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ARTICLES

Temperance and Eating Meat

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Abstract

This paper provides an account of the Aristotelian virtue of temperance in regards to food, an account that revolves around the idea of enjoying the right objects and not enjoying the wrong ones. In doing so, the paper distinguishes between two meanings of "taking (or not taking) pleasure in something," one that refers to the *idea* of the activity and one to the *experience* of the activity. The paper then connects this distinction to the temperate person's attitude towards enjoying the right things and to hitting the mean by enjoying the right object, at the right time, and so on. Throughout, the paper uses eating meat as a case in point, to both illustrate and inform the discussion. In the penultimate section, the paper argues that temperance admits of various conceptions depending on what is right and wrong in regards to eating meat. The paper concludes by responding to three objections.

Keywords Animals · Aristotle · Meat eating · Pleasure · Temperance · Virtue

Introduction

The few existing virtue ethics accounts of eating meat do not contain detailed discussions of the relevant virtues and vices.[1] Yet many virtues explain how and why a virtuous person would be disposed towards eating meat. For example, the virtue

[1] Hursthouse, one of the founders of contemporary virtue ethics, has little to say about specific virtues (2006, 2011). Temperance especially, which is a crucial virtue with respect to eating, is not discussed much. It appears on the list of key words in Gambrel and Cafaro's essay (2010), but is not discussed in the essay itself. When temperance is discussed, it is discussed superficially. Alvaro (2017, pp. 771–774, 2019, pp. 94–95, and *passim*) treats it as about only nutrition and health, and does not discuss the moral psychology of the temperate person. Van Tongeren's (2003) view of temperance is sketchy and treats it as a virtue of moderation.

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of compassion might dispose the virtuous person to not eat the meat of animals that are inhumanely treated or prematurely (even if humanely) killed. The virtues of care and benevolence might dispose her to alleviate animals' suffering, even perhaps promote their well-being. The virtue of justice might dispose her to give animals their due, such as leaving them alone, even promoting their well-being as a form of reparation. Moreover, given the sheer number of meat-eaters in the world, investigating what it means to be vicious in regards to this practice is needed to illuminate our understanding of both virtue ethics and the moral psychology of eating meat.

My focus is on a specific virtue, which is Aristotle's virtue of temperance, a virtue that moderates the desires for *bodily pleasures*. Given that a principal reason why people eat meat is the pleasure that they derive from its taste, temperance is one of the most crucial virtues to analyze in this context.[2] My aim is to explain what I take to be a broad Aristotelian conception of temperance and to raise a few questions prompted by Aristotle's sketch of this virtue.[3] I then connect this analysis to reasons for and against eating meat. Let me elaborate.

There are two sides to discussing ethics and virtue. On one side is the moral psychology of the virtues (and vices). My focus is on this side. I use factory-farmed meat as a case in point: I *assume* that eating factory-farmed meat is immoral—a plausible assumption to make given that factory-farmed meat is a well-documented and clear moral wrong[4]—and investigate what the temperate person's disposition towards it is given its moral wrongness.

On the other side of discussing ethics and virtue is that of what is wrong and right to do with respect to eating meat—it is here where most of the focus of animal ethics is. Later in the paper ("Right and Wrong Meats" section) I briefly discuss the reasons for and against eating meat depending on its source (factory-farmed or humanely raised and killed, e.g.) and depending on how we conceive of animals in relation to us. Given the reasons offered for and against these ways, different conceptions of temperance can be developed in reaction to these reasons—for example, temperance might "look differently" if there are no strong moral reasons against eating the meat of roadkill or humanely raised and killed animals.

In brief, I analyze the Aristotelian virtue of temperance using factory-farmed meat as an uncontroversial example of a type of meat that is wrong to eat ("Temperance" section). Once the analysis is done, I check it against the harder cases, such as humanely sourced meat ("Right and Wrong Meats" section).

[2] Other prominent reasons for eating meat include cultural and religious ones. Taste, however, is more basic in that many would not eat meat for cultural or religious reasons if they did not enjoy its taste. See Ciocchetti (2012) for aesthetic and cultural arguments for eating meat. See Piazza et al. (2015) for studies on the four justifications (the 4 Ns) that people give for eating meat.

[3] I do not aim for an exegesis of Aristotle's view but for constructing an Aristotelian conception of temperance that might depart from Aristotle's own view in some respects. Also, due to limited space I don't discuss intemperance.

[4] In the "Right and Wrong Meats" section I discuss other reasons for why eating non-factory farmed meat is wrong. The cruelty of factory farms and the suffering they cause are well documented. I find the first section of Rachels' "Vegetarianism" (2011) excellent in recounting the horrors.

Before we begin, I see the virtues as, roughly and among other things, dispositions to do what is right and to not do what is wrong. This means that the virtuous person knows what to do and how to react in a particular situation, regardless of how she does that (e.g., by contextually and wisely applying moral rules, or altogether shunning them). The crucial point is that what to do and feel depends on a correct (moral) understanding of the situation, which the virtuous person has. This implies that her knowledge of the situation does not *constitute* rightness, but *responds* to it.[5] Thus, I avoid agent-based forms of virtue ethics but take no stand on whether a generalist or a particularist virtue ethics is correct. I stress this point so as to ward off the objection that the points in the "Right and Wrong Meats" section (about what is right and wrong to eat) are not derived from those in the "Temperance" section (about temperance); I do not attempt such a derivation simply because I do not think it will succeed.

I also understand virtue as "a disposition, well entrenched in its possessor … to notice, expect, value, feel, desire, choose, act, and react in certain characteristic ways" (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2016). Virtues are excellences, all infused with wisdom, that allow the virtuous person to be motivated by certain types of reasons given the details of any situation in which he finds himself (I take no position on the relationship between being virtuous and flourishing). In the following discussion, we will see how the temperate person reacts in some of these ways to eating meat.

