

# **Moral Vegetarianism and the Ethics of Eating Meat.**

Is it morally justified to kill animals for food?

# I. Introduction

Man has been eating meat since time immemorial. Controlling and killing animals for producing meat has been a way of life ever since the existence of the human species began. Hundreds of millions of animals are bred and killed every year for human consumption. If killing animals for food is indeed morally wrong, then a colossal amount of wrong-doing takes place everyday of our lives.

In this paper, I wish to ethically evaluate and show that it is not morally right to kill and use animals for food. The general argument given by many philosophers over time is that it is not morally acceptable to control, hurt and kill animals as they are sentient beings capable of feeling pain. I shall henceforth refer to this as the 'humane argument'. Apart from elaborating upon the humane argument, I shall also consider the role of time and see whether it was right to deny moral considerations to animals in the past. Finally, I shall also look upon any moral obligations we may have towards our environment and whether the consumption of meat goes against environmental responsibilities, if any. I would try to refrain from scientific facts as much as possible and argue reasonably with logic.

## II. The Moral Status of Animals

We humans share this planet with very interesting living creatures we like to call 'animals'. For centuries, humans have killed and used these non-humans for food and clothes. Chicken, lamb, pork and beef are essential meals in a lot of cultural cuisines around the world. Should these animals be assigned the same moral status as that of humans? It is morally incorrect to willingly kill our fellow humans for food, because all humans are considered at the same level in the ladder of morality. The laws of every country dictate that we should not kill our fellow humans, unless in self defence. Such an act is punishable by the law. The fact that we slaughter millions of animals every year without any fear of punishment is proof enough that majority of the countries assign a lower moral status to animals as compared to humans.

There may be some exceptions however, like for instance, the killing of cows is a punishable offence in India because cows are considered holy to the religion of Hinduism and morally equal to humans. But overall, one may safely conclude that animals are not considered at the same moral level as that of humans.

Peter Singer<sup>1</sup> says that discrimination based on the species of a living creature is not ethical. Animals are capable of suffering and that giving lesser consideration to animals is no more justified than discrimination based on skin colour. He refuses to use 'intelligence' as a parameter to distinguish between animals and humans because it has been shown that some animals have been displayed signs of intelligence at par with humans. Hence, one must assign

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<sup>1</sup> <https://philpapers.org/rec/SINAL>

‘equal consideration’ as he calls it, to animals and killing animals for food should be as punishable an offence as killing a human for food is.

It is indubitably true that animals are perfectly capable of feeling pain and suffering. Scientifically, animals do have a central nervous system, a brain and multiple sense organs that allows them to ‘feel’ and makes them sentient. Animals can feel pain just like humans and they eat, sleep, think and communicate in ways very similar to us. They feel joy and sorrow, gorillas paint pictures and elephants can grieve. However, the one quality that humans have which animals don’t is the ability to **make choices**. Yes, chimpanzees do have an uncanny similarity to humans, but it cannot self-reflect and be aware of its image in the mirror and deduce that it is its reflection. Humans have a very complex brain and are capable of solving intellectual problems and can have profound memories. Most importantly, humans have the ability to reason, to make choices, to evaluate and reason with logic, which is far more than animals have. There is no doubt that humans are certainly superior to animals and that there is a phenomenal difference between the humans and the non humans. Humans live by rules (atleast in today’s world) and only without rules and reason, would humans be the same as animals.

Hence, one can easily debunk Peter Singer’s theory of equal consideration because animals are certainly not the same as humans and hence, would be assigned a lower status to that of humans. **One cannot say that the moral rules which apply to humans would necessarily apply to animals as well, simply because humans are not the same as animals.**

### III. Inflicting Pain

Causing pain and slaughtering our fellow humans for food would be unethical because one must not cause suffering to one’s fellow humans for no valid reason. It would be fairly undebatable to say that it is not morally acceptable to kill our fellow humans and eat them. But why is it so? Why would it be unethical to kill humans for food?

1. Humans are sentient beings, that is, they are perfectly capable of feeling and sensing pain.
2. All humans are assigned the same moral status as they belong to the same species.
3. One must not inflict pain upon sentient species that are either above or at the same level of moral status, as they can feel, sense and experience pain.

From premises (1), (2) and (3), one can conclude that it would be morally wrong to kill our fellow humans for food. But this argument would not work for animals because as we have seen, animals are assigned a lower status to humans. Let us consider a modified version of (3).

3C: One can inflict pain upon sentient species that are of a lower moral status.

