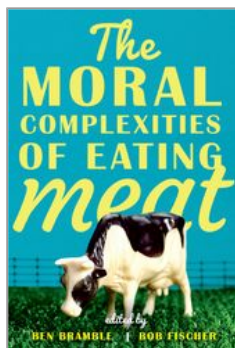


Strict Vegetarianism Is Immoral

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The Moral Complexities of Eating Meat

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Abstract and Keywords

The most popular and convincing arguments for the claim that vegetarianism is morally obligatory focus on the extensive, unnecessary harm done to *animals* and to the *environment* by raising animals industrially in confinement conditions (factory farming). These arguments may succeed in showing that purchasing and consuming industrially raised meat is immoral. They fail, however, to establish that strict vegetarianism is obligatory because they falsely assume that eating vegetables is the only alternative to eating factory-farmed meat that avoids the harms of factory farming. Moreover, the very premises of the arguments imply that eating some (non-factory-farmed) meat rather than only vegetables is morally obligatory. Therefore, if the central premises of these usual arguments are true, then strict vegetarianism is immoral.

Keywords: vegetarianism, factory farm, animals, environment

Strict Vegetarianism Is Immoral

Introduction

The most popular and convincing arguments for the claim that vegetarianism is morally obligatory focus on the extensive, unnecessary harm done to *animals* and to the *environment* by raising animals industrially in confinement conditions (factory farming). I outline the strongest versions of these arguments. I grant that it follows from their central premises that purchasing and consuming factory-farmed meat is immoral. The arguments fail, however, to establish that strict vegetarianism is obligatory because they falsely assume that eating vegetables is the only alternative to eating factory-farmed meat that avoids the harms of factory farming. I show that these arguments not only fail to establish that strict vegetarianism is morally obligatory, but that the very premises of the arguments imply that eating some (non-factory-farmed) meat rather than only vegetables is morally obligatory. Therefore, if the central premises of these usual arguments are true, then strict vegetarianism is immoral.

The Factory Harm Argument

The first argument for vegetarianism to consider focuses on the harm done to animals raised on factory farms. I take as my point of (p.31) departure an agreement between me and the strict vegetarian on premise (P1) Factory farming causes extensive harm to animals. I use “extensive” in the double sense of large in both scope and severity. I take this point about extensive harm as so well established by the scientific and the philosophical literatures, as well as by popular media accounts, that we can simply treat it as common knowledge and a shared assumption.¹ To review just a few of the harmful practices and conditions: To reduce the natural impulse of laying hens to peck at each other that is exacerbated by their stocking density in cramped battery cages, the first quarter or third of their beaks is painfully cut off when they are young. Meat chickens are raised in enclosures housing tens of thousands of birds, where ammonia levels are so high that many suffer from chronic respiratory disease. Pregnant pigs are kept in gestation crates so small that they can barely move. Male pigs and beef cattle are castrated without anesthesia. Pigs and cattle on the way to the slaughterhouse

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are packed on trucks without protection from the elements and without food or water. Many suffer, and some die on the way. At the slaughterhouse, cattle and pigs are sometimes shackled and hoisted fully conscious and kicking, before their throats are cut. These would all seem to be harms, whether, as David DeGrazia (2009, p. 153) points out, one's account of harm is based on pain, an inability to engage in species-specific functioning, or something else.

Consider now the next premise: (P2) This harm is unnecessary. It is unnecessary in the sense that we humans do not need to cause it in order to gain adequate nutrition for healthy bodies and to preserve our lives. Simply put, there are other, readily available, perfectly nutritious, non-animal sources of food. I will not dwell on this point at all, except to say that it is commonly accepted in the field of nutrition on the basis of careful scientific study.²

Combining these first two premises, we get the intermediate conclusion (C1) The practice of factory farming causes extensive, unnecessary harm to animals.

The next premise of the argument is (P3) It is wrong (knowingly) to cause, or support practices that cause, extensive, unnecessary harm to animals. DeGrazia (2009, p. 159) argues that this premise—indeed, the whole argument I am in the process of sketching—is consistent with a variety of normative ethical theories.³ (p.32) One need not be a consequentialist, for example, to accept it. I grant this crucial assumption for the sake of the argument. The next premise is (P4) Purchasing and consuming meat originating on factory farms supports the practice of factory farming. Therefore, we get the conclusion (C2) Purchasing and consuming meat from factory farms is wrong.

