Vegetarianism and Virtue: Does Consequentialism Demand Too Little?

I will argue that each of us personally ought to be a vegetarian.[1]

Actually, the conclusion I will attempt to defend concerns more than one's eating habits in that I will argue that we should be "vegans." Not only should we not buy and eat meat, but we should also not purchase fur coats, stoles, and hats, or leather shoes, belts, jackets, purses and wallets, furniture, car interiors, and other traditionally animal-based products for which there are readily available plant-based or synthetic alternatives. (Usually these are cheaper and work just as well, or better, anyway.) I will argue that buying and eating most eggs and dairy products are immoral as well. (Since it's much easier to avoid all fur, leather, and wool than all eggs and dairy products, I mention those first.) My conclusion might even imply that outfitting one's self in what has been, in recent history, the most "philosophical" of fabrics—tweed—is immoral too!

Many arguments defending the moral obligation to become vegetarian and, to a lesser extent, adopt a vegan lifestyle, have been given, especially in recent decades.[2] While these arguments have convinced many to become vegetarians or vegans, most are still not convinced.[3] My dis-

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[1]My argument is restricted to apply only to people with nutritious and readily available alternatives to meat. I will say nothing about the morality of meat eating among the relatively few people who, due to insufficient vegetable-food sources, literally *must* eat meat to survive.

[2]The recent literature on ethical issues concerning non-human animals is immense, but the writings of Peter Singer and Tom Regan have been most influential. See, e.g., Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Ecco Press, 2001), and *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), *Defending Animal Rights* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), and (with Carl Cohen) *Animal Rights: A Debate* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). Singer's and Regan's articles are widely reprinted, especially in introductory moral problems texts.

[3]It seems that for some philosophers their unwillingness to modify their dining and consumer habits is not due to their finding serious defects in the common arguments for vegetarianism. Mylan Engel reports that his "experience has been that when confronted

cussion is directed towards those who have not been convinced, especially for these reasons: first, it is often unclear what the argument is for the exact conclusion that "*You*, the reader, are morally obligated to be a vegetarian (or a vegan)."[4] Second, it is often unclear what moral premise is given to justify this conclusion. And, third, it is often especially unclear how this premise might be justified from a broadly consequentialist moral perspective.[5]

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with these arguments [for vegetarianism] 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'." See Mylan Engel, "The Immorality of Eating Meat," in Louis Pojman (ed.), *The Moral Life: An Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 856-90, at p. 857; reprinted as "Why You Are Committed to the Immorality of Eating Meat," in William Shaw (ed.), *Social and Personal Ethics*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 2002). Engel notes that "[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 to reply to 'justify' or rationalize virtually any behavior ... [A] fictitious rape-loving philosopher could ... point out that all ... ethical theories are flawed and *ipso facto* so too are all the arguments against rape [and] . . then assert: 'Until someone can provide me with clear moral reasons for not committing rape, I will continue to rape whomever I please'." For a response to a similar philosophers' "rationalization [in the context of discussing ethical vegetarianism] that there are simply too many issues on which [philosophers] could be expected to have a settled opinion, especially given [their] philosophical understanding of the complexity of any issue," see Joel Marks, *Moral Moments: Very Short Essays on Ethics* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000), pp. 60-61, and his "Teaching Philosophy, Becoming a Philosopher," *Teaching Philosophy* 16 (1993): 99-104.

[4]I will argue that many arguments on this topic, if sound, establish a conclusion concerning *collective* vegetarianism, but that this is importantly different from *personal* vegetarianism or veganism and that the latter might not obviously entail the former. My proposal attempts to bridge this gap within consequentialist constraints.

[5]Consequentialism is, very roughly, the ethical theory that says the morality of a token action is determined solely by the value of the consequences in terms of the overall balance of intrinsic goods versus evils produced by that action. The view most readily contrasts with views that hold that token actions get their moral status in virtue of being of *kinds* or *types* of action that are intrinsically (albeit perhaps prima facie) moral or immoral, e.g., acts of promise-keeping, respectful treatment, torture, etc. Singer characterizes non-consequentialism (see his *Practical Ethics*, p. 3) as a "system of rules" that adjudicates conflicts of rules (e.g., the rules "Don't lie" and "Don't kill") by "finding more complicated and specific rules that do not conflict with each other, or by ranking the rules in some hierarchical structure to resolve conflicts between them." One problem for the non-consequentialist is explaining what grounds their (often quite plausible) moral rules, if it isn't the consequences of following them. I will attempt to ground the rule that seems necessary for justifying personal vegetarianism (or veganism) by appeal to some, often unnoticed, consequences of following this rule.

The demand that personal vegetarianism be justified from general consequentialist principles is important because if buying and eating meat, purchasing leather, etc., are

This final lack of clarity is somewhat surprising, since much of the contemporary vegetarian movement takes its inspiration from the work of Peter Singer, a self-professed utilitarian consequentialist.[6] He writes, "I am a utilitarian. I am also a vegetarian. I am a vegetarian *because* I am a utilitarian. I believe that applying the principle of utility to our present situation—especially the methods now used to rear animals for food and the variety of foods available to us—leads to the conclusion that we ought to be vegetarians."[7] While a number of non-consequentialist ethical theories can justify a vegetarian or vegan conclusion fairly easily, I will present some doubts that consequentialism can so easily do so. [8] I will then attempt to caste doubts on these doubts.

So my target reader is a consequentialist who denies that she ought to become a vegetarian or vegan. As a consequentialist, she believes this, presumably, because she thinks that her making these changes in her eating habits and lifestyle would result in her bringing about less intrinsic goods into the world than were she to maintain her current omnivorous eating and consumer habits. In effect, she thinks that, in terms of doing what she can to increase the world's overall amount of goodness, there are ways for her to spend her time and resources that are, at least, morally equivalent to becoming a vegetarian, and so it is not obligatory. She must also think that her becoming a vegetarian will prevent her from achieving these other goals that she believes yield equal or, perhaps greater, goods.

Consequentialism is often criticized as being "too demanding," since it demands that we do the best we can. For most of us this requires doing a lot more than what we're doing now. Since consequentialism implies

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wrong actions, then they possess the essential wrong-making features that a general theory about right and wrong, like consequentialism, attempts to identify. If personal vegetarianism doesn't seem to share much in common with other, more obviously wrong acts and the moral premises used to justify the vegetarian conclusion do not seem to be entailed by a person's general theory of right and wrong, it makes sense (at least for a consequentialist) to be skeptical about the purported wrongness of animal-product purchasing and consumption.

