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# Five Arguments for Vegetarianism<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *Five different arguments for vegetarianism are discussed: the system of meat production deprives poor people of food to provide meat for the wealthy, thus violating the principle of distributive justice; the world livestock industry causes great and manifold ecological destruction; meat-eating cultures and societal oppression of women are intimately linked and so feminism and vegetarianism must both be embraced to transform our patriarchal culture; both utilitarian and rights-based reasoning lead to the conclusion that raising and slaughtering animals is immoral, and so we ought to boycott meat; meat consumption causes many serious diseases and lowers life expectancy, and so is unhealthy. Objections to each argument are examined. The conclusion reached is that the cumulative case successfully establishes vegetarianism as a virtuous goal.*

## I. Introduction

In this paper I will examine five different arguments for adopting a vegetarian diet. These "arguments" can be viewed as various persuasive strategies directed towards different audiences. Many readers will be familiar with some of these arguments, but I think it is useful to bring them all together and to see them as presenting a cumulative case for vegetarianism. Taken as a whole they lead one in a certain direction regarding the choice of one's diet. Although these arguments may have different degrees of logical persuasiveness and different rhetorical audiences, it is worthwhile to ask whether virtuous persons find in themselves some moral trait that inclines them to respond sympathetically to each argument, and even more sympathetically to the persuasive case taken as a whole. That

is, I want to bring these arguments together in order to challenge an otherwise serious, mature human being who wants to be a morally good person. What kind of person would be unmoved by the cumulative case for vegetarianism? Wouldn't the case at least make one more sensitive to dietary choices concerning meat? And would such sensitivity lead naturally in the direction of vegetarianism?

While the conclusions of these arguments may prescribe nonidentical and overlapping scopes of dietary restriction, these restrictions all include abstaining from intensively raised, grain-fed, factory-farmed sentient animals such as cattle, pigs, and poultry, and perhaps also lambs (sheep).<sup>2</sup> Thus the dietary goal towards which the arguments lead is not strict veganism which excludes consumption of all animal products, including dairy food and eggs. Nor do the arguments exclude consumption of those fish, crustaceans, mollusks, and other organisms whose sentience is doubtful and which have not been bred, raised, and slaughtered by intensive, factory-farming methods. Moreover, these arguments do not apply universally to all people in all agricultural circumstances. These arguments do not apply to those few people who, out of genuine necessity, must, in order to survive, hunt and/or trap wild animals in remote areas that are unsuitable for raising crops. Nor for that matter do these arguments rule out either passive cannibalism, that is, eating the corpses of humans who died natural deaths, or passive carnivorousness, that is, eating the corpses of nonhuman animals who either died natural deaths or were killed accidentally like roadkill.<sup>3</sup> Rather, these arguments address the usual situation of North Americans and Europeans who live in agriculturally-wealthy communities that enjoy ample dietary alternatives to

grain-fed, factory-farmed beef, pork, chicken, turkey and lamb.

The five arguments I will discuss are the Argument from Distributive Justice, the Argument from Environmental Harm, the Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics, the Argument from Moral Consideration for Animals, and the Prudential Argument from Health.<sup>4</sup> After presenting these arguments I will offer a critical discussion of them. I will then conclude with a brief analysis of the moral character of the person who resists the cumulative case aimed at persuading consumers of affluent nations to set a meatless diet as a virtuous goal.

## II. The Arguments for Vegetarianism

### A. The Argument from Distributive Justice

This first argument was advanced as early as 1971 by Frances Moore Lappé,<sup>5</sup> and has been repeated by such philosophers as Peter Singer,<sup>6</sup> James Rachels,<sup>7</sup> Stephen R. L. Clark,<sup>8</sup> Mary Midgley,<sup>9</sup> and mentioned in passing by still others.<sup>10</sup> The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1) 16 to 21 lbs. of grain and soy are needed to produce 1 lb. of beef.

6 to 8 lbs. of grain and soy are needed to produce 1 lb. of pork.

4 lbs. of grain and soy are needed to produce 1 lb. of turkey meat.

3 lbs. of grain and soy are needed to produce 1 lb. of chicken meat.<sup>11</sup>

2) Therefore, converting grain and soy to meat is a very wasteful means of producing food. (From 1)

3) Every day millions of human beings in the world suffer and die from lack of sufficient grains and legumes for a minimally decent diet.

4) By choosing to eat meat when sufficient grains and vegetables are available for a healthy diet for oneself, one participates in and perpetuates a very wasteful means of producing food.

5) If one eats meat knowing 3 and 4, then one endorses a very wasteful means of producing food, and shows an insensitivity to malnourished and starving human beings.

6) By knowingly participating in and perpetuating a very wasteful means of producing food, the meat eater shows a selfish refusal to share with starving human beings food that could have been made available to them, and thereby shows disregard for the principle of distributive justice.

7) Developing nations mimic the dietary habits of Americans, and Americans are setting a harmful, irresponsible example by wasting grain to produce and consume meat.

8) Therefore, members of affluent nations ought to adopt vegetarian diets and boycott meat so as not to be implicated in the wasteful and unjust system of meat production, and to show concern for the welfare of unfortunate human beings.

Basically, the idea here is that eating meat perpetuates a system which indirectly harms other human beings. Therefore, to choose to be a part of this system indicates a disregard for those people, and this in effect contaminates one's moral character.

The Worldwatch Institute reports that:

Large areas of the world's cropland now produce grains for animals. Roughly 38 percent of the world's grain—especially corn, barley, sorghum, and oats—is fed to livestock, up from 35 percent in 1960. Wealthy meat-consuming regions dedicate the largest shares of their grain to fattening livestock, while the poorest regions use the least grain as feed. In the United States, for example, animals account for 70 percent of domestic grain use, while India and sub-Saharan Africa offer just 2 percent of their cereal harvest to livestock.<sup>12</sup>

By consuming intensively-raised, grain-fed meat, the few who are affluent indulge in a luxury produced by wasting grain that is desperately needed by the many who are poor. Since those suffering from malnutrition and starvation surely do not deserve to be without adequate nutrition, the principle of distributive justice dictates that we who are fortunate enough to live in agriculturally-wealthy nations at least ought to boycott the luxury of meat, and instead adopt a vegetarian diet.<sup>13</sup> By choosing to forego meat, lower the demand for it, and thereby exert pressure to reduce meat production, we contribute to the possibility of many more people being fed by the freed up grains and vegetables, or equivalently, by the freed up acreage of fertile land. The criticism of the moral character of meat eaters that is embedded in this argument is that they are selfishly squandering our agricultural wealth to support their luxurious food preference instead of resting content with a modest yet healthy vegetarian diet in order to share the fruits (and grains and vegetables) of our abundant agricultural wealth with those who, by accident of birth, live in agriculturally poor areas.

Jeremy Rifkin adds to this argument by observing that in order to make room for cattle grazing, the cattle industry (and the spreading desertification it has caused) has displaced millions of people in developing nations from their ancestral lands, forcing them to migrate to squalid urban areas where, suffering from chronic hunger, they succumb to diet-deficiency diseases.<sup>14</sup> I shall discuss the environmentally harmful results of the global meat industry in the next argument. Here I need only observe that the Worldwatch Institute also has reported that "rising meat consumption among the fortunate in developing societies sometimes squeezes out food production for the poor and boosts imports of feed grains."<sup>15</sup> The upshot of these considerations is that the factory farming of animals indirectly harms human beings.

### B. The Argument from Environmental Harm

This argument is motivated by the interest many who are sensitive to environmental issues have in "treading lightly on the planet." The sources of my reconstruction of this argument are Jeremy Rifkin,<sup>16</sup> Frances Moore Lappé, and the Worldwatch Institute, but it has been mentioned by many others.<sup>17</sup> This argument runs as follows:

1) Livestock manure mixed with nitrogen from artificial fertilizers produces harmful nitrates which pollute groundwater and cause nervous system impairments, cancer, and methemoglobinemia ("blue baby" syndrome).<sup>18</sup>

2) Cattle feedlots are a dangerous source of organic pollutants, accounting for more than half the toxic organic pollutants found in fresh water.<sup>19</sup>

3) Livestock cause considerable amounts of soil compaction<sup>20</sup> and erosion<sup>21</sup>; each pound of feedlot steak costs about 35 lbs. of eroded topsoil.<sup>22</sup>

4) The destruction of thousands of species of tropical plants, insects, birds, reptiles, and mammals through deforestation is to a great extent caused by the creation of livestock pasture land which in only a few years loses its fertility.<sup>23</sup>

5) Livestock production contributes considerably to the depletion of soil fertility.

