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Pleasures of the Flesh

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Abstract:

I give an argument for veganism by drawing parallels between a) bestiality and animal fighting, and b) animal product consumption. Attempts to draw principled distinctions between the practices fail. The wrong-making features of bestiality and animal fighting are also found in animal product consumption. These parallels give us insight into why popular objections to veganism, such as the Inefficacy Argument, are inadequate. Because it is often difficult to enact significant life changes, I hope that seeing the parallels between animal product consumption and acts we are already so strongly motivated to avoid can help us abstain from animal products.

Introduction:

The public reacted intensely to news that American football quarterback Michael Vick was running a dogfighting ring. Amid calls for legal and professional penalties, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell condemned Vick's conduct as "not only illegal, but cruel and reprehensible" (ABC News 2007). Over a decade later, articles continue to come out with updates on the recovery and lives of the rescued dogs.¹ Public outrage on behalf of animals is not limited only to cases of animal fighting, as we can see from the vehement denouncements of Peter Singer's (2001) suggestion that some bestiality might be permissible.² Our strong and often visceral moral judgments about such practices are supported by the legal system. In most US states and across much of the world, there are laws prohibiting dog fighting and bestiality (Animal Legal Defense Fund 2019, Global Animal Law 2021). These laws align with the general consensus that some practices that cause great harm to animals are very wrong, and ought to be criminal.

¹ Giambalvo 2019 is a particularly good documentation.

² See Boxer 2001 for a sample of the reaction.

In contrast, animal product consumption³ also significantly harms animals, yet is not routinely condemned. In fact, almost all of us consume animal products. As of 2018, only 5% of Americans reported following a vegetarian diet, and 3% a vegan diet.⁴ And as anyone who has read the comments on an article covering veganism can attest, many individuals are extremely passionate about the acceptability of animal product consumption. It is common to see comments like “mmm bacon” below articles discussing the brutal treatment of factory farmed pigs. Animal activists are said to be doing something wrong in calling attention to these issues. It is said that people should mind their own business about what goes into the mouths of others. This starkly contrasts with animal fighting⁵ and bestiality.

Standard View: Bestiality and animal fighting are morally impermissible.

Animal product consumption is morally permissible.

The Standard View⁶ will initially strike many as defensible. They’ll posit that there is some morally relevant difference between the practices, a difference significant enough to justify our highly divergent intuitions about their moral statuses.

However, the Standard View is mistaken. There is no difference between bestiality and animal fighting, on the one hand, and most animal product consumption, on the other, that can

³ By ‘animal products,’ I am referring to dairy, eggs, and the meat of mammals, birds, and fish. Whether the arguments hold for creatures such as insects turns on their moral statuses. These arguments also have implications for the use of animal products in cosmetics and household products.

⁴ This is according to Reinhart 2018. Other polls have turned up somewhat different numbers, but they all remain low.

⁵ By ‘animal fighting’ I am referring to the practice of goading animals to fight with each other or with humans, the accompanying tactics meant to make the animals more aggressive, and the economic support of these actions.

⁶ I call this the ‘Standard’ View not to imply everyone holds it, nor that it is the norm everywhere, but because it is common and culturally dominant. This is parallel to how phrases such as ‘beauty standards’ are used.

justify considering one set of practices impermissible while considering the other practice permissible. And there is even more clearly no difference that could justify the stronger view that many people hold, that animal fighting and bestiality are morally repugnant, while animal product consumption is permissible. This conclusion should, I think, come as a shock to most people. With 97% of Americans consuming animal products, almost all of us are doing something on par with practices we abhor. Yet all of these practices cause extreme amounts of harm to animals primarily for mere human pleasure, and so are wrong.⁷

It is not my intention to be needlessly provocative with the comparison of animal product consumption to bestiality and animal fighting. Rather, this comparison serves an important purpose. It shows us that most animal product consumption is not just wrong given a certain contentious moral framework, but wrong in light of values that we ourselves are strongly committed to. This paper follows in a long tradition of arguing that ethical veganism is required by our own moral intuitions. Philosophers such as Alastair Norcross (2004), Mylan Engel Jr. (2000, 2016b), Tristram McPherson (2014, 2015), David DeGrazia (2009), and Stuart Rachels (2011) have all argued that in light of our commonly held moral views, there is something seriously wrong with consuming animal products. I take my paper to advance this tradition by relying not on common intuitions about more far-fetched thought experiments, nor on any contentious moral principle about how we ought to treat animals, but on our strong moral commitments to avoiding actual and widely reviled practices.

Additionally, the papers in this tradition deal primarily with individual actors behaving very badly, and often antisocially. McPherson (2014) discusses the case of setting a cat on fire for fun, and

⁷ You might think, as many utilitarians do, that the suffering itself is what makes animal product consumption impermissible. You might also think that animals have rights against suffering inflicted upon them by animal agriculture (Regan 2007). You could also reject that animals have rights, but think that we still have an obligation against causing them needless suffering (Cohen 1997). All of these views are compatible with my arguments.