[6]Utilitarianism is a species of consequentialism that says, roughly, that the only morally relevant consequence is the overall balance of pleasures and pains (or preference satisfactions and dissatisfactions) that come about as a result of the action.

[7]Peter Singer, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9 (1980): 325-37, p. 325 (my emphasis).

[8]In "Collective Responsibility and Moral Vegetarianism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 24 (1993): 89-104, p. 89, Hud Hudson reports: "A colleague once pointed out to me that there seems to be a higher percentage of Kantian ethicists who are vegetarians than, say, Utilitarian ethicists who are vegetarian, although from a cursory reading of the primary texts and the popular expositions of these schools of thought, one would have expected just the opposite."

that most of us are routinely doing wrong, many conclude that it must be a mistaken moral theory.[9] I will turn this objection on its head and criticize a standard consequentialist perspective on the grounds that it seems to demand *too little*. I will argue that if consequentialism does not imply or justify a moral principle that *we should not benefit from or (even symbolically) support very bad practices when we can easily avoid doing so*, then consequentialism is mistaken.

A principle like this has implications not only for ethical vegetarianism or veganism, but for many areas of personal morality that are motivated from a response to practices that essentially involve unnecessary suffering and unfairness. If consequentialism implies that we should be morally indifferent in our response to the factors that motivate people not only in the vegetarian, vegan, and "animal rights" movements, but in civil rights and "liberation" movements in general (e.g., opposing slavery, "human rights" and labor movements, bringing women, racial minorities, homosexuals, and other groups fully into the moral community, etc.), then consequentialism is a far too conservative morality because it demands far too little of its adherents in terms of their personal lives.

I will attempt to meet this kind of objection and try to show that a kind of consequentialism can justify the vegetarian or vegan conclusions presented above. This kind of consequentialism is unique in that it takes the instrumental value of having and acting from certain virtues seriously. Some might respond, "So much the worse for consequentialism," but this might be unwise, since, as Henry Sidgwick argued, the theory provides, "a principle of synthesis, and a method for binding the unconnected and occasionally conflicting principles of common moral reasoning into a complete and harmonious system."[10] My discussion is directed towards someone who thinks that consequentialism does this organizing and synthesizing job best, but is skeptical that her seemingly well-confirmed theory implies that she should be a vegetarian or vegan and do her best to develop and act from the virtues that are commonly said to motivate vegetarianism: compassion, caring, sensitivity to cruelty and suffering (both animal and human), resistance to injustice, and integrity, among others.[11]

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[9]For a forceful reply to this objection, see Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[10]Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 422.

[11]For discussion of vegetarianism and these and other virtues, see Nicholas Dixon, "A Utilitarian Argument for Vegetarianism," *Between the Species* 11 (1995): 90-97, p. 96; Steve Sapontzis, "Everyday Morality and Animal Rights," *Between the Species* 3 (1987): 107-27; Russ Shafer-Landau, "Vegetarianism, Causation and Ethical Theory,"

Contemporary Animal Agriculture and Human Nutrition

First, I will briefly summarize some facts about modern animal agriculture and human nutrition. While this information is readily available, relatively few people are aware of it.

Many people become vegetarians or vegans when they learn about modern animal agriculture and slaughter techniques, especially "factory farming."[12] In the U.S., each year around nine billion animals live in factory farms where most lead generally miserable lives. Newborns are separated from their mothers hours or days after birth; they are then kept in small cages or crates or confined for most of their lives in extremely cramped, overcrowded pens. Male chicks at egg farms are discarded by the tens of thousands each day into trash bins because their meat is deemed unsuitable for human consumption, or they are ground alive into feed for other animals. Male calves of dairy cows are fed liquid, iron-deficient diets and raised in crates that wholly restrict movement so that their muscles remain weak and tender.

Most animals are confined indoors: very few live "happy lives" in an outdoor barnyard. This confinement results in the animals' basic instinctual urges being frustrated. Many animals become psychotic and exhibit neurotic, repetitive behaviors: many become unnaturally cannibalistic. To ward off death and disease from the stressful and unsanitary conditions, a constant regimen of antibiotics and growth hormones is maintained. On both factory and non-intensive family farms animals are subject to surgical modifications such as beak, toe, and tail removal, ear

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Public Affairs Quarterly 8 (1994): 85-100, pp. 97-98; William Stephens, "Five Arguments for Vegetarianism," *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 1 (1994): 25-39, p. 33; and Andrew Tardiff, "Simplifying the Case for Vegetarianism," *Social Theory and Practice* 22 (1996): 299-314, pp. 307, 312.

[12]Condemnation of the institutionalized cruelty of factory farming and slaughter has recently made its way to the U.S. Senate. See Senator Robert Byrd's (D-WV) 7/9/2001 "Cruelty to Animals" speech [Page: S7310-S7312] available at http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/B?r107:@FIELD(FLD003+s)+horror+cruelty. See also, e.g., Engel, "The Immorality of Eating Meat" (and his six-minute video documentary "Modern Factory Farming and Slaughter: The Cruelty Behind the Cellophane" that narrates pp. 861-67 of his article); Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 1990); Gary Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000); and Gail Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1997). These practices have been documented in videos such as the Humane Farming Association's *The Pig Picture* (1995); PETA's *Meet Your Meat* (2001); PETA's *Pig Farm Investigation* (1999); and Tribe of Heart's *The Witness* (2000), which emphasizes the fur industry. There are many more readily available video documentaries that provide information on all the common practices that necessarily involve harming animals.

tagging and clipping, teeth removal, branding, dehorning, castration, and ovary removal. In the interest of containing costs, all these procedures are performed without anesthesia.

Many animals die from starvation and exposure to cold in transport to the slaughterhouse.[13] Those that are unable to walk to slaughter are labeled "downers" and are left to die lying in the yard. Those that remain are slaughtered in extremely painful and inhumane ways.[14] Fur-bearing animals are either trapped in the wild and typically die a slow, painful death, or are raised in small cages, fed each others' remains, and killed by anal electrocution so their pelts are not marred.

Understanding these facts is a common motivation for ethical vegetarianism and adopting a vegan lifestyle: people learn of, especially by *seeing*, the pain, suffering, and death involved in these practices and, at least, simply do not want to be involved with or benefit from it anymore.

