

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

The Commonsense Case for Ethical Vegetarianism

ABSTRACT

The article defends ethical vegetarianism, which, for present purposes, is stipulatively taken to be the view that it is morally wrong to eat animals when equally nutritious plant-based foods are available. Several examples are introduced (i) to show that we all agree that animals deserve some direct moral consideration and (ii) to help identify and clarify several commonsense moral principles—principles we all accept. These principles are then used to argue that eating animals is morally wrong. Since you no doubt accept these principles, the argument demonstrates that consistency with your own beliefs and values commits you to the immorality of eating meat and requires you to alter your eating behavior accordingly.

MYLAN ENGEL JR.
Northern Illinois University

Volume 19, Issue 1

Aug 2016

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1. Introduction

Case 1: Mocha¹

Suppose I go to a local animal shelter and adopt a three-month-old Labrador retriever puppy named “Mocha.” When I get him home, I cut off his tail, castrate him, and pull all his teeth, *all without anaesthesia*. Then, I put him in a wooden crate so small that he cannot turn around. I provide him with food (mostly scraps) and water, but I leave him permanently confined in his crate. After three months of this miserable existence, I violently remove him from his feces- and urine-encrusted crate, and while he is fully conscious, I hang him by his hind legs, lower him face-first into a 140°F scalding tank, pull him out, skin him alive, and then start dismembering him as he dies in agony. Have I done anything wrong?

Of course, I have. I have harmed, abused, and killed an innocent dog for no good reason. We all agree that such wanton cruelty and abuse is morally reprehensible. We think people guilty of such *aggravated animal abuse*—a felony in all fifty states—deserve to be sent to prison for their horrific, immoral behavior.

But don't be so hasty. Before you condemn me, you owe it to me to find out why I did what I did. I mutilated the dog, raised him in total confinement and killed him *for food*—I intend to eat him. After all, dog meat is an excellent source of protein. Does the fact that I intend to eat Mocha justify my horrifically abusive treatment of this innocent animal? Not one bit. Since I can easily meet all of my protein needs without abusing and killing Mocha, I have no justification for treating Mocha so badly.

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Case 2: Carni²

Suppose that I didn't abuse and kill Mocha for myself. I did it for "Carni," a meat eater who is too squeamish to raise and kill her own food. Now is my behavior justified? Absolutely not. Abusing an animal for no good reason is *never* justified, and all decent people recognize this fact. Since both Carni and I can easily meet all of our nutritional requirements with a plant-based diet, my mutilating, confining, and killing Mocha as described above is morally abominable; the only difference now is that, since Carni has paid me to do it, she too is morally culpable for that innocent animal's suffering.

2. Lessons Learned: Common Moral Ground

These examples are instructive for a number of reasons. First, they show that we all agree that animals deserve some *moral consideration*,³ i.e., we all agree that we must take animals' interests and welfare into account when deciding what we should and should not do. Second, they show that we all agree that there are some ways of treating animals that are morally wrong. For example, we all agree that:

(P1) It is wrong to harm a *sentient*⁴ animal *for no good reason*.

(P2) It is wrong to abuse a sentient animal *for no good reason*.

(P3) It is wrong to cause a sentient animal to suffer *for no good reason*.

(P4) It is wrong to kill a sentient animal *for no good reason*.

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As a convenient shorthand, I shall use the expression ‘HASK practice’ to refer to any practice that involves intentionally Harming, Abusing, inflicting Suffering on, or Killing sentient animals *for no good reason*. Given this terminology, we can condense (P1) – (P4) into the following single principle:

(P5) It is wrong to engage in a HASK practice.

Just as it is wrong for you to pay a hitman to kill an annoying neighbor, the Carni example shows that:

(P6) It is wrong to pay others to engage in HASK practices on one’s behalf.

Principles (P1) – (P6) are not in dispute. Even the staunchest critics of animal rights embrace these commonsense moral principles. For example, Carl Cohen accurately captures our commonsense morality when he observes: “If animals feel pain (and certainly mammals do, though we cannot be sure about insects and worms), *we humans surely ought cause no pain to them that cannot be justified. Nor ought we to kill them without reason. . . we, as moral human beings, have the duty not to be cruel.*”⁵ Similarly, Peter Carruthers observes:

It will be useful to have a rough idea at the outset of what our common-sense morality tells us about the status and appropriate treatment of animals. . . . Most people hold that it is wrong to cause animals unnecessary suffering. Opinions will differ as to what counts as necessary. . . . But *all will agree that gratuitous suffering—suffering caused for no good reason—is wrong.*⁶

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Thus, even these prominent animal-use advocates acknowledge that we owe sentient animals a non-negligible amount of direct moral consideration. How much consideration? At least this much: We cannot harm animals, or pay others to harm them, *for no good reason*. We cannot abuse animals, or pay others to abuse them, *for no good reason*. We cannot cause them to suffer, or pay others to cause them to suffer, *for no good reason*. And we cannot kill them, or pay others to kill them, *for no good reason*. If we engage in or pay others to engage in HASK practices, we are doing something morally wrong. We are failing to give the animals affected the moral consideration that they are due.