6) Livestock are a major cause of the depletion of fresh water aquifers<sup>24</sup>; 3,000 liters of water are used to produce a single kilogram of American beef.<sup>25</sup>

7) Cattle play a prominent role in global desertification<sup>26</sup> as a primary factor in all four causes of it: a) overgrazing, b) overcultivation of the land, c) deforestation, d) improper irrigation techniques.<sup>27</sup>

8) The Bureau of Land Management has exterminated to near extinction mountain lions, bears, lynx, bobcats, and eagles in order to expand pasture land for livestock.

9) Livestock are a significant cause of damage to the narrow streambank habitats vital to arid-land ecology. These "riparian zones" are in the worst condition in history.<sup>28</sup> This riparian zone damage has, for example, resulted in the depopulation of fresh water fish species.<sup>29</sup>

10) Livestock have degraded and drastically transformed plant ecosystems in the western U.S., causing depopulations of songbirds, elk, bighorn sheep, and pronghorn antelope.<sup>30</sup>

11) Livestock production consumes considerable amounts of nonrenewable energy; producing the red meat and poultry eaten each year by a typical American uses the equivalent of 190 liters of gasoline.<sup>31</sup>

12) The grain-fed cattle complex is a significant factor in the emission of three of the four global "greenhouse" warming gases—methane, carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxides.<sup>32</sup> Livestock account for 15 to 20 percent of global methane emissions.<sup>33</sup>

13) One-third of the value of all raw materials consumed for all purposes in the United States is consumed in feed for livestock.<sup>34</sup>

14) Consequently, livestock are one of the most serious causes of environmental harm, and livestock production and meat-eating are at odds with sustainable development. In contrast, plant agriculture and vegetarian diets are sustainable, environmentally benign practices.

15) Therefore, it is ecologically beneficial to boycott livestock by adopting a vegetarian diet.

The Worldwatch Institute reports that:

Cattle and other ruminant livestock such as sheep and goats graze one-half of the planet's total land area. Ruminants, along with pigs and poultry, also eat feed and fodder raised on one-fourth of the cropland. Ubiquitous and familiar, livestock

exert a huge, and largely unrecognized, impact on the global environment.<sup>35</sup>

Basically, the argument is that with over a billion cows, bulls, and steers worldwide, the cattle industry is responsible, either directly or indirectly, for considerable ecological devastation.

This Argument from Environmental Harm appeals to the value of ecosystems as more worthy of preserving than the system of raising cattle and other sentient animals that causes manifold harms to the environment in order to generate meat. Notice that one need not establish whether ecosystems have inherent value independent of human valuing, or whether environmental damage is wrong only because it harms human beings. All one needs to accept is that the environmental damage to which the commercial meat industry greatly contributes is *bad*. The Worldwatch Institute states that "If livestock are to live in balance with the environment again, First World consumers will have to eat less meat, while Third World citizens will need to keep their meat consumption low."<sup>36</sup>

### C. The Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics

This third argument is that there is an intimate connection between vegetarianism and feminism, and between male dominance and meat eating. Carol J. Adams<sup>37</sup> argues that "to talk about eliminating meat is to talk about displacing one aspect of male control and demonstrates the ways in which animals' oppression and women's oppression are linked together."<sup>38</sup> Adams calls this connection "the sexual politics of meat." She claims it is overtly acknowledged when we hear that men, and especially soldiers, athletes, and other "working men," need meat to be strong and virile, or when wives report that they could give up meat, but prepare it for their husbands who insist on it. Adams tries to reveal the more covert associations between meat eating and male dominance that she claims are deeply embedded within our patriarchal culture. She writes:

By speaking of the *texts of meat* we situate the production of meat's meaning within a political-cultural context. None of us chooses the meanings that constitute the texts of meat, we adhere to them. Because of the personal meaning meat eating has for those who consume it, we generally fail to see the social meanings that have actually predetermined the personal meaning. Recognizing the texts of meat is the first step in identifying the sexual politics of meat.<sup>39</sup>

Adams argues that it is meaningful to speak of "texts of meat" for three reasons. First, meat carries a recognizable message since it is seen as an essential and nutritious item of food. Second, meat's meaning is unchangeable because it recurs continuously at mealtimes, in advertisements, and in conversations. Third, meat is comprised of a system of relations having to do with food production, attitudes toward animals, and, by extension, acceptable violence toward them.<sup>40</sup>

The Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics can be reconstructed, at length, as follows:

1) In the Bible, the male prerogative for meat is exhibited in Leviticus 6, according to which "The meat so delicately cooked by the priests, with wood and coals in the altar, in clean linen, no woman was permitted to taste, only the males among the children of Aaron."<sup>41</sup> The fused oppression of women and animals through the power of naming can be traced to the story of the Fall in Genesis in which women and an animal, the serpent, are blamed for the Fall, and Adam is entitled to name both Eve (after the Fall) and the other animals (before the Fall).<sup>42</sup>

2) According to the ancient Greek myth, Zeus, the patriarch of patriarchs, desires Metis, chases her, coaxes her to a couch with "honeyed words," subdues her, rapes her, and then swallows her, but he claims that he receives her counsel from his belly, where she remains. This myth collapses together sexual violence against women and meat eating and exhibits the masculine consumption of female language.<sup>43</sup>

3) Fairy tales exhibit meat eating generally as the male's role. The King in his countinghouse ate four-and-twenty blackbirds in a pie, while the Queen ate bread and honey. Folktales of all nations, including Jack and the Beanstalk, depict giants as male and "fond of eating human flesh."<sup>44</sup>

4) In most nontechnological cultures, obtaining meat was performed by men. In societies with animal-based economies, men hunt and control meat distribution, thus wielding economic and social power typically used to dominate women. In contrast, societies with plant-based economies in which women gather vegetables tend to be egalitarian since women gain an essential economic and social role without abusing it.<sup>45</sup>

5) The language of the hunt implies that it is a variation of rape, since the word "venison" (which originally meant the flesh of any animal killed in the chase or by hunting) derives from the Latin word *venari*,<sup>46</sup> to hunt, and is akin to the Sanskrit term meaning "he desires, attacks, gains."<sup>47</sup> "According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the word 'venery' had two definitions (now both archaic): Indulgence in or the pursuit of sexual activity (from *Venus*, love), and also the act, art, or sport of hunting, the chase (from *vener*, to hunt)."<sup>48</sup>

6) In many nontechnological societies women are forbidden to eat meat. They may not eat pork in the Solomon Islands, fish, seafood, chicken, duck, and eggs in some cultures in Asia, and chicken, goat, partridge, or other game birds in equatorial Africa. The Kufa of Ethiopia punished women who ate chicken by enslaving them, while the Walamo put to death women who violated the restriction of eating fowl.<sup>49</sup>

7) In famine situations (e.g. in Ethiopia) women engage in deliberate self-deprivation, serving men meat at the expense of their own nutritional needs.<sup>50</sup>

8) In 19th-century British working-class families, where poverty forced a conscious distribution of meat, men received it, not women.<sup>51</sup>

9) Dr. George Beard, a 19th-century advocate of white superiority, endorsed meat as superior food that more highly-evolved, more civilized white men eat. The beef-eating English, Beard said, keep in subjection "the rice-eating Hindoo and Chinese" peasant and "the potato-eating Irish peasant."<sup>52</sup>

10) Hegel wrote: "The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid."<sup>53</sup>

11) Originally "men" was a generic term for all humans, and "meat" was a generic term for all solid foods. But "meat" no longer means all food, and "men" no longer includes women. Today "meat" represents the essence or principal part of something, whereas "vegetable" represents passivity and monotonous existence. Colloquially, "vegetable" is a synonym for a person severely brain-damaged or comatose. "To vegetate is to lead a passive existence; just as to be feminine is to lead a passive existence."<sup>54</sup>

12) Twentieth-century meat textbooks proclaim meat to be a virile food.<sup>55</sup> In technological societies, cookbooks reflect the presumption that men eat meat (e.g. the *New McCall's Cookbook* states that London Broil is a man's favorite dinner).<sup>56</sup>