One might think that this suffering and death is justified because we need to eat meat and other animal products, but, clearly, nobody needs to eat meat to survive. In fact, the common diet in the U.S. and Europe, a meat-based diet, is strongly correlated with such health problems as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, stroke, and various cancers. Vegetarians are far less prone to these chronic diseases and they tend to outlive meat-eaters by seven years.[15] There is strong medical evidence

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[13]In 1998, USDA inspectors condemned 28,500 ducks, 768,300 turkeys, and 37.6 million chickens before they entered the slaughter plant because they were either dead or severely injured upon arrival. See *Poultry Slaughter*, National Agricultural Statistics Service, USDA (Washington, D.C.: February 2, 1999): pp. 2, 4 f.

[14]Pigs, cattle and sheep are hung upside down by one leg, which often breaks, and their throats slit and their hearts punctured. Most of these animals are improperly stunned and are still conscious throughout slaughter or have been brought into unconsciousness by painful electric shock. Gail Eisnitz, chief investigator for the Humane Farming Association, in *Slaughterhouse*, pp. 71, 126-28, reports that speeds are so fast in slaughterhouses that animals frequently do not have time to bleed out and die before reaching the skinners and leggers. As a result, fully conscious animals often have their legs cut off and their skin removed while they are still alive. Pigs are often lowered into the 140°F scalding tank while still conscious. See also Joby Warrick, "They Die Piece by Piece: In Overtaxed Plants, Humane Treatment of Cattle is Often a Battle Lost," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2001, p. A1.

[15]See, e.g., the position paper, "Position of the American Dietetic Association: Vegetarian Diets," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 97 (November 1997): 1317-21, p. 1317, where the ADA reports: "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." Mylan Engel, in "The Immorality of Eating Meat," summarizes the *extensive* medical

that not eating meat is to one's health advantage: even conservative health organizations encourage people to cut back on their consumption of meat to reduce cholesterol and saturated fat intake; others encourage cutting it out completely.

The same things, in fact, can be said about all animal products: no one needs to eat eggs or milk or cheese. Progressive health organizations that advocate preventative medicine, such as the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine, advise eliminating them completely and adopting a vegan diet that contains a wide variety of foods solely from the four new food groups: vegetables, fruits, legumes (beans and nuts), and whole grains.[16] There is ample evidence that people not only survive on such a diet, but that they thrive.[17] The list of world-champion vegan athletes is impressive, so no one can honestly say that vegans can't achieve optimal health or nutrition.[18] And, of course, no one needs to wear fur, leather, or wool, or use products made from these materials.[19]

Thus, no product of factory farming, non-intensive farming or animal slaughter is necessary for human health or survival. Animals' short and often miserable lives and cruel and painful deaths are not outweighed or justified by any human need. As for the aesthetic pleasures of taste and fashion, vegetarian cuisine and cruelty-free clothing and accessories can easily gratify those interests. But even if the pleasures of consuming animal-based dishes uniformly outweighed the pleasures of all vegan alternatives (which they don't), it is exceedingly unlikely that the difference in aesthetic pleasure for us outweighs the great pains, suffering, and

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literature on the health benefits of vegan and vegetarian diets. See also Mark and Virginia Messina, *The Dietician's Guide to Vegetarian Diets: Issues and Applications*, 2nd ed. (Gaithersburg, Md.: Aspen Publications, 2001); John Robbins, *The Food Revolution* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 2001); and Brenda Davis and Vesanto Melina, *Becoming Vegan: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Plant-Based Diet* (Summertown, Tenn.: Book Publishing Co., 2000).

[16]Available at http://www.pcrm.org/health/VSK/VSK9.html

[17]See the references to the nutrition literature above. For a brief review of the medical literature on the benefits of eliminating dairy products, see Robert Cohen, *Milk A-Z* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Argus Publishing, 2001).

[18]See Robbins, *The Food Revolution*, pp. 78-79.

[19]In "The Mere Considerability of Animals," *Acta Analytica* 16 (2001): 89-108, Mylan Engel notes: "To be sure, sometimes being a vegetarian is inconvenient. But lots of times, eating meat is just as inconvenient (e.g., it takes hours to roast a turkey, whereas it takes only a few minutes to heat up some pasta with fresh veggies), and the inconvenience of eating meat (when it is inconvenient) does not dissuade most meat-eaters from eating meat. If one can put up with the inconvenience of eating meat, one can just as easily put up with the inconvenience of eating vegetables." Similarly, buying non-animal based clothing and products is either not inconvenient or no more inconvenient than buying animal-based items.

death for the animals. Thus, it is quite unlikely that the status quo regarding the use and treatment of animals is justified from a consequentialist perspective.

Singer, Regan, and The "Impotence of the Individual" Objection

I now turn to some of the philosophical literature on vegetarianism. I will discuss some recent arguments for vegetarianism and, from a consequentialist critic's perspective, identify a common difficulty for these arguments that makes it difficult for them to establish the conclusion that each of us, personally, ought to be a vegetarian or vegan.

As sketched above, Singer holds that we should be vegetarians because our being vegetarian will maximize utility: if we were all vegetarians, there would be no demand for meat and so animals would no longer be inhumanely raised and killed for products that are unnecessary and often harmful for human health and well-being.

A critic might accept that it is likely that if *everyone* became a vegetarian (perhaps gradually, so the economy is not disturbed) utility would be maximized, but object that her *personally* becoming a vegetarian won't make any difference to the overall utility. Because the meat and animal products industry is so huge and markets are too insensitive, no consequence of her becoming a vegetarian, or even a vegan, would be that fewer animals would be raised and killed than if she were to continue in her omnivorous ways. While these industries do exist only because people buy their products, they don't exist because *she* buys their products, and they won't come tumbling down if she divests herself from them. If she is supposed to become a vegetarian or vegan *because* doing so will help the plight of animals, this seems to not be the case.

