

## BOOK REVIEW

*Food for Thought. The Debate over Eating Meat* by Steve F. Sapontzis, Amherst, NY. Prometheus, 2004, 370+ pp, ISBN 13:9781591021186

Steve Sapontzis has edited an interesting collection of articles, each of which addresses some dimension of the various issues in the ethical debate over eating meat that Sapontzis identifies in his introduction and that he uses to justify dividing the collection into seven sections. Although Sapontzis's own position should be well known (see *Morals, Reason, and Animals*, 1987), he avoids taking a position in his editorial, instead, inviting us to think about the various sides in the debate so that we can make our own decision. My sense is that he intended this collection to be used as a text and/or to address a wider audience than professional philosophers. It is an invitation to think about the issue of ethical vegetarianism.

The first section consists of a single article, by Daniel Dombrowski, designed to acquaint the reader with the fact that among philosophers, the debate goes back to ancient times. Oddly, the author thinks, there is more sympathy for vegetarianism among Platonists than Aristotelians, though Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus pointed out that a virtue theory of ethics should pay attention to the effect that eating meat has on us. What seems odd is that Aristotelians, who valued sense information more than Platonists, should have paid more attention to the suffering of animals. Dombrowski concludes his short essay (10 pp) by expressing a veiled hope that "Perhaps the tradition of philosophical vegetarianism going back to Pythagoras and traveling through many in the Platonic tradition will one day win out over its dialectical opponent, which traces its meat-eating lineage back to Aristotle and the Stoics."

Section Two is called *What Anthropology and Medicine Have to Tell Us About Eating Meat*. It consists of three articles. The first one addresses the question about what our *natural* diet is and dismisses this question in favor of a concern for whether a vegetarian diet is a healthy one. The author, Randall Collura, says that there is plenty of scientific information to support the claim that it can be. In the second article ("Vegetarianism. The Healthy Alternative"), Neal Barnard and Kristine Kieswer clearly argue against including meat in our diet and they give a lot of information about our various dietary needs and the sorts of food that provide them. In the third

article, Johanna T. Dwyer and Franklin Loew focus specifically on the nutritional risks of vegan diets. They argue that there are potential health risks for women and children, but by careful dietary planning, they can be avoided.

The third section (The Recent Debate Over the Moral Status of Animals and its Implications for Our Diet) is the longest (pp. 70–166) and includes eight contributors, all of whom are recognized philosophers whose positions are most likely familiar to the journal readers, so I will not rehearse them. Some are for ethical vegetarianism and some against it. They are Rachels, Scruton, Phuhar, Singer, Frey, Gruzalski, Clark (who appeals to virtue ethics to support ethical vegetarianism), and Cohen. I did not feel that I personally learned much from reading these selections because I was already familiar with the positions represented. But as a text for nonphilosophers, this section would be quite valuable.

Section Four (Traditional and Contemporary Religious Teachings About our Relation to Animals) has seven selections, some arguing that certain traditions do support vegetarianism while other traditions do not. Sapontzis says that these selections are a mixture of surveys and advocacy. The traditions covered include Judaism, Christians, Catholics, Islam, Eastern religions, and Native American traditions. Some of these authors give ingenious explanations why, contrary to what is normally thought, most Western traditions can be interpreted to support vegetarianism. For example, Tom Regan suggests that rather than think of Eden as paradise lost, we should think of it as a future condition. Major C. W. Hume, the founder of UFAW and the father of the animal welfare movement held a similar view (see his *The Status of Animals in the Christian Tradition*, UFAW, 1956).

I found Sections Five and Six the most relevant for my own current work (Competing Conceptions of Animal Welfare) but didn't get much help from any of these selections. Section Five, The Feminist Debate over the Relation Between the Treatment of Animals and of Woman) has four selections. I have seen references made to the Ethics of Care as giving support for meat consumption if farming practices are suitably reformed (e.g., David Fraser and Peter Sandoe and Michael Appleby), but I did not find much support for that interpretation of feminist ethics in the four selections. Carol Adams's position, the first selection, should be familiar to everyone. Basically, women and animals are both thought of as consumable. Kathryn George's position is that ethical vegetarianism is unfair to women and children because of their dietary vulnerabilities, a position challenged by Collura in Section Two.

The third paper in the feminist section is by Deane Curtin, who calls her position "Contextual moral relativism." It is contextual because it addresses the situation of women in the developed Western world, who do

not have to eat meat. Curtin bases her position on one interpretation of the Gilligan care ethics, namely Warren's ecofeminism, distinguishing it from a care ethics that lock's women into serving their husbands, or one that is used to justify caring only or primarily for those close to us. She contrasts her approach with both a conservative and a liberal one. The connection to ecological feminism is the recognition that there are important connections between the domination of women, nature, and animals. To oppose this domination, we must learn to value our relationships with the dominated, and extend the same care to them as we do to our pets, for example. In the contemporary Western world, farming food animals is destructive of valuable ecosystems at the same time that it causes suffering to these animals. A contextual ethical vegetarianism expresses our caring for both the environment, the animals that live in it, and the animals that are farmed and killed for food. So does eating locally. But it is left open for people who need to eat meat to survive to not be ethically bound to vegetarianism.