However, is this argument sound? Would it be morally justified to kill creatures that are perfectly capable of feeling pain, just because they are not as reasonable and logical like us? Would it be acceptable to kill sentient creatures just because they don’t have the ability to

make choices? JK Rowling once said that, “If you want to know what a man is like, take a good look at how he treats his inferiors, not his equals.”. Yes, it is true that animals are inferior to us. But that does not morally justify the act of killing them because they are perfectly capable of feeling pain and sorrow. The suffering of animals can certainly not be compared to the suffering of humans, simply because their statuses are different. But it is ‘suffering’ in every sense of the word, because it is being felt by the animal. **The action of causing pain and suffering to anything that is capable of feeling pain can never be ethically good, regardless of the moral status of the victim, unless it is needed for survival.**

Today, all humans are considered equal, irrespective of their race or colour. Let us go a century back when the blacks were considered inferior to whites. Let us assume for the sake of this argument that it is indeed true that whites are the superior race. Would it then be morally justified to kill and inflict pain on the blacks, for food or other temporary pleasures? **A sentient being’s life is as important to itself as a human’s life is to himself.** The animals have sentience and we should not be inflicting pain on them unless it is absolutely necessary for our survival.

One might object here and say that meat is essential for our survival because we need food and nutrients for our growth and development. However, a plant based diet, which involves eating non sentient beings, **is perfectly capable of providing all the nutrients and vitamins needed for one’s growth.** There is enough scientific evidence for this, with organisations such as the WHO and ADA stating that a plant based diet is more than sufficient to provide for one’s daily needs, especially in today’s world where plant agriculture is massively abundant.

One might object by saying that plants are living things as well and one who objects to animals begin eaten for meat is hypocritical. Yes, it is true that plants are living things, but the definition of ‘living’ is purely scientific and not what humans consider ‘living’. Plants ‘breathe’, that is, they use carbon dioxide and sunlight and they synthesise their own food. However, **plants are totally non sentient beings who cannot feel pain and suffering**, as has been widely accepted all throughout the scientific community. Plants do not have a central nervous system or a brain and hence, are incapable of experiencing sensual pain. We can draw a lot of similarities between animals and humans, but it would be uncanny to even compare a plant to a human. Plants cannot walk or talk, reproduce asexually and cannot feel. They are ‘living’ things, but totally non-sentient.

Let us try to question the basic principle that it is unethical for us to inflict pain and suffering on others. **The reason it would be unethical for someone to slaughter something is because that certain something has the ability to conceive pain.** That something would run for its life if we would try to inflict pain and cause it any suffering. Their life may not be as valuable as ours, but that does not mean it is totally invaluable. However, plants are totally non sentient beings who are incapable of feeling any sort of pain whatsoever.

It would certainly seem astounding to someone who eats meat regularly that a plant based diet can suffice for one's nutrition. But that's only because the person has been less exposed to the variety of plants in the world that humans can consume as food. A plant based diet is nutritionally sufficient for our survival<sup>2</sup> and there are hundreds of plant species that we consume everyday. We often believe things because society says so, and some may think that there isn't a good enough variety in a non animal diet because it hasn't been so in the particular society they grew up in.

## IV. The Way of Life.

Benjamin Franklin says that he was once convinced that he should stop eating meat because it would be taking a sentient being's life would be 'unprovoked murder', since the poor animal could never do him injury. But then, he opened the fish and saw a smaller fish inside of it. He said to himself, '**if you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you**'.

Yes, it is true that other animals eat other animals all the time. **But we humans are not animals because we can reason and make choices.** That, as we have seen in (II) is what distinguishes us from the animals, the fact that we have the ability to think and make reasonable choices. Just because one animal may eat another does not morally implicate that a human can kill a non human. **Animals kill other animals is not a reason enough for us to kill animals for food.** We can reason and make a choice and animals cannot. Moreover, some animals do need meat for their survival and would die without it. We wouldn't, and hence, we do not require meat for our survival.

John Stuart Mill talked about the utilitarian principle, about how those actions are deemed morally desirable which promote general happiness and tend to increase the overall utility. One must choose to perform an action that will increase the general well being of the world. Let us consider two actions:

A: A person eats pulses, broccoli, soy and chickpeas for supper.

B: A person eats broccoli, chicken and some meat for supper.

In the first scenario, the person eats non-sentient things and did not have to inflict any pain or suffering, simply because none was felt by the experiencer. In the second scenario, pain was experienced by the experiencer due to sentience. The animals were slaughtered against their will. **There is suffering involved in the second action and hence, there is lesser happiness in action B.** Both actions have the same objective: to satisfy hunger and allow the survival of the human species. Both meals would equally provide all the nutrients needed and would not make the human species go extinct.