13) In our society, football players drink beer because it's a man's drink, and eat steak because it's a man's meal. The emphasis is on "man-sized portions" and "hero" sandwiches. Meat-and-potatoes men are our stereotypical strong and hearty, rough and ready, able males. Hearty beef stews are named "Manhandlers." The ex-head football coach of the Chicago Bears, Mike Ditka, operates a restaurant that features "he-man food" such as steaks and chops.<sup>57</sup>

14) Men who batter women have often used the absence of meat from their meal as a pretext for violence against women.<sup>58</sup>

15) Animals' lives precede and enable the existence of meat. Through butchering, the live animal is replaced by a dead body, thus transforming it into food. So animals in name and body are made absent referents for meat to exist.<sup>59</sup> Since women are also made absent referents through pornographic pictures of pigs,<sup>60</sup> there is an intersection between sexual violence against women<sup>61</sup> and meat eating.<sup>62</sup>

16) The coherence meat achieves as a meaningful item of food arises from the "patriarchal attitudes" that the end justifies the means, that the objectification of other beings is a necessary part of life, and that violence can and should be masked.<sup>63</sup>

17) Therefore, meat's recognizable message is closely associated with the male role in our patriarchal, meat-advocating cultural discourse, and so the oppression of women and the other animals is interdependent.<sup>64</sup>

Having reached this conclusion about the sexual politics of meat, Adams extends her argument as follows:

18) A meal is an amalgam of food dishes, each introduced in precise order. Each course is seen as leading up to and then coming down from the central entrée that is meat. This pattern is evidence of stability.<sup>65</sup> Thus to remove meat, as the centerpiece of a meal, is to threaten the structure of the larger patriarchal culture.<sup>66</sup>

19) Since meat eating is a measure of a virile culture and individual, our society equates vegetarianism with emasculation or femininity.<sup>67</sup>

20) The fact that people do not often closely scrutinize their own meat eating is an example of the prerogative of those in the dominant order determining what is worthy of conversation and critique.<sup>68</sup>

21) Consequently, vegetarians become trapped by this dominant patriarchal worldview, and fail to perceive that in a meat-eating culture, the ill health, death of animals, and ecological spoilage caused by meat eating do not really matter.<sup>69</sup>

22) It is a very important fact that the hidden majority of this world has been primarily vegetarian.<sup>70</sup> The dietary history of most cultures indicates that complete protein dishes were made of vegetables and grains.<sup>71</sup>

23) As a result, what is most threatening to our cultural discourse is self-determined vegetarianism in cultures where meat is plentiful.<sup>72</sup> Vegetarianism acts as a sign of autonomous female being and signals a rejection of male control and violence.<sup>73</sup>

24) Since some vegetarians, vegetarian groups, and vegetarian cultures are sexist, adopting an overt feminist perspective is necessary<sup>74</sup> for rebuking a meat eating and patriarchal world.<sup>75</sup>

25) Therefore, feminism AND vegetarianism ought to be embraced by members of our patriarchal culture in order to transform it from within.

To build her case Adams uses linguistic and etymological analyses, mythology, scripture, folklore, anthropological, sociological, and historical studies, cultural observations, and literary analysis of Mary Shelley's book *Frankenstein*, drawing throughout from a wide range of sources. For example, she notes that in the English tradition it is female hares that are hunted (as in Playboy bunnies)<sup>76</sup> and it is female chickens that are eaten because the flesh of males is believed to be of poor quality,<sup>77</sup> and that by using chickens and cows to produce eggs and dairy products before being slaughtered "we exploit their femaleness as well."<sup>78</sup> In summary, then, the basic gist of Adams' Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics is that since meat is a symbol of patriarchal oppression, domination, and violence perpetrated against both nonhuman animals and women, vegetarianism represents an explicit rejection of our "Meat is king"<sup>79</sup> patriarchal culture.

#### D. The Argument from Moral Consideration for Animals

This argument is probably the most familiar one to philosophical audiences and has several different formulations,<sup>80</sup> but since the object of moral concern in each is the sentient animals themselves, whether couched in terms of the value of their lives, their moral rights, or their suffering, I group them all together as arguments appealing to moral consideration for animals. I will only briefly reconstruct the two most influential versions: Peter Singer's utilitarian argument from suffering<sup>81</sup> and Tom Regan's deontological argument from inherent value.<sup>82</sup>

Singer's argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1) The interests of every sentient being affected by an action ought to be taken into account and given the same weight as the like interest of any other sentient being.

2) Practices which inflict suffering on sentient beings without good reason are morally wrong.

3) Factory farming inflicts considerable suffering on cattle, pigs, sheep, turkeys, and chickens, all of which are sentient beings.

4) Humans do not need meat for a healthy diet (see section E below).

5) Sentient beings have a serious interest in not being made to suffer.

6) Humans have only a trivial interest in meat since it is a dietary luxury. (From 4)

7) Therefore, the trivial interest humans have in eating meat is outweighed by the serious interest factory-farmed animals have in not being made to suffer. (From 1, 3, 6)

8) Therefore, factory farming inflicts suffering on sentient beings without good reason. (From 3, 7)

9) Therefore, the practice of factory farming is morally wrong. (From 2, 8)

10) We ought neither to participate in, nor perpetuate, morally wrong practices.

11) Therefore, we ought to boycott factory farming by becoming vegetarians. (From 9, 10)

Singer's utilitarian contention here is that through vegetarianism, decreasing the demand for factory-farmed meat will reduce animal suffering.

Regan's argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1) Experiencing subjects of a life are living, conscious beings who have beliefs and desires, perception, memory, and a sense of the future, including their own future, have an emotional life together with feelings of pleasure or pain, have preference and welfare interests, have the ability to initiate action in pursuit of their desires and goals, have a psychophysical identity over time, and have an individual welfare in the sense that their experiential life fares well or ill for them, logically independently of their utility for others and logically independently of their being the object of anyone else's interests.<sup>83</sup>

2) Cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, and turkeys are experiencing subjects of a life.

3) All experiencing subjects of a life have inherent value.

4) All beings with inherent value have equal inherent value, and a right to be treated respectfully. All moral agents have a duty to respect the rights of all such beings.

5) We fail to treat beings with inherent value respectfully if we treat them in ways that detract from their welfare, that is, in ways that harm them.<sup>84</sup>

6) Raising and slaughtering cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, and turkeys harms them and treats them as mere resources.<sup>85</sup>

7) Therefore, raising and slaughtering cattle, pigs, sheep, chickens, and turkeys violates their right to be treated respectfully, and so is fundamentally unjust. (From 4, 5)

8) Therefore, we moral agents have a duty to boycott factory-farmed products and become vegetarians so as not to be causally implicated in this unjust practice. (From 3, 6)

Regan's argument rests on no utilitarian calculation weighing the interests farm animals have in not suffering against the interests meat eaters have in eating meat.<sup>86</sup> Instead, he argues that animals are experiencing subjects of a life, have inherent value, and thus have a *prima facie* right not to be harmed by being raised and slaughtered when we can become vegetarians without being made worse off by doing so.

Both Regan and Singer appeal to the moral consideration we owe the animals themselves; Singer enjoins us to reduce their pain and suffering, while Regan enjoins us to respect them as beings with inherent value equal to our own. Both contend that we are wronging these animals whom we breed into existence, make to suffer, and slaughter.

#### E. The Prudential Argument from Health

The last argument for vegetarianism is perhaps the least philosophically interesting argument because it turns on a simple appeal to self-interest,<sup>87</sup> but it is probably the argument that has succeeded in persuading most people. In recent years, many nutritionists have judged eating meat to be unhealthy.

The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1) The Eskimos, the Laplanders, the Greenlanders, and the Russian Kurgi tribes are populations with the highest animal flesh consumption in the world; they are also among the populations with the lowest life expectancy, often only about 30 years.<sup>88</sup>

2) The Russian Caucasians, the Yucatan Indians, the East Indian Todas, and the Pakistan Hunzakuts are other peoples who live in harsh conditions, but they subsist with little or no animal flesh and have life expectancies of 90 to 100 years, some of the highest in the world.<sup>89</sup>

3) The United States has the most sophisticated medical technology in the world, and one of the most temperate climates, yet it is also one of the highest consumers of meat and animal products in the world, and has one of the lowest life expectancies of industrialized nations.<sup>90</sup>

4) The cultures with the longest life spans in the world are the Vilcambas, who live in the Andes of Ecuador, the Abkhasians, who live on the Black Sea, and the Hunzas, who live in the Himalayas of Northern Pakistan. These people also enjoy full, active lives, working and playing at 80 and beyond. All three groups are either totally vegetarian or close to it; meat and dairy products combined account for only 1 1/2% of the total calories of the Hunzas, the largest of the three groups.<sup>91</sup>

5) Several different studies have shown that the stamina and strength of vegetarians is superior to that of meat eaters.<sup>92</sup> A number of world-class athletes are vegetarians.<sup>93</sup>

6) Meat eaters risk serious and sometimes fatal illness from trichinosis, salmonella, mercury poisoning, and clostridium perfringens gastroenteritis.