Temperance

Basics

Temperance is the virtue concerned with moderating the bodily desires for food, drink, and sex; it is "well-formed desire" (Van Tongeren 2003, p. 123). Food temperance is that aspect of the virtue concerned with moderating our desires for food. Food temperance, then, is the proper disposition in one's desires for the pleasures of eating.[6]

To elaborate: according to Aristotle, temperance is the virtue concerned with bodily pleasures, but its scope is specifically the pleasures of touch and taste; they are those "shared with the other animals, and so appear slavish and bestial"; the pleasures of sight, hearing and smell, though they can be excessive, are not the subject of temperance (*NE* 1118a, 1118a25, 1118a3–25, respectively).[7] Aristotle adds that taste has little to do with it, even in the case of food; he gives the example of a glutton who wished for a long neck so as to feel for longer the *touch* of the food as

[5] The virtuous person, then, can be the criterion by which we know what to do, but her knowledge does not constitute or ground rightness (on this, see McAleer 2007).

[6] In what follows, I use "desire an object" to mean "desire an object for the pleasure that engaging with it (e.g., eating it) brings." One "enjoys an object" when one's desire is being satisfied.

[7] All references are to *NE* (1999).

it goes down his throat (1118a30). It's unclear why Aristotle claims this, given that taste is crucial in enjoying food. Perhaps it was Aristotle's understanding of taste as a kind of touch, or his belief that only touch can exist without the other senses,[8] or, perhaps, his difficulty in conceiving of how eating can be enjoyable if one could not swallow the food. But Aristotle might be wrong about this point, since not being able to taste the food takes the pleasure right out of it. This is confirmed by the fact that the sense of smell is crucial for tasting food, and people who, say, suffer from colds do not enjoy eating as much as they usually do because they cannot taste the food. Fortunately, we do not need to settle the issue of which senses are primary as long as we agree that food temperance is about the pleasures of food.

Temperance, however, is more about what Aristotle calls "distinctive pleasures." He distinguishes these pleasures from natural pleasures or appetites. The latter are for nourishment, and they tend not to differ among people. But distinctive pleasures are those derived from individuals' tastes, which pick out specific pleasures (1118b10–35).[9] Some people enjoy the taste of shrimp, others don't. Some find artichokes or okra nauseating, others relish their tastes. It might be that Aristotle's distinction is similar to, or derives from, a distinction between desiring food to satisfy one's hunger and desiring food to enjoy the food's taste. Although these two types of desire often overlap, they are conceptually and ethically different from each other.

They are conceptually different because the pleasure of the former is mainly a pleasure of replenishment, and the hungry person need not enjoy the taste of the food she is eating. Imagine a committed vegan who has not eaten for days and whose only option is meat. She might enjoy eating it in that it satisfies her hunger, but she might not enjoy eating it, even feel nauseated by it, in that it feels noxious to eat meat. The displeasure seems to be not simply attitudinal—that she dislikes *the idea* of eating meat—but also sensate—she feels revulsion as she chews the meat and swallows it. On the other hand, one need not be hungry in order to enjoy food, though being "stuffed" is likely to inhibit the desire for more food. One need not be hungry to desire a Cadbury bar or another serving of lasagna. Indeed, people frequently snack when not hungry. Since not everyone enjoys the same foods, we can here see Aristotle's notion of distinctive pleasures at play.

Moreover, natural and distinctive pleasures are ethically different from each other because they raise different issues. Eating to satisfy hunger is a biological desire that leaves the hungry with little choice but to seek satisfaction. Aristotle asserts that it is unusual to err with natural pleasures, and that when this happens it is usually for excess in eating "indiscriminately" until one is very full. So the ethical issue this pleasure raises is rare but, when it does occur, is about eating too much (it is here that the popular understanding of intemperance as involving excessive amounts of food consumption is most relevant). With the pleasures of taste, we have more choice, and which pleasures we choose to enjoy, how, and by how much, are all factors that play into temperance. As Aristotle puts it, "many [people] make errors and in many ways" because with distinctive pleasures people can enjoy the *wrong* things.

[8] Sisko (2003) argues for the former claim, while Pearson (2014, pp. 124–125) argues for the latter.

[9] On this, see Pearson (2014, p. 126).

"And in all these ways intemperate people go to excess. For some of the things they enjoy are hateful, and hence wrong; distinctive pleasures that it is right to enjoy they enjoy more than is right, and more than most people enjoy them" (1119b25).

This quotation includes two conceptions of intemperance: that concerning the *wrong object*, and that concerning *excessive amounts*, including of the right objects. One can go wrong by desiring the wrong object, and one can go wrong by desiring too much of the right object (one can also go wrong, of course, by desiring too much of the wrong object).[10] So when one eats for both for nourishment and taste,[11] and if one has a choice about what to eat, two moral questions arise, one about the choice of the object (as we will see in more detail below): Is it the wrong object? And one about the amount that is eaten: Is it excessive?[12]

Aristotle, then, does not offer merely a doctrine of moderation, of too much and too little to eat, but also one of wrong and right things to desire.[13] The former he seems to offer especially with respect to the natural pleasures and the right objects to enjoy (these two might of course coincide, as when one enjoys a plate of vegetables to fill one's hunger), whereas the latter he offers with respect to the distinctive ones (as when one is not hungry yet enjoys the French fries one steals from another's plate). Although Aristotle does not rule out natural pleasures from the scope of temperance, he thinks that the virtue and its vice are more relevant to distinctive pleasures.

Why is that? The main reason, I think, is that the distinctive foods that we enjoy say something about our *choices*, which in turn say something about our values and our responsibility in making these choices, including possibly our culpable ignorance and lack of reflection.[14] These in turn indicate something about our characters. That is, the distinctive pleasures we take in food reflect back on us as moral agents in ways that eating to satisfy hunger does not—while we have little choice about satisfying hunger, the pleasures of eating that we seek reflect our voluntary decisions in the seeking itself and in the things we seek to enjoy. Someone's desire, for example, to regularly eat steak because of how it tastes expresses that he values certain foods, and his desire's persistence despite his knowledge of the harm caused to the animal expresses that he does not value much, if at all, the animal's welfare.[15] It is here that the idea of the right and wrong things to enjoy is prominent. Moral considerations arise, then, especially in regards to those distinctive foods one chooses to enjoy, and

[10] Curzer claims that temperance is a matter of hitting two targets, the desire target and the enjoyment target. But it seems to me that it is just the desire target, with the desire being for enjoying the wrong object or for enjoying too much the right object (2012, p. 74).