Call this the "impotence of the individual" objection. It obviously depends on an empirical assumption concerning the failure of an individual's consumer behavior to affect a huge industry. This claim seems plausible; it is even accepted by a number of philosophers who defend vegetarianism.[20] As far as I know, nobody has summoned the empirical

[20]Hud Hudson, in "Collective Responsbility," writes that he "is persuaded that the [meat] industry is not fine-tuned enough to be affected at all by [his] becoming a [strict] vegetarian," much less be affected by his purchasing a "large basket of extra-hot chicken wings" every two weeks at his favorite restaurant (p. 94). James Rachels, in "The Moral Argument for Vegetarianism," in his *Can Ethics Provide Answers?* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 99-107, notes: "It is discouraging to realize that no animals will actually be helped simply by one person ceasing to eat meat. One consumer's behavior, by itself, cannot have a noticeable impact on an industry as vast as the meat industry" (p. 106). Bart Gruzalki discusses this objection in his "The Case Against

data to show that it is false. I will presume it is true and so here's the rub: if an individual's refraining from purchasing animal-based products does not make a difference for the animals, then this critic might think that Singer's argument is sound, but that it just does not imply the relevant conclusion, namely that *she* should become a vegetarian. The conclusion seems to be that it ought to be the case that *we all* become vegetarians, which is importantly different from the conclusion that *she* ought to be vegetarian, irrespective of whether others do the same (for one difference, the critic can make it the case that *she* is vegetarian, but her powers over others are quite limited). A consequentialist case for *personal* vegetarianism or veganism, if it can be made, will thereby have to be made on the *actual* positive consequences of an individual's becoming a vegetarian, and it appears that less animals being raised and killed is, unfortunately, not one of the actual consequences.

This problem is not unique to consequentialism, since it plagues Regan's account of animal rights as well. Suppose animals do have moral rights that make it, at least, wrong to cause them to have lives full of pain and suffering and, at most, wrong to kill them painlessly for no reason other that many find them tasty to eat and fashionable to wear. A critic might object that since *he's* not killing them, he's not violating their rights. Again, since the market is so big and his share of the purchases so small, his refraining from purchasing these products will not result in any less animals' rights being violated either. And his eating the last burger at the picnic won't result in any more animal's rights being violated. So, even if animals have rights, in itself this does seem to di-

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Raising and Killing Animals for Food," in Harlan Miller and William Williams (eds.), *Ethics and Animals* (Clifton, N.J.: Humana Press, 1983), pp. 251-66, p. 265. His reply focuses on dubious estimations of the probable positive consequences for animals that an individual's becoming a vegetarian would have. In "Opportunistic Carnivorism," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 17 (2000): 205-11, p. 205, Michael Almeida and Mark Bernstein argue that "insensitivity of the market notwithstanding, consistent consequentialists are morally prohibited from each additional purchase and consumption of meat" because of the very small probability that any individual will purchase the "threshold chicken" (or other animal) that will result in the "increased terror, slaughter, and death of more chickens" (or other animals). The argument is troubled by the dubious empirical assumption that there is such a "threshold chicken" and a wavering back and forth between a subjective or probabilistic consequentialism that judges acts by their expected or probable consequences and an "objective" consequentialism that judges acts by their actual consequences. R.G. Frey raised this objection in his *Rights, Killing, and Suffering: Moral Vegetarianism and Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); Michael Martin raises it in "A Critique of Moral Vegetarianism," *Reason Papers*, No. 3, Fall 1976, pp. 13-43, and his "Vegetarianism, the Right to Life and Fellow Creaturehood," *Animal Regulation Studies* 2 (1979-80): 205-14. This objection is not new. Unfortunately, it seems little has been said to respond to it.

rectly support personal vegetarianism, unless animals have an additional right not to be purchased, eaten, worn, and so on, even after they are dead. But this is doubtful. Additional premises are needed here, as in Singer's case, to render personal vegetarianism obligatory.

Recent Non-Theory Based Work on Vegetarianism

A number of recent attempts have been made to simplify the arguments for vegetarianism and not have them rely on what some see as unnecessarily complicated, controversial, and dubious premises such as that "all animals are equal," that speciesism is wrong, that animals have rights, that animals are persons or subjects of experience, or that some particular ethical theory is correct. These approaches are also subject to the same kind of objection as above, basically the "How will there be more good in the world if *I* become a vegetarian (or vegan)?" objection, and so do not succeed in the eyes of the consequentialist critic.

In Andrew Tardiff's "Simplifying the Case for Vegetarianism,"[21] he shows that we all believe that if we can very easily spare an animal's life (e.g., by changing our walking pace to avoid stepping on and killing a small animal) at the expense of a plant (or even the "cost" of keeping a clump of dirt intact) then we should do so. This is because we believe there are morally relevant differences between, on the one hand, animals and, on the other, plants and other inanimate objects. Tardiff also points out that we believe that if killing a plant will result in equal or greater good for us, compared to killing an animal, then we believe that we should kill the plant and spare the animal.

From these premises about the moral priority of animals over plants and the empirical premises that we don't need to kill animals for our survival and that, in fact, a plant-based diet can contribute to optimal human health, Tardiff concludes that "we ought not kill animals for food."[22] Presumably, analogous arguments would conclude that animals ought not be killed for other products as well.

These arguments may be sound, but unfortunately again they do not strictly imply that it's wrong to buy and/or eat meat and use other animal products. This is because most meat eaters do not kill animals for food:

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[21]See also Andrew Tardiff, "A Catholic Case for Vegetarianism," *Faith and Philosophy* 15 (1998): 210-22, p. 211, where he presents a case that "does not focus on the eating of animals, but the killing of them. It does not say that it is wrong to eat meat ... but wrong, under certain conditions, to kill animals for food or to buy those that have been killed for food."

[22]Tardiff, "Simplifying the Case," p. 304.

they buy their products at a store. So Tardiff's argument does not establish its intended conclusion. To do this he would need to defend a premise that it's wrong to purchase or use products that have their origins in wrongdoing, which he does not do. He claims that "[n]o one loses a job if [he] stop[s] participating in the killing of animals for food by becoming a vegetarian."[23] But if this is so, then it is doubtful that any animal is spared by his actions either. Thus, Tardiff's argument does not succeed in establishing personal vegetarianism.

In "The Immorality of Eating Meat," Mylan Engel argues that the view that "eating meat is immoral" follows from a set of ordinary moral beliefs that most people already hold. These beliefs concern the badness of unnecessary pain and suffering (for both humans and animals), and the belief that morally decent people do what they can, at least, to avoid making the world a worse place, in terms of increasing (undeserved) suffering, especially when they can easily do so.

