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Against Eating Humanely-Raised Meat: Revisiting Fred’s Basement¹

Abstract: In “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases,” Alastair Norcross uses a thought experiment he calls “Fred’s Basement” to argue that consuming factory-farmed meat is morally equivalent to torturing and killing puppies to enjoy the taste of chocolate. Thus, he concludes that consuming *factory-farmed* meat is morally wrong. Although Norcross leaves open the possibility that consuming *humanely-raised* meat is permissible, I contend that his basic argumentative approach rules it out. In this paper, then, I extend Norcross’ thought experiment in hopes of convincing readers that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally wrong.

Keywords: animals, factory-farmed meat, humanely-raised meat, utilitarianism, virtue ethics

1. Introduction

In “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases,” Alastair Norcross uses a thought experiment he calls “Fred’s Basement” to argue that buying and eating (or what I’ll call “consuming”) *factory-farmed* meat is morally wrong. Most of Norcross’ readers, myself included, find his argument compelling. In fact, some go even further than Norcross and conclude that all meat-eating is morally wrong. Others, however, resist this stronger conclusion. Although Norcross leaves open the possibility that consuming *humanely-raised* meat is permissible, I contend that his basic argumentative approach rules it out. In this paper, then, I extend Norcross’ thought experiment in hopes of convincing readers that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally wrong.

¹ Many thanks to [removed for blind review] for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper as well as to audiences at [removed for blind review] whose comments and questions have resulted in numerous improvements to the paper.

2.1 Fred's Basement

In Norcross' thought experiment, a man named Fred is in a car accident that irreparably damages his godiva gland. As a result, his brain stops producing cocoamone, the hormone that enables humans to enjoy the taste of chocolate. So, if Fred is going to enjoy the taste of chocolate ever again, he needs hormone replacement therapy. The problem is that there isn't an easy way for him to get cocoamone. It can't be extracted from the brains of humans, and the only other way to produce it is to torture puppies. But since no companies have been willing to get into the puppy-torturing business, Fred must torture puppies himself. Undeterred, Fred's does some research, which suggests that that for every puppy he locks up in a small cage, mutilates without anesthetic, and then brutally slaughters at the age of six-months, he can harvest enough cocoamone to last him one week. Thus, Fred sets up twenty-six cages in his basement and gets to work.

After a while, however, his puppy-torturing operation is discovered by his neighbors who report him to the authorities. Fred is denounced as a vile sadist and put on trial. Although we don't find out whether Fred is convicted of animal cruelty, the reader can't help but think that he should be.²

2.2 Norcross' Argument

Norcross uses this thought experiment to argue that it is morally wrong to consume factory-farmed meat. One way of reconstructing his argument is as follows:

- (N1) Fred's behavior is morally wrong.
- (N2) Consuming factory-farmed meat is morally equivalent to Fred's behavior.
- (N3) Therefore, consuming factory-farmed meat is morally wrong.

² Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," pp. 229-230.

The crucial premise in Norcross' argument is (N2), the claim that consuming factory-farmed meat is morally equivalent to Fred's behavior. While this premise may initially seem false, it's surprisingly difficult to refute. Despite there being numerous differences between Fred's behavior and the behavior of those who consume factory-farmed meat, none of those differences seems to be morally relevant.

For example, one might try to deny (N2) by claiming that whereas Fred does not need cocaine to be healthy, those who consume factory-farmed meat *do* need it to be healthy. As Norcross points out, however, few, if any people would suffer ill health from going vegetarian.³

Alternatively, one might try to deny (N2) by claiming that whereas Fred tortures animals, those who consume factory-farmed meat merely *buy and eat* them. Here, Norcross responds by pointing out that we wouldn't think any better of Fred if he had paid someone else to torture puppies for him.⁴

One might try to deny (N2) by claiming that whereas Fred knows that he is causing animal suffering, those who consume factory-farmed meat *do not* know that they are supporting it. In response to this objection, Norcross admits that this argument may work in defense of some people's behavior, but he notes that it does not work in defense of his readers' behavior since they are now aware that consuming factory-farmed meat supports animal suffering.⁵

Finally, one might try to deny (N2) by claiming that whereas Fred supports the suffering of puppies, those who consume factory-farmed meat support the suffering of *farm animals*. The

³ Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," p. 231.

⁴ Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," p. 231.

