Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics (2021) 34:19
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-021-09860-5

ARTICLES

What Would the Virtuous Person Eat? The Case for Virtuous Omnivorism

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Accepted: 7 June 2021 / Published online: 15 June 2021
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Abstract

Would the virtuous person eat animals? According to some ethicists, the answer is a resounding no, at least for the virtuous person living in an affluent society. The virtuous person cares about animal suffering, and so, she will not contribute to practices that involve animal suffering when she can easily adopt a strict plant-based diet. The virtuous person is temperate, and temperance involves not indulging in unhealthy diets, which include diets that incorporate animals. Moreover, it is unjust for an animal to be killed for food when this is unnecessary. By contrast, I argue that the virtuous person in an affluent society would eat animals, at least sometimes. I explain how the very virtues thought to motivate "virtuous modest veganism"—compassion, temperance, and justice—motivate the virtuous person to consume some animals.

Keywords Virtue · Temperance · Compassion · Justice · Animals · Veganism

Would the virtuous person eat animals? According to some virtue ethicists, the answer is a resounding no, at least for the virtuous person living in an affluent society (Halwani, 2020; Alvaro, 2017a, b, 2019; Van Dyke, 2016; Hursthouse, 2011, 2006; Nobis, 2002; Walker, 2007; Nussbaum, 2006; Shafer-Landau, 1994).[1] The case for this conclusion is compelling at first glance. The virtuous person cares about acting so as to reduce animal suffering, and so, she does not contribute to practices that promote animal suffering when she can easily adopt a strict plant-based diet. Indeed,

[1] I am aware of only a few virtue-based defenses of eating animals. Beth Haile (2013) argues that a thrifty, temperate, and responsible person would consume meat and this practice would "be incorporated into a life directed toward the good" (2013: 87). Lars Ursin argues that "virtuous eating of meat is possible" so long as animals are respected and the agent consumes a modest amount. (2016: 144). Roger Scruton (2006) argues for compassionate carnivorism. I disagree with their position, as will be clear in Sect. 3 below. List (1998) and (2013) and Jensen (2001) offer a virtue ethics-based defense of hunting.

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since an alternative plant-based diet is readily available, to consume animals for no reason other than pleasure would be unjust or unfair, and the virtuous person is both just and fair. The virtuous person is also temperate, and temperance involves not indulging in unhealthy diets, including diets that incorporate animal flesh. Although these reasons do not show that the virtuous person would never, under any circumstances eat animals, they are thought to collectively show that the virtuous person who has the means and opportunity to live off of a plant-based diet would not eat animals.

In this paper, I argue that the virtuous person in an affluent society would adopt some animals in her diet, not a strict plant-based diet.[2] The basis for this conclusion is that it is becoming increasingly known that strict plant-based diets are not harmless to field animals, birds, and fish. The virtuous person, therefore, finds herself in a non-ideal situation, a situation in which animals will be harmed no matter what diet she adopts. Accordingly, the virtuous person will be motivated to adopt the diet that involves the least amount of harm to animals and this diet, I argue, will involve eating some animals. To be clear, the virtuous person would not be complicit in unjust practices such as factory farming. Rather, the animals she would consume are non-traditional animals, animals that lack or have much lower moral considerability (e.g., insects) or whose procurement is from outside the industrialized food production system (e.g., scavenged meat). Importantly, the temperate, compassionate, and just person living in an affluent society would not adopt a strict plant-based diet.

This paper proceeds as follows. In section one, I explain virtue ethics and how it grounds the rightness and wrongness of actions in a person's character. In section two, I explain the argument of Carlo Alvaro for thinking that the virtues of temperance, compassion, and justice motivate the virtuous person in an affluent society to adopt a strict plant-based diet. In section three, I argue that these three virtues actually motivate the virtuous person to consume some animals. The remaining three sections respond to objections.

Virtue Ethics

According to virtue ethics, the locus of moral evaluation is the agent, not an action's conformity to a moral rule or the action's outcomes, and this is because morality is too complex to be captured by moral rules or outcomes (Annas, 2007; Hursthouse, 1999; Swanton, 2003). For instance, adherence to rules overlooks the role of emotions, feelings, the importance of our situational relation to others, as well as our reasons for acting as we do. What is most important to virtue ethics, as Carlo Alvaro explains, is "whether the individual's actions are expressions of good character, through the acquisition of the moral virtues" (2017a: 770). The virtues are morally good, praiseworthy character traits, which is to say they are strongly entrenched dispositional states that incline the person to think, reason,

[2] I focus on eating animal flesh in this paper, as this is the primary focus of my interlocutors. The position of this paper can be extended to animal products (e.g., milk and eggs).

feel, and behave in excellent and praiseworthy ways. The virtues thus encompass the whole person, from thoughts and judgments to emotions and behaviors. They involve correct moral appraisals of and responses to the situations in which a person finds herself in. When the virtuous person performs a temperate act, for example, she acts *from* temperance-: her cognitive appraisal correctly assesses the situation, and she feels and behaves appropriately in response. That virtues are holistic illuminates how they relate with one another. When the virtuous person finds herself in a situation in which justice calls for one action and compassion calls for another, her intellectual virtue of prudence discerns what the right response to the situation is, and she responds accordingly. There might be a conflict about what to do in a situation, but prudence fosters a kind of unity in the virtuous person's character. The virtues, *qua* excellent character traits responsive to right reasons, are thus foundational to living an integrated and excellent life.