7) Consuming meat (eggs, dairy food) and animal fat increases one's chances of suffering heart disease, atherosclerosis (hardened and narrowed arteries), high cholesterol, stroke, peptic ulcers, colon cancer, breast cancer, uterine cancer, cervical cancer, prostate cancer, osteoporosis, kidney disease, and even lung cancer.<sup>94</sup>

8) Those who suffer from angina and other cardiac diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, kidney stones, diverticulitis, gall bladder disease, peptic ulcers, diabetes, asthma, and hypertension have been shown to benefit by switching to a vegetarian diet.<sup>95</sup>

9) The human intestine is anatomically very different from that of natural carnivores, such as dogs and cats. Carnivore bowels are short and straight with smooth walls that guarantee short transit times. Human bowels are long and winding and full of pouches with deeply puckered walls.<sup>96</sup> Wolves and other natural carnivores have highly acidic saliva and digestive secretions designed to dissolve the bones of their prey, whereas human saliva is highly alkaline, and human digestive secretions are far less acidic.<sup>97</sup>

10) The dentition, facial structure, and digestive system of humans do not closely resemble those of natural omnivores, such as bears.<sup>98</sup> Rather, our teeth appear to be designed for the grinding of grains, vegetables, and fruits, and our intestines for their digestion.<sup>99</sup> So human physiology suggests the evolutionary history of an herbivorous species.

11) Therefore, a balanced vegetarian diet tends to be healthier than a diet containing meat and animal fat.<sup>100</sup>

Some evidence also suggests that a strict vegan diet is the healthiest diet of all. Thus prudence would seem to dictate eliminating at least all beef, pork, lamb, and poultry from one's diet, and preferably all fish, seafood, eggs, and dairy products as well. As conservative a group as the American Dietetic Association, having reviewed the current literature on the nutritional status of vegetarians, has concluded that "vegetarian diets are healthful and nutritionally adequate when appropriately planned."<sup>101</sup> Thus, since a balanced, meatless diet is healthier than a diet containing meat, there appear to be strong prudential reasons for becoming a vegetarian.

### III. Critical Discussion

A critic could object that if each one of these arguments is flawed by weak reasoning, then all I have presented are five poor arguments for vegetarianism. So let's now look briefly at each argument from the standpoint of its relation to a wider persuasive strategy. That is, consider each argument as a logical or rhetorical moment that attempts to build a stronger and stronger case for the *prima facie* virtue of vegetarianism.

#### A. Distributive Justice or Gustatory Guilt?

First let's consider the Argument from Distributive Justice. It is certainly true that if an individual American in Omaha refuses to buy and eat a particular hamburger, the hamburger will not magically transform itself into a bowl of porridge large enough to sustain ten hungry Rwandans. The lines of causation that stretch out between the boycotting of meat by Americans, the market effect this will have on international agribusinesses, rising surpluses of grain worldwide, and political decisions to export such surpluses to famine-plagued areas, are without question long, complicated, difficult to establish, and even more difficult to predict. One could argue that such tenuous,

convoluted causal lines are too easily severed by unforeseen or uncontrollable circumstances. But even granting this in no way concedes that such causal lines are *unreal*. Such a boycott would not be a mere symbolic gesture.<sup>102</sup> Coupled with political action, it could exert real market pressure to undercut the meat industry.

But even if the effects of one discrete human action are negligible in a utilitarian sense, the ethics of individual boycotting can never be generated merely by appeals to overall consequences. If everyone were to act in a certain manner, good consequences might occur. However, boycotts may fail as collective action dissipates or never gets energized in the first place. Action remains the expression of individual virtue. If some action or practice produces widespread suffering or injustice, a virtuous person will not be insensitive to this. By making the *personal* choice to abstain from meat, a virtuous individual would be actively expressing her compassion for famine victims. She would be making a moral exemplar of herself, whether others rally to follow her example in sufficient number to achieve the hoped for market effects or not. It is a matter of moral integrity, not empirical, utilitarian calculations of probable consequences.

Consider the fact that Americans lead the world in meat consumption, with 112 kilograms per capita in 1990; that averages out to over 2 kilograms per week, whereas in India on average 2 kilograms per capita are consumed per year.<sup>103</sup> Our view of meat consumption might be transformed if we bear in mind that if Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only 10 percent for one year, it would free at least 12 million tons of grain for human consumption—or enough to feed 60 million starving people. We can see factory-farmed meat as a luxury indulged in predominately by Americans and Europeans at the expense of the poor of developing nations. As such it is a form of wastefulness and selfishness at odds with distributive justice. Thus it betrays a lack of compassion for those who deserve decent food.

### B. Environmental Harm or Harmless Heifers?

Peter Singer observed some time ago that “there would be environmental benefits from ending factory farming, which is energy intensive and leads to problems in disposing of the huge quantities of animal wastes which it concentrates on one site.”<sup>104</sup> Here Singer is only concerned with the environmental harm resulting from factory-farming animals on land which could be put to other agricultural uses for humans. He grants that “If a calf, say, grazes on rough pasture land that grows only grass and could not be planted with corn or any other crop that provides food edible by human beings, the result will be a net gain of protein for human beings, since the grown calf provides us with protein that we cannot—yet—extract economically from grass.”<sup>105</sup> This suggests a counterargument to the Argument from Distributive Justice. The defender of meat eating could argue that by limiting consumption to those animals (e.g. goats) that graze on unfarmable “rough pasture land that grows only grass” as Singer describes it (e.g. mountain slopes), meat eaters would *not* be depriving hungry people of any grain protein at all.

The first reply to this argument is that it already concedes that farmable land should not be used to support meat production. But the deeper reply is that this argument too quickly assumes that all land “that grows only grass” can and rightly should be used to produce animal protein for humans. This assumption can be challenged by asserting the ecological value such grassland (say, open prairie) has independent of human agricultural use. Peter S. Wenz<sup>106</sup> has argued that if healthy ecosystems are of value, and the value of an ecosystem is positively related to its degree of health, then people have *prima facie* obligations to avoid harming, to repair damage to, and to improve the health of ecosystems. He reasons that using land to grow large quantities of food impairs the health of the ecosystems involved, so people have a *prima facie* obligation to meet their nutritional needs through minimal use of land. Because vegetarianism enables people to do this, Wenz infers, we have a *prima facie* obligation to be vegetarians. Wenz contends that for healthy people in our society, the countervailing considerations are generally of little weight. He concludes that people have an obligation that is not merely *prima facie* to try vegetarianism for a length of time sufficient to become habituated to it.

A second objection to the Argument from Environmental Harm might be that abstaining from pork chops and steak fajitas may to some degree aid in preserving natural ecosystems, but can hardly reverse the wholesale, widespread ecological devastation that is occurring on a global scale. In short, this criticism is that a vegetarian diet won't be enough to heal the planet. My reply is that vegetarianism is not being advanced as a cure-all solution to the plethora of ecological ills. Rather, I claim only that it embodies one concrete example of what it means in practice to “tread lightly on the planet.”<sup>107</sup> By consuming less rather than more of the planet's agricultural resources three times a day, each vegetarian definitely contributes to positive environmental change.

Moreover, those who, for ecological reasons, choose to recycle glass, plastic, and paper, use public transportation or a bicycle instead of commuting alone by car, or who choose to install more energy efficient devices in their homes, should be just as sympathetic to this argument for vegetarianism. If one is motivated to take steps to decrease the amount of garbage one generates or the harmful emissions of one's car, then it is only consistent to make dietary choices that reflect a desire to decrease the amount of energy, pollution, and agricultural resources required to eat. If a person sees the value of healthy ecosystems and feels the urgency to preserve them, then integrity of character would also dictate making the appropriate choices of what to consume. Human beings are just as dependent on the ecosystems they inhabit as nonhuman animals and plants are, and as fellow creations of evolution are no less natural organisms. This perspective can instill in us an attitude of proper humility toward the rest of nature. Such considerations have led one moral philosopher to advocate what he calls a morality without hubris.<sup>108</sup> Mature human adults can also reflect on the ethics of their diet, and they have the moral freedom and physiological ability to adapt their nutritional choices so as to exact a lighter

toll on the planet's renewable resources. To claim that "the meat eater symbolizes his sense of solidarity with the ecological cycles within which he locates the human race"<sup>109</sup> betrays an ignorance of the central location of the meat industry within the realm of ecological destruction.