The last paper in this section is by Lori Gruen, "Empathy and Vegetarian Commitments." Gruen first reviews some of the objections that some feminists have raised against ethical vegetarianism, replies to them, and then offers a Humean feminist argument in support of ethical vegetarianism. Some feminists view the moral requirements that insist that people refrain from eating meat as representing a form of value imperialism or cultural chauvinism. Gruen cites Jane Meyerding (1982). And some feminists who adhere to an "ethics of care" argued that since non-humans are not able to enter into reciprocal relations with us, we have no obligations to become vegetarians. Gruen cites Noddings (1984). And some feminists working for environmental and economic justice see the demands for vegetarianism as elitist, classist, and racist. Vegetarianism seems to be another constraint placed on women from outside, because many of the arguments that are given appeal to *reason* alone, and this focus on reason "continues a tradition that separates reason from emotion, thought from feeling." And it seems to assume that emotion is non-cognitive. Some feminists have argued that this *value dualism* is one of the political tools by which women, who are supposed to be less rational than men, are thought to be less important, etc. This alleged difference between men and women has been used as a justification for dominating women. Thus, an ethical vegetarianism that is supported by rational argument alone seems imposed on women, Gruen speculates. Her goal, then, is to argue for a more agent centered source of moral vegetarianism. To do this, she uses a Humean analysis, arguing that our experiences of sympathy, empathy, and compassion support vegetarianism. The ability to feel empathy for the sufferer of another being, one that is different from

oneself is a special virtue that comes from inside oneself. It is thus agent-centered and not imposed from outside. “Empathic engagement with different others is a form of moral attention that not only brings into focus the claims that nonhumans make on us, but also helps to shift our moral attention.” When we are able to empathize with how animals feel, then we can no longer view them as food, and this is a demand that comes from within us rather than being imposed upon us. But in arguing for an empathy based grounding for ethical vegetarianism, Gruen is not supporting a reason-emotion dualism, and arguing solely for an emotional based support for vegetarianism. Nor does she deny that ethical understanding based on abstract reasoning can also come from within, although I do not think she makes this last point as clear as she should. Surely, the ability to engage in abstract reasoning is as innate in all of us as is the ability to feel empathy.

The title of Section Six is The Environmental Debate over Respecting Predatory Nature and Protecting Animals. It has four articles. I was especially interested in looking at the material here because I think the problem of predation is a difficult issue for an ethical vegetarian to address. If it is wrong for humans to kill and eat animals, why is it not wrong for predators do to it? Even if we argue that they are not moral agents, so cannot be blamed for killing and eating, especially if they need to do it to survive themselves, it doesn't follow that we shouldn't have a moral obligation to intervene where we can. On the other hand, if predators play an important role in population control, does this mean that humans are justified in killing animals for the same purpose? Ned Hettinger, in the first article in Section Six raises a similar issue, using Rolston's argument that predation is a part of nature and humans who reject it (and even refuse to participate in it by hunting) are *haters of nature*. Hettinger argues that ethical vegetarians who are consequentialists and value predation in nature because of its role, are faced with explaining why they reject playing a similar role themselves. Deontologists like Regan, on the other hand, must explain, why, on the one hand, it is acceptable to protect human children from rabid foxes, but not protect prey in nature from predation. But, Hettinger argues, if Regan is forced into this position, then he cannot say that predation in nature is good. Hettinger's conclusion is that when hunting and meat eating are based on a desire to participate in carnivorous predation, they are

... legitimate, nature-respecting activities whose goals cannot be achieved in other ways. Animal activists who oppose these activities are left with the following options: Either consider animal predation as evil (and explain why this does not involve hating nature) or show that there is some other way to value animal predation as good while consistently and plausibly condemning human predation. (p. 300)

I think Hettinger's argument fails to distinguish between ways in which nature is good (it provides resources for animals and humans) and ways in which it is bad (as a community, it fails to protect many of its individual members and, in this way, does not seem fair to all of its "members"). And while we might excuse predators from surviving in the only way they can, nature might seem like a better place if predation was not necessary for the survival of predator species. Of course, there is still the issue of the service that many predators play in controlling dangerously excessive populations. The issue, it seems to me, is how might this service be provided in a way that is fair?

In the second selection, "Vegetarianism, Predation, and Respect for Nature," Jennifer Everett replies to Hettinger by arguing that even if it were true that hunting and meat eating played an important role in the evolution of humans, it doesn't follow that we should be committed to following this practice. However we got to be that way, we are now moral beings who are capable of deploring the suffering that predation causes even though we might admire the flourishing of predators and appreciate the role they play. Our moral capacities are just as much a part of nature as is predation.