The focus of virtue ethics on excellent character traits can ground an account of the rightness or wrongness of an action, and accordingly, virtue ethics can be action guiding in much the same way that rival ethical theories are. Following the work of Rosalind Hursthouse (1999), an action is right if it is the action that a virtuous person would characteristically perform in that circumstance, while an action is wrong if it is an action that the virtuous person would not characteristically perform in that circumstance. That rightness and wrongness of actions are grounded in what the virtuous person would characteristically do in a particular situation given their unique skills and abilities highlights the contextual nature of moral actions. Consider two soldiers on the battlefield, both of whom ought to exhibit the virtue of courage. What is courageous for a poorly-trained soldier might be different from what is courageous for a well-trained soldier in the same situation. This distinction is often considered to be an upshot of virtue ethics, namely, it accommodates the intuition that the application of moral rules is not always rigid. For example, that lying is wrong is a general moral rule because the virtuous person is honest, honesty being the virtue related to disclosing and withholding information. But this is not to say the virtuous person will never lie. For if a virtuous person is hiding a battered child in her house, she might lie to the abuser about the child's whereabouts. The virtuous person sees that it is not a matter of honesty to provide truthful information to someone who intends to harm another. In this case, the virtuous person does an ordinarily wrong action, and, importantly, she does not do anything morally wrong in this extraordinary situation.

Although a lot more can be said in elaboration, what matters for present purposes is how virtue ethics bears on dietary choices. The virtuous person's characteristic actions determine or ground what is right and wrong, permissible and impermissible. This implies that, if the virtuous person in an affluent society would adopt a strict plant-based diet, then that is the morally right diet to adopt for those of us living in an affluent society. In other words, we (morally) should eat what the virtuous person in our situation would eat. Accordingly, in seeking to show that the virtuous person in an affluent society would adopt a strict plant-based diet, scholars are seeking to show the wrongness of consuming animals.

The Case for "Virtuous Modest Veganism"

With this much before us, the topic to be addressed is whether the virtuous person in an affluent society would in fact adopt a strict plant-based diet. A survey of the relevant literature reveals a focus on three virtues, all of which independently and collectively are thought to motivate the virtuous person to adopt a strict plant-based diet. Rather than examine the case for virtuous veganism as presented in a variety of places, I will limit my focus to Carlo Alvaro's article, "Ethical Veganism, Virtue, and Greatness of Soul," for two reasons. First, he offers a clear presentation of the arguments in favor of "modest ethical veganism", or the position that "it is immoral to use animals when equal or superior plant-based alternatives are readily available" (2017a: 767). Second, his arguments are similar to the arguments offered by others, and so there is no harm in focusing on his article.[3] I will incorporate the insights of others when relevant.

The virtuous person is temperate and temperance is the virtue that regulates one's desire for bodily pleasures. Raja Halwani explains that temperance regarding food "is the proper disposition in one's desires for the pleasures of eating" (2020: 403). The temperate person enjoys bodily pleasures, including food, in the right circumstances, in the right way, and for the right reasons.[4] A consideration of the virtue of temperance suggests, Alvaro argues, that the virtuous person would not eat animals. Because the temperate person eats for the sake of nourishment, not pleasure alone, she will avoid foods that are unhealthy, and since she knows that consuming animals is not conducive to health, the temperate person will not consume animals (2017a: 771). The temperate person would consume animals in moderation if she could not sustain herself on a plant-based diet. It is thus important to remember that the virtuous person in an affluent society has access to plant-based foods, and so, it is unnecessary for her to eat animals, even in moderation. Consequently, since adopting a strict plant-based diet does not require an immense sacrifice on the part of the virtuous person—indeed, a vegan diet can be both delicious and cost effective—and since a plant-based diet is more conducive to health, the temperate person "will not indulge in those types of food—not even moderately" (2017a: 773).

The virtuous agent is not only temperate, of course. She is also just and compassionate, along with all of the other virtues, and there is an internal harmony among her virtues. Justice is the virtue that regards doing what is right or equitable. The virtuous agent who recognizes that meat is unnecessary for living a healthy life and that animals are harmed in meat-production will appreciate that killing animals for food is unjust and unfair, as Alvaro explains: "In societies where plant food is readily available and abundant, using animals as a source of food is, by definition, unfair" (2017a: 777). Since people in affluent societies have an abundance of readily

[3] Halwani (2020) offers a different line of reasoning based on temperance. I address his argument in Sect. 6.

[4] I agree with Halwani's exposition of temperance according to which the temperate person does eat for pleasure (2020: 406; see Hursthouse 2011: 129–131). Alvaro thinks the temperate person eats only for health (2017a).

available plant alternatives, the reason why they continue to eat animals is because of convenience, taste, or pleasure. The virtuous agent recognizes that these reasons do not justify the harm animal experience in food-production, including death on more humane farms, and therefore, Alvaro argues, the virtuous person recognizes that "using animals is immoral" (2017a: 773).[5] Because the virtuous person is both just and fair, she will not adopt a diet that includes animals but rather adopt a strict plant-based diet.

