

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Review of
*Beating Hearts:
Abortion and Animal Rights*

Sherry F. Colb and Michael C. Dorf
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Sherry Colb's and Michael Dorf's provocative and insightful new book grew out of a pair of observations: (i) Many animal rights activists are categorically opposed to killing animals (i.e., mammals, birds, fish, and shell fish) for food, sport, or science, but favor the right to abortion, a practice that involves the deliberate killing of a human organism. (ii) Many "Pro-Life" advocates are categorically opposed to the destruction of even a single-cell human zygote, but have no qualms about dining on the bodies of fully developed, conscious sentient animals "whose lives were filled with unspeakable suffering, ended only by horrific deaths" (1). Is either of these stances tenable? Or, are both groups guilty of a kind of moral blindness when it comes to the moral status of certain individuals? With this as its starting point, the book explores the various ways in which the abortion debate and the animal rights debate interconnect (and sometime diverge) and the ways these debates mutually inform each other—an exploration that proves fruitful both philosophically and practically. Anyone new to either debate would benefit from reading this lively and provocative book. The book is clearly written and engaging throughout and would make an exceptionally useful supplemental text for any contemporary moral issues course that includes sections on abortion and animal ethics. Indeed, I plan on using it the next time I teach contemporary moral issues.

When reviewing a book, it is important to evaluate it on its own terms. *Beating Hearts: Abortion and Animal Rights* is not aimed at professional scholars seasoned in the subtle nuances both debates. It is aimed at laypersons of good faith, who are relatively new to one or both debates. As such, the book does not pretend to be the final word on either issue; rather, it is an invitation and an opportunity to think seriously and critically about both. By looking at these two debates side-by-side, Colb

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and Dorf “mean to provoke thought even if [they] do not change minds” (2), though given the strength of some of their arguments, I suspect some minds will be changed. The book has two parts. Part 1 focuses on the ethical and legal issues surrounding abortion and the instrumental use of animals in agriculture and science. Part 2 focuses on strategies and tactics that activists in each movement might employ to win over the hearts and minds of those yet unconvinced. Rather than attempt to catalog the content of the book chapter by chapter, my aim in this review article is to engage critically with the book’s central arguments and principal theses to highlight the richness of the book. Let’s begin.

Part 1. The Ethics and Legality of Abortion and Animal Use

The book addresses and answers two fundamental moral questions:

Q1. “When, if ever, is it morally permissible for humans to use or kill animals?” (11)

Q2. “Under what circumstances, if any, is abortion morally permissible?” (11)

The book also explores the following legal/political question:

Q3. “To what extent should a democracy allocate these matters to individual conscience rather than to collective decision making through law?” (11)

Colb and Dorf answer these questions as follows:

A1. Killing animals for food and using them as experimental subjects is almost always seriously morally wrong. As such, we

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should refuse to support such practices and embrace a vegan lifestyle instead.

A2. Aborting pre-sentient fetuses raises no moral concerns at all. Aborting sentient fetuses harms those fetuses and is *prima facie* wrong (i.e., wrong in the absence of overriding reasons that justify inflicting that harm). Despite the presumptive wrongness of aborting sentient fetuses, some such abortions may still be permissible, provided the woman has morally weighty enough reasons to justify the harm imposed on the fetus.

A3. Even when abortions are immoral, they should still be legal. Similarly, even though killing animals for food is morally wrong, it should remain legal given the current context in which we live.

So, how do they defend these claims? First, they argue that sentience – the ability to suffer – is sufficient not only for moral considerability but also for possessing moral rights, including the right not to be harmed and the right not to be killed. As they see it, sentient beings have interests and the corresponding moral rights needed to protect those interests. The idea that sentience is sufficient for moral considerability is relatively uncontroversial in the philosophical literature on animal ethics. The claim that sentience is sufficient for possessing moral rights is more contentious. Indeed, many people insist that in order to have moral rights, a being must be rational. But, as I have argued elsewhere (2016b), such a view is implausible for at least two reasons: First, many humans, e.g., infants, young children, and the mentally infirm, lack rationality, but these humans still possess the right not to be harmed. Second, when identifying a rights-conferring property, “the property picked must have

