

Why is meat consumption a moral issue?

- The Recommendations for a Climate Tax on Beef in Denmark

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| Project: Ethical consumption



Could, in some situations, consumers be said to have a moral obligation to take ethical considerations into account when buying food?



Should, in some cases, regulatory instruments (prohibitions, taxes or labelling) be imposed instead of leaving the responsibility to the individual consumer?



Climate change and individual moral responsibility

- The food sector, and especially the rearing of cattle, causes climate change which results in severe harm to others
- Does that make individual consumers responsible for climate change?



| Doing harm and individual moral responsibility

❖ Atypical harm:

- distance in time and space between the act and its consequences

Acting independently, Jack and a large number of unacquainted people set in motion a chain of events that causes a large number of future people, who will live in another part of the world, from ever having bicycles (Jamieson, 2009).



| Doing harm and individual moral responsibility

❖ Atypical harm:

- distance in time and space between the act and its consequences
- ‘the problem of many hands’

A situation in which undesirable collective effects occur and makes it very hard to hold any individual reasonably responsible



| Doing harm and individual moral responsibility

❖ Atypical harm:

- distance in time and space between the act and its consequences
- ‘the problem of many hands’
- Individual acts do no harm

My individual act is neither necessary nor sufficient for global warming”
Therefore I as an individual am not morally obligated to avoid consumption with a large climate impact



| Harm and moral responsibility

Whether or not *individuals* have a moral responsibility to avoid causing climate change

Human collectives in the shape of governments and international organisations do

They are the entities who can take efficient steps to counter the harms caused by global warming; therefore they have a responsibility to do so.



Government intervention and personal freedom



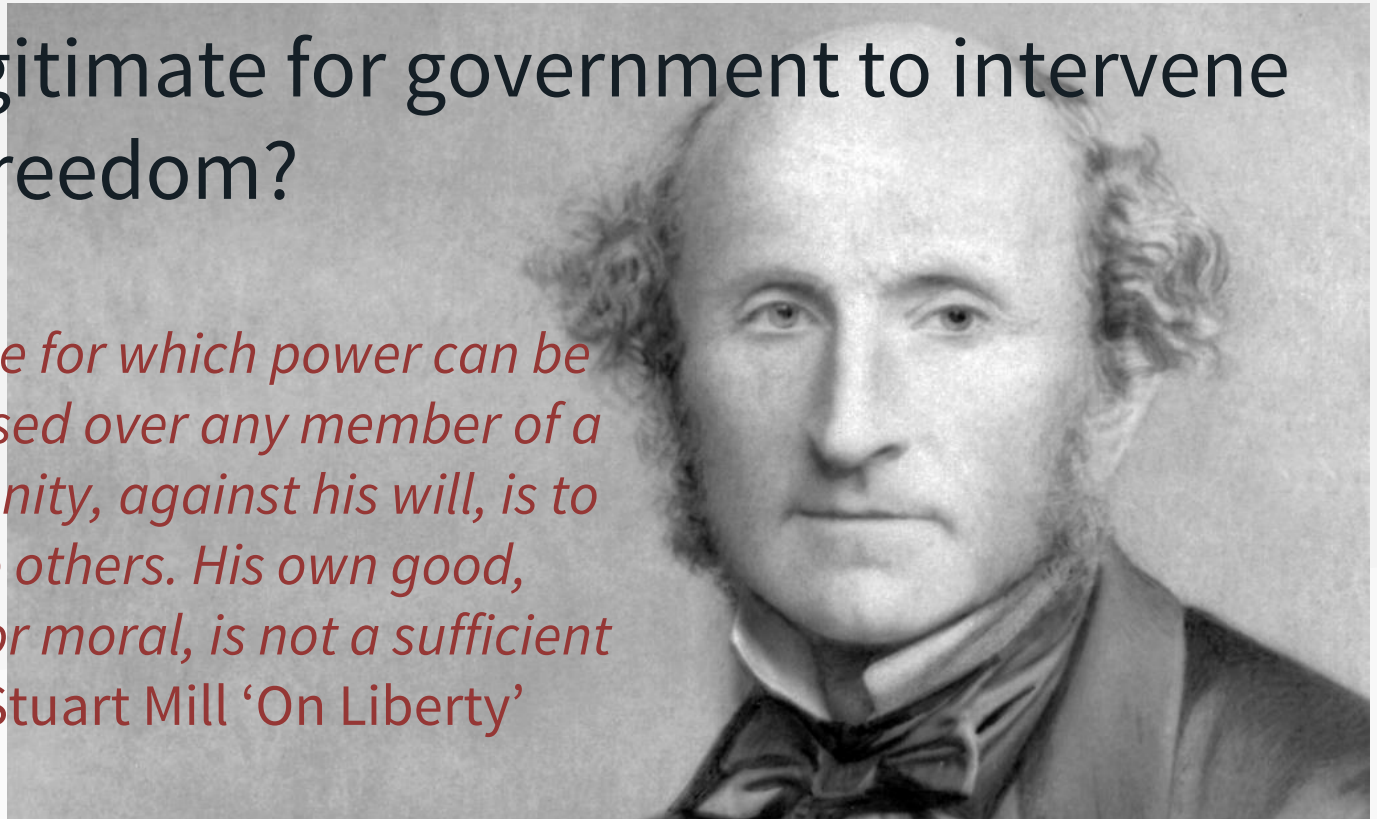
- Would regulatory instruments (prohibitions, taxes or labelling) be warranted in this area even though they would reduce the number of choices available to consumers