Philosophers have raised questions about some of these assumptions.⁴ I do not know whether the questions can be met, but I do think that this general line of argument, or something like it, lies behind the most common and strongest case that can be made against purchasing and consuming factory-farmed meat. So I shall just assume for the sake of my purposes here that this argument does, indeed, establish that

purchasing and consuming meat from factory-farmed animals is wrong. What I wish to question is the next step that is often taken. This is the step from the conclusion that purchasing and consuming meat from factory farms is wrong to the obligatoriness of a vegetarian diet. It is apparently just supposed to be obvious that we are morally obligated to eat vegetables rather than factory-farmed animal products because eating vegetables does not harm factory-farmed animals.⁵

Let us call the argument just rehearsed that starts from the extensive harm done to factory-farmed animals and that ends with the conclusion that we are morally required to be vegetarians—let us call this argument the Factory Harm Argument. I now show that this last step of the Factory Harm Argument is a misstep.⁶

(p.33) Factory Farming and Roadkill

I am going to argue, in effect, that the Factory Harm Argument presents a false dilemma. The argument assumes that the only alternative to eating meat from factory-farmed animals is to eat vegetables. That is just not the case, though, for there are alternatives to eating factory animals that avoid some or all of the harm to animals associated with factory farming. These are: (1) Meat from humanely raised and slaughtered animals; (2) Meat from hunted wild animals; (3) Meat from animals killed by vehicular collisions, that is, roadkill. I will not address humane meat or hunted meat⁷ because (a) I have partially addressed them elsewhere (Bruckner, 2007) and (b) I think their cases are less clear than the case of roadkill, because only eating roadkill completely avoids supporting practices that cause harm to animals, whereas eating humane meat or hunted meat still supports practices that cause at least some harm to some of the animals from which the meat is taken.

The premises of the Factory Harm Argument, I claim, support eating roadkill at least as much as they support eating vegetables. The Factory Harm Argument appeals to the extensive, unnecessary harm done to factory-farmed animals. We are obligated not to purchase and consume such meat

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because doing that supports practices that cause extensive, unnecessary harm to animals. So we are obligated to eat something else. Vegetables are something else. But so is roadkill. So the Factory Harm Argument supports eating vegetables and it supports eating roadkill, since eating both avoids supporting factory farms.

I need to head off some immediate objections by clarifying the sort of roadkill under discussion and explaining some of the freegan practices involved in its collection and consumption. Under discussion is the collection and consumption of large, intact, fresh, and unspoiled animals such as deer, moose, and elk. Most US states allow individuals to collect and consume such animals, usually after adhering to some reporting requirements to protect (p.34) against poachers claiming that illegally taken game was road-killed. In some states, charitable organizations and government agencies have pioneered systems for collecting, butchering, and distributing road-killed meat to needy individuals. Not under discussion is the rotting squirrel or rabbit carcass that is being picked apart by vultures, or the mangled deer spread over several lanes of highway that is conjured in many minds when mentioning roadkill.

In this connection, here are some very quick statistics. State Farm Insurance (2011) estimates that in fiscal year 2010–2011 in the United States, there were 1,063,732 claims that involved deer, elk, or moose to all automobile insurance companies.⁸ Now “[e]stimates of the proportion of deer that are hit on roadways and go undocumented, and hence unreported, range from 50% . . . to more than six times the reported number” (Forman et al., 2003, p. 118). To err on the conservative side, let us just double the State Farm estimate, and take 2.1 million as a reasonable estimate of the number of deer, elk, and moose killed by vehicular traffic in the United States each year. Although elk and moose are considerably larger (and yield more meat) than deer, let us suppose that all of those animals were deer, that 75% of those deer were suitable for consumption, and that 75% of the meat on each deer was undamaged. Still estimating conservatively, a deer yields 35 pounds of meat (Pennsylvania Game Commission,

2014). So that means that those 2.1 million deer would yield approximately 41,343,750 pounds of perfectly nutritious meat. One beef animal yields about 516 pounds of meat (Iowa State University, 2009, p. 15). So if those deer, elk, and moose (collectively “venison”) were collected for consumption, that would be equivalent to approximately 80,124 beef animals or 8,268,750 five-pound chickens per year.⁹

(p.35) Roadkill and Vegetables

So much for that. I claim to have shown that collecting and consuming roadkill is at least as well supported by the Factory Harm Argument as purchasing and consuming vegetables, since both refrain from supporting factory farming. I now argue that if the premises of the Factory Harm Argument are true, then we are positively morally obligated *not* to have diets consisting of all vegetables. Instead, we are obligated to get some of our protein from roadkill.

