

# *The Moral Life*

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An Introductory Reader  
in Ethics and Literature

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3. Do you agree with Cohen that absurd consequences would follow from our embracing a strong position on animal rights?

## *The Immorality of Eating Meat*

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Most arguments for the moral obligatoriness of vegetarianism take one of two forms. Either they follow Singer's lead and demand equal consideration for animals on utilitarian grounds,<sup>1</sup> or they follow Regan's deontological rights-based approach and insist that most of the animals we routinely consume possess the very same rights-con-

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<sup>1</sup>See Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, 2d edition (New York: Avon Books, 1990) or his "All Animals are Equal" in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, 2d edition, eds. Regan and Singer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1989), pp. 73-86.

ferring properties which confer rights on humans.<sup>2</sup> While many people have been persuaded to alter their dietary habits on the basis of one of these arguments, most philosophers have not. My experience has been that when confronted with these arguments meat-loving philosophers often casually dismiss them as follows:

Singer's preference utilitarianism is irremediably flawed, as is Regan's theory of moral rights. Since Singer's and Regan's arguments for vegetarianism are predicated on flawed ethical theories, their arguments are also flawed. Until someone can provide me with clear moral reasons for not eating meat, I will continue to eat what I please.

A moment's reflection reveals the self-serving sophistry of such a reply. Since no ethical theory to date is immune to objection, one could fashion a similar reply to "justify" or rationalize virtually any behavior. One could "justify" rape as follows: An opponent of rape might appeal to utilitarian, Kantian, or contractarian grounds to establish the immorality of rape. Our fictitious rape-loving philosopher could then point out that all of these ethical theories are flawed and *ipso facto* so too are all the arguments against rape. Our rape proponent might then assert: "Until someone can provide me with clear moral reasons for not committing rape, I will continue to rape whomever I please."

The speciousness of such a "justification" of rape should be obvious. No one who seriously considered the brutality of rape could think that it is somehow justified/permissible *simply because* all current ethical theories are flawed. But such specious reasoning is used to "justify" the equally brutal breeding, confining, mutilating, transporting, killing, and eating of animals all the time. My aim is to block this spurious reply by providing an argument for the immorality of eating meat which does not rest on any particular ethical approach. Rather, it rests on beliefs which you already hold.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>See Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), or his "The Case for Animal Rights" in *In Defense of Animals*, ed. Peter Singer (New York: Harper and Row Perennial Library, 1985), pp. 13–26.

<sup>3</sup>Obviously, if you do not hold these beliefs (or enough of them), my argument will have no force for you, nor is it intended to. It is only aimed at those of you who do hold these widespread commonsense beliefs.

Before turning to your beliefs, two prefatory observations are in order. First, unlike other ethical arguments for vegetarianism, my argument is *not* predicated on the wrongness of speciesism,<sup>4</sup> *nor* does it depend on your believing that all animals are equal or that all animals have a right to life. The significance of this can be explained as follows: Some philosophers remain unmoved by Singer's and Regan's arguments for a different reason than the one cited above. These philosophers find that the nonspeciesistic implications of Singer's and Regan's arguments just *feel* wrong to them. They sincerely *feel* that humans are more important than nonhumans.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps these feelings are irrational in light of evolutionary theory and our biological kinship with other species, but these feelings are nonetheless real. My argument is neutral with respect to such sentiments. It is compatible with both an anthropocentric and a biocentric worldview. In short, my argument is designed to show that even those of you who are steadfastly committed to valuing humans over nonhumans are nevertheless committed to the immorality of eating meat, given your other beliefs.

Second, ethical arguments are often context-dependent in that

<sup>4</sup>*Speciesism* is the widespread view that one's own species is superior to and more valuable than the other species and that, therefore, members of one's own species have the right to dominate members of these other species. While "speciesism" and its cognates are often used pejoratively in the animal rights literature, I use them only descriptively and imply no negative or condescending appraisal of the individual so described.

<sup>5</sup>Bonnie Steinbock's criticism of Singer's view seems to be rooted in such a sincerely held feeling. See her "Speciesism and the Idea of Equality," *Philosophy*, vol. 53, no. 204 (April 1978). Therein Steinbock writes:

I doubt that anyone will be able to come up with a concrete and morally relevant difference that would justify, say, using a chimpanzee in an experiment rather than a human being with less capacity for reasoning, moral responsibility, etc. Should we then experiment on the severely retarded? Utilitarian considerations aside . . . , we *feel* a special obligation to care for the handicapped members of our own species, who cannot survive in this world without such care . . . . [A]lthough one can imagine oneself in the monkey's place, one *feels* a closer identification with the severely retarded human being. Here we are getting away from such things as 'morally relevant differences' and are talking about something much more difficult to articulate, namely, the role of *feeling* and *sentiment* in moral thinking. (pp. 255f, my emphasis)

they presuppose a specific audience in a certain set of circumstances. Recognizing what that intended audience and context is, and what it is not, can prevent confusions about the scope of the ethical claim being made. My argument is context-dependent in precisely this way. It is not aimed at those relatively few indigent peoples who, because of the paucity of edible vegetable matter available, must eat meat in order to survive. Rather, it is directed at people, like you, who live in agriculturally bountiful societies in which a wealth of nutritionally adequate alternatives to meat are readily available. Thus, I intend to show that your beliefs commit you to the view that eating meat is morally wrong for anyone who is in the circumstances in which you typically find yourself and *a fortiori* that it is morally wrong for you to eat meat in these circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Enough by way of preamble, on to your beliefs.

## 1. THE THINGS YOU BELIEVE

The beliefs attributed to you herein would normally be considered noncontentious. In most contexts, we would take someone who didn't hold these beliefs to be either morally defective or irrational. Of course, in most contexts, these beliefs are not a threat to enjoying hamburgers, hotdogs, steaks, and ribs; but even with burgers in the balance, you will, I think, readily admit believing the following propositions: ( $p_1$ ) Other things being equal, a world with less pain and suffering is better than a world with more pain and suffering; and ( $p_2$ ) A world with less unnecessary suffering is better than a world with more unnecessary suffering.<sup>7</sup> Anyone who

<sup>6</sup>Accordingly, throughout the text my claim that "your beliefs commit you to the immorality of eating meat" should be understood as shorthand for the following more cumbersome claim: Your beliefs commit you to the immorality of eating meat for anyone who is in the circumstances in which you typically find yourself.

<sup>7</sup>By "*unnecessary* suffering" I mean suffering which serves no greater, outweighing justifying good. If some instance of suffering is required to bring about a greater good (e.g., a painful root canal may be the only way to save a person's tooth), then that suffering is *not* unnecessary. Thus, in the case of ( $p_2$ ), no *ceteris paribus* clause is needed, since if other things are *not* equal such that the suffering in question is justified by an overriding justifying good which can only be achieved by allowing that suffering, then that suffering is *not* unnecessary.

has felt the force of the atheistic argument from evil based on gratuitous suffering is committed to  $(p_1)$  and  $(p_2)$ . After all, the reason we think a *wholly good* God would prevent unnecessary suffering is because we think that such suffering is intrinsically bad and that the world would be better without it.<sup>8</sup> Since you think that unnecessary suffering is intrinsically bad, you no doubt also believe:  $(p_3)$  Unnecessary cruelty is wrong and *prima facie* should not be supported or encouraged. You probably believe:  $(p_4)$  We ought to take steps to make the world a better place. But even if you reject  $(p_4)$  on the grounds that we have no positive duties to benefit, you still think there are negative duties to do no harm, and so you believe:  $(p_{4'})$  We ought to do what we reasonably can to avoid making the world a worse place. You also believe:  $(p_5)$  A morally good person will take steps to make the world a better place and even stronger steps to avoid making the world a worse place; and  $(p_6)$  Even a "minimally decent person"<sup>9</sup> would take steps to help reduce the amount of unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, *if s/he could do so with very little effort on her/his part*.

You also have beliefs about yourself. You believe one of the following propositions when the reflexive pronoun is indexed to yourself:  $(p_7)$  I am a morally good person; or  $(p_8)$  I am at least a minimally decent person. You also believe of yourself:  $(p_9)$  I am the sort of person who certainly would take steps to help reduce the amount of pain and suffering in the world, *if I could do so with very little effort on my part*. Enough about you. On to your beliefs about nonhuman animals and our obligations toward them.

You believe:  $(p_{10})$  Many nonhuman animals (certainly all vertebrates) are capable of feeling pain;  $(p_{11})$  It is morally wrong to cause

<sup>8</sup>Interestingly enough, one of the most powerful versions of the atheistic argument from unnecessary suffering is predicated on gratuitous animal suffering, namely, the suffering of a fawn severely burned in a naturally occurring forest fire. See William Rowe's "The Problem of Evil," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 2d edition (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1993), pp. 79–82.