In what follows, I will use these six commonsense moral principles—principles you, no doubt, accept—to argue that eating animals is morally wrong. My argument will demonstrate that your own beliefs and values commit you to the immorality of eating meat. Before turning to my argument, two preliminary clarificatory observations are in order.

Observation 1: Clarifying the Question

Ethical arguments are typically context-dependent in that they presuppose a specific audience in a certain set of circumstances. Recognizing what the intended audience and context is, and what it is not, can prevent confusions about the scope of the ethical claim being made. My argument is context-dependent in precisely this way. It is not aimed at those relatively few indigenous peoples who, because of the lack of edible vegetable matter, must eat animals to survive. Nor is it aimed at a person stranded in the wilderness who must eat an animal in order to survive, for these are not the circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are not stranded in the wilderness! The relevant moral question is *not* whether there is any conceiv-

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able set of circumstances where it would be permissible for you to eat meat, but rather whether it is permissible for you to eat meat in the circumstances in which you actually currently find yourself. My aim is to show that eating meat is wrong whenever equally nutritious plant-based foods are available, which, in modern societies, is almost always the case. In short, I will argue that eating meat is wrong for anyone in your circumstances and, thus, that it is wrong for you to eat meat in these circumstances.

Observation 2: Clarifying Good Reasons

As noted above, we all agree that it is wrong both to engage in—and to pay others to engage in—practices that harm, abuse, inflict suffering on, or kill animals *for no good reason*. So, it is important at the outset to be clear about what counts as *a good reason*. To be a *good reason*, the reason must be morally weighty enough to justify the behavior in question; it must be morally weighty enough to override the most significant interests of the animal in question. An example will help illustrate the point:

Case 3: Puppies

Suppose I happen to enjoy *the smell* of live puppies being burned to death. That is *a reason* to pour gasoline on a litter of conscious puppies, light the gasoline, and burn the puppies to death, but it is *not a good* reason. My relatively trivial interest in experiencing a particular smell sensation does not outweigh the puppies' most significant interests in avoiding such horrific suffering and premature death. Burning puppies to death just to enjoy the smell is a HASK practice, and it is clearly wrong for that very reason.

3. The Anti-HASK Argument for Ethical Vegetarianism

Given our commonsense moral principles (P1) – (P6), the case for *ethical vegetarianism*⁷ is really quite simple. All one need do is show that all forms of meat-producing animal agriculture are HASK practices. That demonstration can be accomplished in two steps. **Step 1:** Show that all forms of meat-producing animal agriculture, by their very nature, inflict harm and death on the animals they convert to meat. **Step 2:** Show that there is no good reason to treat animals in these ways (when equally nutritious plant-based foods are readily available, which is almost always the case in modern societies). Formally, the argument runs as follows:

1. All forms of meat-producing animal agriculture are HASK practices.
2. It is wrong to engage in, or pay others to engage in, HASK practices (i.e., it is wrong both to engage in, and to pay others to engage in, practices that Harm, Abuse, inflict Suffering on, or Kill sentient animals *for no good reason*). [(P1) – (P6)]
3. When one purchases and consumes meat, like Carni, one is paying others to engage in HASK practices on one's behalf.

Therefore,

4. It is wrong to purchase and consume meat.^{8,9}

Premise 2 is just the conjunction of principles (P1) – (P6), commonsense principles we all accept. Premise 3 is also clear-

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ly true. When one purchases and consumes meat, one is paying the people who produce meat to engage in the HASK practices required to produce it. Since the anti-HASK argument is valid, the soundness of the argument rests on its *major premise*, premise 1. I now turn to the two-step defense of that premise.

4. Step 1: Animal Agriculture and Modern Slaughter: The Cruelty behind the Cellophane¹⁰

The Mocha example with which I began might have been a sick, pointless thought experiment were it not for the fact that the overwhelming majority (well over 95%) of the 10 billion animals raised each year for food in the U.S. are subjected to the same kinds of unnecessary, cruel and inhumane treatment as Mocha. Broiler chickens and turkeys are housed in sheds containing anywhere from 10,000-100,000 birds.¹¹ The poultry industry recommends--but does not require--that each chicken be allotted seven-tenths of a square foot of floor space.¹² Veal calves are confined in wooden crates 22 inches x 54 inches, permanently chained at the neck, preventing them from being able to turn around or lie down.¹³ Pigs are confined in metal crates or massively overcrowded pens situated on concrete slatted floors with no straw or bedding,¹⁴ and beef cattle are housed in feedlots containing up to 100,000 animals.¹⁵ The inappropriate, unforgiving surfaces on which the animals must stand produce chronic foot and leg injuries.¹⁶ Since they cannot move about, they must stand in their own feces and urine. The noxious ammonia fumes from the urine damage their lungs and eyes. In these cramped, unsanitary conditions, virtually all of the animals' basic instinctual urges (e.g., to nurse, stretch, move around, root, groom, build nests, rut, establish social orders, select mates, and raise offspring) are thwarted, causing severe stress in the animals. The stress and unsanitary conditions together compromise their immune systems. To prevent