Government intervention and personal freedom

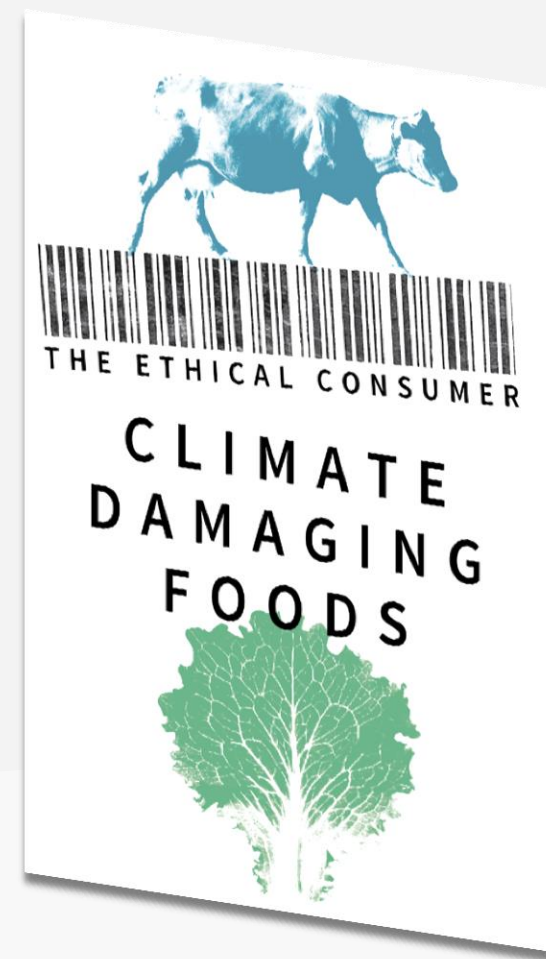
When is it legitimate for government to intervene in personal freedom?

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant (John Stuart Mill 'On Liberty' 1859)



I The recommendations

- Effective efforts should be collective and international
- The Danish government should work for international agreements in order to reduce the climate impact of food
- Supranational efforts in this area would take very long to put in place and time is of the essence



| The recommendations

- As a first step Denmark should lead the way by imposing a national tax on beef
 - Would effectively curb consumption
 - Would raise awareness in the area
 - Would in the long term make it possible to introduce additional climate-friendly measures
 - Would allow Denmark a credible voice in international negotiations





EAT
LESS
MEAT

Thank you



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