Engel claims that if one accepts these moral premises (or various subsets of them)[24] and the facts about animal rearing and slaughter conditions (and the environmental and public health consequences of factory farming) and the facts about the health advantages of an animal-free diet, but denies that he or she ought to not buy and eat meat, animal food products, and other animal-based products when cruelty-free alternatives are comparatively priced and readily available, then that person is being inconsistent. This is because, according to Engel, these premises "*entail* that eating meat is morally wrong and ipso facto that vegetarianism is morally required."[25]

But if an individual's purchases have no causal influence on the

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[23]Ibid., p. 312.

[24]Engel ("The Immorality of Eating Meat," p. 868, n. 38) claims that for someone who believes the following four propositions, his argument will succeed: (P1) "Other things being equal, a world with less pain and suffering is better than a world with more pain and suffering," (P2) "A world with less unnecessary suffering is better than a world with more unnecessary suffering," (P6) "Even a 'minimally decent individual' would take steps to 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," and (P10) "Many nonhuman animals (certainly all vertebrates) are capable of feeling pain." He claims that, to be consistent, one should then believe that eating meat is immoral. However, if no individual's purchases can affect any individual animals, then (P10) cannot be relevant to *this* argument that purchasing and eating meat is immoral. However, since Engel *does* show that since an individual can lessen the amount of *human* suffering in the world by not eating meat (or eating much less meat—how much less might be an open question), it follows from P1, P2, and P6 that a "minimally decent person" would not buy meat and eat meat (or, at the most, would eat very little meat, whatever amount that is that does not have bad consequences for health).

[25]Ibid., p. 882; emphasis in original.

plight of animals, then many of Engel's entailments do not hold because, for the most part,[26] an individual's not buying and eating meat and other animal products will *not* result in less pain, suffering, and death for animals or any less environmental degradation. Even if Engel is correct that a minimally decent individual, "would take steps to reduce the amount of unnecessary pain and suffering in the world, *if s/he could do so with very little effort on his/her part*,"[27] since an individual's meat-abstention can't do anything to make the world a better place, at least not for animals, as Engel seems to suggest, his argument does not succeed.

In "A New Argument for Vegetarianism,"[28] Jordan Curnutt hopes to get beyond what he calls the "stalemates" of the traditional debates by defending an argument for vegetarianism that "does not depend on calculations of utility, any particular conception of rights, or the imposition of pain and suffering."[29] He says his argument will "traverse a relatively uncontroversial theoretical region."[30] His main premises concern the wrongness of causing unnecessary pain, suffering, and death for animals because these are harms and causing harm is prima facie wrong.[31]

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[26]An individual's stopping hunting and fishing would probably make a difference to the plight of animals, but Engel's arguments do imply that these activities are wrong.

[27]Ibid., p. 860 (also at p. 888); emphasis in original.

[28]Jordan Curnutt, "A New Argument for Vegetarianism," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 28 (1997): 153-72.

[29]Ibid., p. 153.

[30]Ibid., p. 155.

[31]Unlike Tardiff's reliance on moral common sense to support these premises, Curnutt's case here is, unfortunately, rather complex (see his discussion on pp. 156-63) and perhaps unnecessarily so, since most of the critics tend to agree that animal suffering and death, considered in themselves, are bad. R.G. Frey, for example, in "Autonomy and the Value of Life," *The Monist* 70 (1987): 50-63, p. 50, states that pouring boiling water on a dog is wrong *because* of the dog's suffering. Jan Narveson states that "although [animal] suffering is too bad and it is unfortunate for animals that they are turned into hamburgers at a tender age, we nevertheless are justified on the whole in eating them." See Jan Narveson, "Animal Rights Revisited," in Miller and Williams (eds.), *Ethics and Animals*, pp. 45-59, p. 59. In "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research," *New England Journal of Medicine* 315 (1986): 865-70, p. 868, Carl Cohen claims that "pains resulting from the use of animals in research" are "balanced out" by human benefits, implying that, considered *in themselves*, animal pain, suffering, and death are bad (and so, in order to be justified, need to be *balanced out* by greater human goods). So, it is unclear who Curnutt is arguing against when he claims that it's wrong to harm animals unnecessarily. One exception, however, is Peter Carruthers, who holds that animals are not conscious to pain. However, in "Medicine, Animal Experimentation, and the Moral Problem of Unfortunate Humans," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13 (1996): 181-211, p. 192, n. 38, even Frey writes that "Carruthers has put forward the claim that animals do not feel pain in a morally significant way; see Carruthers, *The Animals Issue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). While his argument is interesting, I do not think it succeeds." For recent critical discussion of both Frey's and Carruther's arguments, see

But even if we grant the premise that animals' suffering and death are harms and causing these harms is wrong, we find the problem we saw before: how does it follow that it's wrong for an individual to buy and eat animals, since he or she did not kill them? Curnutt admits that "as a matter of economic fact, [his] refraining from eating animals will not affect the meat industry in the least. The loss of [his] financial contribution will not spare a single animal from harm, nor produce the slightest setback of the business; [he] will be preventing no future wrongdoing whatever by becoming a vegetarian."[32] Since his contributions are causally inefficacious, the chain from the wrongness of killing animals to the wrongness of an individual's buying and eating them seems to be broken.

In response to this problem, Curnutt considers two proposals: first, that while raising and killing animals are wrong, meat purchasing and eating are not, strictly speaking, wrong, but we should act as if they are; and, second, that the wrongness of the killing "transfers" to the wrongness of the consumption.[33] He resists both these strategies: "Animal eating is itself wrong, but this is not due to any 'transference' of wrongness to the act of purchasing and eating animal flesh. The purchasing and consuming are two parts of the same wrong."[34]

To make his perspective vivid, he develops an analogy. Someone says:

> This is a lovely lamp. You say its base is made from the bones and the shade from the skin of Jews killed in concentration camps? Well, so what? I didn't kill them. Of course what the Nazis did was wrong, a great moral evil. But my not buying the lamp is obviously not going to bring any of them back. Nor will it prevent any future harm: this sort of thing doesn't even occur anymore, so there is no future wrongdoing to prevent even if my refusal to buy were effective in this way, which of course it wouldn't be. So what's wrong with buying and using the lamp?[35]

Curnutt believes that animal-purchasing and eating is wrong for the *same*

Alastair Norcross, *Three Approaches to the Ethical Status of Animals* (The Maguire Center for Ethics and Public Responsibility, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, 2000), pp. 5-9, 18-25. David DeGrazia, in *Taking Animals Seriously: Mental Life and Moral Status* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 41, and Francione, *Introduction to Animal Rights*, however, quote physicians and scientists who state that animals do not feel pain or that there are no ethical issues involving animals.