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some *plausible rationale*. There must be some *reason* for thinking that possessing the property in question is necessary and sufficient for possessing [the right in question]" (Engel 2016b, 46). Since the non-rational humans mentioned above have a right not to be harmed, being rational is not necessary for possessing the right not to be harmed. Rationality also is not sufficient for possessing the right not to be harmed, a point that, to my knowledge, has been totally overlooked. To see that the argument: "X is rational; therefore, X has a right not to be harmed" is a non sequitur, we need only imagine a rational being without the capacity to be harmed (perhaps, God is such a being). No being that lacks the capacity to be harmed has the right not to be harmed. In light of these observations, it is much more plausible to think that the right not to be harmed is rooted in the capacity to be harmed. So, here, I side with Colb and Dorf. If moral rights exist, then the right not to be harmed is grounded in the capacity to be harmed. Since sentient beings are harmed when they are caused to suffer, sentient beings have a right not to be harmed. More controversial still is their claim that sentience can ground the right not to be killed. But, here again, I side with Colb and Dorf. It is plausible to think that sentient beings with a life worth living are harmed by premature death, and if so, then the sentience-based right not to be harmed entails the right not to be killed.

Though Colb and Dorf don't say so explicitly, it seems clear that they don't take these rights to be absolutely inviolable rights; rather they treat them as *prime facie* rights – rights that morally constrain us unless there are sufficiently weighty countervailing considerations that override them. As they put it: "Absent some very strong justification or excuse, we have a [moral] duty to avoid intentionally inflicting suffering or death on any sentient being, whether human or nonhuman" (13).

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When it comes to raising and killing animals for food, there are no such countervailing considerations. Since we can easily meet all of our nutritional needs, and can actually meet them better, with plant-based foods (45-48) and since we can easily satisfy our desire for tasty food with delicious plant-based meals (52-53), they conclude, there is no good reason to subject animals to the horrors of factory farming nor is there a good reason to kill animals for food. Since we all agree that it is wrong to harm animals or cause them to suffer or kill them for no good reason, our own beliefs commit us to the immorality of raising and killing animals for food.¹ Their argument for ethical veganism is extremely compelling.

Since, on their view, sentient fetuses also have the right not to be harmed and the right not to be killed, Colb and Dorf contend that aborting sentient fetuses is morally wrong unless the pregnant woman has some very strong moral justification for doing so. What about pre-sentient fetuses? As noted above, Colb and Dorf argue that aborting pre-sentient fetuses raises no moral concerns at all. They offer two independent reasons for this conclusion. Let's consider and assess each of these reasons in turn. Their first reason for thinking that aborting pre-sentient fetuses is morally benign is that pre-sentient fetuses cannot be harmed. Lacking consciousness, pre-sentient fetuses are, in their view, "*some things*, not *some ones*" (44). A pre-sentient fetus cannot be harmed, they argue, because, prior to sentience, there is no someone to be harmed.

Is it really the case that pre-sentient fetuses cannot be harmed? Colb and Dorf agree that grinding up live baby chicks harms them, because it deprives them of a future life worth living. (111) But killing a normal healthy pre-sentient fetus likewise deprives that fetus of a future life worth living. If being

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deprived of a future life worth living harms chicks, it's hard to see why it doesn't also harm a healthy pre-sentient fetus. To prevent this discussion from devolving into a mere clash of intuitions, let's consider our commonsense understanding of harm. To harm an entity is to make that entity worse off than it otherwise would have been.

Harm: For any X, action A harms X if and only if action A makes X worse off than X otherwise would have been, had A not occurred.

It follows from Harm that not all deaths are harms. The death of a terminally ill, incurable cancer patient wracked with pain is not a harm. Every additional day such a person lives makes her/him worse off. Death, in such cases, is a relief, a benefit.

We can use this general account of harm to explain when death harms an animal:

Harmful Death: Death harms an animal to the extent that it results in that animal's life containing less net well-being than it would otherwise have contained.

Aborting a normal healthy pre-sentient fetus that would have had a life worth living results in that organism having considerably less net well-being than it would have had if allowed to live.