Engel (2016b) and Norcross (2004) discuss someone torturing puppies for sensory delight. Bestiality and animal fighting offer insight not given by these previously discussed cases. The person deliberately setting an animal on fire is obviously cruel, and a person torturing puppies is clearly personally responsible for their suffering. These cases can, of course, be finagled so they are more parallel to the case of animal product consumption. The first person is no longer lighting the cat on fire out of base cruelty, and the second becomes less directly responsible for the torture of the puppies. However, in doing this we lose some of the initial intuitive pull of the cases, the sense that they were both familiar and manifestly wrong. Bestiality and animal fighting are real practices, and they come in varied forms. This variedness allows us to examine cases in which agents are without cruel intentions, and to look at complex causal responsibility questions, while still thinking about cases that are actual and familiar to us. This keeps our intuitions clearer, and we can see more obviously how the principles we endorse must apply in the case of animal product consumption.

Those who know the literature on veganism will notice that a number of the points made in this paper are familiar. I am certainly not the first to argue for veganism from the premise that animal agriculture is incredibly harmful, nor the first to address the role our intentions play in eating meat. However, old arguments for veganism become newly powerful when we reexamine them in light of our beliefs about bestiality and animal fighting. Considered by itself, an argument against animal product consumption is more likely to face objections. However, when it is obvious that rejecting such an argument would entail not just that eating a steak was permissible, but that watching bestiality or animal fights was also permissible, rejecting the argument is much less appealing. We realize that, in light of our own moral commitments, we ought to reject animal products as well.

And comparing both bestiality and animal fighting to animal product consumption is more illuminating than comparing only one of these practices to animal product consumption. If we looked only at animal fighting and animal product consumption, we might think that cruel intentions are what make a sufficient difference. We might convince ourselves that animal product consumption is permissible because it can be done without intending that animals are harmed. However, by thinking about bestiality in tandem, we are reminded that agents can act wrongly towards animals without cruel intentions. Similarly, if we looked only at bestiality and animal product consumption, we might think that the sexual nature of bestiality is what makes a sufficient difference. We might convince ourselves that animal product consumption is permissible because it can be done without any sexual contact with animals. However, by thinking about animal fighting in tandem, we are reminded that agents can act wrongly towards animal in ways that are not sexual in nature. Comparing animal product consumption to both bestiality and animal fighting helps us to avoid engaging in motivated reasoning. It makes it more difficult to reach for loopholes that will allow us to continue consuming animal products because it brings to the forefront our own moral knowledge that such excuses are inadequate. Because it is often difficult to successfully enact significant life changes, it is my hope that seeing the parallels between animal product consumption and acts we are already so strongly motivated to avoid can help us be more strongly motivated to abstain from animal products.

The Strategy:

I will address a number of strategies that might be used to try to justify the Standard View.⁸

These strategies highlight differences that seem potentially morally relevant, and therefore able to

⁸ I will not address strategies that explain, but could not justify, the Standard View. For instance, our attitude towards bestiality might be explained in part by our disgust at the practice. But disgust alone does not make a practice impermissible. Even if most people found horseradish disgusting, this would not make it impermissible to eat.

distinguish bestiality and animal fighting from animal product consumption. I argue that these fail. I recognize that my dialectical strategy makes the argument against the Standard View an uphill battle, as there is always another candidate morally relevant difference to be suggested. However, I will cover what I believe to be the most tenable candidates, and the ones most often used to defend animal product consumption, or to condemn animal fighting or bestiality. These strategies fit into three broad camps: psychological, consequential, and social. Patterns in my responses illuminate pitfalls for other potential strategies. Furthermore, with the addition of a Simple Principle, I believe I can shift the burden of proof onto the defender of the Standard View.

Simple Principle: It is bad to cause great suffering without good reason.⁹

We can argue about what constitutes a good reason, what suffering is ‘great’, and whether or not someone causes the suffering in question. But when this principle is filled out to your liking, it should be uncontroversial. Those who attempt to justify animal product consumption will therefore need to argue that consuming animal products does not violate the Simple Principle. That is, they must argue that either (1) there is good reason to consume animal products, (2) the suffering of farmed animals is not great, or (3) animal product consumption is not causally responsible for this suffering.

Two is indisputably false. As I will detail, animal farming is responsible for massive environmental destruction, millions of human deaths and many more injuries, and the deaths of hundreds of billions of animals each year. Many of these animal deaths are agonizing, and are

⁹ Similar principles are given in many arguments for veganism, including DeGrazia 2009, McPherson 2015, and Engel 2016b.

proceeded by lives filled with brutal treatment. Three, which denies causal responsibility, is more promising. However, as we will see when the Inefficacy Objection is discussed, the cases of bestiality and animal fighting show us that we do not accept the reasoning found in three. Therefore, the defender of Standard View is left with the first strategy, and must present a good reason to engage in animal product consumption, a reason that does not entail there is also good reason to fight animals or engage in bestiality. As I will show through my detailing and rejecting the most likely ‘good reasons,’ this will prove very difficult to do. Surely, without identifying such a reason, we may not continue to cause such great suffering. Having permission to cause great suffering for good reason does not mean we can cause great suffering while claiming “surely there is some good reason for this suffering, and one day we will discover it.” This could be said about any practice which causes great suffering, but we clearly do not have blanket permission to cause suffering as long as we claim we are confident we will one day find a reason to justify it. A good reason must be offered if the practice is to be continued.