<sup>9</sup>By a "minimally decent person" I mean a person who does the very minimum required by morality and no more. I borrow this terminology from Judith Jarvis Thomson who distinguishes a *good* Samaritan from a *minimally decent* Samaritan. See her "A Defense of Abortion," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1971), pp. 62–65.

an animal unnecessary pain or suffering; and (p<sub>12</sub>) It is morally wrong and despicable to treat animals inhumanely *for no good reason*.<sup>10</sup> In addition to your beliefs about the wrongness of causing animals unnecessary pain, you also have beliefs about the appropriateness of killing animals; for example, you believe: (p<sub>13</sub>) We ought to euthanize untreatably injured, suffering animals to put them out of their misery whenever feasible; and (p<sub>14</sub>) Other things being equal, it is worse to kill a conscious sentient animal than it is to kill a plant. Finally, you believe: (p<sub>15</sub>) We have a duty to help preserve the environment for future generations (at least for future *human* generations); and consequently, you believe: (p<sub>16</sub>) One ought to minimize one's contribution toward environmental degradation, *especially in those ways requiring minimal effort on one's part*.

## 2. FACTORY FARMING AND MODERN SLAUGHTER: THE CRUELTY BEHIND THE CELLOPHANE

Before they become someone's dinner, most farm animals raised in the United States are forced to endure intense pain and suffering in "factory farms." Factory farms are intensive confinement facilities where animals are made to live in inhospitable unnatural conditions for the duration of their lives. The first step is early separation of mother and offspring. Chickens are separated from their mothers *before* birth, as they are hatched in incubators, veal calves are removed from their mothers within a few days, and piglets are sep-

<sup>10</sup>See Gilbert Harman's *The Nature of Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 4, where he presents the following much discussed example: "If you round the corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that it is wrong." What is relevant about this example for our purposes is that no one considering the example seriously doubts whether a cat so treated would feel pain (hence, no one seriously doubts [p<sub>10</sub>]), nor does anyone seriously doubt that cruelly burning a cat for no good reason is wrong (hence, no one seriously doubts [p<sub>11</sub>] or [p<sub>12</sub>] either).

arated from their mothers two to three weeks after birth.<sup>11</sup> The offspring are then housed in overcrowded confinement facilities. Broiler chickens and turkeys are warehoused in sheds containing anywhere from 10,000 to 100,000 birds;<sup>12</sup> veal calves are kept in crates 22" by 54" and are chained at the neck, rendering them unable to move or turn around;<sup>13</sup> pigs are confined in metal crates (which provide six square feet of living space) situated on concrete slatted floors with no straw or bedding;<sup>14</sup> and beef cattle are housed in feedlots containing up to 100,000 animals.<sup>15</sup> The inappropriate, unforgiving surfaces on which the animals must stand produce chronic foot and leg injuries.<sup>16</sup> Since they cannot move about, they must stand in their own waste. In these cramped, unsanitary conditions, virtually all of the animals' basic instinctual urges (e.g., to nurse, stretch, move around, root, groom, build nests, rut, establish social orders, select mates, copulate, procreate, and rear offspring) are frustrated, causing boredom and stress in the animals. The stress and unsanitary conditions together compromise their immune systems. To prevent large-scale losses due to disease, the animals are fed a steady diet of antibiotics and growth hormones.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories*, 2d edition (New York: Harmony Books, 1990), pp. 5, 10, and 11f.

<sup>12</sup>These overcrowded conditions make it impossible for the birds to develop a pecking order, the lack of which generates aggression, feather pecking, and cannibalism in the birds. See Karen Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs: An Inside Look at the Modern Poultry Industry* (Summertown, Tenn.: Book Publishing Co., 1996), pp. 65–71; Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pp. 99f; and Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, pp. 1–7.

<sup>13</sup>John Robbins, *Diet for a New America* (Walpole, N.H.: Stillpoint, 1987), p. 114; Humane Farming Association, "Modern Farming Is Inhumane," *Animal Rights: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1989), p. 118; and Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Humane Farming Association, "Modern Farming Is Inhumane," p. 117. For further details, see Robbins' discussion of the "Bacon Bin" in *Diet for a New America*, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup>Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 110.

<sup>16</sup>Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, pp. 30f; and Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, pp. 21 and 56f.

<sup>17</sup>Estrogens, gestagens, and androgens are routinely administered to cattle, veal calves, hogs, and sheep. Recommended dosages are described in

When it comes to feed, disease prevention isn't the only consideration. Another is cost. The USDA has approved all sorts of cost-cutting dietary "innovations" with little regard for the animals' well-being including adding the ground-up remains of dead diseased animals (unfit for human consumption) to these herbivorous animals' feed,<sup>18</sup> adding cement dust to cattle feed to promote rapid weight gain,<sup>19</sup> and adding the animals' own feces to their feed.<sup>20</sup>

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*Hormones in Animal Production*, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (Rome, 1982), p. 3. Mason and Singer report, "Nearly all poultry, 90 percent of veal calves and pigs, and a debatable number of cattle get antibacterial additives in their feed" (*Animal Factories*, p. 66). Residues often remain in their flesh, despite the fact that many of these drugs are known carcinogens not approved for human use. According to *Problems in Preventing the Marketing of Raw Meat and Poultry Containing Potentially Harmful Residues* (Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, April 17, 1979), p. i.: "Of the 143 drugs and pesticides GAO has identified as likely to leave residues in raw meat and poultry, 42 are known to cause cancer or are suspected of causing cancer; 20 of causing birth defects; and 6 of causing mutations" (cited in Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 72).

<sup>18</sup>Ten billion pounds of processed animal remains were sold for animal feed in the U.S. in 1995." See Eric Haapapuro, "Piling It High and Deep," *Good Medicine*, vol. 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1996), p. 15. It should be noted that feeding cattle the rendered remains of sheep infected with scrapie is the suspected cause of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE or as it is commonly called "mad cow disease"). Consuming BSE-infected cattle is believed to be the cause of one variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a fatal brain disease in humans. See "Mad Cow Disease: The Risk in the U.S.," *Good Medicine*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup>Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup>Haapapuro, "Piling It High and Deep," p. 15. Also see Eric Haapapuro, Neal Barnard, and Michele Simon, "Animal Waste Used as Livestock Feed: Dangers to Human Health," *Preventive Medicine*, vol. 26 (1997), pp. 599-602; as well as Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 53. Detailed feed recipes, some containing as much as 40 percent chicken manure, are outlined in *Feed from Animal Wastes: Feeding Manual*, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (Rome, 1982). Forced coprophagia has been an industry practice since the mid-1970s. See "Animal Wastes Can Be Fed in Silage," *The American Farmer* (January 1974), pp. 14f, an article describing the "suitability" of adding cattle and poultry manure to feed.

The animals react to these inhumane, stressful conditions by developing "stereotypies" (i.e., stress- and boredom-induced, neurotic repetitive behaviors) and other unnatural behaviors including cannibalism.<sup>21</sup> For example, chickens unable to develop a pecking order often try to peck each other to death, and pigs, bored due to forced immobility, routinely bite the tail of the pig caged in front of them. To prevent losses due to cannibalism and aggression, the animals receive preemptive mutilations. To prevent chickens and turkeys from pecking each other to death, the birds are "debeaked" using a scalding hot blade which slices through the highly sensitive horn of the beak leaving blisters in the mouth,<sup>22</sup> and to prevent these birds from scratching each other to death (which the industry refers to as "back ripping"), their toes are amputated using the same hot-knife machine.<sup>23</sup> Other routine mutilations include: dubbing (surgical removal of the combs and wattles of male chickens and turkeys), tail docking, branding, dehorning, ear tagging, ear clipping, teeth pulling, castration, and ovariectomy. In the interest of cost efficiency, *all* of these excruciating procedures are performed *without* anesthesia. *Unanesthetized* branding, dehorning, ear tagging, ear clipping, and castration are standard procedures on nonintensive farms, as well.<sup>24</sup>

Lives of frustration and torment finally culminate as the animals are inhumanely loaded onto trucks and shipped long distances to slaughterhouses without food or water and without adequate protection from the elements. Each year tens of thousands of animals die and millions are severely injured as a result of such handling and transportation. For example, in 1997, USDA inspectors condemned over 22,000 ducks, 26 million turkeys and 30 million chick-

<sup>21</sup>Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, pp. 21–24; and Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, pp. 65–71.