### C. Patriarchy of Pork or Feminist Fuss?

When I explained Adams' views to one of my colleagues, he related to me a story about the dinner ritual of his wife's family in western Nebraska. There were a total of nine sons and seven daughters. The father (i.e. patriarch) would be seated in the middle of one long side of an 8 foot by 4 foot formica-covered dining table. To his left his sons would be seated clockwise around the table. After preparing the meal, his wife would sit to his right, with her daughters seated to her right, counter-clockwise around the table. In serving the meat, the father would always serve first himself and then his sons, going clockwise around the table. This would mean there would be either poorer choices of meat, or else no meat at all, left for the daughters. Often the daughters would have to have peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. But even when some meat remained for the daughters, there was usually no meat left for the mother, since she was invariably the last to be served.

Moreover, when I have discussed arguments for vegetarianism with my undergraduate students, my experience has consistently been that a significantly greater number of young women are receptive to vegetarianism than young men.<sup>110</sup> Admittedly, this is not a scientific survey with a sample guaranteed to be representative. Nevertheless, my colleague's story and my own experience, though anecdotal, do lend some support to Adams' argument.

Additional evidence can be gleaned from media advertising. Television commercials for steak sauces feature robust, hefty men announcing their zealous appetites for thick, juicy steaks. While the actress Cybil Shephard has done a few beef ads, women models selling steak or steak sauce are quite the exception. Consider the beef industry's familiar slogan, "Beef: real food for real people." The clear message here is that vegetarians are really Unpeople.

In contrast to Adams' Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics, Jack Weir has offered what he calls a sociocultural appeal to excuse (not justify) the eating of meat by Americans.<sup>111</sup> Like Adams, Weir takes the ubiquity of meat in our culture to be significant, yet he draws conclusions contrary to hers. The first two "sociocultural factors" which Weir says are "relevant," "although not idealistically unavoidable," are that "beliefs about animals are often religiously based and dogmatically implacable," and that "agribusiness is the most powerful and wealthy multinational industry and is unlikely to stop meat production."<sup>112</sup> Similar sociocultural appeals could be made by white supremacists that their beliefs about African-Americans are scientifically-based (on their own genetic theories) and dogmatically implacable, and by sexists that their beliefs about women are anthropologically-based on gender differences and dogmatically implacable. Moreover, to call the observation that "agribusiness is the most powerful and wealthy multinational

industry and is unlikely to stop meat production" a "factor" that makes vegetarianism nonobligatory is simply a veiled way of citing it as a reason for not giving up meat. This strikes me as analogous to citing the observation that the tobacco industry is a powerful and wealthy multinational industry and is unlikely to stop cigarette production as a reason for not giving up smoking. Weir concludes that "Because meat-eating is so deeply entrenched in our culture, moderation and reform are probably best . . . in our implacably carnivorous society."<sup>113</sup> I doubt Adams could be very receptive to this attempt at rationalization. On her analysis, she would probably interpret this to be saying, in effect, that "Because the oppression of women is so deeply entrenched in our culture, moderate sexism and reform of gender exclusive language are probably best . . . in our implacably patriarchal society."

However, some of Adams' assumptions are suspicious. Take for example her labeling of the ideas that "the end justifies the means," "objectification of other beings is a necessary part of life," and "violence can and should be masked" as "patriarchal attitudes." Gandhi and Martin Luther King were pacifists and were men, but surely that would not make pacifism a "patriarchal attitude." Some of the connections Adams tries to establish between meat-advocating discourse and patriarchal culture seem rather strained and somewhat far-fetched. If the Feminist Argument from Sexual Politics were the only argument for vegetarianism, it might not sway the hardened skeptic who could object that there is no logically necessary connection between meat eating and patriarchy. Yet Adams' argument does, I think, retain an interesting degree of plausibility in its own right, and it adds another rhetorical dimension to the cumulative case for vegetarianism.

### D. Concern for Animals or Sappy Sentimentalism?

First, one could reply to Singer and Regan that their arguments would not prohibit eating nonhuman animals that have been accidentally killed by automobiles on the highway (i.e., roadkill) or that have died "natural" deaths from old age. Steve Sapontzis writes:

. . . even if not morally objectionable, the prospect of our becoming scavengers in order to satisfy our lust for meat strikes me, at least, as bizarre. The prospect of our raising cattle, sheep, hogs, and other animals until they die of old age to satisfy that same lust seems almost equally bizarre. I know of no one who has become convinced of the moral obligation to liberate animals from human exploitation who has also retained such a craving for meat that he or she has resorted to or even seriously contemplated either of these two activities. . . . [E]xcept for the eating of (biological) animals that the eater feels confident are not sentient, vegetarianism is a consequence of animal liberation.<sup>114</sup>

These remarks strike me as correct.

Hud Hudson has argued that we must distinguish between the actual consumption of factory-farmed meat on the one hand, and directly supporting the factory-farming industry economically through the purchase of meat for oneself, or

through allowing meat to be purchased by another on one's behalf, or through one's purchase of meat wholly on another's behalf.<sup>115</sup> Hudson writes: ". . . even if we accepted Regan's argument, we have no *moral* reason to regard the *eating* of some portion of a factory-farmed animal, which has fallen off a carelessly driven delivery truck and into our hands, never to be paid for and never to be missed during inventory, as morally impermissible."<sup>116</sup> This raises the question of 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. What would it indicate about the character of a person who wore items with this kind of morally problematic history? Perhaps a compassionate person would feel moral discomfort, or even revulsion, enjoying something made possible only by the suffering of another. Even though enjoying the carelessly-driven delivery truck meat would not be causally linked to *economically* supporting the factory-farming system that produced it, since no human being ever paid money for it, I suggest that a person sympathetic to the Argument from Moral Consideration for Animals would feel morally tainted deriving pleasure from eating a portion of an animal that paid for that pleasant consumption with its own pain, suffering, and sentient life.

A common criticism of the utilitarian argument for vegetarianism is that as long as farm animals experience a greater balance of pleasure over pain while they exist, then breeding them into existence, treating them on balance decently, and then killing and eating them to increase the gustatory utility of meat eaters, yields greater net utility than a vegetarian world devoid of all farm animals.<sup>117</sup> One could object that this argument fails to include the loss of utility that would have accrued from the balance of the farm animals' lives had they not been slaughtered. Yet this objection can be countered by the "replaceability argument" discussed by Singer. If one is sympathetic to Regan's view that animals have *inherent* value, then one can reject the very idea that animal lives are "replaceable" at all. Here I do find Regan's position more appealing than Singer's since it strikes me as wrong to view animals as our resources to create, manipulate, slaughter, consume, and replace in the name of maximizing the utility of the class of sentient beings. Perhaps a better criticism of the replaceability argument is that it fails to factor in the number of wild animals that could come into existence on their own once we stopped breeding so many domesticated farm animals into existence. Given the fact that farm animals today are the product of dozens of years of selective breeding by humans, these animals are sentient artifacts that humans have manufactured for illegitimate purposes. That is why at this point I would part company with Regan and maintain that battery chickens and grain-fed steers have less inherent value than bald eagles and grizzly bears.<sup>118</sup>

Moreover, I am suspicious of Frederick Ferré's inference that having respect for inherent value means benevolently bringing into existence as many bearers of inherent value as is compatible with their collective well being.<sup>119</sup> Respect for

beings with inherent value could well mean treating benevolently all existing beings with inherent value, rather than creating new ones. For example, I think we have an obligation to care for the many *existing* human babies, not to create *more* babies who *might* have pleasant lives. Given the enormous problems of human overpopulation, I contend that today we have an obligation to reduce the current misery of existing humans (and other sentient beings). Yet I think we have no obligation to create new humans who might experience pleasant lives in the future, since their existence would probably further compound the problems of human overpopulation.<sup>120</sup>