[32]Curnutt, "A New Argument for Vegetarianism," p. 165.

[33]The first of these is Hud Hudson's theory of "collective responsibility," which Curnutt describes as "rather bizarre" (ibid., p. 166). The second proposal is Regan's.

[34]Ibid. Since "wrong" usually predicates *acts*, to be precise we should probably understand Curnutt as saying that the purchasing and the consuming are two *parts* not of the "same wrong" but of the bad or evil *cultural practice* or *series of events* of animals being raised and killed (especially in factory farm conditions), purchased and eaten, worn, etc.

[35]Ibid.

reasons that it would typically be wrong to buy and use this lamp or other products from a concentration camp, or buy clothing produced by slave labor, or buy stolen property. In each of these cases, Curnutt holds, one benefits from the "ill-gotten gains from another" and "profit[s] [and] benefit[s] from a morally nefarious practice," and this is wrong.[36] William Stephens asks similar questions about whether "finding and wearing, but not purchasing, a necklace made from the finger bones of a murdered man, or a jacket made from the tanned skin of a murdered woman, would be morally objectionable."[37]

It does seem that there is something objectionable about enjoying products that have their sources in evil, even if refraining from purchasing or using them wouldn't (or couldn't) improve the plights of those who have suffered to make them. Curnutt states a principle to defend this intuition and *explicitly* link the wrongness of harming animals in farms and slaughterhouses to the individual's purchases and/or consumption:

> If "one ... concurs and cooperates with wrongdoing, ... [and] garners benefits through the defeat of basic welfare interests of others, [then one] is ... doing something which is seriously morally wrong."[38]

He claims that this strikes him as "quite uncontroversial." Unfortunately, this principle *is* controversial: it might seem true when, by refraining from participating in a practice, one actually prevents some evil from occurring, but it is not as easy to see why this principle is true in cases where an individual's participation makes no difference, and we've presumed that this is the case, at least for the animals.

So Curnutt's defense of vegetarianism comes down to a principle that he finds quite uncontroversial but is controversial, and he provides little defense of the principle beyond his saying that he believes it to be true. However, it seems that a premise like this is likely to be needed for an adequate defense of personal vegetarianism or veganism. To defend vegetarianism from a consequentialist perspective, it will need to be shown that a principle like Curnutt's follows from the general consequentialist moral principle. Later I will attempt to do this.

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[36]Ibid. It seems that, at least with the Nazi case, there could *now* be a situation where it's permissible to acquire that lamp, especially, e.g., if one was a museum curator. One's motives for getting the lamp seem relevant. Analogously, there might come a time when the general public is repulsed by someone's cavalier attitude toward animal products, but, if this time comes, then there could be a museum curator who is justified in acquiring such items, so that she might display them as evidence of past evil ways.

[37]Stephens, "Five Arguments for Vegetarianism," p. 32.

[38]Curnutt, "A New Argument for Vegetarianism," p. 166.

Clear Consequences of Vegetarianism

So where are we? One route is to abandon the idea that, in becoming a vegetarian or vegan, one is actually helping suffering animals and that this is a reason to do so. If we go this route, then the case has to be made wholly on the basis of concerns that don't have much to do with animals: improved personal health and well-being, a longer lifespan, and lower costs associated with healthcare. Since a vegan lifestyle is cheaper, as meat and animal-products are a luxury, one could forgo them and use that savings to bring about greater goods, for example, by supporting organizations that save people who, unlike livestock, are starving to death or are chronically malnourished. While one's not purchasing animal products won't make a difference to the meat industry, providing support for smaller vegetarian-product companies might. There, even an individual's financial contributions, as well as his or her trying a product and telling others about it, might very well make a difference to the fate of a product or company. Finally, many people find great value in the friendships they develop in the vegetarian community: being among and working with people who advocate healthful and compassionate living can be quite rewarding. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people who adopt this kind of lifestyle find their lives to have greater meaning and purpose, compared to when they were not vegetarians or vegans.

It might be that the consequentialist argument can run on these considerations alone and get one very close to the vegan conclusion: it might be that for each opportunity to buy, eat, or use an animal product, there is nearly always something better that one can purchase, eat, or use that does not involve animals. Going these routes can plausibly be said to result in better consequences for one's health and finances and so better enable one to bring about more goods for others, as well as one's self.

Vegetarianism and Virtue

However, omitting direct considerations about animals as reasons to be a vegetarian does seem to miss something important. One way to make animal-based concerns relevant is to think of the vegetarian in terms of his or her virtues. While Tardiff does not present his case as a virtue-based one, he does describe the meat eater as "selfish," in that she accepts the system of killing animals for her own pleasure; he also describes the ethical vegetarian as "generous," "compassionate," and

"peace-loving."[39] Stephens suspects that a "compassionate person would feel moral discomfort, or even revulsion, enjoying something made possible only by the suffering of another."[40] Dixon argues that an individual who thinks it is wrong to cause animals to suffer and be killed for food yet continues to eat meat "seems to be guilty of a lack of integrity."[41]

The common suggestion is that one should be a vegetarian or a vegan because, given an understanding of the relevant facts about both animal and human suffering, this is just how a virtuous, good person would respond. Since people should be virtuous, and being virtuous entails being caring and compassionate (among having other traits), and these traits entail disassociation from the animal-products industry *even if* doing so won't result in less harm to animals, virtuous people should be vegetarian.

In exploring a virtue-based defense of vegetarianism, Russ Shafer-Landau suggests that meat-eaters may be "condemnable to the extent that they display an indifference to the cruelty that went into the 'production' of their 'goods'," and that "they demonstrate a disregard for the suffering experienced by the animals whose remains one is wearing or eating." He describes fur-wearers as "callous." He writes that "[s]eeking and deriving satisfaction from 'products' that are known to result from cruel practices diminishes one's admirability. This is so even if the practical impact of one's indulgence is nonexistent or negligible." Similar judgments are made outside of the vegetarian context: there is "something morally repugnant about a willingness to utilize or purchase soap made from the bodies of concentration camp victims," even if doing so won't prevent any future harms. Also, voicing one's support for a racist dictator or wearing a fur coat received as a gift both seem objectionable.[42]

From these intuitions, Shafer-Landau formulates a moral principle similar to Curnutt's: "One must refuse (even symbolic) support of essentially cruel practices, if a comparably costly alternative that is not tied to essentially cruel practices is readily available."[43] He suspects that

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[39]Tardiff, "A Catholic Case for Vegetarianism," pp. 307, 312.