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large-scale losses due to disease, the animals are fed a steady diet of antibiotics and growth hormones.¹⁷ When it comes to feed, disease prevention isn't the only consideration. Another is cost. The USDA has approved all sorts of cost-cutting dietary "innovations" with little regard for the animals' well-being including: (i) adding the ground up remains of dead diseased animals (unfit for human consumption) to these herbivorous animals' feed,¹⁸ (ii) adding cement dust to cattle feed to promote rapid weight gain,¹⁹ and (iii) adding the animals' own feces to their feed.²⁰

The animals react to these inhumane, stressful conditions by developing unnatural aggressive behaviors, including cannibalism.²¹ For example, chickens unable to develop a pecking order (due to the overwhelming number of birds in the shed) often try to peck each other to death, and pigs, bored due to forced immobility, routinely bite the tails of the other pigs in their pen. To prevent losses due to cannibalism and aggression, the animals receive preemptive mutilations. To prevent chickens and turkeys from pecking each other to death, the birds are "debeaked" using a scalding hot blade which slices through the highly sensitive horn of the beak leaving blisters in the mouth;²² and to prevent these birds from scratching each other to death (which the industry refers to as "back ripping"), their toes are amputated using a similar hot knife machine.²³ Other routine mutilations include: dubbing (surgical removal of the combs and wattles of male chickens and turkeys), tail docking, branding, dehorning, ear tagging, ear clipping, teeth pulling, and castration. In the interest of cost efficiency, *all* of these painful procedures are performed *without* anaesthesia. *Unanaesthetized* branding, dehorning, ear tagging, ear clipping, and castration are standard procedures on nonintensive family farms, as well.²⁴

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Lives of frustration and torment finally culminate as the animals are inhumanely loaded onto trucks and shipped long distances to slaughterhouses without food or water and without adequate protection from the elements. Each year millions of animals die or are severely injured as a result of such handling and transportation. Once inside the slaughterhouse, the animals are hung upside down [Pigs, cattle, and sheep are suspended by one hind leg which often breaks.] and are brought via conveyor to the slaughterer who slits their throats and severs their carotid arteries and jugular veins.²⁵ In *theory*, animals covered by the Federal Humane Slaughter Act are to be rendered unconscious by electric current or by captive bolt pistol (a pneumatic gun which, when aimed properly, renders the animal unconscious by firing an eight-inch pin into the animal's skull). Chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese are not considered animals under the Act and receive no protection at all.²⁶ In *practice*, the Act is not enforced, and as a result, many slaughterhouses elect not to use the captive bolt pistol in the interest of cost efficiency.²⁷ As for electric shock, it is unlikely that being shocked into unconsciousness is a painless process, based on reports of people who have experienced electroconvulsive therapy.²⁸ A consequence of the lax enforcement of the Federal Humane Slaughter Act is that in many cases (and all kosher cases), the animals are conscious throughout the entire throat-slitting ordeal.²⁹ For some, the agony does not even end here. Gail Eisnitz, a chief investigator for the Humane Farming Association, reports that the killing line speeds are so fast in modern slaughterhouses that animals often do not have time to bleed out before reaching the skinners and leggers. As a result, unstunned and improperly stunned cows routinely have their legs cut off and their skin removed while they are still alive, and unstunned and improperly stunned pigs are routinely lowered face first into the 140°F scalding tank while they are still

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fully conscious.³⁰ Undercover video footage documenting all of the above abuses can be found in the following short documentary videos: “Glass Walls” (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTifP6idBPs>) and “From Farm to Fridge” (available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fb2Z4RO5xCE>).

The ugly reality is this: There simply is no way to raise animals for human consumption without harming and killing those animals. Meat production, by its very nature, involves harming animals and killing them. The question we must now address is this: Is there a *good* reason to subject animals to such inhumane treatment and premature death?

5. Step 2: Why There Is No Good Reason to Raise and Kill Animals for Food

The first thing we need to realize is that there is *no nutritional need* to eat meat. This fact should be obvious from the number of vegetarians worldwide. According to some estimates, there are 375 million vegetarians worldwide. According to other estimates, there are 400-500 million vegetarians in India alone. Even with the lowest estimates, there are hundreds of millions of perfectly healthy vegetarians worldwide. In fact, there are 7.5 million perfectly healthy *vegans*³¹ in the U.S. alone. While it is obvious that one can survive and be healthy on a vegetarian diet, one still might wonder whether eating meat is necessary for humans to thrive, flourish, and reach optimal health.