Finally, the virtuous person is compassionate and compassion for another requires, among other things, acting to benefit the other. Compassion does not just involve feeling anguish or pain at the misfortune of another; it involves acting to help the other in the right kind of way and in the right amount (Crisp, 2008). Because the virtuous person is compassionate, she is not indifferent to the treatment of animals and their suffering but actively seeks to promote animal well-being. The virtuous agent not only refrains from needlessly harming animals, she also respects their interests and promotes their flourishing, as Alvaro explains:

> A compassionate individual, therefore, will not merely try to alleviate the pain of an animal who, for instance, is about to be slaughtered… This would not be the full expression of compassion. Rather, a compassionate individual, who has empathy, also recognizes that animals do not only wish to avoid pain, but also wish to survive and flourish. Consequently, by definition, a compassionate person would oppose all forms of animal exploitation (2017a: 775).

Pretty clearly, compassion towards animals is at odds with factory farming given what we know about conditions on factory farms.[6] Compassion is also at odds with more humane forms of farming. To enjoy something that is made possible by the death of another seems antithetical to compassion toward that other, especially when that death is not necessary. Consequently, Alvaro concludes, "it is in no way compassionate to kill an animal for food" (2017a: 776).

In sum, the virtuous person is temperate, just, and compassionate, and Alvaro thinks it is evident that "acquiring those virtues and acting from them will motivate ethical veganism" (2017a: 779). The practical implication is straightforward. Since the rightness and wrongness of an action is grounded in what the virtuous person would characteristically do in that setting, and the virtuous person in an affluent society would adopt a strict plant-based diet, it follows that those of us living in affluent societies with ready access to plant-based alternatives should adopt a strict plant-based diet. To not adopt a strict plant-based diet is morally wrong.

[5] This echoes Stuart Rachels, who writes: "We eat the meat, and it helps to nourish us. But there is a catch: we could just as easily nourish ourselves in other ways. Vegetarian meals are also good. Nonetheless, most people prefer a diet that includes meat because they like the way it tastes, the question, then, is whether our enjoyment of the way meat tastes is a good enough reason to justify the amount of suffering that the animals are made to endure. It seems obvious that it is not." (2011: 261).

[6] The harms associated with factory farming are well documented. See DeGrazia (2009), Halteman (2011), and Rossi and Garner (2014), among many others.

The Virtuous New Omnivore

It is important to remind ourselves that the reasons offered above are conditional, not apodictic. They do not show that eating animals is *in principle* wrong, only that the virtuous person in an affluent society is not motivated to eat animals and will actively refrain from doing so. As Rosalind Hursthouse reminds us, “an action such as eating meat, which is exactly what a virtuous agent characteristically refrains from doing in many circumstances, may nevertheless be something that, in other circumstances, a virtuous agent does do” (2011: 131). She gives the examples of someone stranded in the Australian outback who needs to eat a rabbit in order to survive and of people in certain parts of the world who need to consume bush meat to survive (2011: 130–131). Proponents of virtuous modest veganism, such as Hursthouse and Alvaro, think that exceptions are rare for people living in affluent societies, and that virtuous people living in affluent societies would adopt a strict plant-based diet.

I argue that the case for virtuous modest veganism is overstated. While I agree that the virtuous person would oppose factory farming and humane farming, there are other kinds of animals available that do not violate compassion, justice, or temperance. When we consider that plant agriculture harms animals, the argument can be made that to care for animals sometimes requires consuming some of them. Here is the argument formalized:

1. NON-IDEAL WORLD THESIS: A strict plant-based diet involves animal harm.
2. ANIMAL CARE THESIS: The virtuous person cares about animals and seeks to minimize animal harm.
3. FREE MEAT THESIS: Incorporating free animal products in one’s diet will minimize the number of animals harmed in food production.
4. PAIN FREE ANIMAL THESIS: Incorporating animals that do not experience pain—and so cannot be harmed—in one’s diet will minimize the number of animals harmed in food production.
5. Thus, the virtuous person would consume free meat and pain free animals.

Before I discuss the motivation for accepting each premise, it is important to clarify in advance that the conclusion defended here is not that the virtuous person would consume meat from traditional sources, e.g., meat from factory farming or trawling. The position defended here is that the virtuous person would be a “new omnivore”, the name given by Andy Lamey to the position that “endorses animal protection as philosophy but goes on to defend eating animals” (2019: 1). New omnivorism is a broad position, loosely connected around the claim that minimizing animal harm in our non-ideal world sometimes requires eating certain animals. New omnivores disagree about what animals should be eaten, but all agree that some should be eaten in order to minimize animal suffering. The claim of this paper is that the virtuous person living in an affluent society would adopt *some* animals in her diet from a position of compassion, justice, and temperance. Although I do not claim to prescribe a particular diet in this paper, I do describe two kinds of animal protein the virtuous person would be motivated to consume. The conclusion, along with an idea

of the kinds of animals the virtuous person might eat, will be clearer by the end of this section.