Caveats:

My argument has force for people who can choose to omit animal products from their diets without significant risk to their lives or health. For people in life or death situations, or situations where there is substantial health risk, many actions that are wrong under less pressing circumstances are permissible. And whereas engaging in bestiality or animal fighting will seldom be necessary to save one’s life outside of a thought experiment, animal product consumption often is. When one doesn’t have enough to eat, one can’t be expected to refuse available sustenance. Over a quarter of the world’s population experiences moderate or severe food insecurity (FAO 2020). Many more individuals lack access to supplements or fortified foods that could provide the nutrients often

found in dairy, eggs, and meat. In such cases the Simple Principle will not apply, since keeping oneself and one's family alive is morally weighty.

There is also tremendous variety in the practices of raising and consuming animals, bestiality, and animal fighting. Though most animals we eat are raised in horrific conditions on factory farms, we could also eat the eggs of a chicken living comfortably in someone's backyard, or scavenge roadkill. Though many cases of bestiality involve penetration, tearing, and pain for the animal, this is not always the case. As Singer describes, women more often "limited themselves to touching and masturbating the animal, or having their genitals licked by it" (2001). Animal fighting inevitably involves pain and injury for the animals, but the extent of the injuries varies. And we can have different levels of involvement in these practices. We might economically support them by purchasing meat or bestiality porn, or by betting on animal fights. Or we might ourselves run a slaughter house, engage in bestiality, or train dogs to fight. The primary goal of this paper is only to show that it is wrong, by light of our own views, to engage in the practices which risk or cause significant harm to animals. This includes nearly all animal product consumption and animal fighting, as well as much bestiality.

I will, however, discuss some strategies that prohibit more than just the practices which cause suffering. For instance, I shall discuss consent-based prohibitions on bestiality. This is worthy of addressing because it is a commonly held and plausible view about what makes bestiality wrong. If it is right, it will mean that bestiality is always wrong, even if it does not result in harm to animals. And because I show that such consent-based reasons will prohibit most animal product production and consumption as well, this would provide yet more reason to abstain from animal products. So though there is tremendous variation in animal product consumption, bestiality, and animal fighting,

this does not mean we cannot make claims about these practices. Rather, these variations help us better see the various wrong-making features at play, and the ubiquity of all of them in most animal product consumption. However, my arguments do not entail that it is wrong to consume lab grown meat or the body of a pig that's passed naturally, nor that it's wrong to drink a bit of a backyard goat's milk while leaving enough for its kid to nurse.

The Strategies

1. Psychological Strategies

1.1 Intent:

Someone might object that the intentions involved in animal product consumption are different than those involved in animal fighting and bestiality, and that this difference in intention justifies the Standard View. This could be worked into a virtue ethical approach, where the bad intentions of the actor are indicative of viciousness of character. It might be argued that when one consumes animal products, one only intends to consume tasty meals and to feed one's family, not to harm animals. In contrast, if one engages in animal fighting or sadistic bestiality, one intends to harm animals.

This line of reasoning is unable to support the Standard View. It follows from this that it would be permissible to engage in bestiality if one is aiming at sexual pleasure, even if one foresees the animal will be terribly injured. It would also be permissible to buy tickets to dog fights if one just intended to be entertained, and did not intend the dogs be harmed. One might think this is disanalogous because one cannot intend to be entertained by an animal fight without intending the animals harm each other. However, a generation of children grew up enjoying Pokémon, watching

them battle in movies and making them fight in videogames, while feeling significant affection towards these creatures. If one can eat the bodies of animals without intending that they are killed and dismembered, then surely one could watch an animal fight without intending the animals are injured or killed.¹⁰

Still, one might be concerned that there remains a disanalogy due to the tightness of the connection between the intention and the harmful act. As the Pokémon discussion shows, one might not intend that animals be harmed in an animal fight, and so not intend to ‘enjoy a harmful act’ under that description. However, one is intending to enjoy an act in which animals, as a matter of fact, are harmed. And so they do intend *de re* to enjoy an act that is harmful. And that animals are being harmed in the fight is very obvious. They bleed, they cry out. So even if one are not directly intending to harm, and taking pleasure in that, one should know one is intending to take pleasure in something that is harmful. In contrast, with consuming animal products, the consumption itself is not the harmful act. Rather, the harmful acts happen during the production and slaughter of the animal being eaten. So, one merely intends to enjoy the consequence of a harmful act. One might think that intending to enjoy the consequence of an act that is harmful is significantly less vicious than intending to enjoy an act that is itself harmful.

However, this line of reasoning does not accord with the Standard View. It is not just that it is wrong to force animals to fight or to engage in bestiality oneself, but also that it is wrong to pay for and enjoy clips of such acts. Surely the Standard View would condemn an individual who paid for a ticket to an animal fight, but only entered after it was over to enjoy the sight of blood and ripped flesh. Enjoying the consequence of an act that is harmful, rather than the act itself, can clearly

¹⁰ The Doctrine of Double Effect is also unable to support the Standard View because, even if the harms are not intended, the foreseen suffering and deaths of animals are not adequately outweighed by any good (Norcross 2004).

manifest a vice. There is not a morally significant difference between intending to take pleasure in the sight of flesh and intending to take pleasure in consuming it. Moreover, people often intend to take pleasure in not just the taste of a steak, but in how it looks as well. It might be harder to deny that violence brought about the flesh in an arena, but given that anyone reading this paper is being made aware (if they weren't before) of the violence that produces their steak, they cannot plausibly deny that terrible violence was done to get it on their dinner plate.