[11] I thank one reviewer for asking me to explain what happens when both pleasures are pursued.

[12] An interesting issue in this connection (that I won't pursue here) is that in a world of scarcity and inequality, excessive eating is always a matter of desiring the wrong object—the wrong object being an excessive amount of food.

[13] Hursthouse (1981) made this claim originally. Curzer (1996) contested it. For further discussion about these two conceptions in regards to sexual desire, see Halwani (2003, 171–191) (omitted for anonymity).

[14] Recall that to Aristotle the cultivation of virtues and vices is in our control.

[15] On the "meat paradox" (how people can eat meat yet claim to care for animals), see Loughnan et al. (2014).

the food that one takes pleasure in says something about one's character that mere hunger satisfaction does not.

To summarize, the fulcrum of Aristotle's discussion of temperance is desire not just for any pleasures, but for bodily pleasures, and not for just any bodily pleasures, but those having to do with specific senses (taste and touch), and especially for people's desires for distinctive pleasures, not for the satisfaction of hunger. The scope of temperance (and intemperance) is thus quite narrow.

Temperance and Distinctive Pleasures

Aristotle claims that with respect to distinctive pleasures, the temperate person enjoys the right pleasures, in the right ways, and not to excess (1119b25). He adds that the temperate person:

> finds no pleasure in what most pleases the intemperate person, but finds it disagreeable; he finds no pleasure at all in the wrong things. He finds no intense pleasure in any [bodily pleasures], suffers no pain at their absence, and has no appetite for them, or only a moderate appetite, not to the wrong degree or at the wrong time or anything else at all of that sort. If something is pleasant and conducive to health and fitness, he will desire this moderately and in the right way; and he will desire in the same way anything else that is pleasant, if it is no obstacle to health and fitness, does not deviate from the fine, and does not exceed his means (1119a10–20).

There are at least two ideas in the above paragraph. The basic one—and essential for any plausible conception of temperance—is that the temperate person finds no pleasure in the wrong things nor feels pain at their absence (these might characterize the continent). The second idea is that the temperate person *does* find pleasure in the right things, but only under certain conditions, such as when enjoying them is not an obstacle to health, the enjoyment is within his means, and he enjoys them neither intensely nor excessively.[16] The temperate person, then, need have no prudish or ascetic tendencies when it comes to pleasure.[17] Aristotle's seemingly contrary remarks—that the temperate person would not find bodily pleasures intense, would not suffer pain at their absence, and would have no appetite for them—might refer not so much to prudishness as to aloofness; it is as if the temperate person cannot be bothered with such trifles, though, should they happen to come her way, she need not only not shun them, but might enjoy them.[18]

[16] Clearly, there are wrong things to enjoy because they are not conducive to health, such as earth and shattered glass. But I understand Aristotle's point to refer to right things to enjoy that can, in some circumstances, be unconducive to health.

[17] Thus, those who, like Alvaro (2019, pp. 94–95, and *passim*) understand temperance as revolving around eating what is healthy or necessary miss out on a crucial aspect of temperance.

[18] However, there is room in Aristotle's account for the idea that the temperate person would also *seek* such pleasures, at least on occasion. See Halwani (2018) for more discussion.

But there is an ambiguity in Aristotle's claims. "Finds (no) pleasure in" something can mean that the temperate person would not find appealing the *prospect* or *idea* of eating the wrong thing, which prospect can be brought to his attention by an idea of eating the item in question, by its sight, by its smell, or by some other manner. Here, the reactions of the temperate to the prospect of eating something that is wrong can range from lack of appeal to outright revulsion, with all the degrees in between.[19] On the opposite end, the temperate person would find the idea of enjoying the right thing to be appealing, as long as the above-mentioned conditions are satisfied.[20]

But "finds (no) pleasure in" can also mean that the temperate person would not enjoy eating the wrong things—that the *experience* of the activity is unenjoyable. Again, here we can run the gamut from indifference to finding the experience revolting. However, under this second meaning, the claim that the temperate person would not enjoy eating the wrong things could mean different things. Let's suppose that the food in question is a hamburger obtained from a factory-farmed cow. One way in which the temperate person would not enjoy the hamburger is that it would not *taste* good to her—the very taste of the flesh is odious. Another way is that although she finds the taste pleasant enough, the experience itself is unenjoyable knowing that she is eating a wrong thing. There is a clear difference between the two experiences: one is the pleasure of a sensation, while the other is the pleasure of an experience. On both readings, the temperate person would not find the overall experience enjoyable, but in one of them she might find the taste of the meat pleasant.

Both finding the idea of eating a hamburger unappealing and not enjoying the experience of eating the hamburger are true of the temperate person, and for the same reason, namely, because eating hamburgers is wrong. Aristotle accepts both. His claim that the temperate person would not be pained at the absence of right pleasures indicates that he has in mind the attitudinal meaning. And his claim that the temperate person finds no "*intense* pleasure in any [bodily pleasures]" (1119a15; my emphasis) indicates that he intends the experiential meaning. I will capture both points in the expression that the temperate person "would not desire the wrong things," and I will return to the issue of taste shortly. Oppositely, the temperate person would desire the right things: she would find the idea of enjoying the right object appealing, and she would enjoy the experience of enjoying it.

Putting these claims together, Aristotle's conception of temperance contains at least three elements[21]: The temperate person (1) knows (or justifiably believes) and accepts that some objects are right, and others are wrong, to enjoy; (2), because of (1), she would not desire the wrong objects; and (3) under certain conditions, she

[19] The differences in the reactions can be explained situationally and by the temperaments of the various temperate individuals.