If meat consumption were *necessary* for humans to flourish and achieve optimal health and longevity, that might give us a good reason to eat animals. So, let us examine the evidence. First, consider the counterexamples. Since world-class athletic competition is one of the most grueling and physically strenuous activities in which humans can engage, one would

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not expect there to be any highly successful vegetarian athletes or vegetarian world-record holders, **if** meat consumption were necessary for humans to thrive and flourish. However, the list of world-class vegetarian athletes is quite long and includes: bodybuilder Andreas Cahling (winner of the 1980 Mr. International title); Olympic gymnast Kathy Johnson (1984 silver and bronze medalist); tennis champion Billie Jean King (winner of 12 grand slam tennis titles); triathlete Sixto Linares (set the world record for the 24-hour triathlon by swimming 4.8 miles, cycling 185 miles, and running 52.4 miles in a single day); Olympic 400-meter hurdler Edwin Moses (undefeated in international competition for 8 straight years); tennis champion Martina Navratilova (winner of 18 grand slam tennis titles); Olympic distance runner Paavo Nurmi (set 20 world records and won 9 Olympic medals); Dave Scott (six-time winner of Hawaii's Ironman Triathlon); and Olympic snowboarder Hannah Teter (gold and silver medalist in the halfpipe competition). The list also includes numerous world-class vegan athletes including: karateka Ridgely Abele (U.S. Karate Association World Champion, winning both the Master Division Title for fifth degree black belts and the Grand Championship), David Carter (Chicago Bears 300-pound defensive lineman); ultramarathoner Catrina Corbett (she has completed over 250 ultramarathons, including the 424 mile John Muir Trail Run twice!); mixed martial artist Mac Danzig (four-time MMA King of the Cage Lightweight Champion); rock climber Steph Davis (the only female to have ever free climbed El Capitan); ultramarathoner Scott Jurek (he completed a 165.7-mile run in a single day); marathon runner Fiona Oakes (she completed seven marathons in seven consecutive days); and triathlete Rich Roll (he completed five Hawaii ironman triathlons in five consecutive days).³² The remarkable athletic accomplishments of these and countless other vegetarian and vegan athletes make it clear that

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eating meat is *not* necessary for humans to achieve optimal health, strength, endurance, or fitness.

Second, consider the diseases known to be associated with the consumption of meat and animal products—heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and obesity—as documented in numerous highly regarded studies.³³ Four examples must suffice: (1) The Loma Linda study, involving over 24,000 people, found that men who eat meat have a 50% chance of having a heart attack, whereas *lacto-ovo-vegetarian*³⁴ men (who consume eggs and dairy products, but no meat) have only a 19.5% chance of having a heart attack, and vegans have only a 7.5% chance of having a heart attack.³⁵ (2) The ongoing Framingham heart study has been tracking the daily living and eating habits of thousands of residents of Framingham, Massachusetts since 1948. Dr. William Castelli directed the study for 30 years. Based on his research, Dr. Castelli maintains the most heart healthy diet is a *pure vegetarian diet*.³⁶ Perhaps vegetarians suffer from other illnesses or die of other diseases earlier than their meat-eating counterparts. Not according to Dr. Castelli: “The vegetarian societies of the world have the best diet. Within our own country, they outlive the rest of us by at least seven years, and they have only 10 or 15 percent of our heart attack rate.”³⁷ Elsewhere Dr. Castelli adds: “Vegetarians not only outlive the rest of us, they also aren’t prey to other degenerative diseases, such as diabetes, strokes, etc., that slow us down and make us chronically ill.”³⁸ (3) The Cornell/Oxford/China Health Project is the largest epidemiological study ever conducted. It has systematically monitored the diet, lifestyle, and disease patterns of 6,500 families from 65 different counties in Mainland China and Taiwan. The information collected in this massive data set has led

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Dr. T. Colin Campbell, director of the study, and his associates to conclude that:

- A diet comprised of a variety of good quality plant-based foods is the healthiest.³⁹
- There is no threshold of plant food richness beyond which further health benefits are not achieved.⁴⁰
- Even small intakes of foods of animal origin are associated with significant increases in plasma cholesterol concentrations, which are associated, in turn, with significant increases in chronic degenerative disease mortality rates.⁴¹
- 80-90% of all cancers can be controlled or prevented by a lowfat (10-15% fat) vegan diet.⁴²

And (4), the Dean Ornish study in which it was demonstrated that *advanced* heart disease could be *reversed* through a combination of stress reduction and an extremely lowfat vegetarian diet (10% fat).