There is a questionable argument against strict vegetarianism and in favor of the consumption of large pasture-raised herbivores that was put forward in the philosophical literature by animal science researcher Steven Davis (2003). Davis claims that the harm done to wild animals through raising vegetables is greater than the combined harm to wild and domestic animals through raising large herbivores on pasture. His basic idea is that in the farming of common vegetable crops such as wheat, corn, soybeans, and rice, many field animals are injured or killed when the fields are plowed and when the crops are harvested. These include rabbits, field mice, ground-nesting birds, even wild turkeys and numerous amphibians (Davis, 2003, p. 389). For example, cutting a wheat field allegedly results in chopping up about half of the rabbits in the field and almost all of the other small mammals, ground birds, and reptiles (*ibid.*). On the other hand, using the same amount of land to graze beef cattle certainly results in the deaths of those cattle as well as some field animals. In the cattle-grazing operation, however, it is unnecessary to perform operations on the pasture with as much frequency and vigor as is needed to plow, disc, plant, cultivate, and harvest vegetable fields. So, raising large ruminants on pasture will result in fewer animal deaths per acre than

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growing vegetables. Therefore, this argument concludes, we may be morally obligated *not* to have diets consisting only of vegetables, but to include some meat from large pastured ruminants in our diets as well (Davis, 2003, p. 393).

The nice thing about this argument is that it uses the same harm principle as the Factory Harm Argument, namely, (P3) It is wrong (knowingly) to cause, or support practices that cause, extensive, unnecessary harm to animals. Maintaining an exclusively vegetarian diet supports a practice that causes extensive harm. The harm is unnecessary because pastured beef is an alternative food source, the production of which causes less harm. Therefore, it is wrong to maintain an exclusively vegetarian diet.

One less nice thing about this argument, as argued by Andy Lamey (2007), is that it relies on some questionable empirical claims to support the calculations Davis uses to argue that the total number of deaths caused by a vegetarian diet is greater than the total number of deaths caused by a diet of mostly (p.36) vegetables and some pasture-raised beef. Lamey does not dispute that a large number of animals are killed in vegetable production, but only that it is not clear that enough are killed to support the calculations that Davis uses to show that vegetable farming causes more animal harm than cattle grazing.

So, it is not clear that Davis's argument for the obligatoriness of eating some beef is successful, but I have a variation on his argument to propose. Everyone seems to agree that extensive harm is done to animals in the production of vegetables. If only we could find a source of food that did not harm any animals at all, then we would have a knock-down argument for the obligatoriness of eating that kind of food rather than vegetables, because otherwise one supports a practice that causes animals extensive, unnecessary harm, which is wrong, according to (P3). I have it: Picking up road-killed animals does not harm any animals. Road-killed animals are already dead, so *they* are not harmed by picking them up as livestock *are* harmed by common husbandry practices. And no animals are killed in the *process* of picking up roadkill, as field animals are killed in the process of crop farming. So on the very

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standards of the Factory Harm Argument, we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill.

To recapitulate: Factory farming causes extensive, unnecessary harm to animals. By (P3), supporting a practice that causes extensive, unnecessary harm to animals is wrong. So, instead of factory-farmed meat, the argument alleges, we should purchase and consume only vegetables, because that avoids supporting a practice that harms factory-farmed animals.

I objected to this argument on the grounds that eating vegetables is not the only way to avoid supporting a practice that harms factory-farmed animals. Eating roadkill also avoids supporting factory farming. So the conclusion that we are morally obligated to have an exclusively vegetarian diet does not follow.

I just argued that, if the harm principle is true that was used to support the claim that eating factory-farmed meat is wrong, then replacing some vegetables with meat from roadkill is morally obligatory. Once we see that roadkill is a harm-free source of food and that vegetables are not harm free, we see that the reasons usually given for strict vegetarianism support an obligation not to be strict vegetarians but to eat some roadkill.

Objection: Straw Person

Is it not, one might object, really only a straw person who would claim that we are prohibited from eating all meat under all circumstances? What if the philosophers whose view I am addressing responded that they only intend their views to apply to the purchase and consumption of factory-farmed meat and (p.37) that they do not mean to prohibit the consumption of meat altogether? Indeed, there is decisive evidence for interpreting them as not claiming that the total abstinence from meat is a moral requirement. David DeGrazia, for example, is explicit that his argument does not focus “on the consumption of animal products per se” (2009, p. 148). Stuart Rachels, in his argument that most resembles the Factory Harm Argument, is clear that his “is not an argument for

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vegetarianism” (2011, p. 883).¹⁰ We might see our way to excusing them for describing their views as “vegetarian.” For they are assuming, perhaps, that for the vast majority of people (in many industrialized countries, at least), the vast majority of meat available to them for consumption is factory-farmed meat, so for most people (same qualification) abstaining from factory-farmed meat practically amounts to vegetarianism.