1.2 Consent:

Proponents of the Standard View might argue that engaging in bestiality violates duties to get consent in a way animal product consumption does not. They might say that sex with an animal is wrong because sex without consent is wrong. Because of the power and intelligence imbalance, truly consensual sexual relations with animals are impossible. This principle forbids all bestiality, not just instances in which animals suffer. Animal product consumption is not sex, so it might be thought that it does not face this moral problem. It is indeed plausible that there is something morally special about sex and consent. However, factory farming often involves seemingly sexual activities.¹¹ Humans artificially inseminate many farm animals, collecting semen by touching them in ways that are visually indistinguishable from acts of bestiality. The sexual nature of many husbandry practices is rather widely acknowledged as bestiality laws often make explicit exceptions for sexual contact that occurs in the process of raising animals for food (Lewis 2017, Rosenberg and Dutkiewicz 2020).

Furthermore, many uses of the body which require consent have nothing to do with sex. We ordinarily require consent from patients before surgery, or before enrolling in a research trial.

¹¹ Adams 1990 argues that animal product consumption itself, and meat consumption in particular, is sexualized.

Actions performed on the body that risk causing harm generally require consent. Surely then if we think it is wrong to use an animal's body sexually because of the lack of consent, we should also think it wrong to kill them or confine them uncomfortably without consent. This becomes especially salient when we remember that parts of dead animal bodies, such as leather, are used in sexual contexts. If it is wrong to sexually engage with a cow because they cannot consent, it would be strange if it was permissible to instead nonconsensually kill the cow, and then sexually engage with pieces of its body.

This is not all that can be said about beings that aren't capable of giving informed consent. We entrust family members to consent to important medical decisions for young children. However, this is conditional on our trusting that they have the interests of the child at heart. With bestiality we might be reluctant to allow consenting-on-behalf-of because we think a pet owner who wanted to engage in bestiality is primarily motivated by self-interest and neglects to pay adequate attention to the best interests of their dependent animal. As Chloë Taylor and Piers Beirne have argued, those who are invested in an animal's consenting to sex can be prone to seeing signs of distress as indifference or enjoyment (Beirne 1997, Taylor 2017). This gives us good reason to be wary of someone claiming to consent to bestiality on behalf of their pet.

However, it also provides us good reason to reject farmers consenting-on-behalf-of the animals they farm. When a farmer says they consent to the slaughter of their chicken, the farmer is motivated by economic self-interest, not the chicken's well-being. It is not in a healthy animal's interest to be killed at a young age. It is not in a dairy cow's interest to have her calf taken from her, nor in a pig's interest to be confined to a small gestation crate. And even though animals cannot give verbal informed consent, many animals are capable of making their preferences known (Fenton

2014, Regan 1983). A pig running away from painful instruments makes its preferences known. A cow crying after her calf is taken away voices her dissent. Just as we ought to respect a child's nonverbal dissent to research (Wendler 2006), we ought to respect an animal's dissent to farming practices, to confinement and separation, to pain and death. Consent's importance extends beyond the sexual realm.

2. Consequence Strategies

2.1 Health:

Health is often invoked in defense of consuming animal products. This health appeal can be interpreted in two ways.

2.1.1 Bad for Health

We could interpret this as meaning that bestiality and animal fighting are especially bad for human health in a way that animal product consumption is not. Watching dog fights could be corrosive to mental health, or bad for societal health because it makes viewers immune to suffering and violence. Bestiality might risk transferring animal diseases to humans.

Zoonoses are diseases that pass from animals to humans. They “comprise a large percentage of all newly identified infectious diseases” (WHO). The list of diseases that can jump from animals to humans is long, and includes diseases such as bird flu, the bubonic plague, rabies, and salmonella (CDC 2021). Given the tremendous amount of death and suffering caused by such diseases, it is plausible that we should avoid actions which risk introducing new zoonoses.

However, it is a mistake to think bestiality is more likely than animal products to spread disease. HIV is likely to have jumped from chimpanzees to humans during hunting or butchering

processes (Van Heuverswyn and Peeters 2007). Over 70 million people have HIV and 35 million have died because of it (WHO 2019). COVID-19 is likewise thought to be zoonotic in origin (Boni et al 2020). As of May 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed over 3 million people and sickened over 150 million (John Hopkins 2021). Food poisoning caused by animal products affects millions and causes hundreds of deaths annually in the US (Painter et al 2013). Slaughterhouse workers, who are disproportionately low income earners with few other employment options, are injured and suffer mental illness at rates substantially higher than the general population (Dillard 2008). Concentrated animal feed operations, and the smells and waste they produce, can affect both the physical and mental health of the communities they reside in (Hribar 2010). Animal product consumption has caused a huge amount of human suffering, death, and ill-health. If we think we should condemn uses of animal bodies that contribute to poor health for humans, or have a significant risk of doing so, we must condemn animal product consumption.

2.1.2 Good for Health

The second way we can interpret the health claim is that animal product consumption is necessary or particularly good for health and thus contrasts with bestiality and animal fighting, which are done merely for pleasure. Although animal product consumption is harmful to animals, we could think this harm is justified when it is necessary to keep humans healthy. This is similar to justifications given for harming animals in medical research.