<sup>22</sup>Debeaking is the surgical removal of the birds' beaks. When beaks are cut too short or heal improperly, the birds cannot eat and eventually starve to death (Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, pp. 48 and 65–71; Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, pp. 39f; and Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 57.)

<sup>23</sup>Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, p. 47; and Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup>Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 145.

ens before they entered the slaughter plant, because they were either dead or severely injured upon arrival.<sup>25</sup> Once inside the slaughterhouse, the animals are hung upside down (pigs, cattle, and sheep are suspended by one hind leg, which often breaks) and are brought via conveyor to the slaughterer who slits their throats, severs their jugular veins, and punctures their hearts with a butcher knife. In *theory*, animals covered by the Federal Humane Slaughter Act are to be rendered unconscious by electric current or by captive bolt pistol (a pneumatic gun which, when aimed properly, renders the animal unconscious by firing an eight-inch pin into the animal's skull). Chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese are not considered animals under the Act and hence receive no protection at all.<sup>26</sup> In *practice*, the Act is not enforced, and as a result, many slaughterhouses elect not to use the captive bolt pistol in the interest of cost efficiency.<sup>27</sup> As for electric shock, it is unlikely that being shocked into unconsciousness is itself a painless process, based on reports of people who have experienced electroconvulsive therapy.<sup>28</sup> A consequence of the lax enforcement of the Federal Humane Slaughter Act is that in many cases (and all kosher cases), the animals are fully conscious throughout the entire throat-slitting ordeal.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup>*Poultry Slaughter*, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (Washington, D.C.: April 3, 1998), pp. 17 and 24f. The antemortem condemnation statistics just cited are estimates, since NASS tracks antemortem condemnations in pounds, not bird units, and were deduced as follows: the total weight of antemortem condemnations for a given bird-type was divided by the average live weight of birds of that type. For example, in 1997 antemortem chicken condemnations totaled 144,424,000 pounds and the average live weight of the chickens slaughtered was 4.81 pounds. Dividing pounds condemned by average pounds per bird yields 30,025,779 chickens condemned.

<sup>26</sup>Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 139.

<sup>27</sup>Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 153.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>29</sup>While only 5 percent of U.S. meat is sold as kosher, as many as 50 percent of the animals are slaughtered while fully conscious in conformity with antiquated ritual slaughter laws (Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 142).

These animal rearing and slaughtering techniques are by no means rare: 97 percent of all poultry are produced in 100,000-plus bird operations,<sup>30</sup> 97 percent of pigs are raised in confinement systems,<sup>31</sup> over half of the nation's dairy cows are raised in confinement systems,<sup>32</sup> all veal calves are crate-raised by definition, and 61 percent of beef cattle are confined in factory farm feedlots.<sup>33</sup> To see just how many animals suffer the institutionalized cruelties of factory farming, consider the number slaughtered in the United States each year. According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, 36.3 million cattle, 1.58 million veal calves, 92.0 million pigs, 3.91 million sheep and lamb, 22.0 million ducks, 290.2 million turkeys, and 7,903.5 million chickens were slaughtered in

<sup>30</sup>*Animal Agriculture: Information on Waste Management and Water Quality Issues*, a U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) Report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry (June 1995), pp. 2 and 47.

<sup>31</sup>Confinement is the norm in hog operations with more than 100 head. In 1997, 97 percent of the total U.S. hog inventory was housed in operations with more than 100 head. In fact, 85 percent of hogs were raised in facilities with more than 500 head and a startling 35 percent were raised in operations with more than 5000 head (*Hogs and Pigs*, NASS, USDA (Washington, D.C.: December 29, 1997), pp. 24f. All NASS publications can be accessed on the Web at: [www.usda.gov/nass/](http://www.usda.gov/nass/)). The trend toward consolidation of the hog industry with ever larger operations is continuing. According to the U.S. GAO, "From 1978 to 1994, the total number of [hog] operations (of all sizes) decreased by about 67 percent—from 635,000 to 209,000—while inventory remained the same at about 60 million head" (*Animal Agriculture: Information on Waste Management and Water Quality Issues*, p. 41). In 1997, the number of hog farms plummeted to 138,690, down 11 percent from 1996 and 24 percent below 1995, while inventory continued to remain relatively unchanged at 59.9 million head (*Hogs and Pigs*, NASS, USDA, p. 1).

<sup>32</sup>Again confinement is the norm in operations with 100+ dairy cows. According to NASS, in 1996, 57 percent of the nation's dairy cows were housed in operations with 100+ head (NASS, USDA, *Agricultural Statistics 1997*, Table 8-7 [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1997], p. VIII-5).

<sup>33</sup>As of January 1, 1998, 61 percent of the total cattle inventory was housed in feedlots with a capacity of 1000+ head (according to *Cattle on Feed*, NASS, USDA [Washington, D.C.: January 23, 1998], p. 1).

1997.<sup>34</sup> In sum, 8.35 *billion* animals are raised and slaughtered annually (not counting horses, goats, rabbits, emu, other poultry, or fish);<sup>35</sup> and even this number underestimates the number of farm animals killed by animal agriculture by over 10 percent, since it does not include the 921.4 million animals who suffer lingering deaths from disease, malnutrition, injury, or suffocation before reaching the slaughterhouse either as a result of the abysmal unsanitary conditions in factory farms or as a result of brutal handling in transit.<sup>36</sup> Extrapolation reveals that over 25 million animals per day (roughly 293 animals per second) are killed as a result of the food animal industry. Suffice it to say that no other human activity results in more pain, suffering, frustration, and death than factory farming and animal agribusiness.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF YOUR BELIEFS: WHY YOU ARE COMMITTED TO THE IMMORALITY OF EATING MEAT

I will now offer an argument for the immorality of eating meat predicated on *your* beliefs  $(p_1)$ – $(p_{16})$ . Actually I will offer a family of related arguments, all predicated on different subsets of the set  $\{(p_1), (p_2), \dots, (p_{16})\}$ . While you do not have to believe all of  $(p_1)$ – $(p_{16})$  for my argument to succeed, the more of these propositions you believe, the greater *your* commitment to the immoral-

<sup>34</sup>*Livestock Slaughter 1997 Summary*, NASS, USDA (Washington, D.C.: March 1998), p. 1; and *Poultry Slaughter*, NASS, USDA (Washington, D.C.: April 3, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>35</sup>And these numbers are for the United States alone. Worldwide, cattle, poultry, goats, and sheep total 15 billion (UN Food and Agricultural Organization, *Production Yearbook 1989* [Rome, 1989], vol. 43, table 89).

<sup>36</sup>According to *The Farm Report* (Spring 1997), 530.8 million broilers, 252.6 million layers, 115.7 million turkeys, 1.4 million ducks, 1.8 million cattle, 2.8 million veal calves, 15.1 million pigs, and 1.2 million sheep died in 1997 *before* reaching the slaughterhouse. These numbers are only for the United States.

<sup>37</sup>With the possible exception of the seafood industry, which, strictly speaking, should be viewed as an extension of animal agribusiness.

ity of eating meat.<sup>38</sup> For convenience, (p<sub>1</sub>)–(p<sub>16</sub>) have been compiled in an appendix at the end of the article.

Your beliefs (p<sub>10</sub>)–(p<sub>13</sub>) show that you already believe that animals are capable of experiencing intense pain and suffering. I don't have to prove to you that *unanesthetized* branding, castration, debeaking, tail docking, tooth extraction, etc., cause animals severe pain. You already believe these procedures to be excruciatingly painful. Consequently, given the husbandry techniques and slaughtering practices documented above, you must admit the fact that: (f<sub>1</sub>) Virtually all commercial animal agriculture, *especially* factory farming, causes animals intense pain and suffering and, thus, *greatly increases* the amount of pain and suffering in the world. (f<sub>1</sub>) and your belief (p<sub>1</sub>) together entail that, other things being equal, the world would be better without animal agriculture and factory farms. It is also a fact that: (f<sub>2</sub>) In modern societies the consumption of meat is *in no way necessary* for human survival,<sup>39</sup> and so, the pain and suffering which results from meat production is entirely *unnecessary*, as are all the cruel practices inherent in animal agriculture. Since no one *needs* to eat flesh, all of the inhumane treatment to which farm animals are routinely subjected is done *for no good reason*, and so your belief that it is morally wrong and despicable to treat animals inhumanely *for no good reason* [(p<sub>12</sub>)] forces you to admit that factory farming and animal agribusiness are morally wrong and despicable. Furthermore, your belief that a world with less unnecessary suffering is better than a world with more unnecessary suffering [(p<sub>2</sub>)], together with (f<sub>2</sub>), entails that the world would be better if there were less animal agriculture and fewer factory farms, and better still if there were no animal agriculture and no factory farms. Moreover, your belief in (p<sub>3</sub>) commits you to the view that factory farming is wrong and *prima facie* ought not be supported or encouraged. When one buys factory farm-raised meat,

<sup>38</sup>If you believe (p<sub>1</sub>), (p<sub>2</sub>), (p<sub>6</sub>), and (p<sub>10</sub>), my argument will succeed. In fact, an argument for the immorality of eating meat can be constructed from (p<sub>15</sub>) and (p<sub>16</sub>) alone.