In further fairness to the philosophers under discussion, some indeed do recognize that it is perfectly permissible by their lights to eat roadkill and other meat as long as one does not support practices that cause extensive, unnecessary harm to animals. Peter Singer has been asked repeatedly in interviews about eating roadkill. In 2009 he said he does not “think there’s any problem with [eating] roadkill” (Dawkins, 2009, 19:00–19:35).¹¹ David DeGrazia writes in a footnote to the paper from which I have been drawing that his “position does not oppose, say, the consumption of a dead animal one finds in the woods” (2009, p. 148, fn. 14). Stuart Rachels similarly writes: “Perhaps you shouldn’t support the meat industry by buying its products, but if someone else is about to throw food away, you might as well eat it” (2011, p. 883). Jordan Curnutt is also explicit that his Factory-Harm-type argument “allows . . . eating animals who died due to accidents” (1997, p. 156).

So on their view, there is not “any problem” with eating roadkill; their view “allows” and “does not oppose” eating an already-dead wild animal; and on their view you “might as well eat it.” So eating it is *permissible*. The concern I have with these ways of putting it is that they make it sound like eating these things is *merely* permissible: It is not forbidden by morality to do it, but it is not obligatory either. You can do it or not. From the standpoint of morality, it is a don’t-care decision, similar to the decision whether to tie your left shoe (p.38) first or your right shoe. But clearly the strength of the premises of the Factory Harm Argument—and these are four philosophers who endorse arguments very much like the Factory Harm Argument—clearly the strength of their own premises makes it obligatory, and not merely permissible. For

as I have taken pains to argue, if you fail to eat the already-dead animal and you purchase vegetables instead, then you are supporting a practice that causes extensive harm to animals that is unnecessary, in violation of (P3).

So if the position I was addressing were the position that no meat-eating is permissible under any circumstances, I could justly be accused of attacking a straw person, because these philosophers explicitly disavow that position.¹² But I am not addressing that view. I am addressing their failure to make what I have argued is an obvious inference to which they are committed by their own premises. This is the inference that it is not only permissible in some circumstances to eat meat, but it is obligatory.

The Environmental Harm Argument

Set aside the Factory Harm Argument and considerations of animal welfare. The second argument for vegetarianism that I wish to examine is based on harm done to the environment by raising livestock for food. My discussion of this Environmental Harm Argument will have the same structure as my discussion of the Factory Harm Argument.

The first premise of the argument is (P1) Factory farming causes extensive (i.e., large in scope and severity) harm to the environment. Again, these harms are well established, so I travel quickly and only mention a few.¹³ One sort of harm caused by factory farming is pollution. Factory farming produces (a) CO₂, an environmentally harmful greenhouse gas, largely through operating petroleum-powered equipment. The animals themselves emit vast quantities of (b) methane and nitrous oxide, two other greenhouse gasses. They also produce (c) manure, which contaminates water when improperly managed. Growing crops to feed livestock produces (d) nitrogen runoff from fertilizer, which also pollutes water. A second sort of environmental harm caused by factory farming is the overconsumption of natural resources. This overconsumption is due to the fact that raising crops to feed animals that are then fed (p.39) to humans is much less efficient than raising crops to feed humans directly.

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This inefficiency results in the overuse of petroleum, water, and land.

The next premise of the argument is (P2) These harms are unnecessary. They are unnecessary because we humans do not need to eat meat. This is the same premise with the same support as in the Factory Harm Argument.

Combining (P1) and (P2), we get (C1) The practice of factory farming causes extensive, unnecessary harm to the environment.

The next premise in the argument is (P3) It is wrong (knowingly) to cause, or support practices that cause, extensive, unnecessary harm to the environment. This premise is significantly weaker than the one Michael Allen Fox uses in his version of this argument: “[W]e ought to minimize the harmful impact of our lives . . . on the biosphere” (2000, p. 166). I grant the crucial (P3) for the sake of the argument. Since (P4) Purchasing and consuming meat originating on factory farms supports the practice of factory farming, we get the conclusion (C2) Purchasing and consuming meat from factory farms is wrong. Therefore, vegetarianism is obligatory.