[40]Stephens, "Five Arguments for Vegetarianism," p. 33.

[41]Dixon, "A Utilitarian Argument for Vegetarianism," p. 97.

[42]Shafer-Landau, "Vegetarianism, Causation and Ethical Theory," pp. 96-98.

[43]Ibid., p. 95. DeGrazia, in *Taking Animals Seriously*, pp. 262, 285, advocates the principle, "Make every reasonable effort not to provide financial support for institutions or practices that cause or support unnecessary harm." He notes: "This principle might worry some utilitarians, because it might sometimes require one to abstain, boycott, or divest without its being clear that doing so will actually lead to good results. But, if so, that is a knock against the version of utilitarianism in question, not against the principle." He goes on to argue that these kinds of worries would "doom potential social reforms from the start," but also suggests that "[a]ctually, there is probably considerable utility in

something like this principle offers the best hope for those concerned to defend the existence of an obligation to refrain from animal consumption. The problem here, as he notes, is that it's not easy "to identify the sorts of considerations that can ground such a principle," or to find a general moral theory that would justify such a principle.[44]

One approach would be to go the route of a rule-based non-consequentialist or deontological ethic, and hold that this is one of the rules. However, this probably wouldn't be wise, since an ethic of rules is often thought to be "fundamentally non-explanatory" and "anti-theoretical."[45] Presumably, there is a unifying principle that makes these rules the right rules: if there is such a principle, then this is what justifies the rule and makes it the case that the rule should be followed. This fundamental principle is thereby of theoretical interest, not the mid-level rule.

Another route would be virtue ethics. Virtue ethics says, roughly, that evaluations of character and motive are primary in ethics and that other ethical evaluations—say of actions—are derivative from considerations of character and motive: for example, that an action is right if, and only if, a virtuous person would do it.[46] The morality of an action is to be explained by the character of the agent. If one is interested in defending vegetarianism or veganism (and other intuitions about concerned and responsible consumer behavior in general), and one suspects that non-virtue-based theories have a hard time generating the correct judgments about these cases, then one might have a good reason to take more interest in virtue-based ethical theory.[47] It just seems that a virtuous person would not, in response to an understanding of the facts about animal ag-

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the ... principle. But it need not rest on so uncertain a basis as utilitarianism." As an adherent of a "coherence model of ethical justification," DeGrazia does not think his principles need to "rest" on a theoretical foundation because "normative ethics does not need a foundation" (p. 12). So he denies the theoretical assumptions of the "concerned consequentialist critic" who is the target of this paper.

[44]Shafer-Landau, "Vegetarianism, Causation and Ethical Theory," p. 96.

[45]See David McNaughton, "Intuitionism," in Hugh LaFollette (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 268-87, at pp. 270-71.

[46]For presentations of virtue ethics, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[47]In personal correspondence, Linda Zagzebski noted that considerations about these kinds of moral cases are unique motivations for exploring virtue ethics because a common criticism of virtue ethics is that it is unable to provide adequate guidance for matters of "applied" ethics or moral problems. My suggestion here is that virtue ethics seems to provide the most adequate *practical* moral guidance concerning ethical vegetarianism and similar moral issues. However, virtue ethics unfortunately seems subject to the traditional criticisms of divine command and ideal observer theories.

riculture and nutrition, think that even though animals suffer greatly and die for these products that she does not need (and, in fact, are sometimes harmful to her) and thus only fulfill aesthetic preferences for her, she is nevertheless justified in consuming and using them, even though she could easily refrain from doing so. Thus, virtue theory seems to provide a ready defense for a general principle, similar to Curnutt's and Shafer-Landau's, that *we shouldn't (even symbolically) support bad practices when good alternatives are readily available*, which we might call the "vegetarian justifying principle."

Virtue theory's greatest "vice," however, is that it simply does not seem to provide much of an explanation for why it's good to be virtuous, for example, why it's good (or virtuous) to be compassionate or why a virtuous person would accept the vegetarian justifying principle. Consequentialists can plausibly argue that it's good to be compassionate because compassionate people tend to bring more happiness into the world. They see the virtues as instrumentally valuable: virtue ethics, at least in its bolder varieties (and the non-bold varieties seem to just be theories *of* the virtues, which don't imply anything about ethical theory), holds that the virtues are intrinsically valuable.

In taking a consequentialist view on the virtues, one attempts to give more basic reasons why someone should be compassionate (assuming compassion is a virtue), not merely asserting, as virtue ethics does, that it's just a brute, unexplained fact that compassion is good. The consequentialist critic, of course, will be more attracted to the option that it's a brute fact that, say, happiness or pleasure is good and that virtues are means to those ends. This seems more likely than the idea that the virtues are ends in themselves or are intrinsically good.

If this criticism of virtue ethics is compelling, then while virtue ethics does readily support vegetarianism, it lacks explanatory power. The theory-minded ethical vegetarian seems to be faced with a dilemma: *either* accept a generally plausible ethical theory (e.g., consequentialism) that gets a broad range of cases right (and for seemingly good reasons) but doesn't seem to do as well with personal vegetarianism or veganism in that it seems to lack a place for concerns about animals to provide reasons for action, *or* adopt a virtue ethics or other non-consequentialist, rule-based perspective that readily supports vegetarianism or veganism but, unfortunately, doesn't amount to much of a general moral theory because it lacks explanatory power.

I suspect that there may be a compromise here, one that will be amenable to consequentialists and help them defend the vegetarian justifying principle. There already are reasons to believe that the locus of evaluation for consequentialism should be broadened beyond individual actions

to include the "life histories" of a person.[48] One proposal is to hold that an individual action is right for a person just in case it is part of one of that person's optimal life histories, that is, a life history in which value is maximized over the span of the life.

And here we have a natural place to merge the plausible insights of virtue ethics with consequentialist ethical theory. Pre-theoretically, it seems that, all else equal, a person will bring about more goodness if she has the virtue of compassion, cares about and is sensitive to unnecessary cruelty and suffering (wherever it is found, in humans or animals), opposes injustice and unfairness, and, in general, attempts to have an integrated, coherent moral outlook. These seem to be virtues that we try to instill in our children. And earlier we saw that these virtues (and others) readily support vegetarianism and veganism, as well as a general moral outlook typically associated with them (e.g., deep concerns about human health and the recognition that the most effective ways to promote this are through simple dietary changes and non-animal based medical research,[49] disappointments that people are starving to death while cattle are well-fed, environmental concerns, concern for public health and safety, concerns for the safety of slaughterhouse workers, and so on).