The motivation for accepting premise one, the non-ideal world thesis, is that animal harm is pervasive. “All aspects of consumption in late capitalism,” Lori Gruen and Robert Jones observe, “involve harming others, human and nonhuman” (2016: 157). It is now well known that strict plant-based diets involve some harm to animals, understanding “harm” broadly to include everything from death to physical pain.[7] Pesticides, field traps, land clearing, and mechanical harvesting contribute to harming various animals, birds, and fish. Some of this harm is intentional (e.g., pest control), while other harms are unintentional (e.g., accidentally running over a mole). Orangutans are burned alive through deforestation for palm oil plantations (Nellemann et al., 2007). Pesticides are credited with causing significant harm to Brazilian Tapirs: a study of 116 Tapirs found that forty percent were contaminated with pesticides and heavy metals, leading to various harms to bodily organs (Gonzalez, 2019). Field animals are killed in mechanical harvesting (Archer, 2011; Davis, 2003). Bob Fischer and Adam Lamey estimate that “9.5 million birds are killed per year in the US” as a result of plant agriculture and that, given increased fertilizer runoff and pesticide use, “it’s all but certain that fish have continued to be killed in substantial numbers” since 1975 (2018: 4–5). Hugh Finns and Nahiid Stephens estimate that “more than 50 million mammals, birds and reptiles are likely to be killed annually” in Queensland and New South Wales alone because of land clearing, including land clearing for agricultural use (2017: 386; see Fraser & MacRae, 2011). Although it is difficult to gather precise data on how many animals, birds, and fish are harmed, Fischer writes in another article that “no one disputes that some wild animals are currently harmed” in plant agriculture (2018: 247).[8]

It might be thought that the virtuous person would pursue plant agricultural methods that promise to eliminate animal harm altogether (e.g., greenhouses or backyard gardens) rather than entertain the option of eating animals. I grant that the virtuous person would be motivated to consume plants that have been humanely produced. If this is feasible for a particular virtuous person, then the argument above does not apply. The problem, however, is that most people living in affluent societies lack access to humane plant agriculture and most of those who participate in humane plant agriculture do not grow enough food to be self-sustaining. Presently, the vast majority of plants are grown on large, industrialized farms. While a retired virtuous

[7] Abbate argues that field animals are not “all things considered” harmed by agricultural farming. This is because these animals live decent lives made possible by plant agriculture and experience quick deaths (2019: 176–178). I do not find this convincing for a number of reasons. Not all field animals experience a quick death, for some experience disease and other longer-lasting injuries (e.g., fish and birds who die as a result of pesticide consumption do not experience a quick death). Moreover, many animals do not evidently rely on plant agriculture for their existence (e.g., fish). Finally, if Abbate is right, then there is little reason to pursue humane agriculture (greenhouses; vertical farming) because agricultural practices that promise to eliminate animal harm altogether would remove the natural habitat these field animals live in.

[8] Fischer’s position is more modest than Donald Bruckner, who writes that everyone “seems to agree that extensive harm is done to animals in the production of plants” (2015: 36). Perhaps Bruckner has Stephen Davis in mind, who writes: “I remembered riding on farm equipment and seeing mice, gophers, and pheasants in the field that were injured or killed every time we worked the fields” (2003: 388).

person living in the countryside may have the time and resources to devote to a humane garden, a virtuous person living in New York City who works 40 or more hours a week likely does not, and she may not be able to get all of her produce from humane farms. Likewise, exceptional cases aside, a virtuous farmer would likely need to purchase *some* food items from a grocer, as few are able to grow enough food to sustain themselves. While humane plant agriculture is something that the virtuous person strives for, she currently lives in a non-ideal world, a world in which some of her produce is the product of an industrialized farm that causes animal harm.

The motivation for accepting premise two is that this is just what we would expect the virtuous person to do. The virtuous person is compassionate and so she cares about animal well-being and preventing unnecessary harm: the "compassionate individual," Alvaro notes, "is concerned about the well-being of all living things" (2017b: 23). The virtuous person is motivated to oppose practices that unnecessarily harm animals and she is certainly not party to animal cruelty herself. However, she recognizes that we live in a non-ideal world and that it is presently impossible to eliminate animal suffering and death through the adoption of a strict plant-based diet. She is thus motivated to act so as to minimize as much animal suffering and death as possible. To be clear, the virtuous person does not turn into a consequentialist interested in maximizing certain outcomes; rather, the virtuous person is motivated by compassion to minimize tragedy in a non-ideal situation. If she did not act to minimize animal suffering, especially needless animal suffering, she would not be compassionate toward animals. She would appear callous or cruel if she adopted a diet knowing that it would create more animal harm than an alternative diet.

It strikes me that the most contentious steps of the argument are premises three and four. The motivation for accepting premise three comes from the observation that there is meat that is available to consume (a) that does not contribute to the further exploitation of animals, (b) that will be otherwise wasted, and (c) that is available outside the food production system. I refer to meat that satisfies these three conditions as "free meat", two examples of which would be roadkill and discarded meat (see Bruckner, 2015; Milburn, 2017). To consume a deer that has been struck and killed by a truck does not contribute to more animal suffering, for the deer died by accident and people try to avoid hitting deer with their cars.[9] This flesh is not the result of hunting or other practices that *use* animals and kill them for food. Similarly, to consume a discarded steak found in a dumpster behind a restaurant—or a steak that has been donated on account of expiring and hence unable to be sold—does not contribute to more animal suffering, for the discarded steak is counted as a loss to the restaurant and the person does not pay for it. That the meat has been discarded will lower the demand for meat since restaurants adjust purchasing orders based on loss. In both of these cases, edible meat will be wasted unless a person were to consume it; the meat is obtained in a non-standard way; and to consume the meat

[9] We can further stipulate that the region in which the accident happened has an abundance of food available to predators so that eating the roadkill does not indirectly harm predators who would have eaten the carcass.

will not promote more animal harm. Recalling that we live in a non-ideal world, if the virtuous person were to consume this edible flesh rather than let it go to waste, she would reduce the number of animals harmed producing a strict plant-based diet. Since the compassionate person is motivated to lower animal harm, and this meat does not evidently promote animal harm, she will be motivated to eat free meat.