[20] And, perhaps, as long as we keep in mind Aristotle's claims that the temperate person does not find the right pleasures *too* appealing and that she does not feel pain at their absence. "Perhaps" because this touches on how plausible we think that being aloof towards pleasure belongs to temperance. See Halwani (2018).

[21] "At least" because adding in other ideas from Aristotle—such as that the temperate person does not enjoy right pleasures too intensely or feels pain at their absence—yields two different conceptions of temperance. See Halwani (2018).

would desire the right objects and would (moderately) enjoy the pleasures of consuming them. (1) is shared with the continent and the incontinent, and (2) is crucial because being temperate is not simply what one believes or values but how these beliefs reverberate in one's psyche. (2) also serves to distinguish the temperate from the continent, on the assumption that part of what tempts continent people to engage in such activities is enjoying their pleasures (*NE* 1151b35). (3) is needed to distinguish the temperate from those who are "who are deficient in pleasure and enjoy them less than is right" (1119a6).[22]

Having temperance in regards to food, then, disposes the agent to enjoy the right objects and to not enjoy the wrong ones.[23] It is here, of course, where disagreement arises about which are the wrong and right objects, and much depends on our views of what is wrong and right when it comes to eating food (meat, specifically, for this paper).[24] For now, we can claim that factory-farmed meat is the wrong thing to enjoy (given our assumption), that the temperate person would not desire to eat it, and that this lack of desire can run the gamut from indifference to finding the very idea revolting.[25]

Does the above raise the bar too high for temperance, given how wide-spread factory-farmed meat is, given the sheer number of meat-eaters, and given how ingrained in us is the desire to eat meat? Does claiming that the temperate person does not desire factory-farmed meat imply that most people are not temperate when it comes to such meat? Put assertively, the claim that the temperate person lacks such desires implies that the desires are base, and this implies that many people are not temperate because they desire factory-farmed meat.

Generally speaking, the difficulty of being virtuous should not be surprising, given that the virtues are formed by habituation, that they involve pleasure and pain, and that hitting the mean is difficult. Regarding temperance specifically, the objection is probably right that many people do desire (*de re*, but for many also *de dicto*) to eat factory-farmed meat. However, given its wrongness, there should be no hesitation in describing such desires as base. What else would base desires be if they are not desires for the wrong object? And although there could be cases in which the desire is so tenacious that the agent simply cannot rid himself of it, lack of control does not imply lack of baseness (indeed, the agent might beat himself up over having these desires precisely because they are base).

Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the desires for meat, specifically for factory-farmed meat,[26] are so tenacious that they cannot be shed, especially after

[22] Pearson thinks that (3) does more. It "moves Aristotle's account beyond a simple doctrine of moderation… it may be right to let one's hair down and make a really good night of it" (2014, p. 132).

[23] In the "Pleasant Tastes and Pleasant Experiences" section I address the question of whether the temperate person can enjoy to some extent the wrong things.

[24] I address this in the "Right and Wrong Meats" section.

[25] The desires in question are *de dicto*, of course. A temperate person could desire a factory-farmed hamburger thinking that it is an Impossible Burger.

[26] In the "Right and Wrong Meats" section, I discuss reasons for and against eating non-factory-farmed meat. For now, my focus continues to be on factory-farmed meat as a clear case of wrong meat so as to continue with the analysis of temperance.

agents know how factory farms operate and the kind and amount of cruelty they involve. Indeed, people's desires for meat (not only for factory-farmed meat) can be eradicated, as witnessed by thousands of vegetarians and vegans who are not in the least bit tempted by eating it. Because of this, and assuming basic commonalities in people's psychologies, people who have disavowed eating meat but who nonetheless continue to find the idea appealing or tempting are better classified as continent people, which is, really, nothing to scoff at.

Finally, to claim that one finds the idea of eating factory-farmed meat appealing is precisely to claim that one is not temperate. After all, the point of being temperate is having one's desires for pleasure (and avoidance of pain) conform with one's reason. When this is not the case, we have good reason to doubt the person's virtue. Even in cases of extreme hunger, when one's only option is meat, we expect to find a complex psychological picture in which the temperate agent finds himself torn between the pull of his physiology and the pull of his informed desires.

Thus, we probably need to face the fact that most people are not temperate when it comes to eating factory-farmed meat. This fact should not surprise us. Because meat is ever-present, because eating it is rarely condemned, because eating it is even celebrated in multiple direct and indirect ways, and because almost all cultures' foods contain meat dishes, it is to be expected that temperance in regards to meat is uncommon.[27]

Pleasant Tastes and Pleasant Experiences

The difficult question, however, concerns cases of mixed enjoyment in which one finds the taste of something pleasant but does not enjoy, for various reasons, the overall experience. In regards to meat, the type of case is one in which a temperate person eats factory-farmed meat, knows that she is eating it, is against eating it, and does not enjoy the overall experience, but nonetheless finds the *taste* of the meat pleasant.[28] Such cases are not far-fetched: temperate people can find themselves in situations in which there are good reasons for eating meat (e.g., cultural or religious reasons). What should we say about the person's temperance? *Is* she temperate if she somehow finds the taste of the meat pleasant?

One option is to insist that she is not. Finding the taste of the meat pleasant while knowing its source is a good sign that one is not temperate. To find the taste pleasant is thus a strike against one's virtue. This line of reasoning, however, is difficult to sustain, because it seems to imply that if the meat had been sourced humanely, finding its taste pleasant would not tell against one's temperance. Yet this would

[27] We should keep in mind that just because most people are not temperate when it comes to meat does not mean that they are *overall* not virtuous. This is because people eat meat for reasons other than the pleasures of its taste, and these reasons must be factored into the assessment of someone's overall virtue. I thank a referee for pressing me to clarify this point.