These virtues have deep implications for how one lives one's life and how one affects others' lives. For each person, it is unclear how their characters would not be improved and how they would fail to bring about more goodness were they to adopt the virtues that commonly motivate vegetarian or veganism. What other better character traits would preclude doing this? Becoming caring and compassionate about animals invariably seems to have "trickle down" positive effects for the rest of one's life. It seems exceedingly unlikely that anyone would, in general, come to treat other humans worse were she to become a vegetarian or vegan out of compassion or sympathy for animals. In fact, the opposite seems likely. One common motive for telling others about the plight of

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[48]This view is a response to the problem that "big" action with very good consequences can be composed of "small" actions that, in themselves, have very bad consequences, and so consequentialism might say that a "big" action is obligatory, but its "parts" forbidden. See Fred Feldman, *Doing the Best We Can: An Essay in Informal Deontic Logic* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1986), and his *Utilitarianism, Hedonism, and Desert: Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), on the problem of formulating a coherent statement of consequentialism that deals with problems of act individuation. He develops the formulation of consequentialism that I am suggesting, although my version is very informal.

[49]See Hugh LaFollette and Niall Shanks, *Brute Science: Dilemmas of Animal Experimentation* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Ray and Jean Greek, *Sacred Cows and Golden Geese: The Human Cost of Experiments on Animals* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

animals, and attempting to persuade them to be vegetarian or vegan, is that others' lives will improve and they will develop these virtues.

One could practice these virtues selectively and not have them affect one's views about animals, or allow one's self to occasionally eat, but probably not buy, meat (whatever amount won't have negative consequences for health, which is unknown). In doing so, however, it seems not unlikely that one would be taking oneself down a life history that would be, on balance, worse than the vegan one. This is because, first, a thoughtful humanist should probably come to conclusions about how to behave that would be very similar to the vegan's (since all their prescriptions promote human well-being anyway) and, second, personal consistency, integrity and commitment typically contribute to better character anyway. It might be difficult to be selectively caring and compassionate: if this would lead one down a slippery slope, the better strategy for doing the best one can with one's life might be to consistently hold these virtues and act in accordance with them. If this is the case, this bridges the gap between the consequentialist case for near-vegetarianism or veganism articulated above and the more consistent outlook, character, and behavior that many vegetarian and vegan philosophers advocate.

Singer states that "becoming a vegetarian [or a vegan, I think he'd agree] is a way of attesting to the depth and sincerity of one's belief in the wrongness of what we are doing to animals."[50] He probably would agree that veganism also is a way to attest to the sincerity of one's belief in the wrongness of what happens to *humans* as a result of how animals are used. I suspect that, in general, a person who has these beliefs and attests to them by becoming a vegetarian or vegan brings more goodness into the world than her non-vegetarian counterpart: some of these ways are more obvious (e.g., health, comparative ability to make financial contributions to good causes), others are less obvious and, of course, harder to evaluate (e.g., consequences of character). If a switch to a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle results in a life history that brings about greater overall value than an omnivorous life history, then this is what consequentialism demands, and, therefore, consequentialism does not demand "too little" because it will require that one conform one's behavior to the "vegetarian justifying principle" (which has implications beyond vegetarianism).

In conclusion, my discussion can be presented as this argument:

(1) If consequentialism is true, then S ought to live an optimal life his-

[50]Singer, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," p. 337.

tory.

(2) If S ought to live an optimal life history, then S ought to have the virtues entailed by an optimal life history.

(3) If S ought to have the virtues entailed by an optimal life history, then S ought to be compassionate, sensitive to cruelty (wherever it is found), resist injustice, have moral integrity, etc.

(4) If S ought to be compassionate, sensitive to cruelty (wherever it is found), resist injustice, and be morally integrated, etc., then S ought to be a vegetarian or vegan.

(5) Therefore, if consequentialism is true, then S ought to be a vegetarian or vegan.

Consequentialists readily accept premise (1) and should accept premise (2) as well, since it explains why it's good to be virtuous. Premise (3) is defended by the quasi-empirical observation that people with these and related virtues tend to, in general and all else being equal, bring about more good in the world than people who lack these virtues. Were major lifestyle changes not at stake, many would probably readily accept this premise: it is difficult to see how people who *lack* compassion, caring, and sensitivity would bring about *more* goods than those who have these traits, or have them to a greater degree.

Premise (4) is obviously difficult, since it concerns empirical matters. It is the claim that people who become vegetarians or vegans in order to more consistently practice virtue produce more overall good than those who dabble in virtue or practice it selectively. Admittedly, this is an exceedingly difficult premise to defend. The data regarding the positive consequences of changing one's character by becoming vegetarian are, for the most part, anecdotal and speculative. However, this is a problem in general for trying to defend any view about personal morality from a consequentialist perspective, since it is very difficult to find any hard data on the consequences of character and lifestyle. Intuitions and impressions are often all we have to go on for such matters, especially those concerning personal choice. But that does not leave us in the dark, since one impression that most of us have is that it is better to be more compassionate and caring, compared to less, unless doing so would be emotionally draining, which being a vegetarian typically isn't (in fact, many find it quite uplifting). Furthermore, whatever other projects we have, it is unclear exactly how becoming a vegetarian could preclude our efforts with them: if our other projects are noble, it is likely that our reasons for doing them would support being a vegetarian as well.

So, while (4) is not easy to defend on consequentialist grounds, it is not easy to deny either. The vegetarian consequentialist typically has

some personal experience to justify her sense that her becoming a vegetarian or vegan has resulted in her bringing about better consequences, while the critic typically has little personal experience to think that her being an omnivore has had the best consequences. If this consequentialist strategy for defending personal vegetarianism has promise, further research into the actual consequences of having the kind of character that is receptive to concerns about animal suffering will be necessary. Until then, I hope that some burden has been shifted to those who hold that their becoming vegetarians or vegans would not maximize intrinsic value to explain why this is so and why their characters, and the consequences of their characters, would become worse for their making this change.[51]

Nathan Nobis
Department of Philosophy
University of Rochester
nobs@mail.rochester.edu

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