The motivation for accepting the fourth premise begins with the plausible observation that not all animals have the same degree of moral considerability. Pre-theoretically, it is much worse to experiment on a non-human primate than on an ant or a worm. Philosophers have sought to delineate what makes for the greater moral considerability of some animals compared to others, and a common answer appeals to the admittedly slippery notion of sentience. Tom Regan, for instance, writes that moral considerability is grounded in a creature's mental capacities:

> individuals are subjects-of-life if they have beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future; an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure and pain; preference-and welfare-interests; the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals; a psychophysical identity over time; and an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them (1983: 243).

On this view, animals that lack some of the above criteria are understood to lack "any value in their own right" (1983: 246). Peter Singer, similarly, claims that "the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, or complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities" (1990: 20). Similar accounts that appeal to sentience in some manner can be found in the writings of David DeGrazia (2002), Christine Korsgaard (2004, 2007), Jeff McMahan (2005), Martha Nussbaum (2006), and Stijn Bruers (2015), among many others. While the move to equate moral status or considerability with mental capacities has been subject to serious criticism, what matters for present purposes is that the ability to manifest sentience is considered by many animal ethicists to be a moral baseline, a sufficient condition for moral considerability.[10] Although there might be other factors that make a creature worthy of moral consideration, sentience—and the ability to feel pain in particular—is a good place to start.

The fourth premise thus focuses on animals that are either insentient or manifest low-grade sentience, sentience that does not matter morally or matter as much as other animals, including the animals killed in plant agriculture. I refer to these animals as "pain free" since the ability to feel pain is considered by many to be an indicator of sentience. A couple examples of these kinds of animals would be insects (e.g., crickets, worms, and grasshoppers) and bivalves (e.g., clams, mussels, and oysters). Bivalves lack brains and sophisticated nervous systems required to have

[10] See Carruthers (1992), Kittay (2010), Hsiao (2015) and Crary (2018), among others, for criticism of the move to equate moral status with sophisticated mental capacities. It should be noted that if any of these criticisms succeed, the position of this paper will be largely unaffected, for the virtuous person would eat some animals.

a conscious experience of suffering, and they are not evidently capable of abstract thought or sense of psychophysical identity over time. Peter Singer and Jim Mason explain that, "with bivalves, the evidence for consciousness is barely stronger than it is in plants…Ethical arguments against eating animals that are based on not causing…suffering therefore get little grip on eating oysters, clams, and scallops" (2006: 133).[11] Insects are also clear candidates for lacking morally significant considerability in virtue of lacking sophisticated nervous systems required for conscious, felt experience of pain. C.D. Meyers argues that, because insects are not capable of experiencing a conscious, felt experience of pain, "we ought to engage in and encourage *entomophagy:* the practice of eating insects" (2013: 119).[12] Since the compassionate person is motivated to lower animal harm, and these animals are not harmed on account of their inability to feel pain, she will be motivated to eat pain free animals.

It might be objected that we are unsure whether bivalves and insects can feel pain or have higher moral status than previously thought (see Klein & Barron, 2016). The science is unsettled on the matter, and because the ability to feel pain is morally significant, we should err on the side of caution and refrain from eating them (see Knutsson & Munthe, 2017). After all, it matters if an animal can suffer, and so we should be confident that bivalves and insects lack sentience before harming them.

This objection is not convincing for four reasons. First, as Bob Fischer (2016) argues, to not eat insects (and by implication bivalves), who might be sentient in a morally significant way, increases harm to field animals, birds, and fish by increasing agricultural production to sustain a plant-based diet, and we are more confident that these animals are sentient in a morally significant way. The question facing the virtuous agent is not how to eliminate animal harm altogether but how to minimize it. Fischer argues that "if our choice is between, on the one hand, harming beings that we know to be sentient and, on the other hand, harming beings that we *don't* know to be sentient, we should go with the latter option" (2016: 258). Second, insects, along with other animals, are killed *en masse* in plant agriculture through the use of pesticides, and consequently, not eating insects will not prevent insect harm. Fischer argues that to not consume insects may lead to *more* insect harm as a result of pesticides. According to his estimations, a diet that incorporates insects will require around 130,090 insect deaths per acre, while a plant-based diet will require around 201,000 insect deaths per acre (2016: 261). Third, farming insects and bivalves promises to significantly lower overall harm to other animals and the environment. According to the Marine Conservation Society (2020), farming oysters, clams, and mussels can eliminate needless animal deaths through low impact farming methods. Mussels, for instance, are farmed on ropes suspended in water, and they require no feed and no chemicals; farming them is mostly harmless to other animals and the environment. Since insects eat pretty much anything, they can be raised on recycled waste, thereby lowering the demand for plant agriculture to feed them. Finally, it is important to note that, assuming insects and bivalves can feel

[11] For a defense of eating bivalves, see Cox (2010) and Huemer (2019).