[28] I thus do not have in mind cases in which the temperate person finds the taste of the meat unpleasant *and* the experience unpleasant, or cases in which the very taste of the meat changes knowing its source or that it is meat. The latter type of case is one in which the temperate person's beliefs and values changes the very way that the meat tastes.

be puzzling: why should we crucify someone's temperance for finding the *taste* pleasant if the meat is factory-farmed, when we wouldn't if the meat is humanely produced, *on the assumption* that one does not find the overall experience in the former case enjoyable? One's temperance should not depend on finding the taste of meat pleasant if we maintain the distinction between morally and immorally sourced meats. The claim against one's temperance would be more convincing if based on a moral indictment of *all* meat-eating, on the basis that meat is the wrong type of thing to eat, regardless of how it is sourced (see the "Right and Wrong Meats" section).

Another option is to claim that temperance is a threshold concept, that above a certain level there can be various degrees of temperance, and that our case represents someone at the threshold.[29] While all temperate people would neither enjoy the overall experience nor would find the idea of eating the meat appealing, some of them—those whose knowledge of the ingredients of the dish does not change the dish's very taste for them—might find the taste of the meat pleasant. In support, I note that, first, meat does taste good (at least to a large number of people); second, we need a conception of temperance that is demanding *enough*: it maintains the non-baseness of the temperate person's desires, while not requiring the absolute purity of the desire (which a non-threshold conception might demand); third, the idea of being demanding enough is adequately found in the requirements of not finding the idea of eating factory-farmed meat appealing and of not enjoying the overall experience of eating it; and fourth, these two requirements are enough to distinguish the temperate from the non-temperate.

We should thus not deny temperance to someone who finds the taste of meat pleasant but does not enjoy the overall experience of eating it.

At the Right Time, for the Right Reason, etc

Aristotle's claim that the virtuous person would act "at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way" (1106b21) further complicates things. Consider that on the assumption that eating and enjoying factory-farmed meat is wrong, it would be akin to Aristotelian adultery—there is no such thing as committing adultery in "a mean"—with the right person, at the right time, for the right reasons, etc.; similarly with eating factory-farmed meat: there is no mean in its respect, and any desires to eat such meat under particular conditions implies that the desires are non-virtuous.[30]

But are there foods that are in themselves okay to enjoy but wrong to enjoy under specific conditions? Consider foods that are in themselves perfectly okay to enjoy, such as strawberries. But suppose that the strawberries one is about to eat were harvested by immigrants under terrible conditions.[31] What should the temperate

[29] Swanton (2003) defends a threshold concept of virtue. See also Russell (2009, pp. 112–123).

[30] I am excluding cases in which the desire is to do the right thing and the right thing somehow happens to be eating factory-farmed meat.

[31] I assume in this example that we know how strawberries are harvested. I also use strawberries as the example, and not meat, in order to focus on the temperate person's attitude towards enjoying a type of thing that is clearly okay to enjoy (strawberries) but whose cultivation is often unjust (e.g., see https://dailynexus.com/2019-03-19/whats-the-real-cost-of-a-strawberry/).

person's attitude towards them be? Would he desire them? How would he feel about such strawberries? Would the prospect of eating them be appealing? Would he find the experience overall enjoyable?

This question is difficult to answer. On the one hand, if the temperate person enjoys the right things, for the right reasons, at the right times, etc., then strawberries harvested through exploitation and under terrible conditions would count as the wrong object, so they would not appeal to the temperate person. We should not enjoy objects produced under unjust and terrible conditions. And although Aristotle himself never listed "not produced through unjust mechanisms" as one of the conditions for right action, he probably neither intended nor understood his list to be exhaustive. Even if he did, we are not hostage to it, for enjoying something that is the product of near-slavery conditions is morally contentious (hence, e.g., the existence of debates about buying products made in sweatshops).

On the other hand, to insist on the above point leads to a problem,[32] namely, that if it turns out that most foods are produced under terrible and unjust conditions, then most foods would be morally inappropriate to eat and—more relevant to temperance—to desire. If we assume that most foods are indeed produced under unjust and terrible conditions, then people who desire and enjoy such foods would not be temperate, and temperate people would be doomed to enjoying only very few things. These seem to be unacceptable implications.

An important consideration here is the *kind* of thing being eaten. Imagine someone arguing as follows[33]: There is nothing intrinsically morally problematic about eating strawberries. In a world that is generally equitable, that is, in a non-ideal world which is not vitiated by massive and structural forms of injustice, especially as pertaining to agricultural practices, eating strawberries is perfectly ethically wholesome. So strawberries are not the *kind of thing* that is intrinsically wrong to enjoy or desire, whereas factory-farmed meat is intrinsically the wrong kind of thing to enjoy.[34]

This distinction exploits an ambiguity in Aristotle's view that temperate people do not enjoy the wrong things. The ambiguity is whether "wrong things" refers to types or tokens: do temperate people not enjoy meat, period, or do they not enjoy *this* meat (the one that is factory farmed)?[35] Aristotle must have intended both readings: some types of things are wrong to enjoy, such as eating fetuses (1148b20), and some tokens are wrong to enjoy if consuming them is not "at the right time, for the right reason," etc. The above point banks on this distinction and claims that strawberries and fruits are examples of right things to enjoy while meat is one of the wrong things.

[32] Thanks to Brian Berkey for this point.

[33] Budolfson gives a similar argument that relies on the idea of the degree of the essentiality of harm (2016, pp. 94–98).

[34] Plakias (2016, p. 208) uses "extrinsic vegetarianism" to refer to the view that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating meat (and that what's wrong is the way the meat is produced), and "intrinsic vegetarianism" to refer to the view that eating meat is intrinsically wrong.

[35] Types can be classified differently, such as meat in general vs. factory-farmed meat. I use "token" to always refer to a specific dish: *this* meat on this plate, and *that* meat on that plate.

Granted that strawberries are the type of food that is okay to eat, what about temperance and *these* particular strawberries, produced and harvested under cruel conditions? Returning to the three-way distinction among finding the taste pleasant, enjoying the experience, and finding the idea of eating a particular dish pleasant, there is no good reason to impugn the temperance of an agent who finds the *taste* of strawberries pleasant, because strawberries are not the kind of thing that is intrinsically wrong to enjoy.

