

# The “Ethics” of Eviscerating Farmed Animals for “Better Welfare”

A Presentation by Karen Davis, PhD,  
President of United Poultry Concerns



*Photo by Frank Johnston,  
The Washington Post*

Could A Brain-Dead Chicken  
'Matrix' Solve Ethical Issues Of  
Factory Farming? *Huffington  
Post*, February 29, 2012

“André Ford, an architecture  
student from the U.K., wants  
to bring new meaning to the  
phrase ‘like a chicken with its  
head cut off.’”

“He proposed his ‘Headless  
Chicken Solution’ for a project  
at the Royal College of Art in  
which he was asked to look for  
sustainable solutions to the  
U.K.’s farming inefficiencies.”



Various researchers and animal welfarists equate removing brain, sensation, and body parts of farmed animals with the removal or reduction of “suffering.” The primary “beneficiaries” of these “welfare” experiments and bodily excisions are chickens.



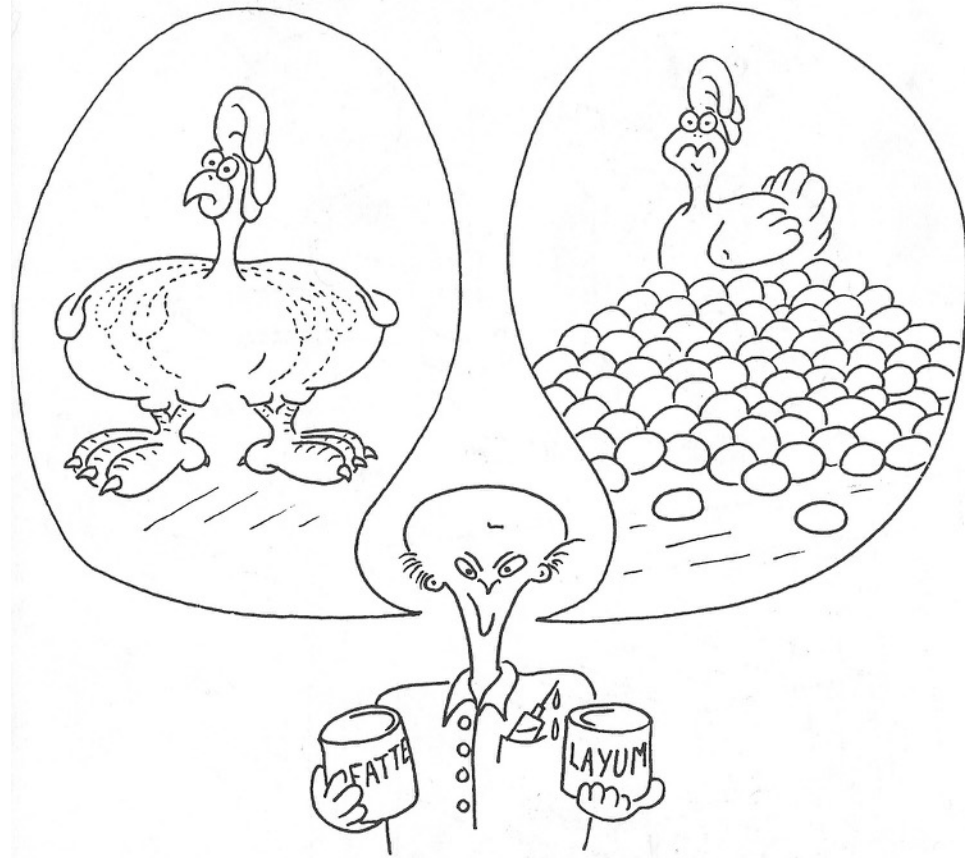


**Perdue chicken house in Delaware**

*Photo by: David Harp*

The traditional surgical removal of body parts of chickens and other farmed animals – debeaking, detoeing, de-winging, dehorning, tail docking, castration, etc. – is now being extended to include proposals for genetic manipulation of farmed animals’ brains, so they will be born without a cerebral cortex, without the ability to feel or experience themselves or their surroundings.