⁵ Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," p. 231.

problem with this objection, however, is that we wouldn't think any better of Fred if he had selected especially unintelligent puppies for use in his puppy-torturing operation.⁶

Although I have not given an exhaustive list of objections to (N2), I have touched on the most common ones in hopes that my reader might feel the force of Norcross' analogy and his argument more generally.⁷ In my experience, most readers find this argument against consuming factory-farmed meat compelling. If Fred must choose between torturing puppies and forgoing the gustatory pleasure of chocolate, then he must forgo the gustatory pleasure of chocolate. Accordingly, if one must choose between supporting the torture of farm animals and forgoing the gustatory pleasure of meat, one must forgo the gustatory pleasure of meat.

But most of Norcross' readers, however, needn't choose between supporting the torture of farm animals and forgoing the gustatory pleasure of meat. There's a middle way. They can consume humanely-raised meat. The purpose of this paper, then, is to consider whether it is morally permissible to consume humanely-raised meat, and to do this, I'll extend Norcross' thought experiment.

3.1 Revisiting Fred's Basement

Norcross' thought experiment ends with the jury deliberating over whether to convict Fred of animal abuse. Let's assume that they do. Fred serves his time and is eventually released. He puts his puppy-torturing days behind him, marries, and has a child, Frederick, who they nickname "Freddy."

⁶ Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," p. 235.

⁷ For those who are interested in a more thorough discussion of some other objections to Norcross' analogy, I would strongly encourage them to read the entirety of Norcross' paper.

Time passes, and the medical community learns that Fred's condition is not nearly as rare as they thought it was. Given the frequency of car accidents and the popularity of sports like American football, boxing, hockey, and mixed martial arts, gustatory neurologists discover many others whose godiva glands have been irreparably damaged and, therefore, need cocoamone to enjoy the taste of chocolate. Accordingly, a number of cocoamone-producing companies have sprung up to meet the demand.

Moreover, these companies have found that since it's puppy pain that produces cocoamone, it's perfectly possible for them to produce it without *torturing* puppies. It takes three times longer, let's say, but it's possible. Since these companies are committed to maximizing profits, however, they continue torturing puppies even though they don't need to. They realize, of course, that they would probably go out of business if people knew that they were torturing puppies, so they have lobbied effectively to keep their production methods hidden from public view.

It is in this context that Fred and his wife retire to Florida, leaving their old house to their son, Freddy. While re-painting the exterior of the house, Freddy slips off his ladder, falls to the ground, and hits his head. His neighbors witness the fall and call 911. An ambulance arrives and rushes Freddy to the hospital. Although otherwise fine, Freddy learns that he has ruptured his godiva gland and will therefore need cocoamone replacement therapy to enjoy the taste of chocolate.

While most people in Freddy's position would simply buy cocoamone from one of the leading cocoamone-producing companies, Freddy knows how they treat their puppies and decides that since he wouldn't keep puppies locked up in cages for six months, mutilate them without anesthetic, or brutally slaughter them, he won't pay someone else to do it for him. At the same time, however, Freddy is unwilling to forego enjoying the taste of chocolate ever again. Instead, he

resolves to raise his own puppies. Not only will he not torture them, but he'll treat them as well as, if not better than any dog-lover would.

Since humanely-raised puppies must live about eighteen months in order to suffer enough pain to produce enough cocoamone to last a week, Freddy would need to keep seventy-eight puppies at a time to have a constant supply of cocoamone. But given the enormous financial cost of caring for so many puppies, Freddy decides to limit his chocolate consumption to one week out of each month. That way, he only needs to keep eighteen puppies at a time, reducing his costs to the point at which they are roughly equivalent to what he would have to pay cocoamone-producing companies to keep him stocked with cocoamone all year long.

After designing and building a puppy park in his backyard with plenty of space for his puppies to roam around and engage in their natural behaviors, Freddy buys his first puppy, Bella. The next month he buys Charlie, and the next month he buys Lucy, etc. He feeds his puppies premium dog food and provides them with excellent veterinary care. He plays with them daily and knows them by name. By any metric, Freddy's puppies are flourishing.