It would be preposterous to say that there is more happiness in action B because it satisfies one's taste buds to a greater extent. Yes, it may be true that the taste is exceptional in action B, thereby increasing happiness of the world. But it also involves the suffering and slaughter of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0002822309007007>

sentient animals, thereby drastically decreasing the amount of happiness in the world, which is lower than that of action A. **In no way, can the temporary satisfaction of a human's taste buds be equally significant to the life of a sentient being, regardless of its status.**

Yes, the happiness of the animal may not matter as much as that of the humans, but it matters never the less, especially when it is its life we are concerned with. Yes, the food chain is such that bigger animals eat smaller animals and we eat them in turn. But we eat them out of choice; and **when there is another choice available that allows us to cause less pain and suffering and equally ensure the survival of humans, then by the utilitarian principle, action A would certainly be more morally desirable than action B.**

## V. The Role of Time

The human argument seems to hold true so far when our survival can be supplemented conveniently with a plant based diet. However, one might say that man has been eating meat ever since the beginning of time. We have been killing animals right from the start and that has always been the 'way of life'. But just because humans have been doing something centuries ago does not make it morally justifiable. For instance, slavery had been existing in our world for centuries. When Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery in America, many slave masters stood up to him saying that slavery was an essential part of human life because that's the way it had always been. But what we fail to realise is that it wasn't the 'way of life', it was 'our way', because we chose to accept and practice slavery. The morality of an action cannot be justified because of its continued persistence over time.

However, in the early centuries, man wasn't civilised. Agricultural farming began much later and until then, man's primary source of food was meat. Was it ethically justified then, for man to slaughter animals for food? Yes, it certainly was, because if man didn't, then he wouldn't have survived. The action itself may have involved causing pain and suffering to sentient beings, but it was for the survival of the human species, which is assigned a greater status as compared to animals. The happiness would decrease due to the pain being inflicted upon the animals, but it would be compensated by the increase of happiness in ensuring the survival of the human species. One may still say that sentient beings were slaughtered, but it was necessary for survival and hence, isn't morally wrong.

**But just because something was ethically justified a thousand years ago does not necessarily imply that the action would continue to be morally acceptable.**

The ethical justification of murdering animals for food in the past can never justify the ethics of eating meat in today's time. **It is not good enough to say that our ancestors used to eat meat and hence, it is okay for us to kill animals and eat meat. One must draw a fine line of distinction between gluttony and survival.** The reason for most of the ancient humans to kill animals was for survival. Today, when our survival and

nutritional requirements can grandly be completed with non sentient beings, our only reason for killing animals is gluttony, which cannot even come close to compensating the loss of a sentient being's life.

## VI. Milk and Meat

I have so far, been looking at whether it is morally justifiable to slaughter animals for food. However, apart from direct killing, humans also 'use' animals for food. The best instance of that would be cow's milk. Cows are impregnated continuously and thus, are able to produce milk, as they are mammals. This is often a very painful process which is evident from the pain that female humans face during labour. No animal would like to be forcefully impregnated against her will. Such dairy cows remain pregnant throughout their lifetime and in the end, are sent to the butchers for beef. Since the cows get pregnant, they give birth to many babies throughout their life. The male calves are almost always killed or sold for veal, as they would be of no use to the dairy farm due to their inability to produce milk.

There is no doubt that even though the process of producing cow's milk may not seem to involve any killing, there is a lot of pain caused to the animal. In the end, these cows are slaughtered for beef anyhow, so the dairy and meat industry actually end up working hand in hand. **Is drinking milk as morally undesirable as consuming meat?** Let us consider two scenarios, one of a lamb living on a free range farm and one of a dairy cow being used for milk.

In the first scenario, after the lamb is brought into this world, the farmer takes utmost care of her. She is loved by the farmer, who treats her just like his own pet. It is a free range farm, so the lamb can go around playing with all her friends and live a happy life. The farmer feeds her good and nutritious food and they both love each other a lot. After three years of a happy life, the lamb is painlessly killed by the farmer in her sleep and sent to the market for lamb.