Another persistent criticism of the utilitarian argument is that a compassionate person can be more effective adopting any number of other tactics designed to reduce the suffering of factory-farmed animals without becoming a vegetarian.<sup>121</sup> Hudson has responded to this skepticism about the market impact an individual vegetarian has on the leviathan meat industry by developing an argument for vegetarianism which appeals to collective responsibility. Hudson asserts that:

. . . certain individuals, by virtue of their membership in a loosely-structured group, are at least partially morally responsible for not collectively preventing certain harms by committing themselves to modified, moral (conditional) vegetarianism along with other members of that group, even though none of the individuals could have prevented the harm by acting independently.<sup>122</sup>

Hudson reasons that since the collective inactivity of the group of nonvegetarians contributes to the demand for factory-farmed meat, the members of this group are collectively causally implicated in a morally-aborrent chain of events, and in order to extricate themselves from that chain, members of this group have reason to, and are morally obligated to, abstain from purchasing factory-farmed products, and to the extent that this affects their eating habits, act as if eating meat with that sort of history is in itself a moral wrong.<sup>123</sup> Hudson's argument grounds the wrong of the meat industry in the harm done to the sentient animals. But if his appeal to collective responsibility is legitimate, then as we have seen in this paper the "loosely-structured group" of nonvegetarians is also partially morally responsible for not collectively preventing harm to poor famine victims in developing nations, harm to the environment, and harm to oppressed women in our patriarchal culture. Just as it seems plausible to think that we are collectively responsible for the suffering of factory-farmed animals, it seems equally plausible to think we are collectively responsible for world hunger, ecological diversity and preservation, and hierarchical, oppressive institutions of all kinds.

Many other objections to the Argument from Moral Consideration for Animals, including the "replacement argument," have been made by R. G. Frey<sup>124</sup> and, in my view, fairly refuted by S. F. Sapontzis,<sup>125</sup> so I will not rehearse them here. Instead I wish to focus on the virtue of compassion. As Hume observed long ago, compassion and sympathy actually move people to act much more than carefully constructed

pieces of philosophical reasoning which hinge upon contentious interpretations of theoretical principles. I suggest that compassionate persons who had to breed, raise, and slaughter by their own hands the animals they would eat would be greatly disinclined to do so. The anguished cries, terrified struggles, and spurting blood of the farm animals would no doubt deter many people from cutting off the animals' heads in order to make a meal of them. The gory, visceral experience of slaughtering a breathing, feeling animal may trigger the sensitive person's latent compassionate impulse enough to make the prospect of a fleshy meal quite unappetizing. The suggestion here is that if a person would be unwilling to perform the labor necessary for producing an item she wants to have (or consume), then that realization should deter the person from having (or consuming) that item even when it is produced by the labor of another. I take it that we have a strong intuition that just as it would be wrong to murder an innocent person, it would also be wrong to hire a hitman to murder an innocent person. Thus, if we would have moral qualms about slaughtering a helpless sentient animal, even one bred into existence for that purpose, then consistency would require that we extend those moral qualms to, in effect, hiring workers in abattoirs to kill sentient animals.

Here my critic could reply that this argument would force me to do without shoes, my automobile, and the housing material manufactured for the construction of my home since I would not enjoy producing such things myself (assuming I had the required skills). But this objection fails because I *would* be willing to manufacture my own shoes precisely because I would *not* be morally repelled from performing the labors needed to do so. My critic may then reply that those who feel no such moral repulsion in slaughtering nonhuman animals have no moral compulsion to be vegetarians. But if this is the case, then I suggest that we have *prima facie* grounds for doubting the depth of compassion those people have for the following reason. We can and do fault racists for having little or no compassion for members of other races. We can and do fault sexists for having little or no compassion for members of the other sex. A virtuous person will have and will show compassion to Africans, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, AmerInds, Caucasians, females, and males alike. Similarly, a person possessed of the virtue of integrity will have compassion for the living, breathing, feeling animals who are bred into existence, raised and made to suffer in unpleasant conditions, and slaughtered as cheaply, not as humanely, as possible, all for the sole purpose of satisfying the luxurious preference for the taste of their flesh.

#### E. Prudential Health or Dietary Delusion?

A criticism that has been leveled at all moral arguments for vegetarianism is that while it may be ethically "pure" or "ideal" to abstain from meat, we can have no general duty to become vegetarians because meat is necessary for a healthful diet. Jack Weir has argued that abstaining from meat is at best supererogatory and at worst dangerous to one's health, and Steve Sapontzis has offered a critical response to Weir.<sup>126</sup> A more protracted exchange has ensued between Kathryn Paxton

George and Evelyn Pluhar, with Gary E. Varner joining the fray.<sup>127</sup> It seems to me that Sapontzis and Pluhar have had the better of these exchanges. Worries about deficiencies from strict vegan diets have ranged from protein, calcium, and iron to zinc and riboflavin. The majority of nutritionists seem to agree that vegans can amply satisfy their needs for these nutrients by eating a variety of grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits.<sup>128</sup> B<sup>12</sup> (cobalamin or cyanocobalamin) is the only vitamin which strict vegetarians may not be able to obtain from a balanced plant diet, but only 1 mcg of this vitamin is needed per day, and it can be stored in the body for days at a time. Some packaged food, particularly breakfast cereals, are enriched with B<sup>12</sup>, health food stores carry vegetarian B<sup>12</sup> supplements, usually made from algae, and nearly all common multivitamin tablets also contain B<sup>12</sup>.<sup>129</sup> Finally, George's worries about detrimental effects of a vegan diet on pregnant and lactating women and on children appear to be misplaced. The Preventive Medicine Research Institute is convinced that "Plant-based diets provide a good balance of nutrients to support a healthy pregnancy and are superior to diets containing milk or other animal products."<sup>130</sup> Barnard and his associates hold that "A vegan menu is preferred for nursing women, too. A plant-based diet reduces levels of environmental contaminants in breast milk, compared to that of meat eaters."<sup>131</sup> Barnard and his associates also maintain that "The New Four Food Groups are great for kids. Vegetarian children grow up to be slimmer and healthier, and to live longer than their meat-eating friends."<sup>132</sup>

While it is true that the specific dietary needs of individuals vary, and that some people are allergic to some plant foods, no one has yet established that even a strict vegan diet cannot be adapted to fulfill each person's dietary needs. Carol Adams' claim that anthropological evidence suggests that humans have predominantly been vegetarians has been confirmed by other authors: "Studies of tribal Australian aborigines and the Kung-San of South Africa—groups that live under conditions similar to those of our ancestors—show that only about one fourth of their caloric intake derives from animal products. Nuts, seeds, fruits, and vegetables are the staple foods of these groups. A view of early humans as *gatherers* rather than hunters is a more accurate portrayal."<sup>133</sup>

#### IV. Conclusion

A final, more global counterargument could be constructed as a *reductio ad absurdum*. It would run like this. If we adopt vegetarianism to help feed the hungry, preserve the environment, resist sexist oppression, save sentient animals, and be kind to our colons, then we'll be led to give up more and more of our enjoyments out of guilt that we're doing harm. We'll quit our academic jobs to join UNICEF or the Peace Corps in order to work full time helping to end starvation. We'll get rid of our cars, eschew all use of fossil fuels and nuclear energy, build environmentally-friendly, efficient homes to live in, and tend organic gardens to live on. We'll revolt against all patriarchal institutions, razing all oppressive bodies to the ground, and

building new, truly egalitarian, truly gender-neutral, non-exploitative societies in their place. We'll eliminate all animal products, including all those used in cosmetics, clothing, food, fuel, building materials, and even baseball mitts. Finally, we'll wear sealed masks and body suits that protect us from all airborne viruses, bacteria, and disease-carrying substances, breathing only filtered oxygen from respirators, drinking only purified distilled water, and eating only organically grown, irradiated plant-food, free of all toxic residue. Thus, according to this argument, if we judge that eating factory-farmed meat is so problematic that we opt for vegetarianism, then consistency will force us to give up our jobs, our cars, our homes, our relationships, and virtually our entire way of life, all in order to strive to achieve an utterly innocuous, totally benign existence. An utterly innocuous, totally benign existence is impossible for human beings in this world, and so striving for such an existence would be futile. Therefore, accepting the five grounds for vegetarianism presented here commits one to a life of complete futility.