Eighteen months later, Freddy prepares to slaughter his first puppy, Bella. The night before, he spends some extra time with her, thanking her for her good work and service.⁸ Then, the next morning, he takes Bella into his basement. After giving her one last belly-rub, Freddy shoots Bella between the eyes, hangs her by her hind legs, and slits her throat to let her bleed it out. Once Bella dies, he extracts the cocoamone from her brain and packages it for use later that month. The following month, Freddy "processes" Charlie the same way, then Lucy, etc. After slaughtering a handful of puppies this way, however, it occurs to Freddy that he could stun his puppies (i.e., render his puppies unconscious) more safely and less expensively by using a captive bolt pistol, so he makes

⁸ This is what Katherine Dunn does the night before slaughtering her sheep. See Dunn, "Farm Confessional: What Butchering Your Animals Really Feels Like."

the change. Unfortunately, however, Freddy finds that this new stunning method is slightly less effective. Sometimes he has to shoot a puppy multiple times in order to stun it, and even when he is able to stun a puppy on the first shot, he finds it emotionally difficult to deliver such a powerful blow to the head of an animal he has lovingly nurtured over the last eighteen months.

As a result, Freddy tries a couple of alternative stunning methods. First, he tries hanging his puppies up by their hind legs and then using a pulley system to drag them through an electrified water-bath. Although he appreciates that this stunning method doesn't require him to shoot his puppies, he finds it just as difficult to watch his puppies thrash about upside down on their way to the water-bath as it was to shoot them in the head. Second, Freddy tries asphyxiating his puppies. This involves leading them into an air-tight chamber, shutting the door, and then pumping the chamber full of carbon dioxide to render them unconscious. Although Freddy can hear his puppies howl as the chamber fills with carbon dioxide, he finds this to be the least disturbing of his options and settles on it as his preferred method of stunning. He must, of course, still exsanguinate his puppies after stunning them, but he takes comfort in the fact that they are unconscious when he does so. End of story.

3.2 The Argument against Consuming Humanely-Raised Meat

This thought experiment suggests the following argument against consuming humanely-raised meat:

- (S1) Freddy's behavior is morally wrong.
- (S2) Consuming humanely-raised meat is morally equivalent to Freddy's behavior.
- (S3) Therefore, consuming humanely-raised meat is morally wrong.

In defense of (S1), note that even though we can unequivocally say that Freddy's treatment of his puppies, prior to their slaughter is humane, we cannot say the same for his slaughtering practices. If there is a humane way to kill puppies, it is to euthanize them using pentobarbital.⁹ Even that, however, is an inhumane way to treat young, healthy puppies unless maybe no one is willing to care for them or they pose a significant threat to others. But Freddy does not kill his puppies because no one is willing to care for them or because they pose a significant threat to others. Instead, he kills them for the cocaine in their brains. This is callous and, therefore, morally wrong.¹⁰

In defense of (S2), note that Freddy does everything he possibly could to ensure that his puppies lived good lives. It follows that he treats his puppies at least as well as, if not better than humanely-raised cattle, chickens, and pigs.¹¹ In fact, he even allows them to live significantly longer than their factory-farmed counterparts, a benefit that is only occasionally awarded to humanely-raised farm animals. And, in the end, he stuns and kills his puppies using the same methods used to stun and kill humanely-raised cattle, chicken, and pigs, respectively.

⁹ *The HSUS Euthanasia Reference Manual*, p. 75.

¹⁰ My defense of (S1) is a virtue ethical one. Freddy's behavior is morally wrong because it is callous, because callous behavior is vicious, and because vicious behavior is morally wrong. Accordingly, this defense of (S1) doesn't depend on the claim that animals have a right to life. Even if it's morally permissible to hunt animals for food, for example, my view still entails that Fred's behavior is morally wrong. Similarly, my defense of (S1) doesn't depend on the consequences of Fred's behavior. So, even if Fred's behavior produces more net happiness or more net expected happiness than his next best alternative, it is still morally wrong on my view.

¹¹ [Removed for blind review] have noted that "humanely-raised" farm animals are never or at least almost never treated as well as Freddy's puppies, the suggestion being that the argument against consuming "humanely-raised" meat is much easier than I have made it. That's a fair point. Nevertheless, my goal of my paper is to show that even if farm animals were treated as well as Freddy's puppies, it would still be morally wrong to consume their meat.

4.1. Freddy's behavior doesn't have health benefits.

The most natural way to attack my argument is to attack (S2), the claim that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally equivalent to Freddy's behavior. As was the case with (N2), this premise may initially seem false, but it is surprisingly difficult to refute. Although each of the objections raised against (N2) can also be raised against (S2), the problems with those objections remain. To illustrate that, let me briefly revisit one of the objections discussed earlier, the health objection.