There are two problems with this approach. Even if, against empirical evidence, we assumed animal product consumption was necessary for good health, the health distinction could not cleanly separate it from the other practices. We can imagine a person who is sexually inclined only towards

bestiality, whose mental health would suffer if they are not permitted to engage in it.¹² No amount of therapy or anything else could improve their health if they were not allowed to act upon their sexual desires. Mental wellbeing is surely required for having a healthy life. To say bestiality would be impermissible for them, while saying animal product consumption for health is permissible, unfairly prioritizes the health of the rest of the body over mental health. It seems human health is not the ultimate moral trump card, allowing us to cause any amount of harm to other creatures to make ourselves a little healthier.

If, rather than helping improve our health just a little, a harmful practice was so necessary that we would have severe health problems without it, we might think it permissible. However, for most of us in wealthier countries, this is clearly not the case. Vegans on average have lower serum cholesterol and blood pressure, and lower risk of coronary heart disease and certain kinds of cancer than do omnivores (Craig 2009). And although some vitamins, such as B-12, occur infrequently in plants, many common vegan food items and supplements are fortified with them (Craig 2009). For people to whom these products are accessible, it is possible to have a healthy vegan diet.¹³ For people who for genetic, economic, or geographic reasons cannot maintain a healthy vegan diet, my remarks in the caveats section apply.

2.2 Harms:

I will consider whether the harms of animal product consumption might be importantly different from the harms of animal fighting and bestiality. Physical and psychological suffering are ubiquitous in animal agriculture. This might lead some to think some ‘humane farming’ is morally

¹² I here am conceiving of mental health as a kind of mental well-being, including both subjective feelings of well-being and ability to function in the world. We can imagine someone who will feel much happier and be able to live a typical life only if they are permitted to engage in bestiality.

¹³

permissible. I will argue that, because death is a harm for animals, most ‘humane farming’ will also be morally impermissible. I will then examine how the harms and pleasures arising from animal product consumption could weigh against each other, and argue that the harms are not outweighed in a way that could support the Standard View. Finally, I will argue the distinction between production and consumption is not able to support the Standard View.

2.2.1 Harms: Suffering:

Bestiality often results in injuries for the involved animal. Animal fighting usually causes grievous harm to the dogs, roosters, bulls, or other animals that are made to fight. A Standard View defender might note that in the U.S. and many other nations, farmers are required to meet humane treatment standards, and so argue that animal product consumption is permissible because animals can live and die generally free of suffering.

This vision of the meat, milk, and egg industries is widely inaccurate.¹⁴ Animals raised for food do not have painless deaths and relatively suffering free lives. Fish are often killed by slow suffocation, the rupturing of their organs as they experience decompression, or are cut up while alive. Pigs, chickens, and cows all routinely have body parts removed without any pain relief and live so packed together they often become ill from the fumes of their own waste. Existing ‘humane slaughter’ regulations do not prevent male chicks, of no use to the egg industry, from being buried alive or thrown into wood chippers.¹⁵ Studies estimate that 25-50% of dairy cows are ‘clinically lame’, often due to poor nutrition, insufficient space for physical activity, and inattention to health in selective breeding.¹⁶ Animals are commonly injured on their way to slaughter, where meager

¹⁴ For an overview, see “An HSUS Report: The Welfare of Animals in the Meat, Egg, and Dairy Industries.”

¹⁵ The practices found in the previous three sentences are described in Rachels 2011.

¹⁶ Estimates vary widely, but estimates in this range are found in Griffiths, Grove White, and Oikonomou 2018; Dudley 2017; and “An HSUS Report: The Welfare of Cows in the Dairy Industry.”

regulations are not complied with (Dillard 2008). As slaughterhouse worker Ramon Moreno describes, some cows “survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. ‘They die. . . piece by piece’” (Warrick 2001).

Animal agriculture could feasibly be made more humane by enacting additional animal welfare laws and better enforcing them. One might think that we are temporarily obliged to leave animal products off our plates, or at least all those not researched and found to be from ‘humane’ producers,¹⁷ but think that once the system is improved it would not be unprincipled to eat animal products, but condemn animal fighting and bestiality.

2.2.2 Harms: Death as Harm:

Enacting and enforcing more animal welfare laws would significantly cut down on the suffering of farm animals, but that’s not enough.¹⁸ As long as we end animals’ lives prematurely, to eat their flesh or because their bodies have stopped producing eggs or milk at a sufficiently profitable rate, we harm them. The following discussion will assume it is possible to kill painlessly, even though I am skeptical this is feasible on a mass scale. However, it is important to discuss the harms associated with death in case mass painless deaths become possible, and to show us what we may permissibly do in cases in which we could kill an individual animal painlessly.

Although death isn’t the same kind of harm for animals that suffering is, nor perhaps as severe, it is wrong to assert that it is not a harm at all.¹⁹ Most of us would find it atrocious if an

¹⁷ Arguments for and against the permissibility of ‘humane’ animal agriculture are given in McMahan 2008.

¹⁸ Moreover, I am skeptical of the large-scale feasibility of *genuinely* humane standards. Dairy cows, for instance, are often killed after 5 or 6 years, but have a life span of 20 years. Caring for these animals, plus the males who don’t produce milk, for their entire lives would require that a farmer support many more animals to produce the same amount of milk. Giving these animals adequate space, healthcare, and stimulation would transform animal farming into a substantially more expensive endeavor.

¹⁹ The claim that killing animals harms them does not commit me to saying the same thing about fetuses. In addition to having no plans or desires, the vast majority are killed before they are capable of sentience, pleasure, or pain. And even if fetuses were harmed by being killed, whereas pleasure is not sufficient justification to kill, a person’s bodily integrity and choices around parenthood are much weightier.

acquaintance put down their healthy, young dog just because it gave them pleasure to do so. We would find it bad for the dog's sake, just as we think it bad that healthy dogs are euthanized in shelters, unable to find loving homes.