In the third selection, "Moderation, Morals, and Meat," Frederick Ferré introduces a logic of the larder argument to defend suitably reformed meat eating. If animals have inherent value, as Regan argues, then the more beings that exist with inherent value, the better. Raising animals for food allows more bearers of inherent value to exist than not raising them for this purpose. This practice is morally acceptable if the animals are given a good life, however short, and slaughtered without experiencing any fear. This argument assumes that death is not a harm to bearers of inherent value, even though life has important instrumental value, as Sapontzis points out in his 1987 book.

The last selection in Section Six is by Marti Kheel, "Vegetarianism and Ecofeminism." She offers an invitation to vegetarianism based on a rejection of the symbolism that meat eating has for being male. She says that she wants "to move away from the construction of universal norms and abstract principles to the deconstruction of a dominant dietary norm, namely, eating meat." To do this, she spends five pages examining the meat eating culture, including the implication of the field called "animal husbandry." While her critique, she says, does not in itself make a case out for vegetarianism, it does invite "vegetarianism as a response." Kheel argues that sympathy and attention to what others are suffering can be as important as abstract reasoning in giving people reasons to become vegetarians. She then discusses the "ethic of care" associated with ecofeminism as a viable alternative to ethical decision making based on the notion of autonomous individuals seeking justice based on equal rights that seem to view individuals as

unconnected to others. Kheel does not join in the rejection of abstract reasoning as some feminists have done on the grounds that it imposes universal norms that are not sensitive to cultural differences. Rather, she invites us to consider the factors in those cultures that encourage meat eating and deconstruct them. Kheel also cautions against confusing an ethics of care with a managerial ethic of care-taking. Caring for nonhuman animals must be distinguished from caretaking or stewardship, which invites us to manage nature, an underlying idea behind animal farming and the conservation movement. Although I think that Kheel's piece is well-argued, it struck me that it would have been better placed in Section Five. In the one paragraph in which Kheel addresses the issue raised by the other authors in Section Six, she addresses the argument that vegetarians fail to accept that predation is a natural part of the life cycle and that eating flesh is an affirmation of human participation in the web of life. Her reply is that predators represent only 20% of animals in the natural world and apart from animals killed by humans, only 5% of all animals are killed by other animals.

The last section, Section Seven is called Which is More Important, Respecting Cultural Diversity or Protecting Animals? It has two articles. In the first one, *Animals and Ecology*, Val Plumwood argues for a position she calls *ecological animalism*. This position rejects meat eating, because "meat," as Adams points out, is a "determinate cultural construction in terms of domination . ." Instead, if we refer to edible life forms as animal food, then we allow that animals are much more than merely food. So while rejecting meat eating in the context of current practices, cultures that respect animal life while also finding it necessary to eat some of them for survival should be permitted to do this.

The last article is by Gary Comstock. In "Subsistence Hunting," Comstock distinguishes between several kinds of hunting and then raises the question whether we should condone subsistence hunting or be justified in prohibiting it. He uses the case of the Makah tribe for his example. They want to resume their tribal practice of hunting whales, a practice that was forbidden when whales became scarce. Now that whales are once again more plentiful, should the petition of the tribe to resume their practice, only now using rifles, be granted? The justification that they give is that this practice is necessary to preserve their survival as a distinct tribal group. To answer this question, Comstock imagines four different cases and distinguishes between three different types of interest: categorical interests, serious interests, and basic interests and the different organisms that are capable of having one or more of these. Since basic interests trump other kinds of interests, animals with basic interests, at least those who also have serious interests, should not be killed unless the killer absolutely needs to kill to stay

alive. The easy case is the tribe who only eats clams and do so in an environmentally friendly way, and have no alternative means of survival. Since clams lack the mentality to have even serious interests (they cannot even enjoy themselves), then this practice should be allowed. In all other cases, it should not be. Thus the Makah tribe should not be allowed to resume their whale hunting.

I have conjectured that this collection was put together with the idea that it would be used as a text in college classes. What do I think of it as a text in a philosophy class? In my own introduction to philosophy classes I usually end up using Singer and Sapontzis's 1987 work. This is all preceded by some historical reading, including some on the ethics of Kant and Mill. Many of the arguments discussed in the current collection are raised by students in my classes, so this collection would certainly serve to address these various concerns. But if I replaced the two texts I now use with this collection, I am concerned that students would miss out on Singer's graphic descriptions of the abuse of animals in research and for food, and they would miss the careful analysis that Sapontzis gives in his 1987 book.

**RICHARD P. HAYNES**

*Department of Philosophy*

*University of Florida*

*Gainesville, FL 32611-8545, USA*

*E-mail: rhaynes@phil.ufl.edu*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.