But in regards to the attitude towards the idea of eating those strawberries and enjoying the experience of eating them, the answer is unclear, and it again depends on how we conceive of the virtues, as, say, threshold concepts or not.[36] For instance, we can claim that a temperate person would not find the idea of eating such strawberries palatable, and would not enjoy the experience of eating them. And, regarding the difficulty raised above that the temperate would enjoy too few things, then so be it. We do live in a world vitiated by structural injustices and massive inequalities, and, given that virtuous people are morally attuned to the moral facts of the world, we expect them to be sensitive about what they encounter and witness. If this means that it would be harder for them to desire and to enjoy what the majority of people does, then that is that. This might take a psychological toll on the virtuous, finding themselves in a position in which they do not enjoy the many things that they could have enjoyed had the world been better. But we know that being morally good is not easy.

We can also claim, however, that if virtue is a threshold concept, we can expect variations in the attitudes of the virtuous. One temperate person might not desire those strawberries but another might, and we could justify the latter's desire on the grounds that the workers who produced them were able to find work and supply money to their families, even if the conditions under which they work are suboptimal, and that many of them chose this kind of work even if there were coercive aspects to their choices.

I incline towards the first line of reasoning, but I offer the second in an attempt to blunt the force of the objection that the unjust strawberries would lead to unacceptable implications. Note that if this attempt to blunt the force of the objection is unsuccessful, it would be *because* we find the conditions of producing the strawberries so horrible that we balk at the idea that the workers' choices and money somehow lessen the horridness of the workers' working conditions. But if we do so balk, then we should not balk at the suggestion that the temperate person would not desire those strawberries and other foods produced under terrible conditions, *precisely* because the conditions are terrible, thereby giving temperate people good reason to not desire such morally tainted objects.

To return to meat, if meat is not as such the wrong thing to eat, but is wrong to eat only under certain conditions (e.g., factory farmed), then there is logical space for conceptions of temperance that allow the temperate person to eat meat under the rights conditions (see the "Right and Wrong Meats" section).

[36] Whether we operate with an ideally virtuous or non-ideally virtuous person is an issue I won't go into because I have been assuming the former.

To sum up, I have so far outlined a conception of Aristotelian temperance and explained its scope. I have also raised three basic points about it: (1) the ambiguity and different meaning of "finds pleasure in" and "finds no pleasure in"; (2) whether a temperate person may find pleasant the taste of a wrong thing as long as she does not enjoy the experience of eating it; and (3) the role that the distinction between types and tokens of wrong things to enjoy plays, and what implications this has to temperance.

Right and Wrong Meats

If temperance disposes the agent to enjoy the right things and to not enjoy the wrong ones, then what *are* the right and wrong things to enjoy? Is meat, *as such*, the wrong kind of thing? Or only tokens of it, such as those from factory farms? These are the kinds of questions that are "on the other side"—that concern what is right and wrong—the answers to which are arrived independently of issues in the moral psychology of the virtuous person. Because temperance is a virtue, and because virtues, per our definition, dispose the agent to react to situations in characteristic ways, there will be different conceptions of temperance that correspond to the various moral facts about the whether it is right or wrong to eat meat or certain tokens of meat.

I have assumed that eating factory farmed meat is wrong. This assumption is entirely plausible given the cruelty involved in factory farms and the incomparable worth of the pleasures obtained from eating their meat. The suffering caused to animals in industrial farming simply cannot justify the pleasure of eating meat.[37] No person can be temperate yet freely and knowingly eat factory-farmed meat. I thus turn my attention to more debatable issues.

If *only* factory-farmed meat (or meat obtained in cruel ways) is wrong to eat, then the temperate person would not desire such meat. However, meat in general would still be *the kind of thing* that is not wrong to desire, so considerations similar to those raised in the strawberry case would apply to it. But it might well be that meat that is harvested through humanely killing the animals is also wrong, because it results in the animals' death (which is a harm) brought about by killing them.[38] If so, then the temperate person would also not desire to eat such meat, though meat *as such* continues to remain the kind of thing that it is not wrong to desire. It might even be that the temperate person would not desire fake meat processed to look and taste like common forms of meat, such as the Impossible Burger, given that they imitate the kind of meat produced through a cruel history of suffering and death.[39] Perhaps the only

[37] On this, see the excellent arguments given by Rachels (2011) and Norcross (2004).

[38] I am assuming that under ideal conditions animals can be killed humanely. The reality is different (https://www.theguardian.com/food/2018/nov/16/theres-no-such-thing-as-humane-meat-or-eggs-stop-kidding-yourself). For the debate about whether death is a harm to animals, see for example Belshaw (2016), Harman (2011), and Norcross (2013).

[39] See Fischer and Ozturk (2017).

types of meat that the temperate person would desire are roadkill and in vitro meat because neither involves the killing of animals for the purposes of eating their flesh.[40]

Thus, there can be various conceptions of temperance that correspond to the various ways that meat may (or may not) be sourced.

To my mind, the most interesting argument would be to the effect that, because there is something distasteful, unbecoming, disrespectful, or ignoble involved in consuming the flesh of creatures whose lives and manner of existence might generally be incompatible with viewing them as food, *all* meat is the wrong kind of object to eat.[41] Discussing the dominant moral approaches to eating meat, Cora Diamond states, "there is nothing in the discussion which suggests that a cow is *not* something to eat" even if it were killed by a bolt of lightning (1978, p. 468). Diamond briefly develops the idea that non-human animals are fellow creatures, though she claims that this is compatible with sometimes eating them, fairly hunting them, or raising them "without bad usage" (1978, p. 475). If she is right that being fellow creatures does not rule out eating them as long as we treat them morally, then the concept of being fellow creatures would need to be bolstered or replaced by one that would rule out viewing animals as consumable or as food.[42] What we need then is not merely a conception of animals as fellow creatures, but as *non-food* fellow creatures, similar in this respect to how human beings see each other. The conception would have to embody ideas such as animals' having their own lives to lead,[43] perhaps even as (secular) "miracles of creation."[44]

Correspondingly, temperance would be informed by this conception of animals, such that the temperate person would not desire to eat their meat, no matter how it is obtained. Meat would be seen as Elizabeth Costello, the protagonist of Coetzee's eponymous novel, sees it, as "fragments of corpses that [people] have bought for money" (2003, p. 114). Mary Midgley similarly refers to a "gestalt-shift": "To himself, the meat-eater seems to be eating life. To the vegetarian, he seems to be eating death" (1998, p. 27). If animals are non-food fellow-creatures, then all meat would be off the table for the temperate person, and instances in which she has to eat it would be ones that she views with compunction.