The health objection to (N2) was that whereas Fred does not need cocoamone to be healthy, those who buy and eat factory-farmed meat *do* need it to be healthy, and the problem with that objection is that few, if any people would suffer ill health from going vegetarian. But maybe the point of the health objection isn't that those who consumes meat *need* meat to be healthy. Maybe the point is that such individuals consume meat for the sake of its health benefits and that whenever we do something for the sake of its health benefits, we act permissibly.

Imagine, for example, that researchers recently discovered that cocoamone significantly slows the spread of cancer. After learning this, Freddy's cousin Teddy, who has recently been diagnosed with cancer, buys a litter of puppies and raises them for cocoamone. After taking his first few doses of cocoamone, Teddy finds not only that the cocoamone has slowed the spread of his cancer but also that it has enhanced his experience of chocolate. In this case, I am willing to grant that it is morally permissible for Teddy to continue raising and then killing young, healthy puppies. provided that he kills them animals for the sake of a health benefit, not for the sake of the gustatory pleasure.

There is, however, an important difference between Teddy's situation and the situation of the typical person who consumes humanely-raised meat, namely, that Teddy has no comparable ways of getting the relevant health benefit (i.e., slowing the spread of his cancer). To make Teddy's situation analogous to the typical person who consumes humanely-raised meat, then, we would

have to imagine that a year or so after Teddy starts taking cocoamone, he learns that there are other ways for him to slow the spread of his cancer. For example, maybe he can slow the spread of his cancer by eating three servings of vegetables each day or, alternatively, by taking a drug called Impossible Cocoamone, which is made from plants and that, in addition to slowing the spread of cancer, also enhances one's experience of chocolate.¹²

In this case, it seems that Teddy is morally obligated to stop killing young, healthy puppies for cocoamone and to start eating more vegetables or to start taking Beyond Cocoamone. He can't continue killing young, healthy puppies for the rest of his life simply because he doesn't like the taste of vegetables or because he's hesitant to try Impossible Cocoamone. Even if Teddy can't afford Impossible Cocoamone and doesn't like the taste of vegetables, his interest in experiencing gustatory pleasure (and/or avoiding gustatory pain) doesn't trump the puppies' interest in not being killed prematurely. This is especially true given that there seem to be reliable ways to cultivate a taste for vegetables.¹³

In the end, even if it is sometimes morally permissible to kill young, healthy animals to get some health benefit, it is not morally permissible to kill young, healthy animals to get some health benefit when there are comparable alternatives that don't involve killing young, healthy animals.

¹² Thanks to [removed for blind review] for suggesting that I add a plant-based alternative like Impossible Cocoamone to Teddy's options.

¹³ According to Devina Wadhwa, Elizabeth D. Capaldi Phillips, and Lynn M. Wilkie, mere exposure to non-bitter vegetables is sufficient to produce liking for those vegetables in people of all ages. When it comes to bitter vegetables, however, associative conditioning (e.g., flavor-calorie learning or flavor-flavor learning) may be necessary to produce liking for those vegetables, at least for older children and adults ("Teaching children to like and eat vegetables," p. 75).

4.2 Freddy's behavior isn't callous.

In the previous section, I suggested that it's morally wrong for Teddy to kill young, healthy puppies to slow the spread of his cancer when he could get the same health benefit by eating three servings of vegetables each day or by taking Beyond Cocoamone. If you're skeptical of that, you're probably also skeptical of (S1), the claim that Freddy's behavior is morally wrong.

Of course, *you* wouldn't kill young, healthy puppies for gustatory pleasure, but maybe you think it's morally permissible for others to do so. According to this objection to (S1), the reason that (S1) is plausible is not that Freddy and Teddy are callous, but rather that we're too softhearted.

This line of thinking appears in Timothy Hsiao's paper "Industrial Farming Is Not Cruel to Animals." There, Hsiao likens raising and slaughtering animals to serving in the military.¹⁴ According to Hsiao, just as non-soldiers see killing in war as being callous, non-farmers see killing young, healthy animals as being callous. But that's just not true, for just as there are soldiers who kill in war without being callous, there are also farmers who kill young, healthy animals without being callous. So, even though you and I may not be willing to kill young, healthy puppies for cocoamone, it doesn't follow that doing so is callous. And if it's not callous, then it's not morally wrong.