In the second scenario, a dairy cow also lives on a nice free range farm. The farmer takes utmost care of her and feeds her well. She is soon impregnated and is injected with oxytocin along with other antibiotics to induce labour. After nine months, she gives birth to a baby calf, who turns out to be a male. The male calf is allowed to live with her mother for a while and then forcefully snatched away and killed for veal, causing intense trauma to its mother. Soon, the cow is impregnated again and the same process continues. After three pregnancies, the cow loses her will to produce a baby again, but is still forcefully made pregnant for milk. Finally, once the cow is all worn down after ten years, it is sent to the beef factory. If that is not allowed in certain countries, it is ejected from the dairy farm and made to roam the streets because it is now a liability to the farmer.

This leads to the classic philosophical debate of euthanasia or the 'right to die'. Would a cow have had a better life had it not been used for milk production and just painlessly killed in the end for beef? **Would it be better to just kill the animal painlessly rather than**

**make it go through a lifetime of suffering and only then slaughter it?** There was certainly more pain inflicted on the cow as compared to the lamb. The end result was the same, but one went through a lifetime of suffering and one did not. Even if the cow didn't die in the end, it still went through a lot of pain and if this is not worse than death, it is certainly as bad as death. One may argue that it is even worse than the painless slaughter of the lamb in the first scenario. But what is certain is that drinking milk would be considered as morally undesirable as eating meat because the production of milk inflicts as much pain (if not more) on the animals as inflicted by the production of meat.

## VII. Morally Undesirable or Ethically Wrong

It is evident from the argument so far that a plant based diet would certainly be considered more morally desirable as it does not involve the slaughter and pain of sentient animals. It would be more ethical for humans to take an action where there is no suffering involved, because one must try to cause as less harm as possible, as it would minimise the amount of sadness and thereby stay true to the utilitarian principle of increasing happiness.

It is true that an action which decreases the happiness of the world would be considered morally undesirable as compared to the one that does not. **But does that necessarily imply that the former action is ethically wrong?** It is morally undesirable, yes, but would it be right for us to label it as 'ethically incorrect'?

Let us consider actions A and B again, similar to before.

A: Luke eats avocados, spinach, carrots and bread for lunch.

B: Luke eats spinach, bread and pork for lunch.

Action A is certainly more ethically justified than action B because it causes less pain and suffering. Action B involves the slaughter of animals and decreases the happiness and is indubitably less morally desirable than action A. **There is a clear moral distinction between both the actions and one cannot say that action B is the same as action A in terms of morality.** Someone who performs action B cannot say that it is as ethical as action A.

However, is action B really that wrong? It is certainly morally undesirable as compared to action A, but should it be classified as a 'wrong' action? Yes, we are inflicting pain upon animals and slaughtering them for food. It may not be the most ethical course of action and ideally one must follow a plant based diet, but it is not wrong to kill animals either because after all, they are at a lower moral level to humans. **Moreover, it is absolutely not necessary to perform cold blooded murder as animals can be killed painlessly and without any suffering.** Would it be okay to kill animals humanely and without causing them any pain? Many animals are raised by farmers as their own pets and are taken utmost care of. In the end, they are killed as painlessly as possible and the animal would have lived a very happy life throughout.



Let us consider a human X who has absolutely no family or loved ones. He lives all alone, has no interactions with the outside world and has no friend or relative. The person doesn't work anywhere, so whether he lives or dies, it would not matter to the world. Would it be ethically justified to kill that person painlessly in his sleep? It would neither increase nor decrease the happiness in the world, so does that mean it is ethically justified? The problem with this argument is that pain and suffering is taken in the literal sense of the words. Yes, painless killing is certainly better than painful killing, but is nevertheless classified as 'murder'. The person might not have been of any use to the world, but was of use to himself. He had a will to survive and live and it was his choice to live the way he wanted. Had he been killed consciously, he would have tried to flee for his life (unless he was not suicidal). Such 'humane' killing can never be justified because it is still classified as murder.

Let us consider three actions, A, B and C:

A: John eats chicken that was cruelly murdered at the slaughterhouse.

B: John eats chicken that was brought up in a free range farm and was painlessly slaughtered in the end.

C: John eats some rice with black eyed peas.

Action B is certainly more morally desirable than Action A, because there is lesser pain inflicted on the sentient animal. The end result of death is the same, but the process is significantly different in both scenarios because in B, the animal did not have to go through the traumatising experience of being slaughtered. It was still killed however, which it would have tried to prevent had it been conscious, and one cannot deny that the sentient being was raised for slaughter. There is still suffering involved and it cannot be morally justified, regardless of the moral status of the creature. Hence, action C would still remain the most morally desirable action and thereby, the most ethically correct one. If John performs action C, he is being more ethical than he would have been had he performed actions A or B.