Conversely, carrying to healthy normal pre-sentient fetus to term would bestow a benefit²—that organism would be better off than it would have been had it been aborted. Any case where being born would confer a benefit is a case where being aborted would constitute a harm. If being born would

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make the fetus better off, then being aborted would make the fetus worse off.

Independent of such conceptual analysis, it's worth noting that most of us commonly think that pre-sentient fetuses can be harmed. A pregnant woman who drinks excessive amounts of alcohol every day of the first trimester of her pregnancy (and then stops all alcohol consumption) harms her fetus by poisoning the fetus. When the baby is subsequently born with severe fetal alcohol syndrome as a result of her first trimester drinking, it is clear that the pregnant woman harmed the fetus, and it is also clear that the harm took place prior to fetal sentience. It would be strange, indeed, to say that the harm did not take place at the time of the drinking, but rather took place months later after the fetus became sentient, since the damage to the fetus was done at the time of the drinking.

The second reason Colb and Dorf offer for thinking that aborting pre-sentient fetuses is morally benign rests on the distinction between negative and positive duties. Negative duties are duties to do no harm. Positive duties are duties to provide some benefit or affirmative assistance. Colb and Dorf draw on the act/omission distinction to argue that we have a strong negative duty to refrain from harming any being capable of being harmed (it is clearly wrong to actively harm another being), but, they insist, we have no positive duties to assist others (failing to confer a benefit is perfectly permissible)—unless we acquire those positive duties by voluntarily entering into certain kinds of relationships or agreements. Since they think that pre-sentient fetuses cannot be harmed (for reasons discussed above), they contend that aborting such fetuses is just a failure to provide the fetus the benefit of being born. Since they think we have no positive duty to benefit others, they conclude that a

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pregnant woman has no duty to benefit a pre-sentient fetus by bringing that fetus to term. (110)

The supposed moral distinction between actions and omissions does not hold up well to philosophical scrutiny. Consider Peter Singer's famous pond example: On my way to give a lecture, I notice that a small child has fallen into the campus pond and is in danger of drowning. If I wade in and save the child, I may ruin my shoes and pants, and I may have to delay my lecture. "Would anyone deny that I ought to wade in and pull the child out?" (Singer 2011, 199).

As I understand them, Colb and Dorf think that my wading in to save the child would be an act of supererogation. Saving the child, though an incredibly good thing to do, is not morally required. Usually, it is only utilitarians that have to bite such large bullets. My take on the pond example (and the take of most others I've encountered) is that it would be profoundly morally wrong of me to let the child drown, and if that's right, then we do have positive duties to assist others in addition to negative duties to do them no harm. Moreover, my positive duty to save the drowning child becomes even stronger, if I am the only person who can do so.

If, as I argued above, pre-sentient fetuses can be harmed by their deaths and if the capacity to be harmed in a certain way confers a right not to be harmed in that way, then pre-sentient fetuses, like their sentient counterparts, have a prima facie right not to be killed. Even so, it wouldn't follow that aborting them is always wrong because prima facie rights are overridable—the woman might have an overriding reason morally weighty enough to justify the abortion. But it would follow that aborting pre-sentient fetuses is wrong absent such a reason.

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Regardless whether or not pre-sentient fetuses have the capacity to be harmed and the corresponding right not to be harmed, sentient fetuses clearly do have this capacity and corresponding right. As noted above, Colb and Dorf hold that “Absent some very strong justification or excuse, we have a [moral] duty to avoid intentionally inflicting suffering or death on any sentient being, whether human or nonhuman” (13). Unfortunately, we are never told what sorts of reasons would be morally weighty enough to justify aborting a sentient fetus, but that is precisely what we need to know to assess the moral status of such abortions. Is the desire to not be pregnant a weighty enough reason to justify killing a sentient being with a right to life? Is the desire for a child of a different sex a sufficiently weighty reason to terminate a sentient fetus? I suspect that their answers would be “Yes” and “No,” respectively, because they think that a “woman has the right to end the internal occupation of her body” (89), but don’t think that “she has the right to discover whether her fetus is male or female” (89).