[12] For a more recent defense of entomophagy, see Fischer (2019).

pain, farming them does not evidently cause them to suffer. Meyers observes that insects prefer living in crowded areas, a point that also applies to many bivalves (2013: 124). Assuming they can feel pain, it is unlikely that insects and bivalves can form future-directed intentions or desires, and therefore, it is debatable whether death harms them (Abbate, 2019). For these and other reasons, Jennifer Jocquet, Jeff Sebo, and Max Elder conclude that, among aquaculture options, bivalves are "the most promising" in terms of "minimizing ecological harm…and minimizing animal welfare concerns related to captive rearing" (Jacquet et al., 2017).

The picture that emerges from the preceding discussion is that the virtuous person in an affluent society would consume some animals. These are not the typical animals that many people in affluent societies consume, i.e., animals from factory farms. The virtuous person is not complicit in immoral practices and actively seeks to combat them. Nevertheless, the virtuous person who comes across a recently killed deer or who sees insects and farmed oysters on sale in the grocery store may well eat these animals. To consume these animals is not (evidently) to be party to unjust food practices nor is it to promote more animal harm.[13] The virtuous person's motivational state is not one of cruelty but of care for minimizing animal harm.

While the argument above is grounded in a consideration of compassion, the virtues of temperance and justice can be appealed to in support of the conclusion. Continuing to eat a strict-plant based diet without incorporating available free meat and pain-free animals would entail more unnecessary suffering for field animals, birds, and fish. Since it is unfair to knowingly continue to rely on a food production system that harms animals when there are alternative sources of food available that do not themselves involve significant, if any, animal harm, *and* promise to lower overall animal harm, the virtue of justice will motivate one to adopt free meat and pain-free animals. In other words, it is unfair to animals to knowingly adopt a diet that involves more animal harm than an alternative diet, a diet that one has good reason to think will lower animal harm. Thus, it is just to eat free meat and pain free animals, and it is unjust to avoid eating them when they are available.

Finally, because justice and compassion motivate her to adopt some animals in her diet, and these animals are conducive to health, the virtuous person will consume these animals in moderation and for the right reason, and enjoy doing so. Alvaro appears to argue that consuming any animals is unhealthy: "health sciences shows that consuming animal products can be dangerous for one's health" (2017a: 771). The evidence he cites, however, fails to show that incorporating *some* animals in one's diet in moderation is inimical to health. The evidence he offers applies to excessive amounts of animal consumption, which is typical in affluent societies. The American Health Association (2020), Mayo Clinic (2020), UK's National Health Services (2018) and US Department of Health and Human Services (2015) all condone eating meat in moderation. It is well known that insects (see Kouřimská &

[13] It might be objected that farming insects and bivalves, as well as collecting roadkill, exploits workers. Since it is well documented that farm workers, including agricultural farm workers, are exploited in various ways, I set this worry to the side. See Martin (2019) for explanation of how field workers are exploited.

Adámková, 2016; Williams et al., 2016), bivalves (see Prato et al., 2019) and even red meat (see Bohrer, 2017; McAfee et al., 2010) are rich in various nutrients. The diet of the virtuous new omnivore will be largely plant-based, as recommended by health experts, with few animals. The virtuous person will adopt a balanced, healthy diet and eat for the right reasons and in the right manner. Of current significance, temperance will *not* prevent her from eating certain animals.[14]

Before moving on, it is important to allay a couple worries. Some might worry that the conclusion defended above is not sufficiently action-guiding. It leaves unanswered the important question about which animals are permissible to eat. Should the virtuous person eat insects and roadkill, or just insects? For those of us wanting action guidance, arguing that the virtuous person in an affluent society does not adopt a strict plant-based diet is not helpful. Another, related worry surrounds the feasibility of incorporating some of these animals in one's diet (Engel, 2016). For instance, roadkill is often unsalvageable, bugs are often unclean, and farmed oysters are not always available.

Three clarifications not only resolve these worries but also help to clarify the position defended here. First, the argument of this paper is primarily negative: the virtuous person living in an affluent society with ready access to a plant-based diet would not adopt a strict plant-based diet when free meat or pain free animals are available. This paper does not claim to proscribe the "virtuous diet". Second, the position defended above is what we would expect given the situational nature of virtue ethics. Alvaro himself reminds us that the point of virtue ethics "is not to draw lines" (2017b: 23). The particular diet of a particular virtuous person will look different based on where that person lives within a particular affluent society. A virtuous person living in the countryside may come across edible roadkill on a somewhat regular occasion, while a New Yorker may have access to scavenged meat (e.g., salvage grocery stores). A virtuous person living in Japan may be in the habit of eating farmed oysters, while a virtuous person living in Malaysia may be in the habit of eating insects. The virtuous diet will likely change over time, as well. While I did not mention cultured meat above, it is not unthinkable that virtuous people will eat cultured meat when it is no longer prohibitively expensive and no longer requires fetal bovine serum. Finally, and related to my second point, the argument above is not exhaustive regarding the types of animals a virtuous person would eat. There are a host of other kinds of animals or sources of protein that may be incorporated in the virtuous diet. These include (possibly) dis-enhanced animals (McMahan, 2008; Shriver, 2009), cultured meat (Fischer & Ozturk, 2017; Lamey, 2019), or hunted meat (Cahoone, 2009; Demetriou & Fischer, 2018). The case has been made that each of these sources of protein are permissible, if not obligatory, for the person