Cognitive ethologist Lesley J. Rogers, in her book *Minds of Their Own: Thinking and Awareness in Animals*, writes: “In the industrial farming of today, the identities of individual animals are completely lost. Animals in intensive farms are seen as bodies, to be fattened or to lay eggs. Their higher cognitive abilities are ignored and definitely unwanted.”



*Illustration by Nigel Burroughs*

*Photo of Mary Britton Clouse's  
artwork, "A Henmaid's Tale"*



The “unwanted” cognitive abilities of chickens and other farmed animals is a basis for laboratory experiments on these animals all over the world. The notion that farmed animals would benefit from the genetic destruction of their minds, emotions, and sensations has prompted proposals, such as Jonathan Latimer’s 2018 University of Oxford Prize-winning proposal in Practical Ethics, “Why We Should Genetically ‘Disenhance’ Animals Used in Factory Farms.”

Latimer writes, “Disenhancement is a genetic modification that removes an animal’s capacity to feel pain. Scientists hope to be able to do this without inflicting any pain at all.”

The Argument: “Disenhancement promises to reduce suffering in factory-farmed animals by removing their capacity to feel pain caused by their terrible environment [and] will significantly increase the quality of life for animals in factory farms.”



# Counter Arguments:

Suffering involves more than a conscious sensation of pain. Suffering refers to a wound, injury, trauma or harm sustained by a sentient individual, whether or not the individual experiences the wound or harm as pain per se.

Therefore, destroying a creature's brain, nervous system and other mind and body parts necessarily inflicts suffering on that creature.

Most people hoping for a genetic solution to the suffering of animals on factory farms have no idea of what really goes on in genetic engineering laboratories, where countless billions of chickens, quails and other animals are “modified,” tinkered with, and trashed by researchers routinely without a shred of conscience or compassion.

Ethically, genetic engineering is NOT a solution to the suffering of animals on factory farms. In fact, it is *an extension* of the system and mentality that produced and produces such suffering to begin with.



*“Spent” hen slaughterhouse. Photo by The Humane Society of the United States.*

# Decompression Technology - A New Way to Torture Birds in the Lab and the Slaughterhouse.

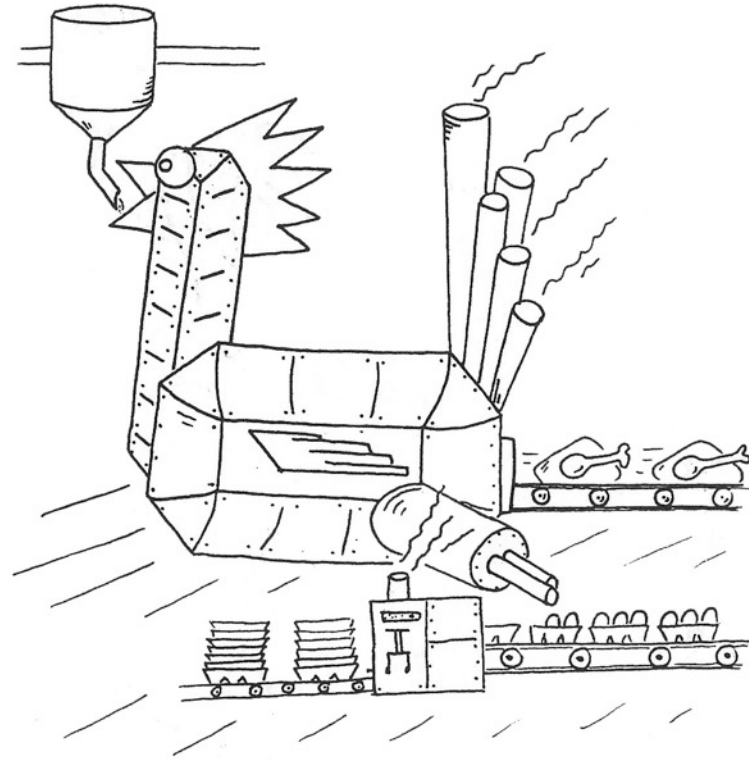
*Illustration by Activist-Artist  
Sue Coe*



Johnathan Latimer's proposal for disenchanting farmed animals in an extension of philosopher Peter Singer's "practical ethics."