As noted at the outset, Colb and Dorf maintain that some abortions are clearly immoral, but argue that the woman should still have a legal right to have an abortion even when the abortion is immoral. They think the decision of whether or not to have an abortion should always be left up to the mother. Given current laws in the U.S., it is up to the pregnant woman whether or not to have an abortion (at least within a certain timeframe),³ but it is not up to the woman whether or not the abortion is morally permissible. Morality doesn’t vary from individual to individual. So, it would have been very helpful (and particularly helpful for women wishing to do what is morally right) to know when an abortion is immoral and when it is not. In short, their discussion of the moral status of abortion would have benefitted considerably from a more detailed discussion of the

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kinds of maternal considerations that do legitimately override the fetus's right not to be harmed and the kinds of maternal considerations that don't.

In places, they seem to suggest that wanting to not be in reproductive servitude is a sufficiently good reason to kill the fetus.⁴ They view any unwanted pregnancy "as an inherently parasitic experience in which one being takes a tremendous amount, in an intimate way, from the other" (66).⁵ Given the parasitic nature of pregnancy, they argue that no woman should ever be legally required to provide such reproductive service. Consequently, they oppose anti-abortion laws on the grounds that such good Samaritan laws would have the effect of forcing women to remain in nonconsensual reproductive servitude.⁶ I agree that there are compelling reasons not to enact such good Samaritan laws, but let's stay focused on the moral status of aborting sentient fetuses.

Any reasonable person must agree that an unwanted pregnancy places a severe burden on a woman who desires to be free of such reproductive servitude.⁷ The moral question we need to address is this: Does the desire to free oneself of reproductive servitude provide a moral reason weighty enough to justify killing a sentient fetus with a right not to be harmed? Rather than trying to answer this question directly, it might be useful to consider three less invasive forms of reproductive-related servitude.

Case 1: Suppose a woman gives birth to a healthy child in an environment where the only source of food for the child is her own breast milk. If she doesn't breastfeed the child, the child will die. In such a situation, is the woman morally required to breastfeed the child, or can she free herself from being in

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nutritional servitude by letting the one-day-old child starve to death? It seems to me that it would be wrong for her to let the child starve to death just to be free of the burden of having to breastfeed the child. Compare Case 1 to Case 2: One could feed the child, but only by purchasing store bought formula. Surely, it would be wrong to let a child starve to death just to avoid the expense of having to purchase baby formula. There are differences between the cases to be sure. Breastfeeding places extra physical demands on a woman's body and requires a kind of intimacy not required by feeding a baby formula from a bottle, but are these differences great enough to justify the mother in letting the sentient baby starve to death in Case 1 but not in Case 2?

Case 3: While it is true that only women can be subject to the kind of reproductive servitude required by pregnancy, men can be and routinely are legally conscripted into another kind of reproductive-related servitude. The father of a single mother's child is legally required pay child support for the first 18 years of that child's life, whether he interacts with the child or not. Suppose he simply doesn't want to be in that kind of involuntary financial servitude for 18 years. Would it be morally permissible for him to kill the one-day-old sentient infant to free himself from such servitude? Surely not! If it is wrong for a man to kill an unwanted sentient newborn child to avoid 18 years of involuntary financial servitude, but permissible for a woman to kill an unwanted sentient fetus to avoid the remaining four months of reproductive servitude, there must be a morally relevant difference between these two kinds of servitude. Note, I'm not claiming that no such difference exists; I'm just asking those who claim that the desire to be free from reproductive servitude justifies killing a sentient fetus to identify what that relevant difference is. Note also, I'm not denying that

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there can be reasons sufficiently weighty to justify aborting a sentient fetus—threat to the life of the mother is clearly such a reason. I'm just inquiring as to whether the desire to avoid reproductive servitude is such a reason.

Part 2. Strategy, Tactics, and Methods

a. Welfarism vs. Abolitionism

Assuming, as Colb, Dorf, and I do, that the ultimate ethical goal is to bring an end to all animal exploitation in agriculture and science, should animal rights activists and animal rights organizations (broadly construed) work, at least in part, to improve the welfare of the billions of animals currently being exploited in the most grotesque, horrific ways, or should they only support approaches that get the abolitionist seal of approval, such as vegan education campaigns?