[14] A reviewer notes that a practicing vegetarian or vegan has a good reason to not adopt the aforementioned kinds of animal protein: to consume animal protein might lead one to crave animal protein, which in turn can motivate them to consume more animals. In reply, it is important to remind ourselves that the virtuous person is temperate and will relate to animal protein appropriately. Just as she drinks alcohol in moderation, so also she eats the right kinds of animal protein in the right situation. Her appetite for animal protein is rightly ordered.

who cares about animal harm. The virtuous person will set out to investigate the permissibility and plausibility of consuming these animals on a case by-case basis.

Compassionate Eating?

With the case for virtuous new omnivorism before us, I turn to objections, specifically objections based on compassion, temperance, and respect. My goal in the remaining sections is to show that these objections are not damning to the position of this paper and thereby do not show that virtuous modest veganism is the right diet. The first objection, grounded in compassion, is that it seems wrong to think that compassion for animals should lead us to eat them when we do not have to. To have compassion on a creature is to care about that creature, and this minimally involves not eating it. After all, it seems peculiar to hold that eating an animal can be a compassionate act toward that animal.

Although this point about compassion is plausible at first glance, two things can be said in response. First, it will be recalled that we live in a non-ideal world, a world that involves plenty of animal harm. When it comes to diet, the virtuous person finds herself in a non-ideal, tragic situation: animals die in the production of a strict plant-based diet, and so there is no harmless diet available to her. Hursthouse explains that the virtuous person in such a non-ideal situation "may well do something that in different circumstances would fall under the prohibition of a vice-rule" (Hursthouse, 2011: 127). She gives the example of the virtuous person wringing the neck of a wounded bird. This is an action the virtuous person otherwise avoids. However, in certain situations, say a situation in which a bird is injured with no hope of recovery, this is precisely the action that is called for. This action appears callous to others but it is a compassionate action. Another example would be euthanizing shelter animals to prevent greater animal suffering. Cheryl Abbate argues that compassion can motivate a person to euthanize shelter animals since not doing so will lead to overpopulation and greater amounts of animal suffering: "An uncompassionate person is one who would maintain that millions of animals should endure a painful life in the name of a negative duty to not kill or cause harm to beings with inherent worth" (2014: 926). Similarly, in an ideal world where plant agriculture does not involve animal harm, the virtuous person would adopt a strict plant-based diet. But we do not live in an ideal world, and so, the virtuous person is motivated to adopt the diet that results in the least amount of animal harm, which is a diet that involves some animals. This might appear callous to observers, but it need not be callous in these circumstances, circumstances in which we currently find ourselves in.

Second, the compassionate person, as Alvaro reminds us, "is concerned about the well-being of all living things" (2017b: 23). However, when the well-being of plants conflicts with the well-being of animals, he argues that it "is more compassionate to use them [plants] than to exploit animals who exhibit a higher degree of sentience and conscious experience of the world" (2017b: 23). The virtuous person would *not* hesitate to walk over flowers to help a dog in need, nor would she hesitate to eat plants to reduce factory farm animal suffering. Alvaro's point applies to insects and bivalves because, as was argued above, it seems pretty clear that field animals, birds,

and fish have "a higher degrees of sentience and conscious experience of the world" than insects and bivalves. At the very least, we are more unsure of the sentience of insects and bivalves than we are of the sentience of birds, field animals, and fish. Since field animals, birds, and fish—not to mention insects—die in industrialized plant agriculture, it is more compassionate to eat insects or bivalves, even free meat, than to adopt a strict plant-based diet, a diet that the virtuous person knows involves more intentional and unintentional harm to animals. The virtuous person would judge that it is preferable, given her non-ideal situation, to consume plants along with the kinds of animal protein described above.

Compassionate donation?

Cheryl Abbate argues that caring about animals will not motivate the virtuous person to consume roadkill because there are other options available to her that promise to lower overall animal harm (2019: 172–173). Her reasoning is compelling. The virtuous person knows that a strict plant-based diet results in less harm than a diet that includes meat from a factory farm. This is because there is a multiplication of animal harm: plants need to be grown to feed factory farm animals. Thus, when she comes across edible roadkill, she will donate the flesh to her meat-eating neighbors, who in turn will consume less factory farmed meat, resulting in less overall harm to animals. Another option, if the neighbors do not want to eat roadkill, would be to donate it to the local animal shelter, which would lower the amount of meat purchased by the shelter to feed carnivores. There are other options, of course, but they all show that caring for animals will not necessarily lead the virtuous person to eat them.