Elizabeth Harman puts forth a strategy to support the claim that an animal is not harmed by being killed. She imagines some might assert that animals, unlike humans, do not lose out on the plans and hopes they had for their futures (2011b). If a painless death is only harmful to us because it denies us the futures we imagined and planned for, then death would not be bad for animals because they lack the complex cognitive capacities necessary to have a conception of their futures. Harman argues that this could not be solely where the harm of death lies because if it were, humans who are so depressed they cannot plan for their futures would not be harmed by being killed (2011b). This view would also entail that humans with certain cognitive disabilities would not be harmed by being killed.

In addition, denying that animals have plans for their futures relies on definitions of 'future' and 'plan' that are too narrow. My dog doesn't have long-term career aspirations, but it is very plausible he has some plans and is upset when they are thwarted. Whenever one of the household humans comes home, he plans to get himself a dog biscuit. Upon their arrival, he scratches at the cupboard where the biscuits are kept and plans to continue scratching until the human opens the cupboard and gives him a treat. He seems to have some conception of his future in mind, and strongly prefers a future in which he has a biscuit. Killing him would frustrate these small-scale plan, and deprive him of a desired future state.

And even if an animal's death was not harmful for the animal itself, if the animal forms strong social bonds, their death can be harmful to their companions. Dairy cows, for instance,

experience stress when separated from members of their social groups (Jensen 2018). And as I've noted, slaughterhouse workers suffer severely psychologically because of the stress of killing (Dillard 2008).

2.2.3 Harms: Balance of Harms and Benefits:

A Standard View defender might then concede that animal product consumption is harmful, but think these harms are outweighed by the goods in it for us, unlike with bestiality and animal fighting. This argument fails for two reasons. First, with over 50 billion animals killed for food each year in the U.S, and hundreds of billions killed worldwide,²⁰ and with the conditions being as I've detailed, the magnitude of suffering is enormous. It is very unlikely the suffering of a sow who spends her whole life unable to turn around could be outweighed by the pleasure humans get from eating her as 'pork chops.' Even if animals were treated more humanely, it is hard to imagine that a family eating a chicken for a single meal could get more out of that meal, compared to a vegan alternative, than the hen would have gotten from all the meals she would have eaten had she been allowed her natural lifespan.²¹ And as Singer argues, avoiding animal production increases overall utility in other ways. It frees up crops that were once fed to livestock so they can be fed to humans, reduces the incidence of diseases like colon cancer, and creates a cleaner environment (Singer 1980).

And even if some animal product consumption could be justified by appealing to outweighing pleasures, so too could many cases of bestiality and animal fighting. For almost any act of bestiality or animal fighting, if the event was streamed to a large enough audience who enjoyed such practices, the event would produce net positive utility. So, the Standard View does not hold up.

²⁰ It's difficult to get an accurate estimate of animal deaths for food. This US number is calculated using the USDA's Livestock and Meat Domestic Data, and was compiled by Animalclock.org. When we include fish in the worldwide count, the number of animals killed yearly is in the trillions (Fishcount.org 2019).

²¹ These empirical claims are difficult to test, of course. However, given their extreme plausibility, the burden of proof lies on my opponent in rejecting them.

One might think that raising animals for food is permissible because they would not be alive to experience any good at all if there wasn't a demand for their products. Henry Salt famously calls this the 'logic of the larder' (1914). However, this would also make animal fights permissible because many animals are bred for fighting as well. That Spanish Fighting Bulls are bred for fighting does not make it permissible to stab swords into live animals, and a pig's being bred to eat does not justify its confinement and killing.

2.2.4. Harms: Consuming vs Producing:

To justify the Standard View, some might appeal to what Russ Shafer-Landau calls the 'Inefficacy Argument.' That is, even if *producing* animal products is wrong, this does not entail it is wrong to *consume* animal products. Because my individual choices have no effect on the huge apparatus of animal agriculture, act consequentialist arguments do not give me reason to abstain from animal products (Shafer-Landau 1994). Someone could agree that animal production has negative consequences, but think that given the structure of our society and economic markets, their individual choice to consume animal products has better consequences than abstention does. Abstention means we often experience less culinary pleasure and more social discomfort at social events, and inconvenience our hosts.

The Inefficacy Argument has been challenged on consequentialist grounds. Peter Singer and Shelly Kagan argue that there is a very small chance our choices make a very big difference, for instance there might be a 1 in 10,000 chance our forgoing chicken will cause farmers to raise 100,000 less chicks (Singer 1980, Kagan 2011). Steve McMullen and Mathew Halteman argue that our individual consumer choices do have an economic impact on animal agriculture (2018). However, as Julia Nefsky has demonstrated, these empirical arguments are contentious (2018, 2019). There have

of course also been nonconsequentialist challenges to the Inefficacy Argument, given that the argument is a consequentialist one.²²

Looking at the cases of animal fighting and bestiality give us new reason to reject the Inefficacy Argument, and insight into which responses to it are inadequate. If one grants that animal product production is wrong, but thinks animal product consumption is okay because it “makes no difference,” one will then have to defend the unpalatable conclusion that it is often okay to purchase bestiality porn and bet on animal fights. If bestiality porn producers will make their videos whether or not you pay for and watch them, the Inefficacy Argument gives us as much reason to think watching bestiality porn is permissible as it does to consuming animal products. And yet, most of us would be unwilling to accept such behavior.²³ With this comparison, we see that the Inefficacy Argument fails to be consistent with most people’s actual moral values. And so, such defenders of the Standard View cannot cite the Inefficacy Objection in defense of consuming animal products.