Colb and Dorf offer a largely a priori argument for favoring the abolitionist approach that I can't rehearse here. While I don't have space to do this hotly contested intra-movement debate justice here, I do want to stress that the issue is an empirical one. We need empirical research to determine the most effective ways to eliminate animal exploitation, and that research simply hasn't been done yet (though [Animal Charity Evaluators](#) is currently in the process of identifying the animal charities that are most effective at reducing the number of animals being exploited). Rather than offer my own unsupported a priori speculations concerning this debate, let me make a couple of ecumenical observations and suggestions. The first thing to note about the debate over welfarism vs. abolitionism is that the two approaches are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. Many organizations work to further both aims, i.e., they work to improve animal welfare while also engaging

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in abolitionist campaigns like vegan education and outreach. There can also be hybrid approaches like abolition-aimed incrementalism. Critics of welfarism often cite the worst forms of welfarism to make their abolitionist case. When a welfarist organization works with the animal agriculture industry to promote some inconsequential change and then, in turn, helps to promote the sale of animal products so produced, that organization betrays the animals it has pledged to protect. But an abolition-aimed incrementalist organization can work with state and federal legislatures (not the industry) to pass laws that ban and criminalize all forms of unanesthetized mutilation. It can work with legislatures to completely ban gestation crates and battery cages. It can work to bring an end to government subsidies that artificially lower the cost of meat and animal products. When such an organization achieves such goals, it should never endorse the new “product” as “humane” because the industry is inherently inhumane. Instead, that organization should immediately start working with the legislature to pass the next reform. Each of the reforms I’m envisioning will raise the cost of producing meat and animal products, and these higher prices will reduce demand, which, in turn, will reduce the number of animals being unjustly exploited. That’s not armchair philosophy. It’s simple economics.

b. Graphic Images

Should animal rights activists use graphic images in an effort to convince others to adopt vegan lifestyles? While Colb and Dorf acknowledge that “exposing people to the violence that they solicit with their choices as consumers is *morally appropriate* and perhaps even beneficial given our natural psychological processes for inhibiting violence” (161, emphasis mine), they are nevertheless generally opposed to showing

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graphic images and videos of the violence inherent in raising animals for food—*on tactical grounds*. Colb and Dorf worry that forcing people to confront the violence they support with their purchases can desensitize those people to animal suffering.

Is the use of graphic images and videos an effective way to convince others to adopt vegan lifestyles? Or, does exposing people to graphic videos simply desensitize them to animal suffering? Once again these are empirical questions. One piece of relevant empirical data comes from the Farm Animal Rights Movement [FARM]. Each year FARM conducts its “10 Billion Lives” tour to call attention to the 10 billion land animals slaughtered annually in the U.S. alone. The tour bus travels to college campuses and music festivals, and activists pay students and festival-goers \$1.00 to watch their graphic four-minute [10 Billion Lives Video](#), which accurately depicts the brutal treatment routinely inflicted on farmed animals. FARM then follows up with these viewers via email. According to the [10 Billion Lives Tour website](#), 80% of the viewers of their video commit to eating fewer animal products. If this self-reported number is accurate, then exposing people to graphic images and videos does seem to be an effective way of convincing people to eat fewer animal products. That said, as an educator, I’m more concerned about effective pedagogy in the classroom than I am about “activist tactics” in the street.

There are a number of reasons why I think it important to supplement philosophical articles and moral arguments with graphic images and videos of the violence students are supporting when they consume meat and animal products. Such images enrich student understanding of the degree of suffering inflicted on animals. As Kathie Jenni astutely observes:

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“We’re troubled by suffering that we learn of through prose and statistics; but our unease remains vague, sporadic, and practically inert. We respond in dramatically different ways to suffering we *see*” (2005, 1). To morally respond to a problem, one must believe that the problem is real. When students read graphic descriptions of the cruelty and suffering inherent in factory farming, they tend to dismiss the accounts as “activist exaggerations.” They simply can’t believe that farmers would actually treat their animals in the ways described. What would normally count as a reason, i.e., an accurate written description of animal treatment, loses its epistemic force in the presence of the “exaggeration” defeater. Showing students graphic images and undercover videos that demonstrate that the written descriptions they read are accurate serves to rebut the “exaggeration” defeater and restore the original reason. As Jenni puts it, graphic visual presentations “make skepticism and avoidance temporarily less possible. Presented with detailed images of factory farms, the student who dismissed horror stories as activists’ exaggerations is forced to acknowledge the neglect and brutality that she had heard of as real” (2005, 2). So, one reason that judicious classroom use of graphic videos is important is because of its epistemic value: “Seeing is believing.”

Graphic visual presentations also play an important role in moral motivation. Nearly every semester that I teach contemporary moral issues, I have encounters of the following sort: After reading and discussing Singer’s arguments for ethical vegetarianism, some students will come up to me after class and say, “Singer has convinced me. I agree that eating meat is wrong.” Only to defiantly add, “But I’m going to continue eating meat anyway!”

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The next class period, these same students meet their meat when I show a ten-minute Mercy for Animals video [[“What Cody Saw”](#)] that documents the harsh realities of animal agriculture. After viewing this video, many of these same students come up to me after class and say, “I had no idea it was so bad. I’m never eating meat again. Thank you for showing that video!” What changed? On day one, they merely believed that eating meat was wrong. They had what I call “thin knowledge” of wrongness of eating meat—a vague conviction that eating meat is wrong, but they did not fully understand, appreciate, or grasp that wrongness. They suffered from what Shelly Kagan (1989) calls “paleness of belief”: a condition in which their beliefs were not fully absorbed, or did not fully register with them. On day two, these students not only believed that eating meat is wrong, they felt and fully appreciated that eating meat is wrong. They acquired “thick knowledge”—a fully integrated understanding and emotional awareness of the wrongness of eating meat.

I see it play out every semester: Graphic images and videos serve as a corrective for “pale” belief. What was “pale” becomes “vivid.” Again, Jenni: “When we see that ‘inhumane slaughter’ entails the struggles of exhausted pigs to escape workers who kick them, beat them, and cut them apart while they are conscious, abstract knowledge becomes richly informed and emotionally powerful awareness” (2005, 3-4). As a philosophy professor, it is not my place to tell students what to believe, but it is my responsibility to provide students with the information needed to make their own fully informed moral decisions, and I have repeatedly found that the judicious use of graphic videos is an indispensable means of providing that information.

c. Violence

One of the greatest virtues of their book is that Colb and Dorf never shy away from controversial topics. One such topic is “Violence.” Should animal rights activists use violence to help reduce the number of animal rights violations?

The first thing to note when answering this question, as Colb and Dorf do note, is that we do think that some atrocities are so heinous that violence is justified to bring them to an end. When the Nazis embarked on their genocidal project and began implementing the so-called “final solution,” the Nazis were systematically violating the rights of millions of innocent Jews. Virtually everyone agrees that the Allies’ use of violence against the Nazis to bring an end to the Nazis’ heinous, criminal treatment of innocent Jews was, indeed, warranted. Colb and Dorf agree. They acknowledge that there are “times when violence may not only be legitimate but may even be morally obligatory. We regard the need to stop Hitler to have represented one such moral imperative” (168).

Some people in the animal rights movement view our current wholesale disregard for the rights of animals as the moral equivalent of the Nazi Holocaust.⁸ Colb and Dorf maintain that sentient beings have a right to life and a right not to be harmed. Since animal agriculture systematically violates these rights, Colb and Dorf explore whether it would be morally permissible to use violence to protect the rights of at least some of these innocent victims. They “unequivocally and categorically oppose violence” in both the animal rights movement and the anti-abortion movement. (167) They offer compelling reasons for opposing violence directed at abortion providers and for opposing violence directed at the perpetrators of animal rights

violations (i.e., farmers and slaughterhouse workers). First, while it may be true that one can save some particular fetuses or animals by an act of violence, there are other particular fetuses or animals that one can save without resorting to violence. When one can choose between a violent method and an equally effective nonviolent method of reducing the number of abortions or animal rights violations, there is clear reason to prefer the nonviolent method. Second, they offer the consequentialist argument that in the current context violence is unlikely to be effective at reducing the number of abortions or the number of animals victimized by the meat and animal products industries, since other providers/producers will simply replace any current providers/producers harmed by the violent attack. Violence that holds no promise of achieving its stated end is both immoral and counterproductive.⁹