<sup>39</sup>According to the USDA, "Vegetarian diets are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and can meet Recommended Dietary Allowances for nutrients." *Nutrition and Your Health: Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 4th ed., USDA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1995), p. 6.

one is supporting factory farms monetarily and thereby encouraging their *unnecessary* cruel practices. The only way to avoid actively supporting factory farms is to stop purchasing their products.

Since, per (p<sub>3</sub>), you have a *prima facie* obligation to stop supporting factory farming and animal agriculture, you have a *prima facie* obligation to become a vegetarian.<sup>40</sup> Of course, *prima facie* obligations are overridable. Perhaps they can even be overridden simply by the fact that fulfilling them would be excessively burdensome or require enormous effort and sacrifice on one's part. Perhaps, but this much is clear: when one can fulfill a *prima facie* obligation *with very little effort on one's part* and *without thereby failing to perform any other obligation*, then that obligation becomes very stringent indeed.

As for your *prima facie* obligation to stop supporting factory farming, you can easily satisfy it without thereby failing to perform any of your other obligations simply by refraining from eating meat and eating something else instead. For example, you can eat veggie burgers rather than hamburgers, pasta with marinara sauce rather than meat sauce, bean burritos or bean tostadas rather than beef tacos, red beans and rice rather than Cajun fried chicken, barbecued tofu rather than barbecued ribs, moo shu vegetables rather than moo shu pork, minestrone rather than chicken soup, five-bean vegetarian chili rather than chili with ground beef, chick pea salad rather than chicken salad, fruit and whole wheat toast rather than bacon and eggs, scrambled tofu vegetable frittatas rather than ham and cheese omelets, etc. These

<sup>40</sup>Here I am bracketing hunting. I realize that not all meat comes from factory farming and animal agriculture. Some comes from hunting. Hunting itself results in all sorts of unnecessary pain and suffering for the animals killed, maimed, and wounded by bullets, shot, and arrows. Every year in the United States alone, hunters kill 175 million animals, and for every animal killed two are seriously wounded and left to die a slow agonizing death (Anna Sequoia, *67 Ways to Save the Animals* [New York: Harper Perennial, 1990], p. 38.); and for every deer killed by crossbow, twenty-one arrows are shot since crossbow hunters rarely hit a vital organ (Ingrid Newkirk, *Save the Animals! 101 Easy Things You Can Do* [New York: Warner Books, 1990], p. 95). Many of these animals are killed for wall "trophies," but even in those cases where the animals are killed (maimed or wounded) for the sake of obtaining meat, all of the pain and suffering inflicted on them is *unnecessary* since no one in a modern agriculturally advanced society *needs* to eat any kind of meat, wild or domesticated.

examples underscore the *ease* with which one can avoid consuming flesh, a fact which often seems to elude meat eaters.

From your beliefs ( $p_1$ ), ( $p_2$ ), and ( $p_4$ ), it follows that we ought to do what we reasonably can to avoid contributing to the amount of unnecessary suffering in the world. Since one thing we reasonably can do to avoid contributing to unnecessary suffering is stop contributing to factory farming with our purchases, it follows that we ought to stop purchasing and consuming meat.

Your other beliefs support the same conclusion. You believe: ( $p_5$ ) A morally good person will take steps to make the world a better place and even stronger steps to avoid making the world a worse place; and ( $p_6$ ) Even a "minimally decent person" would take steps to help reduce the amount of unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, *if s/he could do so with very little effort*. You also believe that you are a morally good person [ $p_7$ ] or at least a minimally decent one [ $p_8$ ]. Moreover, you believe that you are the kind of person who would take steps to help reduce the amount of pain and suffering in the world, *if you could do so with very little effort on your part* [ $p_9$ ]. As shown above, *with minimal effort* you could take steps to help reduce the amount of unnecessary suffering in the world just by eating something other than meat. Accordingly, given ( $p_6$ ), you ought to refrain from eating flesh. Given ( $p_9$ ), if you really are the kind of person you think you are, you will quit eating meat, opting for cruelty-free vegetarian fare instead.

Finally, animal agriculture is an extremely wasteful, inefficient, environmentally devastating means of food production. A full discussion of the inefficiencies and environmental degradations associated with animal agriculture is beyond the scope of the present paper, but consider five examples:

1. Animal agriculture is an extremely energy intensive method of food production. It takes an average of 28 kilocalories of fossil energy to produce 1 kcal of animal protein, compared with an average of 3.3 kcal of fossil energy to produce 1 kcal of grain protein, making animal production on average more than eight times less energy efficient than grain production.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup>David Pimentel, "Livestock Production: Energy Inputs and the Environment," *Proceedings of the Canadian Society of Animal Science*, 47<sup>th</sup> Annual

2. Animal production is extremely inefficient in its water usage, compared to vegetable and grain production. Producing 1 kilogram of animal protein requires around 100 times more water than producing 1 kg of plant protein—for example, it takes 500 liters of water to grow 1 kg of potatoes and 900 liters of water to grow 1 kg of wheat, but it requires 100,000 liters of water to produce 1 kg of beef.<sup>42</sup> Hence, agricultural water usage, which currently accounts for 87 percent of the world's freshwater consumption,<sup>43</sup> could be drastically reduced by a shift toward an entirely plant-based agriculture.

3. Animal agriculture is also extremely nutrient inefficient. By cycling grain through livestock to produce animal protein, we lose 90 percent of that grain's protein, 96 percent of its calories, 100 percent of its carbohydrates, and 100 percent of its fiber.<sup>44</sup>

4. Another negative byproduct of the livestock industry is soil erosion. Much of arable land in the United States is devoted to feed crop production. Eighty percent of the corn and 95 percent of the oats grown in the United States are fed to livestock, and the excessive cultivation of our farmlands needed to produce these crops is responsible for the loss of 7 billion tons of topsoil each year.<sup>45</sup> David Pimentel, professor of agriculture and life sciences, Cornell University, describes the magnitude of the problem as follows: "During the last 40 years, nearly one-third of the world's arable land has been lost by erosion and continues to be lost at a rate of more than 10 million hectares per year."<sup>46</sup> The United States

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Meeting (Montreal, Quebec: July 24–26, 1997), pp. 16 and 20. Fish production is equally inefficient requiring, on average, 27 kcal of fossil energy per kcal of fish protein produced (David Pimentel and Marcia Pimentel, *Food, Energy, and Society*, rev. ed. [Niwot, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 1996], p. 93).

<sup>42</sup>David Pimentel, James Houser, et al., "Water Resources: Agriculture, the Environment, and Society," *Bioscience*, vol. 47, no. 2 (February 1997), p. 100.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 97 and 104.

<sup>44</sup>Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 352.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 351 and 358.

<sup>46</sup>David Pimentel, C. Harvey, et al., "Environmental and Economic Cost of Soil Erosion and Conservation Benefits," *Science*, vol. 267, no. 5201 (February 24, 1995), p. 1117.

is losing soil at a rate thirteen times faster than the rate of soil formation.<sup>47</sup>

5. Animal agriculture creates enormous amounts of hazardous waste in the form of excrement. U.S. livestock produce 250,000 pounds of excrement *per second*, resulting in 1 billion tons of unrecycled waste per year.<sup>48</sup> According to the U.S. General Accounting Office's Report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, animal-waste runoff from feedlots and rangeland is a significant factor in water quality, affecting about 72 percent of impaired rivers and streams, 56 percent of impaired lake acres, and 43 percent of impaired estuary miles.<sup>49</sup> This GAO report found that agriculture is one of the main sources of groundwater pollution and also found: "Among five general categories of pollution sources (Municipal Point Sources; Urban Runoff/Storm Sewers; Agriculture; Industrial Point Sources; and Natural Sources), agriculture ranked as the number one cause of impaired rivers and streams and lakes."<sup>50</sup> The upshot is this: animal agriculture is far and away the most resource-intensive, inefficient, environmentally harmful, and ecologically unsound means of human food production, and consequently, one of the easiest direct actions one can take to help protect the environment and preserve resources for future generations, *requiring minimal effort*, is to stop eating meat. And so, since you believe that we have a duty to preserve the environment for future generations [(p<sub>15</sub>)] and you believe that one ought to minimize one's contribution toward environmental degradation [(p<sub>16</sub>)], your beliefs commit you to the obligatoriness of becoming vegetarian, since doing so is a simple way to help to preserve the environment.