These and countless other studies have led the American Dietetic Association (ADA) and the Dietitians of Canada (DoC), the two leading nutritional organizations in North America, to conclude that appropriately planned vegetarian diets are “healthful, nutritionally adequate, and provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.” The ADA and DoC further observe that well-planned vegan and vegetarian diets “are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence.”²⁴³ The health benefits of vegetarian diets are also highlighted in USDA’s *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*,

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2010: “In prospective studies of adults, compared to non-vegetarian eating patterns, vegetarian-style eating patterns have been associated with improved health outcomes—lower levels of obesity, a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, and lower total mortality.”⁷⁴⁴

In light of these findings, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine [PCRM] recommends centering our diets around the following *new* four food groups: I. Whole Grains (5+ servings/day), II. Vegetables (3+ servings/day), III. Fruits (3+ servings/day), and IV. Legumes (2+ servings/day).⁴⁵ Gone are meat and dairy, the two principal sources of fat and cholesterol in the American diet. It is worth stressing here how easy it is to eat a well-balanced, nutritionally complete vegetarian diet. No special food combining is necessary. All one need do is eat sufficient calories from the PCRM’s new four food groups listed above. Anyone who eats the recommended daily servings of these four food groups will be eating a nutritionally sound plant-based diet (though vegans, who consume 100% plant-based diets, should include a reliable source of B12 in their diets). Far from being risky, such a diet reduces one’s risk of heart disease, cancer, stroke, hypertension, obesity, and diabetes.⁴⁶

The evidence is unequivocal: Appropriately planned vegetarian diets are nutritionally superior to meat-based diets. One cannot justify eating animals on the grounds that eating meat is necessary for human flourishing, because it isn’t. On the contrary, meat consumption promotes a number of chronic degenerative diseases and is *detrimental* to human health and well-being.⁴⁷ Consequently, all of the harm, abuse, suffering, and death inflicted on farmed animals is *unnecessary*. It serves no significant human interest. Since we can meet all of our nu-

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tritional needs with plant-based foods, there is *no good reason* to raise and kill animals for their flesh.

But perhaps I'm being too hasty. Perhaps there is some other reason weighty enough to justify us in harming, abusing, and killing animals for food. Consider cost. Isn't it expensive to eat a vegetarian diet? If anything, cost gives us a reason to prefer plant-based foods. Beans and grains, especially when purchased in bulk, are dramatically cheaper than meat and other animal products. Even when eating out, vegetarian entrées are almost always cheaper than meat-based entrées. What about convenience? Being a vegetarian can be inconvenient at times. But lots of times, eating meat is just as inconvenient (e.g., it takes hours to roast a turkey, whereas it takes only a few minutes to heat up some pasta with fresh veggies), and the inconvenience of eating meat (when it is inconvenient) doesn't dissuade most meat-eaters from eating meat. If one can put up with the inconvenience of eating meat, one can just as easily put up with the inconvenience of eating fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains. But more to the point, if cows, pigs, and chickens deserve any moral consideration at all, then surely their lives are worth more than our relatively minor inconvenience.

Truth be told, most people know that bacon, sausage, hot-dogs, greasy hamburgers, and fried chicken aren't health foods. We know these foods clog our arteries, promote cancer, and make us overweight. So, why do people eat them? Once the veil of rationalizations is lifted, it is obvious that most people eat meat for only one reason—they like the taste. To be sure, enjoying the *taste* of meat is *a reason* to kill and eat a sentient animal, but it is *not* a *good reason*. Just as my trivial interest in experiencing a particular *smell sensation* (the aroma of live puppies burning to death) does not outweigh the puppies'

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most significant interests in avoiding such suffering and premature death, your equally trivial interest in experiencing a particular *taste sensation* (the taste of meat) does not outweigh the animal's most significant interests in avoiding inhumane treatment and premature death. The desire for a particular taste sensation does not justify us in abusing and killing animals for food. There simply is no *good* reason to kill and eat animals, when plant-based foods are available. That completes Step 2.

Interim Conclusion

Taken together, Steps 1 and 2 show that all forms of meat-producing animal agriculture are HASK practices (i.e., practices that harm animals, abuse them, cause them to suffer, and kill them *for no good reason*). Consequently, anyone who accepts (P1) – (P6) is committed to the immorality of eating meat, on pain of inconsistency. Since you accept (P1) – (P6), your own beliefs and values commit you to the immorality of eating meat.⁴⁸

6. Objections and Replies

a. The “Free Range” Fantasy

A critic might object to my argument as follows:

O.K., I understand your strategy. You're trying to show that, given my other beliefs, consistency forces me to admit that eating meat is wrong. Suppose I admit that factory farming causes prolonged, unnecessary, excruciating pain and that, as a result, believing (P1) – (P6) commits me to the immorality of eating factory farm raised meat. Even so, you've yet to show that my beliefs commit me to the immorality of eating humanely

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raised animals. What's wrong with eating "free range" animals which are raised humanely and killed painlessly? How do my beliefs commit me to the immorality of eating them?