Surely the reader can see what is coming. There is an inferential leap from (C2) to the obligatoriness of vegetarianism. Fox at least tries to support the inference by considering meat from animals raised on non-factory farms before claiming that “vegetarians . . . are able to live even more lightly on the land than do meat-eaters of any description” (2000, p. 166). That is false, though, because consumers of roadkill tread yet more lightly on the land than do vegetarians.¹⁴

To make out this last claim, consider pollution first. Farming crops for humans produces (a) some CO₂ through petroleum-operated farm equipment. Ideally, the collection of roadkill increases petroleum consumption only by the tiniest amount of additional fuel one uses transporting the additional weight of the deer to one’s home. In the non-ideal case, one burns gasoline to drop it off and pick it up at a butcher shop. It would be hard to estimate whether this would use more or less petroleum than needed for the production and transport of a

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nutritionally equivalent amount of vegetables. So the best we can say about the production of CO₂ from petroleum use is that in the ideal case collecting roadkill likely produces less CO₂ than vegetable farming. As far as (b) methane and nitrous oxide go, roadkill is vastly superior if rice is among the crops produced for human consumption, as rice (p.40) paddies produce large quantities of methane (Neue, 1993); otherwise, roadkill and vegetables are probably even. Roadkill and vegetables are definitely even with regard to (c) manure, as neither produces any. Finally, (d) no nitrogen is put on the soil in order to produce roadkill, but it is used for crops. In the ideal case of crop production, however, nitrogen need not be added to the soil artificially, and if it is, technology exists to collect much of the nitrogen runoff before it enters rivers and streams (Blanco-Canqui et al., 2004). So in the ideal case of vegetable production, roadkill collection and vegetable production appear to be even with regard to nitrogen runoff. Considering (a)-(d) and ideal practices, therefore, roadkill collection probably produces less pollution than crop farming, but almost certainly no more.

Consider the second sort of environmental harm canvassed, the overconsumption of petroleum, water, and land. We found that roadkill may have a slight edge regarding petroleum use. Clearly no water and land need to be devoted to producing roadkill, whereas lots and lots of water and land are needed to grow crops. So from the standpoint of the use of these natural resources, roadkill has a decided advantage.

Again, the argument goes by appeal to the core premise of the Environmental Harm Argument, (P3) It is wrong to cause, or support practices that cause, extensive, unnecessary harm to the environment. We observe that purchasing and consuming vegetables supports vegetable farming, a practice that causes extensive harm to the environment. We have just seen that some of the environmental harms of vegetable farming are unnecessary because roadkill is a less harmful alternative. Therefore, if (P3) is true, then it is wrong to eat only vegetables and we are obligated to collect and consume some roadkill.

Objections

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Causal Impotence

Objection: Your argument only succeeds if you assume that the practice of collecting and consuming roadkill will be causally efficacious in reducing factory-farmed animal production and vegetable production, thereby reducing harms to farm animals, wild animals, and the environment. Yet individual consumption decisions do not have such causal efficacy. If a person collects even 50 pounds of road-killed meat and abstains, therefore, from purchasing 50 pounds of meat or a nutritionally equivalent amount of vegetables from the grocery store, no fewer meat animals or vegetables will be produced. Even collective consumption decisions would not affect animal or vegetable (p.41) production here, since the amount of available roadkill is so tiny in relation to the aggregate nutritional needs of populations where roadkill is available.¹⁵

Reply: The causal link between food consumption decisions and food production decisions is controversial.¹⁶ So I was careful to present my argument—as well as the standard arguments for vegetarianism—in a way that succeeds whether there is a causal link or not. Recall that the principles numbered (P3) say that it is wrong to cause, *or support practices that cause*, extensive, unnecessary harm to animals or the environment. So if there is a causal link between collecting and consuming roadkill and reducing harm, principles (P3) say it is wrong not to collect and consume roadkill, because otherwise one causes unnecessary harm. If there is not such a causal link, the principles still say it is wrong not to collect and consume roadkill because purchasing other food *supports practices that cause* extensive, unnecessary harm. In either case, it is wrong not to collect and consume roadkill.