The moral of the present section is clear: consistency forces you to admit that meat consumption is immoral and, thus, necessitates your becoming vegetarian immediately.

<sup>47</sup>Pimentel and Pimentel, *Food, Energy, and Society*, p. 153.

<sup>48</sup>Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 372. In contrast, humans produce 12,000 pounds of excrement per second, one-twentieth that of livestock (p. 372).

<sup>49</sup>*Animal Agriculture: Information on Waste Management and Water Quality Issues*, pp. 2 and 8f.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 9.

#### 4. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES: WAYS THINGS MIGHT HAVE BEEN, BUT AREN'T

From ( $f_1$ ) and ( $p_1$ ) we inferred that, other things being equal, the world would be better without animal agriculture and factory farms. Perhaps other things are not equal. Perhaps the agony experienced by animals in factory farms is necessary for some greater good. The present section examines several ways things might have been unequal, but aren't.

##### *Perhaps Meat Consumption Is Necessary for Optimal Nutrition*

A crucial premise in my argument is: (CP1) The pain and suffering which inevitably result from meat production are entirely *unnecessary*. I defended (CP1) on the grounds that in modern societies meat consumption is *in no way necessary* for human survival [ $(f_2)$ ]. But (CP1) does not follow from ( $f_2$ ), since eating meat might be necessary for some reason other than human survival. Hence, one might object: "While eating meat is not necessary for survival, it *might* still be necessary for humans to thrive and flourish, in which case (CP1) would be false since the pain and suffering experienced by farm animals would be *necessary* for a significant human benefit."

If meat consumption were *necessary* for humans to flourish, my argument would be seriously compromised, so let us examine the evidence. First, consider the counterexamples. Since world-class athletic competition is one of the most grueling and physically strenuous activities in which humans can engage, one would not expect there to be any highly successful vegetarian athletes or vegetarian world record holders, *if* meat consumption were necessary for humans to thrive and flourish. However, the list of world-class vegetarian athletes is quite long and includes: Dave Scott (six-time winner of Hawaii's Ironman Triathlon), Sixto Linares (world record holder for the 24-hour triathlon), Edwin Moses (400 meter hurdler undefeated in international competition for eight straight years), Paavo Nurmi (twenty world records and nine Olympic medals), Andreas Cahling (1980 Mr. International title in body building), and Ridgely Abele (U.S. Karate Association World Champion), to name

a few,<sup>51</sup> which strongly suggests that eating meat is *not* necessary for humans to flourish.

Second, consider the diseases associated with the consumption of meat and animal products—heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, and obesity—as documented in numerous highly regarded studies.<sup>52</sup> Four examples must suffice:

1. The Loma Linda study, involving over 24,000 people, found that lacto-ovo-vegetarian men (who consume eggs and dairy products, but no meat) had a 61 percent lower coronary heart disease (CHD) mortality rate than California's general population. Pure vegetarian men (who consume no animal products) fared even better: the CHD mortality rate for these males was 86 percent lower than that of the California general population.<sup>53</sup>

2. The ongoing Framingham heart study has been tracking the daily living and eating habits of thousands of residents of Framingham, Massachusetts, since 1948. Dr. William Castelli, director of the study for the last fifteen years, maintains that based on his research the most heart-healthy diet is a *pure* vegetarian diet.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps vegetarians suffer from other illnesses or die of other diseases earlier than their meat-eating counterparts. Not according to Dr. Castelli: "The vegetarian societies of the world have the best diet. Within our own country, they outlive the rest of us by at least seven

<sup>51</sup>The impressive feats of these world-class vegetarian athletes and numerous other vegetarian athletes are discussed in much greater detail in Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, pp. 158–63.

<sup>52</sup>For an excellent well-documented discussion of the positive correlation between meat consumption and these diseases, see Robbins' *Diet for a New America*, pp. 203–305.

<sup>53</sup>Roland L. Phillips, Frank R. Lemon, et al., "Coronary Heart Disease Mortality among Seventh-Day Adventists with Differing Dietary Habits: A Preliminary Report," *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, vol. 31 (October 1978), pp. S191–S198. CHD mortality rates based on Standardized Mortality Ratios of 39 and 14 for lacto-ovo and pure vegetarian men, respectively (Fig. 5, p. S195).

<sup>54</sup>"An Interview with William Castelli," *Good Medicine*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 15.

years, and they have only 10 or 15 percent of our heart attack rate."<sup>55</sup> Elsewhere Castelli adds: "Vegetarians not only outlive the rest of us, they also aren't prey to other degenerative diseases, such as diabetes, strokes, etc., that slow us down and make us chronically ill."<sup>56</sup>

3. The Cornell-Oxford-China Health Project systematically monitored the diet, lifestyle, and disease patterns of 6,500 families from sixty-five different counties in Mainland China and Taiwan.<sup>57</sup> The data collected in this study have led its director, Dr. T. Colin Campbell, to conclude that 80-90 percent of all cancers can be controlled or prevented by a low-fat (10-15 percent fat) vegetarian diet.<sup>58</sup>

4. The Dean Ornish study in which it was demonstrated that *advanced* coronary artery disease could be *reversed* through a combination of stress reduction and an extremely low-fat vegetarian diet (10 percent fat). All patients in the study had greater than 50 percent stenosis in one or more of the major coronary arteries. Members of the experimental group participated in stress management training and were fed a 1,400-calorie diet consisting of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, tubers, and soy beans, while the control group continued their routine activities at work and at home. After only six weeks, an important indicator of coronary function (mean left ventricular ejection fraction) improved 6.4 percent in the experimental group, but deteriorated 1.7 percent in the control group. In addition, the experimental group showed a 20.5 percent reduction in plasma cholesterol, a 91 percent mean reduction in the frequency of angina, and a mean weight reduction of ten pounds, compared to the control group, which showed no sig-

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>William Castelli, "Lessons from the Framingham Heart Study: How to Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease," *Bottom Line: Personal* (July 1, 1994), p. 10.

<sup>57</sup>J. Chen, T. C. Campbell, et al., *Diet, Lifestyle, and Mortality in China: A Study of the Characteristics of 65 Counties* (Oxford University Press, Cornell University Press, and the China People's Medical Publishing House, 1990).

<sup>58</sup>T. Colin Campbell (Professor of Nutritional Biochemistry at Cornell University), as reported in *Healthcare Foodservice* (March/April 1992), p. 15.

nificant improvement in any of these areas.<sup>59</sup> These and countless other studies have led the American Dietetic Association, the leading nutritional organization in the country, to assert:

Scientific data suggest positive relationships between a vegetarian diet and reduced risk for several chronic degenerative diseases and conditions, including obesity, coronary artery disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, and some types of cancer. . . . *It is the position of The American Dietetic Association (ADA) that appropriately planned vegetarian diets are healthful, are nutritionally adequate, and provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.*<sup>60</sup>

An article in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* concurs, claiming: "A vegetarian diet can prevent 97 percent of our coronary occlusions."<sup>61</sup> In light of these findings, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) recommends centering our diets on the following *new* four food groups: (1) whole grains (5+ servings a day); (2) vegetables (3+ servings a day); (3) fruits (3+ servings a day), and (4) legumes (2+ servings a day).<sup>62</sup> Gone are meat and dairy, the two principal sources of fat and cholesterol in the American diet. The evidence is unequivocal: A vegetarian diet is nutritionally superior to a meat-based diet. One cannot reject (CP1) on the grounds that eating meat is necessary for

<sup>59</sup>Dean Ornish, et al., "Effects of Stress Management Training and Dietary Changes in Treating Ischemic Heart Disease," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 249, no. 1 (1983), pp. 54–59. These findings were confirmed in the Lifestyle Heart Trial. See Dean Ornish, et al., "Can Lifestyle Changes Reverse Coronary Heart Disease?" *Lancet*, vol. 336 (July 21, 1990), pp. 129–33.

<sup>60</sup>"Position of the American Dietetic Association: Vegetarian Diets," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, vol. 97, no. 11 (November 1997), p. 1317. For those wishing to learn more about sound vegetarian nutrition, the ADA has published this article in its entirety at: [www.eatright.org/adap1197.html](http://www.eatright.org/adap1197.html).