Temperance would also be psychologically and conceptually connected to other virtues, such as piety, reverence, humility, respect for nature, and wonder, virtues that embody the above conceptions and attitudes.[45] These virtues dispose the

[40] However, one can argue that a temperate person would also desire neither in vitro meat nor roadkill, because, symbolically speaking, desiring such meat exhibits disrespect to the history of human-caused suffering of animals.

[41] Plakias (2016) tackles the issue of seeing meat as food.

[42] Here, the notion of objectification, which has been much discussed in philosophy of sex, can be enriched by seeing how it connects to our treatment of animals.

[43] Something that Diamond recognizes but then seems to upend in her claim that they may be hunted and raised for our use (1978, p. 475). Other philosophers, most notably Regan (1983) and Taylor (1986), have offered such views—that animals are subjects of a life or have inherent value.

[44] As the protagonist of J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* suggests (1982, p. 105).

[45] Diamond flirts with piety but sets it aside as itself in need of explanation (1978, p. 469). Hursthouse suggests secular piety, reverence, respect, and wonder, but towards nature in general (2007, pp. 161–167, 2011, pp. 140–141). These virtues are not yet developed in the literature.

virtuous person to not see animals as food, even if she understands that their flesh can be physically nutritious or tasty, thereby allowing a temperate person to not desire meat, no matter what its source is.[46]

However, depending on how we conceive of our relationship to animals, virtues other than piety, reverence, respect, and wonder might be relevant. For instance, Diamond's view (which, recall, does not have the additional component of seeing animals as non-food) leaves room for the moral permissibility of eating some meat and, thus, for a temperance that allows its agent to desire some meat. Virtues such as reverence and piety would then play no role *if* we assume that they issue a blanket prohibition on eating animals.[47] But other virtues could, such as a (non-Aristotelian) virtue of magnanimity which might dictate that, yes, animals are fellow creatures that we *may* consume under certain conditions, per Diamond's view, but magnanimous people are above doing that because it is ignoble to consume the flesh of *fellow* creatures, especially ones who are weaker than us given our technological abilities. Such a view of magnanimity latches onto the notion of rightness that refers to what is *good* or *noble* to do, not to what is permissible, thereby disposing the agent to not consume the flesh of animals.[48] It would *inform* and *shape* temperance such that the virtuous person would not desire their flesh.

If the view that animals are non-food fellow creatures is plausible, it would allow us to side-step many of the debates occurring in animal ethics about the moral permissibility of eating meat that is produced humanely or through non-human causes; about issues in causal inefficacy (whether someone's becoming a vegetarian is obligatory knowing that doing so would have little to no effect on the meat industry);[49] about eating left-over meat and worrying whether doing so on occasion would generate "internal permission" to eat non-leftover-meat on future occasions;[50] and it would have interesting things to say about being vegan, especially in cases when using animal products is done humanely (e.g., eating eggs produced humanely and not involving the killing of male chicks, and consuming humanely produced wool), and about certain forms of intervention in the wild to alleviate the suffering inflicted on their prey by predators.[51]

[46] Gruen (2015) addresses this point.

[47] Of course, we can conceive of these virtues in such a way as to allow for some meat-eating, as in some indigenous practices of revering animals and nature while consuming them.

[48] Alvaro (2019, pp. 101–103) misses a great opportunity to develop this virtue in regards to veganism, because his discussion reduces it to the virtue of fairness and compassion.

[49] Some of these arguments revolve around being complicit in moral wrongdoing. See Chignell (2016), Harman (2016), and Martin (2016). I find this debate puzzling for the same reason that Bramble (2016, pp. 148–149) does, namely, that arguments against eating meat don't usually have anything to say about our individual actions and their effects.

[50] Gruen and Jones (2016, p. 168).

[51] McMahan (2016) provides interesting and strong arguments in favor of such intervention.

Whether the view of animals as non-consumable is viable remains to be seen. The crucial point is that our conception of temperance will reflect these moral debates in animal ethics.[52]

Three Objections

I close by replying to three objections. The first claims that given the intricate debates about animals, discussions of temperance will be in a constant state of paralysis because they have to wait on the moral verdicts of these debates, verdicts that in all likelihood will always be revisable given the nature of philosophy.[53] This paralysis affects both philosophical *conceptions* of temperance, and the moral *agents* themselves, who will have a difficult time cultivating the virtues in themselves or in their children if they do not know what is right and wrong, unless we expect moral agents to be versed in the metaphysical and scientific debates about whether the killing of a humanely raised cow wrongs the cow.

This objection, however, is not confined to food ethics: that the conception of temperance is subject to revision is not different from other conceptions in philosophy, an expected consequence in a field defined by the give-and-take of reasons. Consider, for example, that conceptions of compassion and fairness in discussions about euthanasia might have to adjust to the relevant scientific and medical data.

As to the virtuous themselves, they have always managed without having, or needing to have, intricate or specialized knowledge about the relevant fields of their virtues,[54] because beyond a certain point further knowledge might be unnecessary to know right from wrong in order to cultivate virtue in themselves and their children. In the case of animals, three relevant and obvious facts, known to human beings since a long time, seem sufficient to incline us to adopt the conception of them as non-food: animals are sentient, they can enjoy and lead good lives, and death harms them by cutting their lives short, especially when they are killed at a young age for meat. These three facts are all that is needed to cultivate temperance. Moreover, wisdom plays a crucial role[55]: in those situations that require more specific knowledge or that contain competing considerations (e.g., cultural, religious), wisdom guides the virtuous to make the right decisions.