In Singer's view, genetic engineering of wingless chickens would be a "welfare" advantage if it would give them more room in battery cages. He told *Slate* in 2006: "if you could eliminate various other chicken instincts, like its [sic] preference for laying eggs in a nest, that would be an improvement too."

Asked if he would consider it ethical to engineer a "brainless bird," grown strictly for meat, Singer said he would consider it "an ethical improvement on the present system, because it would eliminate the suffering these birds are feeling."



*Illustration by Nigel Burroughs*



Photo: John H. Sheally,  
The Virginian-Pilot,  
Thanksgiving Day, 2004

## Consider:

Do you believe that the wings of a bird are mere physical, expendable appendages that can be lopped off like a table leg? Is the beak or brain of a bird a mechanical component like an auto part?

Scientists cite neurological evidence that the amputated stump of a debeaked bird is experienced by the bird as “similar to what happens in human amputees who suffer from phantom limb pain.”



Scientists cite behavioral evidence for the persistence in factory-farmed chickens of “ancestral memories” of their natural endowments and tropical forest beginnings, even if all they ever experienced in their own lives was a wire cage or a manure-covered floor. Those of us who run sanctuaries bear witness to the persistence of these memories.



*Help Us, Please. We Belong  
in A Green World.  
Not These Metal Cages.*





**“We remember how to run  
free after a life in cages!”**



*UPC sanctuary photo by  
Davida G. Breier*

What if these deeply-structured memory formations and networks of ancestral knowledge in the bodies and brains of factory-farmed birds give rise to “phantom limbic memories” in the living bird?

What if there are embodied experiences so integral to the very being of a chicken or other animal that even dismembered or mutilated brain and body parts possess a memory of who she or he truly is?

Do you consider it ethical to “disenhance” the very *being* of a bird (or any animal) as a “welfare” measure purporting to reduce or eliminate the physical pain inflicted or encountered on the farm?

In considering this question, we have to recall that the sensation of pain is only one form of suffering that, in being consciously experienced, can cause agony and distress to an individual. Think for example of chronic fear, claustrophobia, persistent itching, the sensation of being unable to breathe, sleeplessness, and many other examples of suffering that, even if not technically painful, may be as bad or even worse.

Finally, do you perceive a moral difference between genetically disenchanting the minds of live animals to fit them to industrial farming conditions versus manufacturing “sentience-free flesh” for human consumption, i.e., cellular meat?

*The Screaming Hen by Sue Coe*



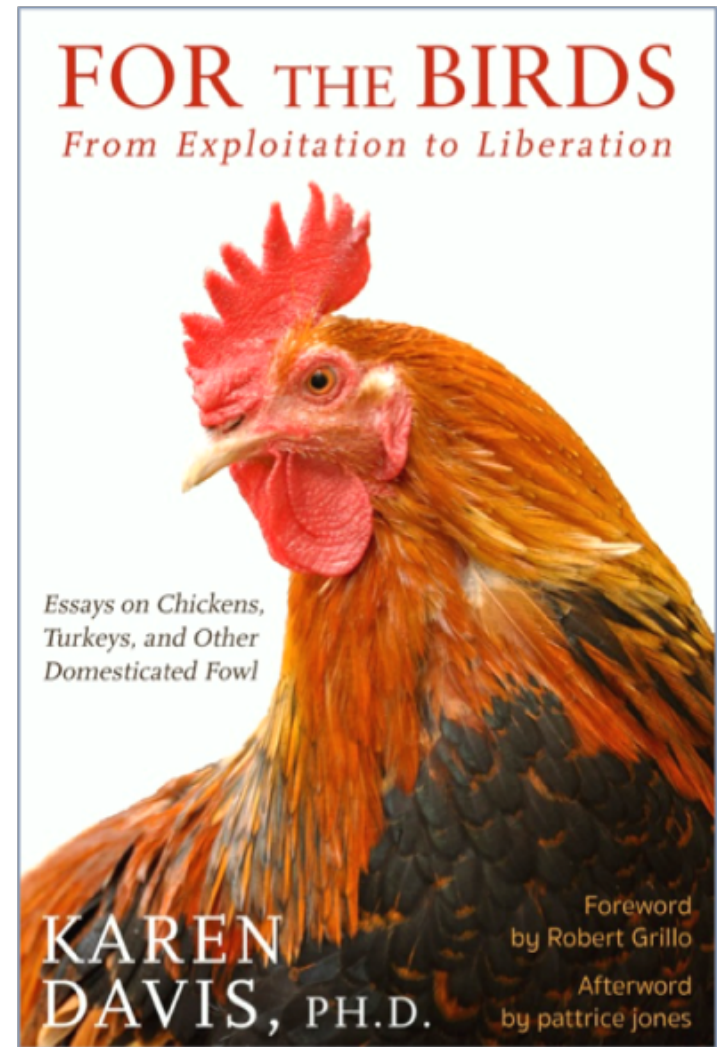
# Karen Davis with UPC Sanctuary Chickens