In response, I am willing to grant that it's possible to kill in war without being callous. But that it's possible to kill in war without being callous doesn't entail that killing in war is never callous. It may be possible, for example, to kill invading enemy combatants in a justified defensive war without being callous. But it isn't, therefore, possible to kill innocent civilians in an unjustified war of aggression without being callous.

¹⁴ Hsiao, "Industrial Farming Is Not Cruel to Animals," p. 51.

Imagine that the chocolate producing countries in West Africa decide to stop selling cocoa beans to the United States. In response, the U.S. sends its army to invade the Ivory Coast. When the citizens of the Ivory Coast resist the U.S. invasion, U.S. generals command the troops to terrorize the country by killing innocent Ivorians (or, alternatively, their pets). Even if killing in war isn't necessarily callous, killing innocent Ivorians in an unjustified war of aggression to obtain cocoa beans *is*. Analogously, even if killing young, healthy animals isn't necessarily callous, killing young, healthy puppies to enjoy the taste of chocolate *is*.

Furthermore, nothing changes if the unjustified war of aggression was motivated by a desire for land that was well-suited to growing an especially nutritious food like quinoa. Even if killing in war isn't necessarily callous, killing innocent Bolivians in an unjustified war of aggression to obtain quinoa *is*. Analogously, even if killing young, healthy animals isn't necessarily callous, killing young, healthy animals for protein *is*.

One may argue, of course, that there is a morally relevant difference between killing young, healthy animals for gustatory pleasure or for health benefits and *paying someone else to kill* those animals. But this is implausible. We wouldn't think that a person is any less callous if he or she avoided killing innocent Bolivians by paying someone else to do it for him or her. Similarly, we shouldn't think that Freddy is any less callous if he avoided killing his young, healthy puppies by paying someone else to do it. In fact, insofar as acting viciously makes one vicious, it seems like it may be especially immoral for Freddy to have someone else kill his puppies for him.

These examples suggest that it is callous to kill young, healthy animals or even support the killing of young, healthy animals regardless of whether one does it for gustatory pleasure or for health benefits. But there is also something especially callous about Freddy's behavior, namely, the way in which he betrays his puppies. Could a virtuous person spend eighteen months caring deeply

for a puppy and winning her trust only to lead that very same puppy into his basement and brutally slaughters her for cocoamone? Surely not.

Sam Harris hints at this when he compares consuming humanely-raised meat to adopting a dog from a kill shelter and then returning her to the shelter when one decides to go on vacation.¹⁵ Will MacAskill does the same when he compares consuming humanely-raised meat to caring for one's dying grandmother and then throwing her in the trash once she's died.¹⁶ What these analogies suggest is that consuming humanely-raised meat involves a kind of betrayal that is almost inconceivable. This explains why a Canadian couple sparked so much outrage when they adopted a potbellied pig from the BC SPCA (i.e., the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and then, after realizing that they didn't know how to care for her, slaughtered her for food.¹⁷

4.3 Freddy's behavior maximizes expected happiness.

A stronger objection to my argument comes from utilitarians who believe that the moral rightness of an act depends, not on the character traits it exemplifies, but on the consequences it produces, specifically, on whether it maximizes expected happiness (i.e., is likely to produce more net happiness than the alternatives). According to utilitarians, then, evaluating the morality of Freddy's behavior requires us to ask whether his behavior maximizes expected happiness.

There are good reasons to think that it does. First, assuming that Freddy enjoys raising puppies, his raising and slaughtering puppies for cocoamone is likely to be better *for him* than his

¹⁵ "A Golden Shower of Guests."

¹⁶ "Effective Altruism and Moral Uncertainty."