[52] Note that even if meat *as such* is the wrong thing to enjoy, a temperate person might decide to eat it in some situations due to, say, respect for another culture. In this case, she would desire to eat the meat, not for its pleasures (she is temperate, remember) but for reasons of respect. Whether such a decision would be overall virtuous is unclear (typically, I think not).

[53] These verdicts do not have to be moral codes about right and wrong, and they can be intricate and finessed moral judgments about various aspects of eating meat. I thank a referee for this point.

[54] About the virtuous person's knowledge in regards to the status of the fetus, Hursthouse states, "the sort of wisdom that the fully virtuous person has is not supposed to be recondite; it does not call for fancy philosophical sophistication, and it does not depend upon, let alone wait upon, the discoveries of academic philosophers" (1991, p. 235).

[55] I thank a referee for pressing me to say something about wisdom.

Still, this is a complicated theme. Consider someone who agrees that eating factory-farmed meat is wrong, but who still has *good yet inconclusive* reasons for eating humanely-sourced meat. Why can such a person not be temperate?[56] This raises the issue of how to think of the development and conception of virtues in light of plausible yet not fool-proof reasons for a moral claim, something especially prevalent in philosophical discourse, where parties to a dispute can have equally plausible reasons for a view.

This is a large topic, but regarding temperance, I have no argument that such a person *cannot* be temperate: *if* indeed there are plausible reasons that justify the humane killing of an animal (especially at a young age) for gustatory pleasure, then perhaps people who desire humanely sourced meat can be temperate—indeed, because virtues respond to right and wrong features of the world, we will have competing conceptions of virtues depending on the reasons for and against a moral claim. However, whether eating humanely-sourced meat is nonetheless *overall* virtuous would still need to be balanced with other virtues. Perhaps virtues such as compassion and magnanimity, though in this type of case they do not *inform* and *shape* temperance, nonetheless take the lead and guide the agent to not eat such meat, such that a temperate person would desire the pleasures of humanely-sourced meat, but would refrain from indulging these desires on other moral grounds.

The second objection is that because meat tastes good, the temperate person incurs serious *aesthetic* losses by not eating it,[57] losses that cannot be compensated for by other food substitutes (e.g., soy meat), assuming that the pleasures of these foods are incommensurable. This loss occurs also in both meat-only or meat-mostly dishes (e.g., steak and hamburgers) and in dishes that contain meat (e.g., zucchini and eggplant stuffed with rice and ground meat). Thus, temperate people forego culinary aesthetic experiences by not eating meat, and this is an aesthetic loss.

In reply, and assuming that meat objectively tastes better than its alternatives, the *value* of certain aesthetic pleasures diminishes when they come at the expense of immoral actions. Imagine an artist setting up an installation consisting of leashed dogs meant to starve in order to make a point about the audience's unwillingness to interfere and help them (because, say, the audience wants to maintain their aesthetic distance when engaging art).[58] No matter how artistically powerful such a set up would be, any aesthetic value derived from experiencing the artwork is seriously compromised by the immoral treatment of the dogs (especially when similar aesthetic experiences can be obtained through other ways). So although the temperate person foregoes those aesthetic pleasures, they might not be important (or important enough) given their source. The loss, in terms of value, would then not be serious.

[56] Thanks to Sean McAleer for this point.

[57] Bob Fischer raised this objection. Note that the fact that the virtuous do not desire to eat meat makes no difference to it.

[58] This example is inspired by the work of the Costa Rican artist Guillermo Vargas's ("Habacuc") 2007 installation, "Eres lo que lees," which involved tying a stray dog to a leash in a gallery in Managua. It was supposedly intended to show the hypocrisy of people who cared more about dogs than people, but the purpose of the installation remains unclear given that it included other parts.

Given that other aesthetic pleasures are available to the temperate, the loss is even less serious.

The third objection is that the claim that all meat is wrong to enjoy implies that people whose existence depends on eating meat are not temperate, unless we imagine them to eat meat reluctantly—to neither desire nor enjoy the meat that they eat—which is not true to the facts.[59] This is an important issue, connected (but not identical) to that of the ability to develop virtues under conditions of oppression, about which a bit has been written.[60] In this regard, however, it need not be a surprise that some people cannot develop some virtues when they act under oppressive conditions or with fewer options. So this implication is not so much an objection as it is a reminder that in our world some people are unfortunate in having a difficult time developing some virtues. This need not mean, however, that they are entirely off the moral hook, because they can be continent: they can desire and enjoy eating meat while knowing this to be the lesser of two evils, given their limited options. As I mentioned, continence is nothing to scoff at, and in this type of case continence might not even be *blameworthy*, given the limited options under which agents act.[61] No doubt, this is a complicated issue, raising questions about whether oppression can warp one's vision of what is right and wrong, and of how this can affect continence and blame. But my point is that a view of the virtues and vices that relies on a conception of animals as non-consumable fellow creatures has the resources to address these types of situations.

Conclusion

I have given a somewhat detailed picture of the temperate person based on that aspect of Aristotle's discussion about right and wrong objects to enjoy. I have argued that a temperate person would at the very least not desire factory-farmed meat, but I also suggested that a conception of temperance built on the idea that animals are non-consumable is both viable and plausible, and that a person whose disposition towards meat instantiates this conception is temperate. I have also nodded in the direction of how other virtues can play a role in the agent's dispositions towards eating meat. Clearly, however, there much remains to be discussed, including the vice of intemperance and eating meat.

[59] A people's existence might depend on meat either because of their geographical location or because of their poverty (e.g., eating because it is cheap). I thus do not tackle cases of eating meat because of cultural or religious traditions, which I think are not morally justified just because they are traditions (on some of these issues, see Ciocchetti 2012).

[60] See Tessman (2005, chs. 1 and 2).

[61] Why not raise the moral bar higher by requiring them to be reluctant meat-eaters? Why allow for the enjoyment that comes with continence? Because it would be psychologically near impossible to sustain a social, cultural *yet reluctant* practice of eating meat, given the usual connections between eating and pleasure.

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