*Photo by Frank Johnston, The Washington Post*

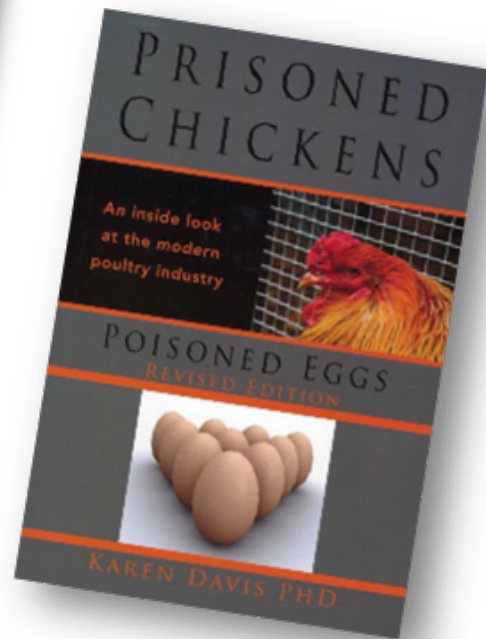
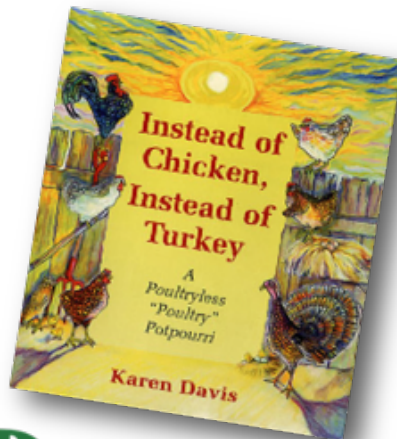
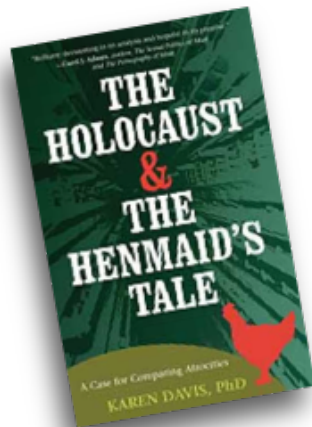
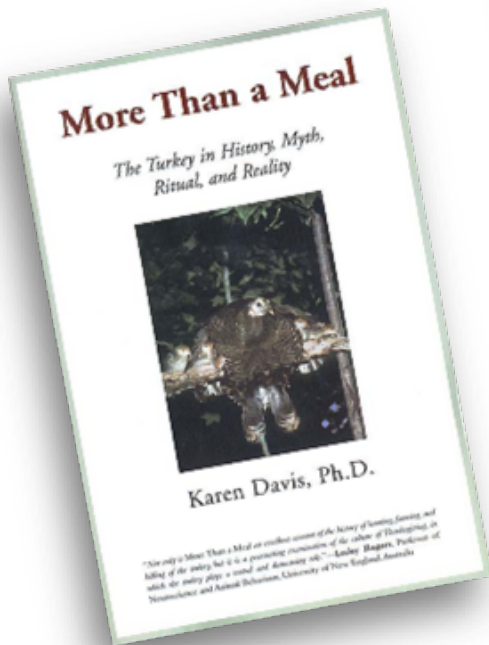


**Karen Davis's  
new book will be  
out very soon!**

**Stay tuned!**



# For more information, visit



**United Poultry  
Concerns**  
[www.upc-online.org](http://www.upc-online.org)

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