3. Social Strategies

3.1 Limits of Humanity:

Proponents of the Standard View might object to my argument with an appeal to human identity. Neil Levy argues that bestiality erases an ‘identity constituting’ line between humans and animals. By engaging in sex with nonhumans, we violate a norm so important to the cultural construction of humanity that we risk losing our status as full members of the human moral community (Levy 2003). A similar argument could be made about animal fighting. It is so brutish

²² See Fischer and Wiegman 2018 for a specific response, and Young 2006 for a more general challenge to focusing on an individual’s actions in an isolated manner.

²³ Laws often forbid this too. Most states do not just ban running cockfights, but being a spectator as well (The Human Society, “Cockfighting Fact Sheet”).

and inhumane that people involved in it risk eroding qualities, like compassion, that make them part of the human moral community. In contrast, animal product consumption lacks taboo status and, it might be argued, does not conflict with how we construct our human identities.

However, some non-taboo acts also erode the qualities important to our humanity. Throughout much of history, slavery has not been considered taboo, and was instead legal and widely accepted. But those who enslave others erode their own humanity by denying enslaved people the treatment they deserve as fellow human beings. Clearly then, acts which erode humanity need not be taboo. Animal product consumption is a practice that epitomizes what might erode fundamental parts of human identity. Despite its ubiquity, it conflicts with values that are central to our human identity, values such as compassion, and kindness towards the vulnerable. If bestiality or animal fighting can erode human identity, consuming animal products surely can too.

3.2 Naturalness

It is often said that meat eating is ‘natural,’ and it might be argued that this contrasts with animal fighting and bestiality, which are unnatural. Although I do not think naturalness can ground what is morally right, even granting that it could does not support the Standard View. Even if some kinds of hunting, like going after wild boar with a knife, are natural, factory farming is not, and neither is eating Havarti bacon cheeseburgers. It is also hard, given the difficulty studying our sexual practices many millennia past, to argue that bestiality isn’t in some sense ‘natural.’ And we know that animal fights have been held for thousands of years, at least dating back to ancient Rome. Given that human beings have often engaged in ritualized violent games, animal fighting does seem, in some sense, ‘natural.’ An appeal to nature, then, cannot ground the Standard View.

3.3 Cultural Significance:

A defender of the Standard View might object to my argument by pointing to the cultural significance of animal product consumption. It is much more culturally significant than bestiality or animal fighting. They might argue that animal products are a large part of almost every food culture, and avoiding consuming them means we will be unable to fully partake in our own cultural heritage or experience others' cultures, and so we will miss out on culinary achievements and be unable to fully appreciate the diversity of human societies. Refusing to fully partake in our own cultural practices might also offend our families and alienate ourselves from our communities.

I do not wish to deny that these costs, if they were to be incurred should one forgo consuming animal products, would be significant. However, the extent of the sacrifice when described like this is overblown. In most cases, one will not be rejected by one's family or community for abstaining from animal products, but more likely will be the recipient of some complaints, frustration, or jokes. This, I think, is a reasonable burden to bear to avoid participating in a practice that causes great harm. And with a little modification, one may still partake in many aspects of food culture. There are movements in many communities to veganize traditional recipes.²⁴ And even if one might be excused in occasionally consuming animal products if one would otherwise be very left out of family or cultural traditions, one should surely be working towards making cuisines less reliant on animal products. This is an achievement we should be proud of, taking delicious elements of our cultures and experimenting with them so they can be enjoyed more justly, without harming our fellow creatures. Cultural and family traditions are not immutable, but have always shifted over time. We can make a conscious effort to change our traditions for the better.

²⁴ For a small introduction to some of these movements, see Arellano 2018, Reinfeld 2013, and Severson 2017.

Moreover, the response that we may eat some animal products to avoid exclusion also entails that we'd be permitted to attend some animal fights should we otherwise be left out of family or cultural traditions.²⁵ When the Spanish constitutional court forbid the Catalonia region from banning bullfighting, they argued that it was part of Spanish cultural heritage (Burgen 2016). Like with cooking, bullfighting has many artistic elements. Though many Spaniards oppose it because of the cruelty of repeatedly spearing live animals, the practice continues (Garcia Valdivia 2019). Someone who regularly attended these fights during their childhood, and whose family continues to attend, might feel excluded should they now refuse to attend with their family. And just as with bullfighting, there are groups that develop significant cultural practices around dog fighting. Likewise, some groups could develop elaborate bestiality rituals. It could not be the case that, although it is wrong for an individual to fight dogs, or engage in bestiality with them, it becomes permissible once it goes on for a few generations (or however long it takes for a cultural practice to develop). The cultural significance of animal products cannot justify the Standard View, and alternatives which allow for animal abuse when it is sufficiently common ought to be rejected for independent reasons.