¹⁷ Judd, "Pet pig adopted from BC SPCA killed and eaten by new owners." Thanks to [removed for blind review] for drawing my attention to this example.

not doing so. Second, Freddy's raising and slaughtering puppies for cocoamone is likely to be better *for his puppies* than his not doing so. This, of course may sound odd. You might wonder how this could be given that Freddy's behavior results in his puppies' being slaughtered while they are still young and healthy. But remember that Freddy is not choosing between raising and slaughtering puppies while they are still young and raising the same number of puppies through adulthood. Instead, he is choosing between raising and slaughtering puppies while they are still young or not raising puppies at all. When we ask which of these alternatives is best for Freddy's puppies, it's clear that what's best for them is that Freddy raise and slaughter them while they are still young and healthy since, on this alternative, Freddy's puppies get to live happy, albeit short, lives. If Freddy didn't raise puppies at all, then those puppies wouldn't exist.¹⁸

This suggests the following argument:

- (U1) Freddy's behavior maximizes expected happiness.
- (U2) If an agent's behavior maximizes expected happiness, then it's morally right.
- (U3) Therefore, Freddy's behavior is morally right.

If this argument is sound, then my argument against consuming-humane-ly-raised meat has a false premise, namely (S1). Defending my argument, therefore, requires refuting this argument. One way would be to offer good reasons for rejecting utilitarianism and therefore (U2). Although I think there are good reasons for rejecting utilitarianism, I also realize that it has a venerable pedigree. Accordingly, I'll try to argue against (U1).

¹⁸ Some philosophers resist the suggestion that a world in which a certain individual or group of individuals have a good life is better *for them* than a world in which they never exist. Accordingly, they would resist the suggestion that a world in which Freddy raises and slaughters puppies is better *for those puppies* than a world in he doesn't raise puppies at all. But what's important, from the utilitarian, is simply that *the world* in which Freddy raises and slaughters puppies is better than the world in which Freddy doesn't raise puppies at all. Whether it's better *for those puppies* is irrelevant.

One problem with (U1) is that it ignores some harmful side effects of Freddy's behavior. For example, as I suggested earlier, slaughtering puppies may make one callous. As evidence of this, we have the following quote from Ed Van Winkle, a former slaughterhouse employee:

If you work in the stick pit for any period of time, you develop an attitude that lets you kill things but doesn't let you care. You may look a hog in the eye that's walking around down in the blood pit with you and think, God, that really isn't a bad-looking animal. You may want to pet it. Pigs down on the kill floor have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later I had to kill them—beat them to death with a pipe. I can't care.¹⁹

Van Winkle's quote suggests that slaughtering animals makes it impossible to care for them. In short, it breeds callousness. But even if slaughtering animals doesn't necessarily breed callousness, surely it increases one's likelihood of becoming callous. And if that's the case, then Freddy's slaughtering his puppies may have bad consequences not only for him (since it's bad to be callous), but also for those around him (since callousness breeds violence), as evidenced by data showing that counties with slaughterhouses have higher arrest rates for violent crime, rape, and other sexual offenses, even when compared to counties with similar demographics.²⁰ This gives us one reason to doubt (U1).

But the bigger problem with (U1) is that it ignores the environmental effects of Freddy's behavior. First, Freddy's puppies need food, the production and transportation of which requires the use of land that could be better used for other purposes, and energy, the production of which will almost certainly contribute to climate change. Second, Freddy's puppies need fresh water, an increasingly limited natural resource, which could be better used for other purposes. Finally, Freddy's puppies need a fair bit of land to roam around on in order to engage in their natural

¹⁹ Ed Van Winkle, as cited in Eisnitz, *Slaughterhouse*, pp. 87-88.

²⁰ Fitzgerald, Kalof, and Dietz. "Slaughterhouses and Increased Crime Rates," p. 158.

behaviors. The problem with this is, again, that the land could be better used for other purposes. For example, it could be used to grow food to feed hungry people, or it could be returned to natural habitat. The benefits of returning the land to natural habitat are especially significant since, according to Peter Singer and Jim Mason, the land used by humanely-raised animals would actually support more animal life were it returned to natural habitat.²¹ So, if Freddy weren't using his land to raise puppies for cocoamone, for example, it could actually support a greater number of animals (e.g., chipmunks, mice, rabbits, and squirrels). Provided, therefore, that the relevant animals are sentient, (U1) is false; Freddy's raising puppies for cocoamone does not maximize expected happiness since there is an alternative available to him (viz., returning the land to natural habitat) that is more likely to produce more net happiness.