<sup>61</sup>"Diet and Stress in Vascular Disease," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 176, no. 9 (June 3, 1961), p. 806. Thus, the coronary health benefits of a vegetarian diet have been known for over thirty-five years.

<sup>62</sup>Neal Barnard, *Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), pp. 144–47.

human flourishing, because it isn't. On the contrary, it is *detrimental* to human health and well-being.<sup>63</sup>

### ***A Utilitarian Gambit: Perhaps Human Gustatory Pleasure Outweighs Animal Suffering***

A speciesistic carnivore might object that I have conveniently omitted one of her pertinent beliefs: (p<sub>17</sub>) Human pleasure always outweighs animal suffering. Given (p<sub>17</sub>), since humans derive gustatory pleasure from eating the flesh of nonhuman animals, other things are *not* equal. Accordingly, there is a justifying reason for the agony billions of farm animals are forced to endure: taste.

First, *you* do not actually believe (p<sub>17</sub>). Remember Harman's cat. You do not believe that the pleasure the thugs get from burning a cat alive morally justifies their disregarding the cat's interest in avoiding suffering. You do not believe that the pleasure a sadistic Satanist gets out of slowly torturing a fully conscious dog by skinning and eating it alive (even if he gets immense *gustatory* pleasure from doing so) outweighs the dog's interest in avoiding such suffering.

<sup>63</sup>These findings are hardly surprising when one considers that both the American Heart Association (AHA) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) recommend a diet that is *high* in complex carbohydrates and fiber, and *low* in protein, dietary cholesterol, fat (especially saturated fat), sodium, alcohol, carcinogens and procarcinogens. Specifically, complex carbohydrates should comprise 55 to 70 percent of our calories, fat should provide less than 30 percent (preferably 10–15 percent) of our calories, protein should make up 10–12 percent of our calories, dietary cholesterol should not exceed 300 mg a day (0 mg is optimal, since there is no minimum amount of dietary cholesterol required), and fiber consumption should be 25–30 grams a day. In stark contrast, the typical American *meat-based* diet is 40–50 percent fat (most of which is saturated), 30 percent carbohydrate, 25 percent protein and contains 400+ mg of cholesterol per day. These statistics are to be expected since meat is high in fat, high in protein, and high in cholesterol (only animal products contain cholesterol), but contains no complex carbohydrates and no fiber. In fact, it is almost impossible to adhere to the AHA's and ACS's dietary guidelines while consuming a meat-based diet, whereas satisfying these guidelines is virtually inevitable when one eats only from the PCRMs' *new* four food groups.

You simply do not believe that trivial human pleasures outweigh the most significant interests of nonhuman animals.

Second, in assessing whether a carnivore's pleasure in eating meat outweighs the pain of the animal that became that meat, it is a mistake to compare the pleasure had by eating meat with the frustration of eating nothing at all. Rather, to assess the pleasure gotten *by eating meat*, one must compare the pleasure one would get from eating meat with the pleasure one would get from eating something else.<sup>64</sup> Suppose your only food options are beef tacos or bean tostadas. If you would get ten hedons of pleasure from the tacos and nine from the tostadas, then only *one* hedon would be attributable *to eating meat*. Since, for any meat item you could consume, there is a vegetarian item which would give you nearly as much pleasure, it is very unlikely that the minimal pleasure one gets *from eating meat* outweighs the prolonged and excruciating pain of castration, branding, dehorning, tail docking, etc.<sup>65</sup>

Third, animals aren't the only beings who suffer as a result of the meat industry. Billions of *humans* suffer as well, including the 1.3 billion people worldwide suffering from chronic hunger;<sup>66</sup> the millions of carnivores themselves who are suffering from heart disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, and obesity; and these carnivores' children who are well on their way to a shortened lifetime of debilitating disease as a result of being fed a meat-based diet by their parents. By not eating (or serving) meat we greatly reduce our chance of suffering a litany of debilitating diseases, we greatly reduce our children's risk of suffering from these same diseases,

<sup>64</sup>Bart Gruzalski makes a similar point. See his "The Case against Raising and Killing Animals for Food" in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, op. cit., pp. 183f.

<sup>65</sup>Here, for the sake of argument, I assume that the carnivore would get a bit more pleasure from the meat dish than the vegetarian dish. This assumption may well be false, as Gruzalski notes: "Since much of the world's population finds that vegetarian meals can be delightfully tasty, there is good reason for thinking that the pleasures many people derive from eating meat can be completely replaced with pleasure from eating vegetables" (ibid., p. 183). Consider also the added pleasure one gets from trying new dishes. For an excellent discussion of these points, see Gruzalski, ibid., pp. 184f.

<sup>66</sup>Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef* (New York: Dutton, 1992), p. 177.

and we, at least indirectly, help to reduce world hunger by reducing the demand for grain-fed meat, freeing up grain for humans. Thus, even if you were a speciesist who did believe (p<sub>17</sub>) and only cared about *human* suffering, consistency with your other beliefs would still require you to stop eating meat.

### ***Perhaps Plants Feel Pain***

*Perhaps*, but *you* don't believe they do. You walk on grass, mow your lawn, and trim your hedges without any concern that you might be causing plants pain. But you would never walk on your dog or trim your dog's legs, because you are certain that doing so would cause your dog terrible pain. Mere conjecture that plants *might* feel pain won't undermine my argument, for my argument is predicated on *your* beliefs. Since you do not believe that plants feel pain, the objection under consideration gives *you* no reason to continue eating meat.

### ***The Supreme Dietitian***

People often attempt to justify their carnivorous habits by claiming that God intends us to eat meat, citing their preferred religious text as evidence of God's will. This "justification" is particularly puzzling since all major religions teach compassion for all living creatures. Islam advocates kindness to animals; the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation encourages equal respect for all animals; and the First Precept of Buddhist ethical conduct is not to harm sentient beings.<sup>67</sup> Both Judaism and Christianity accept the Old Testament, which states: "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'" (Genesis 1:29). So why think that

<sup>67</sup>Evelyn Elkin Giefer, "Religion and Animal Rights," *Mainstream*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 1996), p. 13. There Giefer cites Mohammed's teaching (Hadith Mishkat, book 6, ch. 7, 8:178): "A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being." Giefer also notes that the Hindu Bhagavad Gita (verse 5.18) "proclaims that a self-realized soul is able to understand the equality of all beings" (p. 13).

God intends us to eat meat? Finding writings in these texts which contradict the teachings mentioned here won't resolve the matter, since if these texts' teachings are self-contradictory, then we are left with no clear guidance as to what God intends us to eat.

Fortunately, we can bypass this unpromising hermeneutical project altogether. There is a much more compelling refutation of the "God intends us to eat meat" defense. If God intends us to eat meat, then God is either ignorant, irrational, or malevolent. If God doesn't know that eating meat causes heart attacks, cancer, strokes, etc., then he is ignorant about nutrition. If God knows that eating meat is harmful to our health but intends us to do it anyway, then either he is malevolent and wants bad things to happen to us, or he is irrational since, despite wanting us to be healthy, he intends us to eat a diet detrimental to our health. Since, by definition, God is neither ignorant nor irrational nor malevolent, it is incoherent to believe that God intends us to eat meat.

### ***The "Free Range" Fantasy***

A critic might object to my argument as follows:

O.K., I understand your strategy. You're trying to show that, given my other beliefs, consistency forces me to admit that eating meat is wrong. Now, suppose I admit that factory farming causes prolonged, unnecessary, excruciating pain and that, as a result, believing ( $p_1$ )–( $p_{12}$ ) commits me to the immorality of eating factory farm-raised meat. Even so, you've yet to show that my beliefs commit me to the immorality of eating humanely raised animals. What's wrong with eating "free range" animals which are raised humanely and killed painlessly? How do my beliefs commit me to the immorality of eating them?