My response to such a critic is threefold: First, in admitting that eating factory farm raised meat is morally wrong, you have just admitted that it is immoral to eat over 95% of the meat you eat (assuming that you are a typical meat eater). Second, the terms 'free range' and 'free roaming' are not indicative of humane animal husbandry practices. According to the labelling division of the USDA, "a free range bird is one that has access to the outdoors,"⁴⁹ no matter how small the outdoor pen. The term 'free roaming' just means birds that have not been raised in cages, even though they are permanently confined in a warehouse.⁵⁰ Thus, uncaged broiler chickens with the industry-recommended seven-tenths of a square foot of floor space can legally be sold as "free roaming" birds. Moreover, the painful mutilations described above (*unanaesthetized* branding, dehorning, debeaking, ear tagging, ear clipping, toe clipping and castration) are also routinely performed in both "free range" and nonintensive farms. All of these procedures contribute to unnecessary suffering. Plus, even if the "free range" animals had it good while they were on the farm, there are no humane livestock transportation companies and no humane slaughterhouses. The only way to ensure that the animal you are eating was raised humanely and killed painlessly is to raise and kill her yourself. Third, and most importantly, you no doubt believe:

(P7) Other things being equal, it is worse to kill a sentient animal than it is to kill a plant.

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An example of Andrew Tardiff's will illustrate the point. Suppose we could perform a human-benefitting experiment on either a dog or a plant with equally reliable and equally valuable results, but that the experiment will inevitably result in the death of the test subject.⁵¹ Anyone who accepts (P7) will surely admit that we ought to perform the experiment on the plant. For those who still have doubts, Tardiff modifies his example: Once again, we could perform a human-benefitting experiment on either a dog or a plant, and once again the test subject will be killed in the course of the experiment, only this time suppose that we would get much greater human benefit by testing on the plant than we would by testing on the dog.⁵² Surely, you will grant that we ought to perform the experiment on the plant. Now, compare this case with the case for food. You already believe that, when other things are equal, it is worse to kill a sentient animal than it is to kill a plant. But in the case of food, other things are not equal. Eating plants is more human health-promoting than eating animals. Since a plant-based diet is more nutritious and human health-promoting than a meat-based diet, (P7) commits you to the view that it is worse to kill sentient animals for food than it is to kill plants for food, even if those animals have been raised humanely.

b. The Roadkill Diner and Dumpster Diving

Suppose an animal is accidentally hit by a car and killed. Would it be wrong to eat that animal? Not per the anti-HASK argument.⁵³ If the animal was killed *accidentally*, then you would not be engaging in (nor paying others to engage in) a HASK practice by retrieving the carcass and eating it. Of course, the situation is different if you intentionally run an animal over just to dine on that animal's corpse, for in that case you would be guilty of intentionally engaging in a HASK prac-

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tice, which is wrong. Similarly, if you climb into a dumpster and retrieve and eat the rest of a half-eaten hamburger, you are not engaging in a HASK practice. Health risks aside, eating such meat may be permissible, but the opportunities for eating non-rancid roadkill and non-rancid dumpster-acquired meat are sufficiently rare, that for all intents and purposes, your belief in principles (P1) – (P6) commits you to the moral obligatoriness of vegetarianism.

More importantly, as I noted at the outset, the morally important question is not whether there is some conceivable piece of meat – the flesh of accidental roadkill, for example – that it is permissible to eat; for even if it is permissible to eat roadkill, the fact remains that the meat available for purchase in grocery stores and restaurants comes from animals that were harmed, abused, and intentionally killed for no good reason, and so it is wrong to eat the meat typically available to us. The question we should be asking is not “Is it *ever* morally permissible to eat meat?” but rather “Is it morally permissible to eat *the meat actually available to us* in grocery stores and restaurants?” Those who think it wrong to harm, abuse, and kill animals for no good reason must agree that the answer to the latter question is “No.”

c. Goodness Graciousness

Suppose someone offers to buy you a hamburger at a restaurant or invites you over to have a home-cooked steak. Should you be a gracious guest and eat that meat? In such a situation, you did not engage in a HASK practice, and you didn't pay anyone else to engage in a HASK practice. So, would it be permissible to accept the meat being offered to you?

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Here I think the answer must be “No.” While eating meat that you have scavanged from the bottom of a dumpster is permissible, albeit incredibly gross, letting someone purchase meat on your behalf is not permissible. Suppose you know that I find my nextdoor neighbor extremely annoying, but you also know that I don’t have the money needed to hire a hitman to put an end to his annoyance once and for all. You, however, are flush with cash. So, you offer to hire that hitman for me. It would clearly be wrong of me to accept your offer to pay for a hitman on my behalf. No matter how annoying my neighbor is, I should insist that you not pay someone to kill him on my behalf. Similarly, no matter how gracious someone intends to be by offering to buy you a hamburger or by inviting you to a steak dinner, you should refuse to allow that person to pay others to engage in HASK practices on your behalf.