This point regarding roadkill and by extension scavenged meat is well taken. However, it does not show that the virtuous person would adopt a strict plant-based diet. In some circumstances, the virtuous person would judge that it is better to donate roadkill, while in other circumstances, she might judge that it is better if she consumed it herself or with company. Imagine a virtuous person comes across a recently killed deer. She harvests the meat and knows that the best thing to do would be to gift the meat to her meat-eating neighbors. Yet she suspects her neighbors are not inclined to eat roadkill. The virtuous person, being friendly and hospitable, might thus invite her neighbors over for dinner and prepare roadkill venison for all to enjoy together. With their worries about the edibility and taste of roadkill allayed, the virtuous person will give the neighbors roadkill in the future. This is certainly not an implausible scenario and it is important to note, as Abbate does (2019: 172fn8), that shelters, sanctuaries, and food banks in the virtuous person's area might not accept roadkill; for some virtuous people, the only feasible option may be for them to eat the roadkill. Moreover, Abbate's reasoning does not address insects, bivalves, and cultured meat. She argues that insects are plausibly insentient and, even if they are sentient, they cannot be harmed by death (2019: 174–175). It thus appears that she would agree that the virtuous person in the grocery store would purchase some insects. Therefore, while Abbate certainly complicates the range of

actions available to the virtuous person, her reasoning does not show that the virtuous person in an affluent society would adopt a strict plant-based diet.

Animals as Non-food Fellow Creatures?

It might be objected that temperance will discourage the consumption of animals for a reason other than health. Halwani reminds us that the temperate person refrains from eating the wrong kinds of food: "the temperate person would not enjoy eating the wrong things—that the *experience* of the activity is unenjoyable" (2020: 407). It might be argued that meat in general, not just factory farmed meat, is the wrong kind of food to consume. In order to defend this claim, Halwani explains that the case needs to be made that consuming animals is off limits for similar reasons that consuming deceased humans is off limits. He explains:

> What we need then is a conception of animals 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, perhaps even as (secular) 'miracles of creation' (2020: 414).

Halwani observes that if animals are viewed as off-bounds, non-food, then "all meat would be off the table for the temperate person" (2020: 414). On this position, there is a profound difference between the virtuous person's perception of animals and non-virtuous person's perception. For the temperate person, to consume animals would be distasteful and unbecoming, akin to consuming a fellow human being (Deckers, 2009: 591–592; Engel, 2016: 19; Diamond, 1978).

Halwani does not expand on his notion of animals as "non-food fellow creatures." He leaves this position open for others to develop and is clear that whether this view "is viable remains to be seen" (2020: 416). While it is difficult to assess this admittedly underdeveloped position, I offer a few worries. First, a plausible account of what makes for a "non-food fellow creature" will be grounded in psychological similarities such as sentience, similarities that certainly appear to be lacking in insects and bivalves. Halwani references Regan's "subjects of life" view as an example of how we might come to view animals as non-food fellow creatures (414, fn 43). Given the vast difference between nonhuman primates, say, and insects and bivalves, it will be difficult to make this account apply to insects and bivalves. Second, the notion of "non-food fellow creature" is, in an important sense, dependent on relational, social factors. Part of the reason why Americans eat pigs but not dogs has to do with the role of pets in family dynamics: pets are often seen as "family members" while non-pets are not. Similarly, different cultures have different food norms and views of animals, so what counts as non-food fellow creatures is not the same across cultures. Both of these considerations reveal situational nuance for the virtuous person. Halwani himself gives the example of a temperate person visiting another culture in which eating meat is appropriate. In this case, he muses but remains skeptical that the virtuous person would eat meat from a consideration of respect for the other culture (416, fn 52).

Finally, and most importantly, this line of argument—if successfully developed—shows only that the virtuous person would not consume animals, *extenuating circumstances aside*. I accept this: in an ideal world, a world in which animals are not harmed in plant agriculture, the virtuous person in an affluent society is motivated to adopt a strict plant-based diet. But recall two things. First, virtue ethics is situational in nature. The virtuous person abandoned on an island, who would otherwise not eat fish, will eat fish to survive. A person who otherwise would never consider eating a deceased human may do so in dire circumstances. Second, the argument of this paper is that we do not live in an ideal world, a world in which the virtuous person can adopt a harmless diet. Accordingly, with these two points in mind, the virtuous person is motivated to help animals and this will lead her to adopt some animals in her diet. Halwani himself admits that, if a person has plausible reasons that justify "the humane killing of an animal…for gustatory pleasure, then perhaps people who desire humanely sourced meat can be temperate" (2020: 417). The argument of this paper is much more modest than this. The argument here is that the virtuous person has reason to incorporate some animals and animal flesh for non-gustatory reasons, reasons grounded in a compassion for animals. Importantly, Halwani's admission that a person with good reasons can temperately eat animals reveals the difficulty of showing that all consumption of animals is intemperate.

Conclusion

How different is the diet envisioned above from the virtuous modest vegan diet defended by various ethicists? Well, the conclusion defended in this paper is that the virtuous person living in an affluent society will not adopt a strict plant-based diet when there are free or pain-free animals available to consume, and there are no alternative actions that promise to lower overall animal suffering even more. Since bivalves, insects, and, to a lesser extent, scavenged meat are available in various affluent societies, not to mention cultured meat in the near future, the virtuous person may find herself eating animals from a place of compassion, justice, and even temperance. Recall that this paper does not seek to present an exhaustive list of the possible kinds of animals the virtuous person may eat. This remains an open question, one worthy of further exploration. No doubt this conclusion is contentious, so I welcome further dialogue.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

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