My response to such a critic is fourfold: First, in admitting that eating factory farm-raised meat is morally wrong, you have just admitted that it is immoral to eat over 90 percent of the meat you eat. Second, the terms "free range" and "free roaming" are not indicative of humane animal husbandry practices. According to the labelling division of the USDA, "a free range bird is one that has access to the outdoors," no matter how small the outdoor pen. The term "free roaming" just means birds which have not been raised in cages, even

though they are permanently confined in a warehouse.<sup>68</sup> Thus, uncaged broiler chickens with the industry-recommended seven-tenths of a square foot of floor space can legally be sold as "free roaming" birds. Moreover, the painful mutilations described above are also routinely performed in both "free range" and nonintensive farms. Plus, even if the "free range" animals had it good while they were on the farm, there are no humane livestock transportation companies and no humane slaughterhouses. The only way to be sure that the animal you are eating was raised humanely and killed painlessly is to raise and kill her yourself. Third, even if you had the time, space, and will to raise and kill your own "dinner," you would still be jeopardizing your own health and the health of your loved ones, as well as wasting resources which could be better spent helping to alleviate human hunger and malnutrition. Even "happy cows" require 12.9 pounds of grain to produce a pound of meat.<sup>69</sup> Fourth and most important, you already believe ( $p_{14}$ ), that other things being equal, it is worse to kill a conscious sentient creature than it is to kill a plant. An example of Andrew Tardiff's will illustrate the point. Suppose we could perform a human-benefiting experiment on either a dog or a plant with equally reliable and equally valuable results, but that the experiment will inevitably result in the death of the test subject. Anyone who accepts ( $p_{14}$ ) will surely admit that we ought to perform the experiment on the plant. For those who still have doubts, Tardiff modifies his example: Once again, we could perform a human-benefiting experiment on either a dog or a plant, and once again the test subject will be killed in the course of the experiment, only this time suppose that we would get much greater human benefit by testing on the plant than we would by testing on the dog.<sup>70</sup> Surely, you will grant that we ought to perform the experiment on the plant.

<sup>68</sup>Suzanne Hamlin, "Free Range? Natural? Sorting Out Labels," *The New York Times*, section C (November 13, 1996), p. 1. See also Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, pp. 127-31.

<sup>69</sup>NASS, USDA, *Agricultural Statistics 1997*, Table 1-72, p. I-47. Thanks to the routine use of antibiotics and growth hormones, this 12.9:1 grain-to-meat conversion ratio is down from the 16:1 ratio often sighted.

<sup>70</sup>Tardiff presents and discusses both of these examples in his excellent article "Simplifying the Case for Vegetarianism," *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 22, no. 3 (Fall 1996), pp. 302f.

Now, compare this case with the case for food. You already believe that, when other things are equal, it is worse to kill a conscious sentient animal than it is to kill a plant. But in the case of food, other things are not equal. Since a plant-based diet is more nutritious and human health-promoting than a meat-based diet,  $(p_{14})$  commits you to the view that it is worse to kill conscious sentient animals for food than it is to kill plants for food, even if those animals have been raised humanely.

### ***Consistency: The Two-Edged Sword***

In section 4, I argued that consistency rationally requires you to admit that eating meat is immoral. I did so by showing that your beliefs, when combined with two indisputable facts, entail that eating meat is morally wrong, and *ipso facto* that vegetarianism is morally required. In effect, I presented you with a valid argument of the form

$$[(p_1), (p_2), \dots, (p_{16}), (f_1), (f_2)] \rightarrow Q,$$

where  $Q$  = Eating meat is immoral. Of course, as Harman and Pollock have pointed out vis-à-vis skepticism, being presented with a valid skeptical argument of the form

$$[P_1, \dots, P_n] \rightarrow \sim K,$$

does not force you to accept  $\sim K$ , for it may be more reasonable to reject some premise  $P_i$  than to accept  $\sim K$ .<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, one might object to my argument as follows: "Consistency does not demand that I accept  $Q$ . Consistency demands that I either accept  $Q$  or reject one of my present beliefs. What's to stop me from doing the latter?" First, the cases are not analogous. In rejecting some  $P_i$  of the skeptic's argument, you are rejecting one

<sup>71</sup>As Gilbert Harman puts it, "[T]here is no plausible rule of acceptance saying that if we believe both  $P$  and *If  $P$ , then  $Q$* , we may always infer or accept  $Q$ . Perhaps we should stop believing  $P$  or *If  $P$ , then  $Q$*  rather than believe  $Q$ ." (*Thought* [Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1973], p. 157). John Pollock makes a similar point in *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), pp. 5f.

of the skeptic's beliefs; whereas in rejecting some  $(p_i)$  of my argument, you are rejecting one of your own firmly held beliefs. Since  $(p_1)$ – $(p_{16})$  are *your* beliefs, it's not at all clear that you could simply stop believing one of them—for example, you could no more stop believing that animals are capable of feeling pain than you could stop believing that humans feel pain. Furthermore, my argument actually consists of a family of arguments predicated on different subsets of  $\{(p_1), \dots, (p_{16})\}$ . Thus, while one can escape the clutches of the skeptic's argument by rejecting a single  $P_i$ , to escape my argument you must reject a number of your beliefs. Second, even if you could reject these beliefs, it would be irrational for you to do so. After all, as a philosopher, you are interested in more than mere consistency; you are interested in truth. Consequently, you will not reject just any belief(s) for the sake of consistency. You will reject the belief(s) you think most likely to be false. Now, presumably, you already think your belief system is for the most part reasonable, or you would have already made significant changes in it. So, you will want to reject as few beliefs as possible. Since  $(p_1)$ – $(p_{16})$  are rife with implications, rejecting several of these propositions would force you to reject countless other beliefs on pain of incoherence, whereas accepting  $Q$  would require minimal belief revision on your part. Simply put,  $Q$  coheres with your otherwise already reasonable beliefs, whereas  $\sim Q$  does not, thus making it more reasonable to accept  $Q$  than to reject any of your other beliefs.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by noting two further implications of your beliefs. First, your beliefs not only commit you to the obligatoriness of vegetarianism, but also to the obligatoriness of a vegan diet, that is, a diet devoid of *all* animal products. Here's why: In section 4 we found a vegan diet to be the most nutritious and healthful diet a human can consume.<sup>72</sup> Plus, contrary to what many people think,

<sup>72</sup>The PCRM recommends a vegan diet centered around the *new* four food groups. Anyone who eats only from these four food groups will be consuming a vegan diet. Any article advocating a vegan diet would be remiss

it is extremely *easy* to adopt a vegan diet. To see just how easy, recall that in section 3, I provided a long list of readily available, tasty vegetarian dishes which one could easily eat in place of standard meat fare. Each of the vegetarian dishes listed there is actually vegan. Since eggs and dairy products are both nutritionally unnecessary and easy to avoid, we can now see why your beliefs entail that eating these products is morally wrong.

Let us start by examining the modern egg industry. Two distinct strains of chickens have been developed: "layers" for egg production and "broilers" for meat production. Since layer strains are thought to produce insufficient and inferior meat and since males do not produce eggs, male chicks of the layer strain are identified by chicken sexers, who throw them into plastic bags where they are allowed to suffocate.<sup>73</sup> In 1995, 247 million unwanted male chicks met this fate.<sup>74</sup> Like their broiler counterparts, female layers are debeaked at one week of age. However, since layers are kept alive longer, most egg producers debeak their birds a second time around twelve weeks of age.<sup>75</sup> Worse still, layers are permanently confined in 16" by 18" battery cages, five or six birds to a cage.<sup>76</sup>

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not to discuss the *only* legitimate nutritional concern facing vegans, namely, vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency. The conventional wisdom is that vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is virtually nonexistent in plant foods. New evidence suggests: (1) that B<sub>12</sub> can be found in plants, (2) that organically grown plants contain higher levels of B<sub>12</sub> than those grown with chemical fertilizers, (3) that plant roots are able to absorb vitamins produced by soil microorganisms (B<sub>12</sub> is only produced by microorganisms), and (4) that vegans should be able to obtain B<sub>12</sub> by consuming organically grown produce (T. Colin Campbell, "B<sub>12</sub> Breakthrough: Missing Nutrient Found in Plants," *New Century Nutrition*, vol. 2, no. 11 [November 1996], p. 1). Because this evidence is preliminary, those following a vegan diet should make sure they have a reliable source of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> in their diets (reliable sources include fortified soy, rice, and nut milks; fortified cereals; fortified textured soy protein; and Red Star T-6635+ nutritional yeast) or they should take a B<sub>12</sub> supplement.

<sup>73</sup>Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 54.

<sup>74</sup>Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, p. 105.

<sup>75</sup>Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup>Karen Davis, "The Plight of Poultry," *The Animals' Agenda* (July/August 1996), p. 38. Also see Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 63.