Returning to our thought experiment, then, when we think about Freddy's options, two stand out. First, he can do what most Americans do with their land; he can mow it. Second, he can use it to raise puppies for cocoamone. Now, if Freddy is interested in maximizing utility, then given these two options, he should raise puppies for cocoamone since that produces more expected happiness than his simply mowing his yard. That's why it seems like Freddy's behavior maximizes expected happiness. But Freddy's behavior doesn't *actually* maximize expected happiness because *there's a third option*. Freddy can return his land to natural habitat, or if that's not an option (because of zoning regulations), then he can donate the money he would have spent on raising puppies to an organization that protects natural habitat. If Freddy were to do one of these things, he'd produce even more happiness than he does by raising puppies for cocoamone. Thus, (U1) is false.

Analogously, when we think about what consumers can do with their food budget, two options stand out. First, they can spend it on expensive humanely-raised meat. Second, they can

²¹ Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What We Eat*, p. 254.

spend it on something like expensive Beyond Meat Burgers. Now, it's unclear which of these options maximizes expected happiness. Maybe spending one's grocery budget on expensive Beyond Meat Burgers preserves a bit of Brazilian rainforest that would have otherwise been destroyed. But maybe not. Given these two options, consuming humanely-raised meat may maximize expected happiness. But consuming humanely-raised meat doesn't *actually* maximize expected happiness because *there's a third option*. Consumers can buy inexpensive beans or lentils and donate the difference to an organization that protects natural habitat. If consumers were to do this, they'd produce even more expected happiness than they do by consuming humanely-raised meat. Thus, the utilitarian defense of consuming humanely-raised meat fails. If one is actually interested in maximizing expected happiness, then one shouldn't consume humanely-raised meat but rather buy inexpensive beans or lentils and donate the difference to an organization that protects natural habitat.

4.4 Freddy's behavior doesn't benefit the environment.

In 2012, the *New York Times* held a contest to see which of their readers could come up with the best defense of meat-eating. They received around 3,000 responses, which they whittled down to six. Of those last six, three suggested that animal agriculture is a necessary part of sustainable agriculture and, therefore, that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally permissible (if not obligatory). Stacy Roussel, for example, wrote:

Production of vegetables without the use of animals requires much larger amounts of energy. In small-scale farming, we use animals to clear fields of vegetation instead of relying only on industrial systems like tractors and herbicides. [...] The animals clear vegetation and leave free fertilizer. They build biology in the soil rather than

destroy it. Working in the natural order reduces our dependence on outside sources of energy, allowing us to harness the energy that is on-farm.²²

Along similar lines, Jay Bost, whose submission was ultimately chosen as the winner, wrote:

The fact is that most agroecologists agree that animals are integral parts of truly sustainable agricultural systems. They are able to cycle nutrients, aid in land management and convert sun to food in ways that are nearly impossible for us to do without fossil fuel. If “ethical” is defined as living in the most ecologically benign way, then in fairly specific circumstances, of which each eater must educate himself, eating meat is ethical, in fact NOT eating meat may be arguably unethical.²³

Roussel and Bost would presumably grant (S1), that Freddy’s behavior is morally wrong, but deny (S2), that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally equivalent to Freddy’s behavior. The difference, on their view, is that whereas Freddy’s behavior does not benefit the environment, consuming humanely-raised meat does (by supporting sustainable agriculture).

If this difference is morally relevant, then modifying my thought experiment so that Freddy’s behavior benefits the environment should change our opinion about the morality of Freddy’s behavior. Consider, therefore, an example in which Ned (Freddy’s Australian counterpart) is engaged in a land restoration project. He plants native grasses and trees in hopes that they will attract native animals, and they do. Unfortunately, they also so attract non-native rabbits. To protect his land, Ned can either raise puppies or spray chemicals. Now, raising puppies is slightly more expensive than spraying chemicals, but it’s also better for the environment, so that’s what Ned does. Furthermore, to support his work, Ned sets up a small nature center and solicits funds from patrons and local businesses. He receives some money from these efforts, but he needs more to continue raising puppies rather than spraying chemicals. One day, it occurs to Ned that if

²² Roussel, “We Require Balance. Balance Requires Meat.”

²³ Bost, “Sometimes It’s More Ethical to Eat Meat Than Vegetables.”

he kills his puppies once they reach maturity and sells the cocoamone from their brains, then he can raise the additional money that he needs. After killing his first puppy, he extracts the cocoamone from her brain and puts it up for sale at the nature center. While visiting, you notice it and consider purchasing it from Ned.