The idea behind the second branch of the statement of the principles is that complicity matters. Participating in or supporting a practice acknowledged to cause extensive, unnecessary harm is, all else equal, wrong, even if the harm would occur without one's participatory actions or support. We would not excuse a member of a lynch mob on the grounds that his refraining from participating in the lynching would not be causally efficacious in reducing the harm to the lynched

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person. The Factory Harm and Environmental Harm arguments that appeal to principles (P3) similarly say that purchasing and consuming industrially-raised meat when vegetables are available is wrong, even if abstaining from such meat and eating vegetables instead would not be causally efficacious in reducing harm to animals or the environment from factory farming. In parallel, the roadkill arguments that appeal to the (P3) principles say that purchasing and consuming only vegetables when roadkill is available is wrong, even if abstaining from some of the vegetables and collecting and consuming roadkill instead would not be causally efficacious in reducing harm to animals or the environment from vegetable farming.

Opening the Floodgates

It might be admitted that ideally we should consume roadkill, but objected that doing so would lead us to desire to eat more meat than just the relatively (p.42) small amount of roadkill available. Our psychological makeup (in particular, weakness of the will) would lead us to act on this desire, which would lead to greater harm to animals and the environment than refraining from eating meat altogether. So we should refrain from meat altogether.

This line of reasoning, which has been presented to me several times, is impressive for the number of reasoning fallacies it commits. First, it is a slippery slope argument. This argument has the very same bad form as an argument for celibacy that claims that we should not have sex with our committed relationship partners because doing so would stoke desires that would lead us, through weakness of the will, to having sex with many people, which is a worse condition overall than complete abstinence. Second, it shifts the burden of proof inappropriately, and in an especially objectionable way, by making an empirical claim about human behavior under certain conditions without any empirical evidence. The burden of proof should remain with the objector to show that certain widespread immoral actions would result from my proposal (though, indeed, statistically common monogamous partnerships would seem to be empirical evidence in favor of the assumption that we can avoid sliding down such slopes). Finally, the objection relies on a faulty dilemma. The objection

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assumes that if we eat meat, then either we eat roadkill or we eat immorally when we consume additional meat other than roadkill. But the Factory Harm and Environmental Harm Arguments at most establish that purchasing and consuming factory-farmed meat is immoral, not that consuming meat from non-factory farms or meat from hunted wild animals is immoral. Now in this chapter, I do not argue that these are morally acceptable sources of meat, but for an objector to infer on this basis that they are immoral sources of meat would be to engage the fallacy of negative proof.

Different or Additional Implications

Objection: Instead of showing what you say, it follows from the usual arguments for vegetarianism that we should put up fences on roadways to prevent animals from becoming roadkill.

Reply: That would likely be so costly that we would have to sacrifice many important human interests to pay for such fences. So I doubt it follows. Even if it does, surely it follows only in addition to, rather than instead of the claim that we should collect and consume roadkill, for we are presently in a situation without many fences but with much available roadkill. Not collecting and consuming it causes or supports a practice that causes extensive, unnecessary (p.43) harm to animals and the environment, which is wrong by the standards of the harm principles in the arguments I have examined.

Objection: Okay, but your argument certainly shows that we should not drive our cars or fly in planes unless it is necessary, so it is immoral to drive to the movie theater or fly to philosophy conferences, for example. Otherwise we engage in a practice that causes extensive, unnecessary harm to animals and the environment. Similarly, your argument shows that we are obligated to engage in other freegan practices, such as collecting berries, foraging for unspoiled food in dumpsters, collecting and eating the dead bodies of field animals killed in vegetable production, as well as our dead pets and dead relatives. These are absurd implications of your argument.

Reply: Take care to notice that my thesis is not that we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill. My thesis is that the

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usual arguments for vegetarianism imply that we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill. Either the same reasoning does show the other things mentioned in the objection, or it does not. If it does not, then there is no problem for my thesis. If it does, then there are these further potential problems for the vegetarian who propounds the arguments I have examined, but still no problem for my thesis. So in neither case is there a problem for my thesis.

Health Risks

This objection takes issue with my claim above that road-killed meat is “perfectly nutritious.” First, there is strong evidence that a pure vegetarian diet is nutritionally superior to diets containing meat, especially for the prevention of heart disease and many cancers. In reply, I would point out that, relative to most other meats, venison is very low in saturated fat and much higher in cholesterol-reducing polyunsaturated fat. As well, the research that is normally cited supporting the nutritional superiority of vegetarian diets does not address venison specifically.¹⁷ Second, some deer carry Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), the cervid version of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, or mad cow disease). BSE is believed to cause the human variant, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. In reply, I only state that although CWD is not fully understood, there are zero documented cases of humans contracting CWD and no scientific evidence that it is possible for humans to contract CWD. Third, one might worry about the risk of bacterial infection from (p.44) tainted roadkill. In reply, I reiterate that I have in mind only fresh, unspoiled, and intact wild animals.