Thus, the average layer has only 48–58 square inches of living space, not much larger than a 5" by 8" index card. The cages have slanted wire mesh flooring totally inappropriate for the birds' feet, which sometimes grow fixed to the cage floor making it impossible to reach food and water.<sup>77</sup> Ninety-eight percent of the eggs produced in the United States come from layers permanently confined in such battery cages.<sup>78</sup> After a year and a half of this existence (assuming they don't die in their cages, as do 12–18 percent of them per year<sup>79</sup>), about the time when their egg production begins to wane, the birds are either crammed even more tightly into portable crates, transported to the slaughterhouse, and turned into soup and other processed foods,<sup>80</sup> or they are kept for another laying cycle, whichever is cheaper. Those unfortunate enough to be kept and "recycled" are force-molted to prepare them for the next laying cycle. The primary method of forced molting involves the withholding of all food from the hens for a period of 5–14 days.<sup>81</sup> After one or two forced-molt laying cycles, the spent birds will suffer one of two fates: Either they will be sent to slaughter as described above or, as is increasingly favored, they will meet with on-farm disposal whereby they are ground up alive and fed to the next generation of hens.<sup>82</sup> These birds are forced to endure all of this inhumane treatment, just so we can indulge in an inherently unhealth-

<sup>77</sup>Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 110. The industry justification for such inappropriate flooring is that it allows urine and feces to drop through the cage and the slant facilitates automatic egg collection.

<sup>78</sup>William Dudley-Cash, "Study Shows Adoption Rate of Technology by Laying Hen Industry," *Feedstuffs* (November 4, 1991), p. 11; and Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 53.

<sup>79</sup>Mason and Singer, *Animal Factories*, p. 25.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup>Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, pp. 74–76. Davis explains molting and the industry rationale behind forced molting as follows: "Molting refers to the replacement of old feathers by new ones. In nature, all birds replace all of their feathers in the course of a year. . . . Egg laying tapers off as the female bird concentrates her energies on growing new feathers and staying warm" (p. 74). This process naturally takes four months, whereas during a forced molt, the process only takes a month or two. (p. 74)

<sup>82</sup>Davis, *Prisoned Chickens, Poisoned Eggs*, p. 77.

ful product loaded with cholesterol (300 milligrams per egg) and fat (50 percent of eggs' calories come from fat, most of which is saturated), which has somehow come to be associated with breakfast. Since eggs are nutritionally unnecessary, are easy to avoid, and come from an unnecessarily cruel industry, your beliefs entail that it is immoral to eat them.

As for dairy products, 57 percent of dairy cows are raised in factory farms, where their calves are taken away within one or two days and where they are constantly reimpregnated, pumped full of antibiotics and bovine growth hormone, milked two to three times a day, suffer from mastitis, fed unnatural diets, and prevented from moving about freely. After a few years when their milk production wanes, they, like their meat-producing counterparts, will be inhumanely loaded onto trucks and shipped to the slaughterhouse without food or water and without protection from the elements, where they will be transformed into ground beef. Lest one think this a rare occurrence, in 1997, over 2.9 million dairy cows were slaughtered in federally inspected plants.<sup>83</sup> As for their calves, if the calf is female, she will either be kept or sold to another dairy farmer, but if the calf is male, he will typically be sold to veal farmers who will chain him at the neck and feed him an iron-deficient diet for 14–16 weeks before sending him off to slaughter.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, when one purchases dairy products, one is not only supporting the unnecessary and inhumane confinement of dairy cows, one is also indirectly supporting the even more inhumane veal industry. Since, according to both the ADA and the PCRM, dairy products are in no way necessary for optimum human health, since dairy products are easy to avoid, and since the dairy industry inflicts untold suffering and death on dairy cows and their calves, your beliefs commit you to the immorality of consuming dairy products.

Finally, your beliefs commit you to the immorality of purchasing personal care and household products that have been tested on animals. These tests include the Draize eye irritancy test,<sup>85</sup> the lethal

<sup>83</sup>*Livestock Slaughter 1997 Summary*, NASS, USDA, p. 82.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 12f.

<sup>85</sup>The Draize test involves dripping caustic substances such as bleach or shampoo into restrained rabbits' eyes, frequently resulting in hemorrhage, ulceration, and blindness. Rabbits are used for convenience, because they

dose 50 percent (LD50) test, dermal toxicity tests, and injection tests. Eighty percent of the animals in these tests receive no anesthesia. Moreover, these tests are unnecessary and unreliable. For example, the crude LD50 test, in which a test group of animals is force-fed a substance until 50 percent of the animals die (which is often due to stomach rupture rather than the effects of the substance *per se*), provides no useful data which can be reliably extrapolated to humans.<sup>86</sup> In most cases, avoiding products which have been tested on animals is *easy*, since equally effective, equally priced, equally safe, alternative products which have not been tested on animals and which contain no animal ingredients are almost always readily available. Moreover, determining which products are cruelty free will not require a great deal of time or effort on your part, for these products typically advertise their cruelty-free status on the label. Since one can easily reduce one's contribution to laboratory-generated animal suffering by buying cruelty-free personal care and household products instead of those tested on animals (usually they are right next to each other on the supermarket shelves), *your* beliefs entail that you are morally obligated to do so.

The implications of your beliefs are clear. Given your beliefs, it follows that: (1) eating meat is morally wrong; (2) eating animal products is morally wrong; and (3) purchasing personal care and household products which have been tested on animals is morally wrong (provided comparable cruelty-free products are readily available). These conclusions were not derived from some highly contentious ethical theory which you can easily reject, but from your own firmly held beliefs. Furthermore, these conclusions follow, regardless of your views on speciesism, animal equality, and animal rights. Even those of you who are staunch speciesists are committed to the immorality of these practices, given your other beliefs.

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have no tear ducts to flush out the offending substance. Of course, this makes them poor models for humans who do have tear ducts. Sidney Gendin, "The Use of Animals in Science" in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, op. cit., pp. 199f.

<sup>86</sup>Robert Sharpe, "Animal Experiments—A Failed Technology," in *Animal Experimentation: The Consensus Changes*, ed. Gill Langley (New York: Chapman and Hall, 1989), pp. 101–104. Also see Singer, *Animal Liberation*, pp. 53–56.

Consequently, consistency demands that you embrace the immorality of these practices and modify your behavior accordingly.<sup>87</sup>

## APPENDIX

- (p<sub>1</sub>) Other things being equal, a world with less pain and suffering is better than a world with more pain and suffering.
- (p<sub>2</sub>) A world with less unnecessary suffering is better than a world with more unnecessary suffering.
- (p<sub>3</sub>) Unnecessary cruelty is wrong and *prima facie* should not be supported or encouraged.
- (p<sub>4</sub>) We ought to take steps to make the world a better place.
- (p<sub>4'</sub>) We ought to do what we reasonably can to avoid making the world a worse place.
- (p<sub>5</sub>) A morally good person will take steps to make the world a better place and even stronger steps to avoid making the world a worse place.
- (p<sub>6</sub>) Even a minimally decent person would take steps to help reduce the amount of unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, *if s/he could do so with very little effort*.
- (p<sub>7</sub>) I am a morally good person.
- (p<sub>8</sub>) I am at least a minimally decent person.
- (p<sub>9</sub>) I am the sort of person who certainly would take steps to help reduce the amount of pain and suffering in the world, *if I could do so with very little effort*.

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- (p<sub>10</sub>) Many nonhuman animals (certainly all vertebrates) are capable of feeling pain.
- (p<sub>11</sub>) It is morally wrong to cause an animal unnecessary pain or suffering.
- (p<sub>12</sub>) It is morally wrong and despicable to treat animals inhumanely for *no good reason*.
- (p<sub>13</sub>) We ought to euthanize untreatably injured, suffering animals to put them out of their misery whenever feasible.
- (p<sub>14</sub>) Other things being equal, it is worse to kill a conscious sentient animal than it is to kill a plant.
- (p<sub>15</sub>) We have a duty to help preserve the environment for future generations (at least for future human generations).
- (p<sub>16</sub>) One ought to minimize one's contribution toward environmental degradation, *especially in those ways requiring minimal effort on one's part*.

### ***For Further Reflection***

1. Why does Engel make a point of *not* predicating his argument on any particular moral theory? Explain the strengths or weaknesses of applied ethical arguments not grounded in theoretical considerations.
2. Must ethical vegetarianism be grounded in the *equal* moral considerability of animals or is their *mere* moral considerability sufficient to make vegetarianism obligatory?
3. How does Engel defend the claim that it is wrong to eat humanely raised meat?
4. To whom is Engel's argument directed? What conditions must one satisfy in order for Engel's argument to apply?
5. How could it be permissible for some people to eat meat and wrong for others to do so? Explain. Does Engel's argument entail an objectionable form of relativism? Why or why not?
6. What does Engel's argument imply about: (1) the use of leather, (2) attending circuses and zoos, and (3) using animals in medical research?

7. Are there any good reasons to eat meat which Engel has neglected to address and which would override all the suffering factory farm animals are made to endure?

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