Conclusion

As noted at the outset, *Beating Hearts: Abortion and Animal Rights* is a lively, engaging, and at times, probing and insightful introduction to the central issues in both debates. It would be a particularly useful text for helping students to think more clearly about the moral status of human fetuses and nonhuman animals.

I should note in closing that none of the criticisms raised here affect the soundness of their overarching argument. Regardless whether we have positive duties or not, we clearly have a prima facie duty not to harm beings capable of being harmed. Since sentient fetuses and sentient animals can be harmed, we have a corresponding duty not to harm them, absent a compelling reason for doing so. A pregnant woman might have a compelling reason to abort a sentient fetus, but there is no compelling reason to kill (or pay others to kill) animals for food, since we can

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easily meet all of our nutritional needs with a delicious plant-based diet. Consequently, the book's central thesis is correct: The case for ethical veganism is much stronger than the case against abortion (even where sentient fetuses are concerned). Indeed, veganism is morally required when plant-based food is available.¹⁰

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Endnotes

¹ For a more detailed commonsense defense of the immorality of eating animals, see my "[The Commonsense Case for Ethical Vegetarianism](#)" *Between the Species* 19(1): 2-31.

² A point acknowledged by Colb and Dorf: "for a woman to gestate the pre-sentient fetus past the point of sentience and then give birth to the resulting infant is, in an important sense, to bestow a gift" (110).

³ According to the Center for Reproductive Rights's "[The World's Abortion Laws Map 2013 Update](#)" Fact Sheet: "Currently, more than 60% of the world's population lives in countries where induced abortion is permitted either for a wide range of reasons or without restriction as to reason. In contrast, 26% of all people reside in countries where abortion is generally prohibited."

⁴ I say, "kill the fetus," because, according to Colb and Dorf, most women who have abortions don't just want to be free of the reproductive servitude, they want the fetus dead. As Colb and Dorf put it, most women who have abortions "do not want the growing fetus inside them to exist anymore" (88).

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⁵ They compare an unhappily pregnant woman's parasitic predicament to that of a man suffering from a tapeworm that his body cannot defeat without intervention. (79)

⁶ A point first made by Judith Jarvis Thomson in "A Defense of Abortion" (1971).

⁷ Colb and Dorf compare the burden women who are denied the right to abortions face with the reproductive servitude in which dairy cows and laying hens are held: "In each case, females' reproductive capacities are used for the benefit of others: abortion prohibitions appropriate the bodies of women for the benefit of fetuses; dairy and egg production appropriate the bodies of cows and hens for the benefit of the people who will eventually eat the dairy and egg products" (77). That the dairy and egg industries depend for their existence on the unjust exploitation of females' reproductive capacities was first noted by Carol Adams (1990). She dubbed egg and dairy products "feminized protein" to make visible the hidden female victims of these oppressive industries. (1990, 80)

⁸ The protagonist in Jewish Nobel Laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Penitent* poignantly makes the Nazi comparison as follows:

I had long since come to the conclusion that man's treatment of God's creatures makes mockery of all his ideals and of the whole alleged humanism. In order for this overstuffed individual to enjoy his ham, a living creature had to be raised, dragged to its death, stabbed, tortured, scalded in hot water. The man didn't give a second's thought to the fact that the pig was made of the same stuff as he and that it had to pay with suffering and death so that he could taste its flesh. I've thought more than once that when it comes to animals, every man is a Nazi. (1983, 39)

For others who have argued that our current wholesale disregard of the rights of animals is the moral equivalent of the Nazi Holocaust, see Bernstein 2004 and Patterson 2002.

⁹ Peter Singer makes a similar observation in Singer 2011, 274.

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