Conclusion

Cows, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, turkeys, ducks, emu, and fish⁵⁴ are sentient creatures that can experience morally significant pain and suffering. Since we can easily meet all of our nutritional needs without eating any of these animals, there is *no good reason* for us to harm these animals, abuse them, cause them to suffer, or kill them for food. Consequently, the anti-HASK argument entails that eating animals is morally wrong, whenever plant-based foods are available (which, in our society, is virtually always the case). Anyone who accepts principles (P1) – (P6) is committed to the immorality of eating animals, when plant-based foods are available. Since you accept principles (P1) – (P6), your own beliefs and values entail that vegetarianism is morally required.^{55,56}

Endnotes

¹ I first used this example in Engel 2001b, 9.

² This example also first appears in Engel 2001b, 9.

³ To say that a being deserves moral consideration is to say that we are morally required to consider that being's interests when determining how we should and should not behave. It makes no sense to say that a rock deserves moral consideration, because a rock has no interests to consider. A dog, like Mocha, on the other hand, does have interests, including an interest in avoiding pain. So, we must consider Mocha's interest in avoiding pain when determining how we should treat him.

⁴ A sentient being is any being capable of feeling pain and experiencing pleasure. As such, sentient beings are capable of experiencing morally significant pain and suffering.

⁵ Cohen 2001, 46.

⁶ Carruthers 1992, 8.

⁷ For present purposes, ethical vegetarianism is the view that (in nearly all situations) it is morally wrong to eat animals when equally nutritious plant-based foods are available.

⁸ Remember the context-sensitive qualification I stressed in the introduction. I am only arguing that eating meat is wrong when equally nutritious plant-based foods are readily available, which is almost always the case in modern societies like ours. The anti-HASK argument could be formulated more clumsily to make this qualification explicit:

1. Meat-producing animal agriculture is a HASK practice (whenever equally nutritious plant-based foods are readily available).
2. It is wrong to engage in or pay others to engage in HASK practices (i.e., it is wrong both to engage in, and to pay others to engage in, practices that inflict harm, suffering, or death on conscious sentient beings for no good reason). (P1) – (P6)
3. When one purchases and consumes meat (when equally nutritious plant-based foods are readily available), one is paying others to engage in HASK practices on one's behalf.

Therefore,

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4. It is wrong to purchase and consume meat (whenever plant-based foods are readily available, which, in modern societies, is almost always the case).

It is this context-restricted version of the anti-HASK argument that I am endorsing throughout the paper. That said, for ease of exposition, I will rarely call attention to the qualification “whenever equally nutritious plant-based foods are available” in the body of the paper.

⁹ I have defended versions of the anti-HASK argument for ethical vegetarianism in Engel 2000, Engel 2001a, and Engel 2012a. For related arguments, see Curnutt 1997; Norcross 2004; and DeGrazia 2009.

¹⁰ This section is drawn from Engel 2000, 861-67, Copyright © Mylan Engel Jr. 2000.

¹¹ These overcrowded conditions make it impossible for the birds to develop a pecking order, the lack of which generates aggression, feather pecking, and cannibalism in the birds. See Davis 1996, 65-71; Singer 2002, 99f; and Mason and Singer 1990, 7.

¹² Hamlin 1996, sec. C, 2.

¹³ Robbins 2012, 114; HFA 1989, 118; and Mason and Singer 1990, 12.

¹⁴ HFA 1989, 117. For further details, see Robbins’s discussion of the “Bacon Bin” in Robbins 2012, 83.

¹⁵ Robbins 2012, 110.

¹⁶ Mason and Singer 1990, 30f; and Davis 1996, 21, 56f.

¹⁷ Oestrogens, gestagens, and androgens are routinely administered to cattle, veal calves, hogs and sheep. Recommended dosages are described in FAO 1982a, 3. Mason and Singer report, “Nearly all poultry, 90 percent of veal calves and pigs, and a debatable number of cattle get antibacterial additives in their feed” (1990, 66). Residues often remain in their flesh, despite the fact that many of these drugs are known carcinogens not approved for human use. According to the U.S. General Accounting Office: “Of the 143 drugs and pesticides GAO has identified as likely to leave residues in raw meat and poultry, 42 are known to cause cancer or are suspected of causing cancer; 20 of causing birth defects; and 6 of causing mutations” (1979, i).

¹⁸ “Ten billion pounds of processed animal remains were sold for animal feed in the U.S. in 1995” (Haapapuro 1996, 15). It should be noted that feeding cattle the rendered remains of sheep infected with scrapie is the suspect-

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ed cause of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or as it is commonly called “mad cow disease”). Consuming BSE-infected cattle is believed to be the cause of one variant of Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease, a fatal brain disease in humans. See “Mad Cow Disease: The Risk in the U.S.,” *Good Medicine* 5, no. 3 (summer 1996): 9.

¹⁹ Mason and Singer 1990, 51.

²⁰ Haapapuro 1996, 15. Also see Haapapuro, Barnard, and Simon 1997, 599-602; and Mason and Singer 1990, 53. Detailed feed recipes, some containing as much as 40% chicken manure, are outlined in FAO 1982b.