Other Frequent Objections That I Can Treat Only Briefly

Objection: Roadkill is not harm free. Scavengers are deprived of food if we collect and consume it.

Reply: Usually large road-killed animals of the sort under discussion are not left to be scavenged, but are instead collected by government agencies and wasted in landfills. Individuals who collect roadkill for consumption can place the viscera and other parts not suitable for human consumption where they can be scavenged. Thus, far from harming

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scavengers, the collection of roadkill for consumption can benefit scavengers.

Objection: Collecting and consuming roadkill is disgusting.

Reply: Again, this is not a problem for my thesis. If it is a problem, it is a problem for the vegetarian whose arguments imply that we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill. I can offer some help in solving this problem, however. Even if it were true that collecting and consuming roadkill is disgusting, it would not affect any moral obligation we might have to collect and consume it. People are often morally obligated to do disgusting things. I once found myself obligated to clean my dog's disgusting vomit off of my grandmother's newly-installed carpet. Suppose you suffered a gruesome injury and a stranger could, with very little cost to herself, save your life by closing an impressively hemorrhaging gash in your flesh and applying pressure until the paramedics arrived. That might be disgusting, but (many claim) she would be obligated to do it regardless of the disgust. Some people feel disgust at the thought of eating non-animal sources of protein such as beans and tofu, yet we should not think this bears on whether they are obligated to refrain from animal protein. If one is obligated to do something disgusting, one should get over the disgust and fulfill one's obligation.

Conclusion

If the Factory Harm and Environmental Harm Arguments establish anything, it is only that we are obligated not to purchase and consume factory-farmed meat. Neither argument establishes that we are obligated to purchase and consume only vegetables. Drawing that conclusion requires the hidden premise (p.45) that vegetables are the only morally acceptable alternative to factory-farmed meat. By the strict vegetarian's own standards, another alternative is roadkill.¹⁸

Not only is eating roadkill acceptable on the standards assumed by these arguments, it is obligatory, for otherwise one violates the harm principles central to these arguments. So not only do these arguments fail to establish what they are

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often alleged to establish, that vegetarianism is morally obligatory, but their failure is an interesting one because the core premises of those very arguments can be turned against them to support the conclusion that strict vegetarianism is immoral. The proponents of those arguments could escape this conclusion by giving up the harm principles, but then those arguments against eating factory-farmed meat would have to be given up as well, which is likely more than the vegetarian is willing to pay.¹⁹

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Notes:

(1.) For documentation supporting the following claims, see Rachels (2011), DeGrazia (2009), Singer and Mason (2006), and Rollin (1995).

(2.) On this point, see Rachels (2011, pp. 892–893), Engel (2011, pp. 354–355), and DeGrazia (2009, pp. 154–155).

(3.) Pre-dating DeGrazia (2009), Engel (2000) and Curnutt (1997) similarly argue that vegetarianism is obligatory independent of the truth of any specific moral theory.

(4.) (P3), (P4), and related claims have attracted considerable attention lately, for it is questionable whether any individual's purchase—much less mere consumption—of factory-farmed meat has any causal role in harming animals. Rachels (2011, p. 886) and Norcross (2004, pp. 121–122) recognize this causal impotence problem and argue that there is a tiny chance that an individual's purchasing and consumption decisions will have a massive impact on the number of meat animals produced. This, Norcross says, is "morally and mathematically equivalent to the certainty of saving" a small number of meat animals (2004, p. 233). Budolfson's contribution to this volume attempts to counter this sort of argument. DeGrazia (2009, pp. 157–159) recognizes the need to bridge the gap between the wrongness of factory farming and the obligations of individual consumers. This explains why he settles on a principle similar to the one reflected in (P3) that it is wrong to cause, *or (financially) support practices that cause*, extensive, unnecessary harm. He thinks this sort of formulation is consistent with both consequentialist and non-consequentialist moral theories and reflects our considered view that "complicity matters" (2009, p. 159).

(5.) Making a similar leap in a different argument, Rachels claims that "killing animals to obtain food is wrong" and concludes on this basis that "we should be vegetarians" (2011, p. 894). In fairness to DeGrazia, he does consider non-factory

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farms, and expresses some reservation (albeit mild) that his argument establishes the wrongness of eating meat from all such farms.

(6.) A final note before getting on to the positive part of my argument: I ignore the terminological distinctions among *vegetarian*, *vegan*, and *ovo-lacto vegetarian* because they do not affect the substance of my argument.