Is it morally permissible for you to purchase the cocoamone? I don't think so. If you are truly interested in supporting Ned's land restoration project, you shouldn't purchase the cocoamone; you should simply donate that money directly to Ned. To see this, imagine that a reputable aid organization asks you for financial support as they work to relieve poverty in a particular region. Maybe they ask you to donate \$20. In response, you tell them that you're willing to donate the money, but only if they give you something in return, say, a cocoamone-infused chocolate bar.

Is this morally permissible? Again, I don't think so. Although your donating \$20 in return for a cocoamone-infused chocolate bar will help relieve poverty in the relevant region, your doing so is selfish and inefficient. It's selfish because it involves your refusal to contribute to poverty relief unless you get something out of it, and it's inefficient because your money would go further if you simply donated it without asking for anything in return. The same is true of your purchasing Ned's cocoamone in the example above. Although your purchasing Ned's cocoamone will support his land restoration project, it's selfish and inefficient. It's selfish because it involves your refusal to contribute to Ned's project unless you get something out of it, and it's inefficient because your money would go further if you simply donated it without asking for anything in return.

What this suggests is that supporting sustainable agriculture by consuming humanely-raised meat is like fighting poverty by purchasing an expensive shoes from TOMS.²⁴ If you have to buy expensive shoes, then it's better to buy them from TOMS than from Nike. But if you are truly interested in fighting poverty, it'd be better to buy less expensive (though sustainably produced) shoes and then take the money you've saved and donate it to an effective poverty relief organization.²⁵

Analogously, if you have to buy meat, it's better to buy humanely-raised meat than factory-farmed meat. But if you are truly interested in supporting sustainable agriculture (or benefitting the environment more generally), it'd be better to buy (sustainably produced) beans or lentils and then take the money you've saved and donate it to farmers who are engaged in sustainable agriculture (or an effective environmental protection organization).

One worry with my proposal is that if everyone were to heed my advice and stop consuming humanely-raised meat, then it would become unreasonably expensive for farmers to keep animals on their farms, and as a result, farmers would be forced to spray ecologically harmful fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides on their fields.

If this were true, it might justify some consumption of humanely-raised meat. But it's not true. The reason people think that animal agriculture is necessary for sustainable agriculture is that they think that animal excrement is necessary for cycling nutrients (like nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium) back into the soil without the use of synthetic fertilizers. But this ignores the fact that human excrement could be used as an alternative to animal excrement. Of course, using human excrement as fertilizer may strike us as "gross," but that's not a good reason not to use it.

²⁴ When TOMS started selling shoes in 2006, it promised that, for each pair of shoes that consumers purchased, it would give a new pair of new shoes to a child in need. Although TOMS is still committed to giving shoes to children in need, it no longer matches each purchase one for one.

²⁵ Taub, "Buying TOMS shoes is a terrible way to help poor people."

A more serious worry is that using human excrement as fertilizer would spread disease. In response, however, I would simply note that while using biosolids (i.e., sewage sludge) as fertilizer may very well spread disease, using humanure (i.e., composted human excrement) as fertilizer does not.²⁶

Now, I am certainly not suggesting that farmers could transition to using humanure as fertilizer overnight. Doing so would obviously require dramatic changes to our current agricultural system, changes that take time. Instead, I am simply suggesting that animal agriculture is not necessary for sustainable agriculture. Using humanure as fertilizer is one way we could do this. Practicing veganic agriculture is another.²⁷

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally equivalent to raising and then slaughtering young, healthy puppies to enjoy the taste of chocolate and, therefore, that consuming humanely-raised meat is morally wrong. I have also argued that consuming humanely-raised meat cannot be justified by the fact that it has health benefits (because there are other, comparable ways of getting those health benefits), the fact that it maximizes happiness (because it doesn't), or the fact that it benefits the environment (because there are other, more effective ways to do that). In closing, I would note that although these reasons are those most frequently cited in defense of consuming humanely-raised meat, they are not, generally speaking, the actual reasons that people consume it. The actual reason people consume humanely-raised meat is that they like

²⁶ Price, "Humanure: the end of sewage as we know it?"

²⁷ Thanks to [removed for blind review] for drawing my attention to veganic agriculture. For more information about veganic agriculture, visit <http://veganic.world> or its parent organization, Seed the Commons, at <http://seedthecommons.org>.

the taste of meat and they think that consuming humanely-raised meat enables them to enjoy that taste without being callous. If I am right, however, they are sadly mistaken.

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