Practical Ethics
Second Edition

PETER SINGER
Centre for Human Bioethics
Monash University

Cambridge University Press
atmosphere. Finally, the world's cattle are thought to produce about 20 per cent of the methane released into the atmosphere, and methane traps twenty-five times as much heat from the sun as carbon dioxide. Factory farming also produces methane because, unlike manure, dropped naturally in the fields, it does not decompose in the presence of oxygen. All of this amounts to a compelling reason, additional to that developed in Chapter 3, for a largely plant-based diet.

The emphasis on frugality and a simple life does not mean that an environmental ethic frowns upon pleasure, but that the pleasures it values do not come from conspicuous consumption. They come, instead, from warm personal and sexual relationships, from being close to children and friends, from conversation, from sports and recreations that are in harmony with our environment instead of being harmful to it; from food that is not based on the exploitation of sentient creatures and does not cost the earth; from creative activity and work of all kinds; and (with due care so not to ruin precisely what is valued) from appreciating the unspoiled places in the world in which we live.

ENDS AND MEANS

We have examined a number of ethical issues. We have seen that many accepted practices are open to serious objections. What ought we to do about it? This, too, is an ethical issue. Here are four actual cases to consider.

Oskar Schindler was a German industrialist. During the war he ran a factory near Cracow, in Poland. At a time when Polish Jews were being sent to death camps, he assembled a labour force of Jewish inmates from concentration camps and the ghetto, considerably larger than his factory needed, and used several illegal strategies, including bribing members of the SS and other officials, to protect them. He spent his own money to buy food on the black market to supplement the inadequate official rations he obtained for his workers. By these methods he was able to save the lives of about 1,200 people.

In 1984 Dr Thomas Gennarelli directed a Head Injury Laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia. Members of an underground organisation called the Animal Liberation Front knew that Gennarelli inflicted head injuries on monkeys there and had been sold that the monkeys underwent the experiments without being properly anaesthetised. They also knew that Gennarelli and his collaborators videotaped their experiments, to provide a record of what happened during and after the injuries they inflicted. They tried to obtain further information through official channels but were unsuccessful. In May 1984, they broke into the laboratory at
night and found thirty-four videotapes. They then systematically destroyed laboratory equipment before leaving with the tapes. The tapes clearly showed conscious monkeys struggling as they were being strapped to an operating table where large injuries were inflicted; they also showed experimenters mocking and laughing at frightened animals about to be used in experiments. When an edited version of the tapes was released to the public, it produced widespread revulsion. Nevertheless, it took a further year of protests, culminating in a sit-in at the headquarters of the government organisation that was funding Gernscheir's experiments, before the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services ordered the experiments stopped.

In 1986 Joan Andrews entered an abortion clinic in Pensacola, Florida, and damaged a suction abortion apparatus. She refused to be represented in court, on the grounds that "the true defendants, the pre-born children, received none, and were killed without due process." Andrews was a supporter of Operation Rescue, an American organisation that takes its name, and its authority to act, from the biblical injunction to "rescue those who are drawn toward death and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter". Operation Rescue uses civil disobedience to shut down abortion clinics, thus, in its view, 'sparing the lives of unborn babies whom the Rescuers are morally pledged to defend'. Participants block the doors of the clinics to prevent physicians and pregnant women seeking abortion from entering. They attempt to dissuade pregnant women from approaching the clinic by 'sidewalk counseling' on the nature of abortion. Gary Leber, an Operation Rescue director, has said that, between 1987 and 1989 alone, as a direct result of such 'rescue missions', at least 421 women changed their minds about having abortions, and the children of these women, who would have been killed, are alive today.
Practical Ethics

took Gerrardelli's videotapes. Joan Andrews of Operation Rescue, and Bob Brown and those who joined him in front of the bulldozers in Tasmania's southwest were all breaking the law. Were they all acting wrongly? The question cannot be dealt with by invoking the simplistic formula: 'the end never justifies the means'. For all but the strictest adherent of an ethic of rules, the end sometimes does justify the means. Most people think that lying is wrong, other things being equal, yet think it right to lie in order to avoid causing unnecessary offence or embarrassment — for instance, when a well-meaning relative gives you a ludicrous vase for your birthday, and then asks if you really like it. If this relatively trivial end can justify lying, it is even more obvious that some important end — preventing a murder, or saving animals from great suffering — can justify lying. Thus the principle that the end cannot justify the means is easily breached. The difficult issue is not whether the end can ever justify the means, but which means are justified by which ends.

Stop reading here.

Individual Conscience and the Law

There are many people who are opposed to damming wild rivers, to the exploitation of animals, or to abortion, but who do not break the law in order to stop these activities. No doubt some members of the more conventional conservation, animal liberation, and anti-abortion organizations do not commit illegal acts because they do not wish to be fined or imprisoned; but others would be prepared to take the consequences of illegal acts. They refrain only because they respect and obey the moral authority of the law.

Who is right in this ethical disagreement? Are we under any moral obligation to obey the law, if the law protects and sanctions things we hold utterly wrong? A clear-cut answer to this question was given by the nineteenth-century American radical,