Sapontzis: Reply to Weir

Reply to Weir: Unnecessary Fear, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism

Steven F. Sapontzis
California State University, Hayward

Professor Weir contends that “the vegetarian argument from unnecessary pain fails” because:

1. “the Empirical Argument from Nutrition equivocates regarding what is meant by ‘vegetarian,’ ‘adequate for human nutrition,’ and ‘unnecessary for nutrition,’ ”

2. “animals can be raised humanely and killed mercifully,” and

3. “the prima facie obligation not to inflict pain is overridden by the nutritional risk of vegetarianism (especially veganism).”

Weir fails to establish any of these points as compelling criticisms of a moral obligation to become vegetarians. We shall discuss each of his arguments in turn.

The Empirical Argument from Nutrition

Weir begins his attack on the proposition that “a vegetarian diet is adequate for human nutrition” by claiming that attempting to justify it by referring to “the large numbers of vegetarians who are ‘hale and thriving’” “obviously is an inductive hasty generalization. [because] the empirical fact that some vegetarians are healthy does not prove that all humans—or even most humans—will be healthy on a vegetarian diet.” However, far from being obvious, this charge of fallacious reasoning is false.