This attempted *reductio* contains a disguised false dilemma. The assumption underlying this objection is that either one must do *everything possible* to produce beneficial results, or else one should do nothing at all to produce beneficial results (and so one may eat as one pleases). The choice is not between being a moral saint (cum-health fanatic) and being a heartless egoist. I do not think that people who have deliberately chosen to become vegetarians are moral saints. But I do think that receptiveness to the first four arguments is linked to the character trait of compassion.<sup>134</sup> I suggest that the five different arguments for abstaining from intensively raised, grain-fed birds and mammals constitute reasons for vegetarianism that are at least as strong as the reasons for many daily actions that are routinely accepted by most people. My conclusion is that this cumulative case for vegetarianism succeeds in establishing that vegetarianism is, in at least five different respects, a virtuous dietary commitment. If I am correct, then this shifts the burden of proof to meat eaters who believe their dietary choice is without moral taint.<sup>135</sup>

What motivates the objections to adopting a vegetarian diet? What inclines consumers of affluent, industrial nations to continue to eat meat despite familiarity with criticisms of it? The inertia of habit,<sup>136</sup> the custom of food choices and learned preferences passed down by our parents from their parents, ubiquitous cultural conditioning, and nutritional ignorance are all formidable forces that resist philosophical argument. As Cato said, "It is a difficult task, O citizens, to make speeches to the belly which has no ears."<sup>137</sup> But even if we do slowly modify our eating habits over time, gradually eating less and less meat, where do we stop after giving up meat? I leave that question open for future discussion. Here I conclude by suggesting that given the various virtues of vegetarianism I have discussed, working toward a meatless diet is a worthy endeavor for a person who values compassion, humility, and integrity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I thank Randolph Feezell and Peter Singer for their generous, helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> For a singularly unpersuasive argument that one is morally required both to abstain from the flesh of intensively-raised animals and to eat the flesh of certain non-intensively raised animals, see Roger Crisp, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4 (Spring 1988): 41-47. Peter Singer pointed out to me that sheep are typically not raised intensively in feedlots, but that since intensively raised egg-laying hens are kept in miserable conditions, their eggs ought to be boycotted.

<sup>3</sup> For two discussions of cannibalism see Frederick Ferré, "Moderation, Morals, and Meat," *Inquiry* 29 (December 1986): 391-406, especially 403-4, and William B. Irvine, "Cannibalism, Vegetarianism, and Narcissism," *Between the Species* 5 (Winter 1989): 11-17.

<sup>4</sup> A sixth argument could be constructed which appeals to one or more religious frameworks. Considerations of spiritual purity by not polluting one's body through the consumption of corpses (e.g. Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Animal Food*), or simple asceticism, or reincarnation of (human?) souls into nonhuman animal bodies might be raised. But given the metaphysical difficulties with establishing such religious claims, I'll concentrate on the other five acceptably secular arguments.

<sup>5</sup> Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet for a Small Planet*, 10th ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, rev. ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 164-66. Singer's source is Lappé.

<sup>7</sup> James Rachels, "Vegetarianism and 'The Other Weight Problem,'" *World Hunger and Moral Obligation*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollete (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 180-93.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen R. L. Clark, *The Moral Status of Animals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 52. Clark writes: "If there were no obligations owed the nonhuman at all, it would still be cruelty and injustice to rob our fellow men of food in order to pander to our corrupted palates."

<sup>9</sup> Mary Midgley cites Singer when she writes: ". . . the most striking reasons for not eating meat are now those concerned with human welfare. It is enormously extravagant to use grains, beans, pulses and so forth for animal food, and then eat the animals, rather than letting human beings eat the grains, etc., right away. In the present food shortage, and still more in the sharper ones which threaten us, human interests demand most strongly that this kind of waste should be stopped" *Animals and Why They Matter* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 27.

<sup>10</sup> Jack Weir, in "Unnecessary Pain, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism," *Between the Species* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 13-26, mentions that "being a vegetarian is good because it . . . strikes a blow against capitalistic injustices" (25); Hud Hudson, in "Collective Responsibility and Moral Vegetarianism" *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 24 no. 2 (Fall 1993): 89-104, mentions that "the moral variety of vegetarianism can arise from . . . a concern for human welfare" (90).

<sup>11</sup> Lappé, 69-70.

<sup>12</sup> Alan B. Durning and Holly B. Brough, "Taking Stock: Animal Farming and the Environment," *Worldwatch Paper* 103 (1991): 14.

<sup>13</sup> One may have the further obligation to exert political pressure on one's federal government in order to make food production and distribution globally more just.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef* (New York: Dutton, 1992), 282.

<sup>15</sup> Durning and Brough, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Rifkin, 183-230.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Singer, "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1980): 334; Weir, 21; Hudson, 90.

<sup>18</sup> Durning and Brough, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Rifkin, 221.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 203, quoting Alan B. Durning, "Cost of Beef for Health and Habitat," *Los Angeles Times* (September 21, 1986), V3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-99.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 218-21.

<sup>25</sup> Durning and Brough, 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Rifkin, 200.

<sup>28</sup> Durning and Brough, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Rifkin, 206.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-7.

<sup>31</sup> Durning and Brough, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Rifkin, 223-30.

<sup>33</sup> Durning and Brough, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Lappé, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Durning and Brough, 15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum, 1990).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 14; her emphasis.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, citing Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a nineteenth-century feminist.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Adams mistakenly says the word is *venetus*, which actually means sea-blue (as the color of one of the circus factions), instead of *venatus*, meaning a hunt or animals caught in hunting, i.e., game. See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P.G.W. Glare, Fascicle V (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 2028, 2026 respectively.

<sup>47</sup> Adams, 74.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, citing Lisa Leghorn and Mary Roodkowsky, *Who Really Starves? Women and World Hunger* (New York: Friendship Press, 1977).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-29.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>60</sup> Adams describes a photograph entitled "Ursula Hamdress" as follows: "A healthy sexual being poses near her drink: she wears bikini panties only and luxuriates on a large chair with her head rested seductively on an elegant lace doily. Her inviting drink with a twist of lemon awaits on the table. Her eyes are closed; her facial expression beams pleasure, relaxation, enticement. She is touching her crotch in an attentive, masturbatory action. Anatomy of seduction: sex object, drink, inviting room, sexual activity. The formula is complete. But a woman does not beckon. A pig does. 'Ursula Hamdress' appeared in *Playboar*, a magazine described by critics as 'the pig farmer's *Playboy*'" (39).

<sup>61</sup> Adams explains how in the same month she described Ursula Hamdress at Princeton's Graduate Women's Studies Conference: "Feminism and Its Translations," less than 60 miles away three surviving women were found chained in the basement of Gary Heidnik's house in Philadelphia. The remains of a fourth woman were discovered in the oven, in a stewpot on the stove, and in the refrigerator. Heidnik had repeatedly raped this woman before killing and dismembering her, and feeding her arms and legs to the three captive women. Adams concludes that "Ursula Hamdress and the women raped, butchered, and eaten under Heidnik's directions are linked by an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and the fragmentation and dismemberment of nature and the body in Western culture" (40).

<sup>62</sup> Adams, 43. She explains that ". . . in images of animal slaughter, erotic overtones suggest that women are the absent referent. If animals are the absent referent in the phrase 'the butchering of women,' women are the absent referent in the phrase 'the rape of animals.' The impact of a seductive pig relies on an absent but imaginable, seductive, fleshy woman. Ursula Hamdress is both metaphor and joke; her jarring (or jocular) effect is based on the fact that we are all accustomed to seeing women depicted in such a way. Ursula's image refers to something that is absent: the human female body. The structure of the absent referent in patriarchal culture strengthens individual oppressions by always recalling other oppressed groups."

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. In "Unnecessary Pain, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism," Jack Weir opines exactly the contrary: "So far, vegetarianism largely has been parasitic upon meat-eating cultures" (18).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> Adams writes: "Meat is king: this noun describing meat is a noun denoting male power. Vegetables, a generic term meat eaters use for all foods that are not meat, have become as associated with women as meat is with men, recalling on a subconscious level the days of Woman the Gatherer. Since women have been made subsidiary in a male-dominated, meat-eating world, so has our food. The foods associated with second-class citizens are considered to be second-class protein. Just as it is thought a woman cannot make it on her own, so we think that vegetables cannot make a meal on their own, despite the fact that meat is only secondhand vegetables and vegetables provide, on the average, more than twice the vitamins and minerals of meat. Meat is upheld as a powerful, irreplaceable item of food. The message is clear: the vassal vegetable should content itself with its assigned place and not attempt to dethrone king meat. After all, how can one enthrone women's foods when women cannot be kings?" (33-34).