(7.) I acknowledge a possible problem with constructions such as “hunted meat” and “venison” versus “muscle tissue from hunted wild animals” and “deer body parts.” These constructions risk either thingifying the animals by identifying them with their products or masking reality by making the animals what Carol Adams (1990, pp. 47–48, p. 67 *et passim*) calls “absent referents” when we refer to such things as steak, hamburger, roasts, and bacon rather than the animals from which these parts come. My excuse is mainly expository economy. I am also not persuaded that there is *always* a problem with language that makes referents absent or otherwise masks reality, though surely there *often* is. We also, for instance, talk about pasta sauce and coleslaw rather than tomatoes and cabbage, not to mention the poorly treated migrant workers who harvested the vegetables. The absence of the referents or in any case less-than-full picture of reality in the shorthand does not necessarily show disrespect for the animals any more than for the migrant workers. Thanks to Mylan Engel for discussion on this point.

(8.) This estimate is consistent with others from 720,000 to 1.5 million (Forman et al., 2003, p. 118).

(9.) Objection: This only amounts to about 0.24% of the over 33 million cattle slaughtered in the United States each year (USDA Economic Research Service, 2014a) and 0.10% of the 8.6 billion chickens slaughtered in the United States each year (USDA Economic Research Service, 2014b), barely a drop in the bucket. Reply: I am not claiming that this volume is large in relation to current meat production. I am not even claiming that any animal suffering would be prevented by widespread roadkill consumption, due to the issues pointed out in note 4. Note, however, that estimates of per capita meat consumption

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in the United States range from 128g/day (Daniel et al., 2011, p. 579) to 212g/day (Wang and Beydoun, 2009, p. 623), or between 0.28 and 0.47 pounds per day. Taking the average of the estimates (0.375 pounds/day), those 41,343,750 pounds of meat would be equivalent to about 300,000 meat-eaters leaving the market. Although this number of meat-eaters is small in relation to the total number of meat eaters, surely no one advocating for vegetarianism on moral grounds should sneeze at any proposal that would be equivalent in this way to increasing the number of vegetarians by 300,000.

(10.) He is not always as careful—see note 5.

(11.) Singer makes similar claims in (Kendall, 2011 and Denton, 2004). Singer and Mason also say that eating meat from dumpster diving is “impeccably consequentialist” (2006, p. 268) and that “it is difficult to see any objection to eating meat taken from” animals killed (by hunting) to protect the environment (2006, pp. 259–260). See the next paragraph for my objection to these ways of putting it.

(12.) I say that it would be a just accusation, not that I would be guilty, for Cora Diamond seems to hold the view that eating meat under any circumstances would be wrong, as in her case of the cow struck by lightning (1978, p. 468).

(13.) See Rachels (2011) and Fox (2000) for documentation supporting the following claims.

(14.) Another reason it is false is that according to one study (Vieux et al., 2013), plant-based diets are associated with higher greenhouse gas emissions than some diets containing meat, because fruits and vegetables have lower caloric content per unit weight (p. 576). So a plant-based diet is not more environmentally friendly in all respects than a diet with meat.

(15.) See the end of the section “Factory Farming and Roadkill” and note 9, where I address the amount of available roadkill.

(16.) See note 4 again for a little bit of detail.

(17.) Note as well, in connection with the figures given in note 9, that under discussion is a relatively small amount of meat.

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(18.) Another alternative is insects. See C. D. Meyers (2013).

(19.) Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Chatham University, Penn State University, New Kensington, the Midsouth Philosophy Conference, the International Social Philosophy Conference, and a Group Session of the Society for Applied Philosophy. Thanks to Mylan Engel for his commentary at the Midsouth and to Robert Jones for his at the Society for Applied Philosophy. I have also benefited from feedback from and discussion with approximately one gazillion people, including most notably Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, Aaron Bell, Christopher Belshaw, Ben Bramble, Sean Bridgen, Lynne Dickson Bruckner, Mark Budolfson, Robert Farley, Bob Fischer, Alexa Forrester, Jennifer Gilley, Bart Gruzalski, Jeff Johnson, Alice Julier, Hanna Kim, Kerri LaCharite, Doug Lavin, Heather McNaugher, C. D. Meyers, Ben Minter, Khrys Myrddin, Marc Nieson, Alastair Norcross, Howard Nye, Evan Riley, Tom Rumbaugh, Sally Scholz, Adam Stawski, Sheryl St. Germain, Joe Ulatowski, Jennifer Wood, Federico Zuolo, and anonymous reviewers for this volume.



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