²¹ Mason and Singer 1990, 21-24; and Davis 1996, 65-71.

²² Debeaking is the surgical removal of the birds’ beaks. When beaks are cut too short or heal improperly, the birds cannot eat and eventually starve to death in their cages/shed (Davis 1996, 48, 65-71; Mason and Singer 1990, 39f; and Robbins 2012, 57).

²³ Davis 1996, 47; and Mason and Singer 1990, 40.

²⁴ Singer 2002, 145.

²⁵ Eisnitz 1997, 20, 145, 198.

²⁶ Robbins 2012, 139.

²⁷ Singer 2002, 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

²⁹ While only 5% of U.S. meat is sold as kosher, as many as 50% of the animals are slaughtered while fully conscious in conformity with antiquated ritual slaughter laws (Robbins 2012, 142).

³⁰ Eisnitz 1997, 28-29, 126-28, and 71.

³¹ A vegan is a strict vegetarian who consumes a 100% plant-based diet. Vegans do not eat animals (i.e., they do not eat cows, pigs, chickens, turkeys, ducks, goats, sheep, rabbits, deer, emu, fish, or seafood), and they do not eat animal-derived products (i.e., they do not eat eggs or dairy products). They center their diets around whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, and seeds.

³² The impressive feats of some of these world-class vegetarian and vegan athletes are discussed in much greater detail in Robbins 2012, 158-163.

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³³ For an excellent well-documented discussion of the positive correlation between meat consumption and these diseases, see Robbins 2012, 203-305.

³⁴ Like vegans, lacto-ovo-vegetarians don't eat any animals whatsoever, but unlike vegans, lacto-ovo-vegetarians do eat eggs and dairy products.

³⁵ Phillips et al. 1978, S191-S198.

³⁶ Stapley 1996, 15.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Castelli 1994, 10.

³⁹ Campbell 1997, 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Campbell and Chen 1994, 1153S.

⁴² Campbell 1996, 1.

⁴³ Mangels, Messina, and Melina 2003, 748.

⁴⁴ USDA and HHS 2010, 45.

⁴⁵ Barnard 1993, 144-147.

⁴⁶ Mangels, Messina, and Melina 2003, 748.

⁴⁷ These findings are hardly surprising when one considers that both the American Heart Association [AHA] and the American Cancer Society [ACS] recommend a diet that is high in complex carbohydrates and fiber, and low in protein, dietary cholesterol, fat (especially saturated fat), sodium, alcohol, carcinogens and procarcinogens. Specifically, complex carbohydrates should comprise 55-70% of our calories, fat should provide less than 30% (preferably 10-15%) of our calories, protein should make up 10-12% of our calories, dietary cholesterol should not exceed 300 mg/day (0 mg is optimal, since there is no minimum amount of dietary cholesterol required), and fiber consumption should be 25-30 grams per day. In stark contrast, the typical American meat-based diet is 40% fat (most of which is saturated), 30% carbohydrate, 25% protein and contains 400+ mg of cholesterol per day. These statistics are to be expected since meat is high in fat, high in protein, and high in cholesterol (only animal products contain cholesterol), but contains no complex carbohydrates and no fiber. In fact, it is almost impossible to adhere to the AHA's and ACS's dietary guidelines while consuming

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a meat-based diet, whereas satisfying these guidelines is virtually inevitable when one eats only from the PCRM's new four food groups.

⁴⁸ For a commonsense, consistency-based anti-HASK argument against animal experimentation, see Engel 2012b.

⁴⁹ Hamlin 1996, 1.

⁵⁰ Davis 1996, 127-131.

⁵¹ Tardiff 1996, 302f.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 303.

⁵³ It might, however, be wrong to eat accidental roadkill on other grounds. For example, if animals have inherent value and a right to be treated in ways that respect that value, then eating them, even after their accidental deaths, might fail to give them the respect they are morally due.

⁵⁴ For a detailed look at the evidence of fish sentience, see Braithwaite 2010. Also see my "Fishy Reasoning and the Ethics of Eating" in manuscript.

⁵⁵ The anti-HASK argument entails not only the immorality of eating animals, but also the immorality of eating animal products. Anyone who thinks it wrong to harm animals, abuse them, cause them to suffer, or kill them for no good reason is rationally committed to ethical veganism, though spelling out the case for ethical veganism is beyond the scope of this paper. See Engel 2000, 883-886 for details as to why veganism is morally required.

⁵⁶ I have presented versions of my anti-HASK argument for ethical vegetarianism at the Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress, the Bled Conference on Ethics, the Russell Philosophy Conference, the Midsouth Philosophy Conference, Vegetarian Summerfest, Eastern Illinois University and my home institution Northern Illinois University. I would like to thank those present for their comments and suggestions. Special thanks to Matthias Steup, Tess Siver, and an anonymous referee for *Between the Species* for their very helpful recommendations. The article is much improved as a result.

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