<sup>80</sup> Bart Gruzalski, "The Case Against Raising and Killing Animals for Food," *Ethics and Animals*, ed. Harlan B. Miller and William H. Williams (Clifton, NJ: Humana Press, 1983); 251-63; S. F. Sapontzis, "Animal Liberation and Vegetarianism," *Journal of Agricultural Ethics* 1, no. 2 (1988): 139-53.

<sup>81</sup> Reconstructed from Singer.

<sup>82</sup> Reconstructed from "The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (October 1975): 181-214, and Regan.

<sup>83</sup> Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 243.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>85</sup> "To treat farm animals as renewable resources is to fail to treat them with the respect they are due as possessors of inherent value" (*ibid.*, 345).

<sup>86</sup> As Regan emphasizes: "The totem of utilitarian theory (summing consequences for all those affected by the outcome) is the taboo of the rights view" (*ibid.*, 337).

<sup>87</sup> Peter Singer mentioned "the possible reduction a vegetarian diet would bring in human suffering from heart disease and cancer of the stomach and colon" long ago in "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1980): 334.

<sup>88</sup> John Robbins, *Diet for a New America* (Walpole, NH: Stillpoint, 1987), 154.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-55.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-58.

<sup>93</sup> Vegetarian athletes include: Dave Scott (winner of Hawai'i's Ironman Triathlon a record four times); Sixto Linares (world record holder for the one day triathlon); Robert Sweetgall (the world's

premier ultra-distance walker); Edwin Moses (the famous Olympic Gold Medalist 400-meter hurdler); Paavo Nurmi (the "Flying Finn" who set 20 world records in distance running); Bill Pickering (the world record holder for swimming the English and Bristol Channels); Murray Rose (the Olympic Gold Medalist freestyle swimmer); James and Jonathan deDonato (the joint world record holders for distance butterfly stroke); championship bodybuilders Andreas Cahling, Stan Price, and Roy Hilligan; Pierreo Verot (the world record holder for downhill endurance skiing); Estelle and Cheryl Marek (the world record holders for cross-country tandem cycling); Ridgley Abele (the recent United States Karate Association World Champion); and Marine Captain Alan Jones of Quantico, Virginia (who has accomplished possibly the most remarkable array of physical achievements ever attained) (*ibid.*, 158-162).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-273.

<sup>95</sup> Evelyn Pluhar, "Who Can be Morally Obligated to Be a Vegetarian?" *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 5, no. 2 (1992): 206-7.

<sup>96</sup> Robbins, 258-60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>98</sup> Steven F. Sapontzis, "Reply to Weir: Unnecessary Fear, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism," *Between the Species* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 30; Sapontzis cites the president of the Medical Students Association at Stanford University.

<sup>99</sup> Robbins, 283-84.

<sup>100</sup> Neal Barnard, M.D., in *Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993), argues that for optimal health, increased vitality, and life expectancy, one's diet should be composed of the new four food groups: grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits.

<sup>101</sup> "Position of the American Dietetic Association: Vegetarian Diets," *The Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 3 (1988): 351-55; quoted by Pluhar, 204.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Thomas E. Hill, "Symbolic Protest and Calculated Science," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 9 (1979): 83-102.

<sup>103</sup> Durning and Brough, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Singer, *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 334.

<sup>105</sup> Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 164.

<sup>106</sup> Peter S. Wenz, "An Ecological Argument for Vegetarianism," *Ethics and Animals* 5 (March 1984): 2-9.

<sup>107</sup> In *50 Simple Things You Can Do to Save the Earth* (1989) the Earthworks Group, citing John Robbins' *Diet for a New America*, advises that we should "eat low on the food chain," "cut down on the amount of beef you eat," try edible gardening, and "support local 'farmers' markets'" (90-91).

<sup>108</sup> James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 180-85; see also *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>109</sup> Ferré, 401.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Singer has also reported to me that the memberships of animal welfare/rights organizations have significantly greater majorities of women than men.

<sup>111</sup> Weir, 13-26, and "Response" (to Sapontzis), 33-35. Weir writes: "My argument is that nutritional factors—our biology—plus sociocultural factors make the vegetarian diet nonobligatory" (33).

<sup>112</sup> Weir, 24.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>114</sup> S. F. Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 206-7.

<sup>115</sup> Hudson, 92.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*; his emphasis

<sup>117</sup> Frederick Ferré, in "Moderation, Morals, and Meat," writes that: ". . . if conditions for farm animals are good, so that the net balance of the life experience of the typical animal being raised is positive, then it is morally licit to support such practices, even if they lead to the 'premature' deaths . . . of the animals in question. Having respect for inherent value means, among other things, taking a benevolent attitude toward the bringing into existence of as many bearers of inherent value as is reasonably compatible with their collective well being. If people did not eat meat, many fewer bearers of inherent value would be in the world. Therefore under ideal farming conditions, the eating of meat makes possible a larger net good than its opposite" (399; his emphasis).

Jack Weir, in "Unnecessary Pain, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism," repeats this idea: "But, if no one ate meat, then billions of animals would not exist and would not experience any pleasure. Most food animals could not survive in the wild, and society surely would not pay for their food and veterinary costs. . . . The animals would not exist and would not enjoy any life if they were not to be eaten" (21).

<sup>118</sup> Explanations of the shortcomings of these one-sided utilitarian calculations have been offered by S. F. Sapontzis, "Animal Liberation and Vegetarianism," *Journal of Agricultural Ethics* 1, no. 2 (1988): 139-53.

<sup>119</sup> Ferré, 399.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Singer's discussion of the total view vs. the prior existence view in *Practical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press), 105-9.

<sup>121</sup> Hudson attributes this view to R. G. Frey, (Hudson, 93-94).

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-97.

<sup>124</sup> R. G. Frey, *Rights, Killing, and Suffering: Moral Vegetarianism and Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>125</sup> Sapontzis, *Morals, Reason, and Animals*.

<sup>126</sup> Weir, 13-26; Sapontzis, "Reply to Weir: Unnecessary Fear, Nutrition, and Vegetarianism," 27-32; Weir, "Response," 33-5.

<sup>127</sup> Kathryn Paxton George, "So Animal a Human . . . , or the Moral Relevance of Being an Omnivore," *Journal of Agricultural Ethics* 3, no. 2 (1990): 172-86; Pluhar, "Who Can be Morally Obligated to Be a Vegetarian," 189-215; George, "The Use and Abuse of Scientific Studies," *JAEE* 5, no. 2 (1992): 217-33; Pluhar, "On Vegetarianism, Morality, and Science: A Counter Reply," *JAEE* 6, no. 2 (1993): 185-213; Varner, "What's Wrong with Animal By-products?" 7-17; George, "Discrimination and Bias in the Vegan Ideal," 19-28; Varner, "In Defence of the Vegan Ideal: Rhetoric and Bias in the Nutrition Literature," 29-40; George, "Use and Abuse Revisited: Response to Pluhar and Varner," 41-76; Pluhar, "Vegetarianism, Morality, and Science Revisited," 77-82; Varner, "Rejoinder to Kathryn Paxton George," 83-86; *JAEE* 7, no. 1 (1994).

<sup>128</sup> See for example Barnard, 155-56.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-57.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>133</sup> Paul R. Amato and Sonia Partridge, *The New Vegetarians: Promoting Health and Protecting Life* (New York: Plenum Press, 1989), 2; they give as their source Gretel H. Pelto and Pertti J. Pelto, *The Human Adventure* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 203-4.

<sup>134</sup> My appeal to the virtue of compassion is inspired by Richard Taylor, *Good and Evil: A New Direction* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 205-22.

<sup>135</sup> Hudson offers a separate argument from collective responsibility that adopting and acting upon "modified moral conditional vegetarianism" is a candidate for being a necessary, or at least sufficient, means of "removing the moral taint which pollutes one's character by virtue of one's membership in, say, the group of non-vegetarian, consumers of factory-farmed products" (101).

<sup>136</sup> Stephen R. L. Clark writes: "We continue to eat flesh from habit, and because our palates are conditioned to an ample supply of animal corpses" (*The Moral Status of Animals*, 52).

<sup>137</sup> Quoted by Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 13.