however, is the authors' open mindedness about the implications of any given normative ethical theory, as well as about the possibilities for combining and/or balancing the available positions in creative ways. For example, when discussing the different possible goals of food activism,

Schlottmann and Sebo note that two major competing possibilities are to advocate for the abolition of animal agriculture or for stricter regulations (210-11). Though they note that Kantians tend to be attracted to abolition and that Utilitarians tend to be attracted to regulation, they also note that a case for regulation could very well be made from a Kantian perspective, specifically a case for regulations strict enough to (arguably) render animal agriculture consistent with animal rights, and that a case for abolition could very well be made from a Utilitarian perspective (Perhaps advocating for abolition is likely to produce better consequences over the long term than advocating for regulation?). What's more, they note that abolition and regulation can productively be thought of as opposite points on a spectrum, rather than as a pair of mutually exclusive alternatives. Whatever food system it is that we think we should be advocating for, it's either going to be closer to or further from industrial animal agriculture. Food systems closer to industrial animal agriculture, e.g., free range animal agriculture, can be thought of as regulationist, whereas food systems further from industrial animal agriculture, e.g., entirely plant-based agriculture, can be thought of as abolitionist. Considering that various possibilities exist along the middle of this spectrum, Schlottmann and Sebo invite readers to think about *how* abolitionist or *how* regulationist food activism should be, instead of *whether* food activism should be abolitionist or *whether* it should be regulationist. An example of the sort of mid-spectrum possibility Schlottmann and Sebo have in mind is communities organized in the manner Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka envision, i.e., intentional communities that involve some animal labor and some animal products, but where animals are respected and receive an equitable share of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation ([Zoopolis](#), 134-42).

In so far as *FAE* is concerned specifically with animals, its focus is understandably on domesticated animals who are involved in agriculture. There is some discussion of wild animals, though, and my impression of that discussion is somewhat mixed. On the one hand, I appreciate the authors' realism about the hardships that wild animals face. Writers working in applied ethics sometimes have a rosy view of life in the wild, but as Schlottmann and Sebo note, the lives that most wild animals live is worse than the lives that most animals live on free range farms. Unlike animals on free range farms, wild animals lack easy access to food or shelter, and they aren't protected from predation (164-5). Of course, from an animal rights perspective, free range farms are still morally problematic – they restrict liberties (albeit less so than industrial farms), involve questionable breeding practices, and kill many animals, too (166-7). In so far as the case against such practices depends upon using a baseline for comparison, though – a baseline in light of which animals on free range farms are living worse lives than they otherwise could be are thus appropriately thought of as harmed – that baseline can't, as the authors note, be life in the wild, since life in the wild is worse. A better baseline is life in the sort of intentional communities that Donaldson and Kymlicka envision (168).

On the other hand, Schlottmann and Sebo don't explore the implications that wild animal suffering may have for the relationship between animal and environmental ethics. Considering that *FAE* lies at the intersection of these areas, some discussion is called for. I have no doubt that to some extent the authors are right to claim that our concern for animals and our concern for the environment are mutually supportive (1-3). Industrial agriculture, and many of its alternatives, have a significant negative impact on domesticated animals and on the environment, and thus an interest in protecting animals and protecting the environment overlap when we focus on domesticated animals specifically. When we focus on wild animals, though, some possible tension emerges. Traditionally, environmentalists have been concerned with minimizing our impact on the environment, though some are open to the idea that we should try to impact it in ways that promote environmental values such as biodiversity (14-15). By contrast, concern for wild animal suffering

suggests that we not only have environmental reasons to intervene, but that we should be intervening to improve wild animals' lives (for discussion, see Oscar Horta's '[Animal Suffering in Nature](#)' and my '[Animal Rights and the Problem of r-Strategists](#)'). Whether there's tension between promoting wild animal welfare, and promoting environmental values such as conservation or biodiversity, is a question worth highlighting. What's more, concern for wild animal suffering raises questions about whether the environmental impacts of animal agriculture should always be thought of as costs and nothing else. For example, suppose that animal agriculture causes the extinction of a species whose members normally live terrible lives (perhaps most of their young die painful deaths only shortly after being born). Would this be a bad thing or a good thing from a perspective concerned, at least in part, with wild animals' wellbeing? The answer depends on various factors – on whether this species' members typically experience more suffering than enjoyment over the course of their lives, on whether we use a consequentialist or a deontological approach, on the broader ecological consequences of the species' extinction, etc., but the fact that there's a real moral question here ought to be noted.

My concerns about the implications of wild animal suffering aside, *FAE* is a comprehensive and accessible book that simultaneously manages to introduce and contribute to food ethics. I highly recommend it.

Kyle Johannsen, Trent University