Resolving the Inconsistency:

I have covered what I believe to be the most tenable potential relevant differences between animal fighting and bestiality, and animal product consumption. But of course, there is always an additional strategy that might be tried. However, I suspect other strategies are likely to be ad hoc. Someone might suggest an additional deontological strategy, for instance, but deontological claims are typically based in general principles. As I have exhaustively surveyed general principles that might

²⁵ Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2018 argues using a similar line of reasoning that some animal fighting is morally permissible.

justify animal product consumption and shown they give unsavory results for bestiality and animal fighting, it's hard to see what compelling general principle could support the Standard View. And as I have covered the most commonly cited reasons given to support the Standard View, if there is in fact some morally relevant difference between the practices, it is doubtful many people actually govern their actions under such a principle.

There does not seem to be a plausible and significant difference between (a) animal fighting and bestiality and (b) most animal product consumption. Rather, these practices all harm animals primarily for human pleasure. If there is no relevant difference between them, then it is unprincipled to hold the Standard View. So, we have a dilemma. Either most animal product consumption is impermissible, or animal fighting and bestiality are permissible.²⁶ One of these conclusions is clearly much more promising. As I have earlier argued, the widely accepted Simple Principle commits us to condemning causing great suffering without good reason. Additionally, if animal fighting and bestiality were permissible, it is hard to see how causing any amount of animal suffering for the sake of human pleasure would be impermissible. If animal fighting were okay, why not vivisection for fun? Thinking these acts are permissible would essentially deny animals any moral status at all.

If one wants to take this horn of the dilemma, one will also have to contend with difficult implications about harms we can inflict on other humans for our own mere pleasure. If animals have almost no moral status, it's hard to avoid concluding that some humans have almost no moral status as well. To avoid this, we could embrace a Speciesist view, which Singer has argued is wrong because

²⁶ If the Inefficacy Objection succeeds, there is another set of views one could consistently hold. One could think that bestiality, animal fighting, and animal production are impermissible, but think it is permissible to financially support and benefit from these practices as long as one's abstention wouldn't spare any animals from harm. This is not the Standard View, of course, and will only be appealing to certain consequentialists. Given the risk that we do make a difference in some of these cases, consequentialists should still be wary of engaging in these practices. And given the immense harms caused by animal agriculture, consequentialism will still demand we work to end most animal agriculture, even if we can partake until its end.

of its arbitrariness (2009). We could claim that a capacity like rationality is what gives us moral status, but this would leave out not only animals, but humans incapable of sophisticated reasoning too.

We could claim that embeddedness in our communities is what gives us moral status, but as Elizabeth Anderson argues, some animals are included in our moral communities (2004). If we embraced such a stringent standard of community that pets and farm animals could be left out, we'd be in danger of also denying moral status to humans who cannot or do not interact much with others. Some philosophers, such as Eva Feder Kittay (1999, 2005), emphasize the importance of familial relationships for giving us full moral status. If this is one way to secure full moral status, that many animals have their own family relationships would seem to endow them with at least some moral status as well. And while being a member of a human family might be sufficient for having moral status, it is not necessary. Humans created in a lab wouldn't lack full moral status because of their origin. So that some animal is not part of a human family does not entail that it lacks moral status. I have presented some brief arguments for thinking animals have moral status, and that there are some constraints on what we may do to them. However, we should remember that most of us are already committed to this. Our strong moral aversions to animal fighting and bestiality indicate we already know that there are limits to what we may do to animals for our mere pleasure.

Blameworthiness:

Although animal product consumption, like bestiality and animal fighting, is impermissible, this does not entail that those who eat animal products are just as blameworthy as those who engage in bestiality or animal fighting. It is plausible that one's being raised in a society where animal product consumption is widely accepted, where one's parents and moral educators ate meat, makes

one less blameworthy for consuming animal products.²⁷ It is more difficult to realize that a behavior is wrong when the people we love and respect engage in it. Condemning the behavior means that our loved ones are doing something seriously wrong. Similarly, it might reveal something worse about someone's character if they break social norms to engage in bad behavior like dog fighting, rather than passively engaging in bad behavior by eating the foods available to them at typical social functions. And because factory farming is aggressively hidden from most of us with the help of ag-gag laws, it is easier to avoid confronting the suffering of animals that become food.

Blameworthiness and moral wrongness plausibly can come apart (Kelly 2018), and I am not interested here in judging how much those who consume animal products should be blamed. Rather, I am interested in the moral wrongness of animal product consumption, and how this wrongness compares to the wrongness of animal fighting and bestiality. And when deliberating about what we should do, the ways we personally will use animal bodies, we must focus on the moral acceptability of our actions, rather than only on if others are justified in blaming us for them.

Conclusion:

Many readers, prior to reading this paper, will have thought the Standard View to be obviously true. Although I hope to have convinced you it is false, it should at least be clear that the Standard View must not be taken for granted. Animal product consumption, something most people engage in every day, is strikingly similar to two of our most reviled practices. The most natural strategies meant to distinguish animal product consumption from bestiality and animal fighting cannot withstand scrutiny, and coming to the defense of the Standard View is a formidable task. Given the

²⁷ Some philosophers do not think that ignorance of the relevant moral facts makes one less blameworthy for committing some moral wrong. See Elizabeth Harman 2011a and Gideon Rosen 2004 for discussion of these views.

immense suffering caused by animal product consumption, and its parallels with practices so widely condemned, we should be very wary of continuing to partake. I suspect that consuming animal flesh and products will one day be looked upon as relics from a morally distant past, as we now look upon many once common practices.

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