But would this label action B as ethically incorrect? Some might say that it is certainly not the most ethical course of action, but it still can be ethically justified because:

1. Animals have a lower moral status.
2. It has become part of our culture and lifestyle, which is difficult to change now.

I have already debunked the 'moral status' argument, because inflicting pain can never be considered a good action, regardless of the moral status. I have also partly debunked the second argument because culture has arisen out of the practices of our forefathers, and just because they did something does not necessarily imply we should do it as well. Respecting cultures and traditions is not a justification for doing something unethical. Our ancestors may have slaughtered animals, but our reason for slaughtering animals cannot be that our forefathers did it as well! Times and circumstances changed, and our actions must be grounded in reason. Respecting traditions is a good thing, but it cannot be done at the cost of morality. Just because something unethical was happening centuries ago does not morally imply that it can happen today as well.

**Kant says that as long as the matter is directly between the human and the animal, and no other humans are being harmed, it can be ethically justified to eat animals.** He says that when a human kills an animal and murders it for food, the participants in this deal are the human and the animal only. It does not affect the other humans in any way whatsoever, so even though it is not the most ethical course of action to eat meat, it need not be labelled as morally 'wrong' because it does not affect any other humans. On the contrary, it benefits the human eating it as it provides nutrition and some health benefits.

Kant's argument does seem to hold some merit here. If there was such a scenario between two humans, and no other humans were being affected, we would still classify it as unethical because a human would be wronged. Here however, animals are the ones being wronged and it is not affecting any other human on the planet. Yes, it would have been great if the animal too hadn't been wronged, but animals do have a lower moral status as that of humans. Moreover, if the human were to kill the animal painlessly and unconsciously, it would further reduce the amount of suffering to the animal and not cause any to his fellow human beings. We agree that the act of eating meat is not the most morally desirable one. But can one say that it is not ethically wrong to kill animals because even though we are inflicting some sort of pain on them, the action is not affecting any other human? The only creature being wronged is the animal itself, and that isn't good, but not very bad either because animals after all are at a lower moral status as compared to humans.

It is true that animals are definitely not as reasonable and intelligent as we are. I would certainly say that John made a morally better decision by choosing to not eat meat. But if John does choose to eat meat, and takes all the precautions to minimise the pain inflicted on the animal, would it be right for me to say that he is doing something unethical? Granted it is not the most morally desirable action, **but his slaughtering of a non human creature is not affecting me in any way.** If he were killing a fellow human being, it would have been a different scenario because all humans belong to the same species. I may not have the heart to kill an animal, but maybe John is okay with it. He agrees it is not the best way to live, but is not wrong because it is not affecting me in any way.

## VIII. The Environmental Factor

However, John's argument is flawed, precisely because his action of eating meat is affecting me, albeit indirectly. Kant says that the action of eating meat only concerns the eater and the animal being eaten. However, what we sometimes fail to notice is that **the act of producing meat ends up affecting all the humans on this planet.** For eating meat, humans need to produce meat which is done through animal agriculture. **The process of animal farming, however, causes a colossal amount of environmental destruction.** Raising animals for food requires massive amounts of land, water and food which results in

pollution and ecological imbalance. The United Nations has acknowledged that animal agriculture is one of the most significant contributors to environmental problems.<sup>3</sup>

However, since I don't want to use too many scientific facts, let us try to reason logically and mathematically and attempt to comprehend whether animal farming is harmful to the environment. Let us consider an animal farm where goats are reared and bred for mutton. The farmers truly love their goats and take utmost care of them. The goats are fed a healthy and nutritious diet every day for lunch and dinner. In the process, a lot of land and water resources are used up. Soon, after about a year, the goat is painlessly killed off for mutton and sold in the market. John goes to the market and buys the mutton and eats it for dinner, which accounts for just one meal of his day. Consider the massive amount of grains and pulses that were fed to the animal which could've fed humans for months, **and it all ended up as just one meal for the family.** The math just does not add up and it's a clear indication that farming animals is not a sustainable practice for our environment.

**Thus, the killing of animals for meat is not just a direct affair between the human and the animal. It also involves the environment, our resources and our planet.** Any destruction to the ecology of the planet is a destruction to humanity itself! Animal farming is a major contributor to global warming, which in turn is responsible for rising sea levels, extinction of many species and deadlier hurricanes to name a few. **Kant's argument is therefore debunked, precisely because the production of meat threatens the home planet of the human species, thereby threatening humanity itself.**

It is true that land and water resources are also required for growing plants. Avocados are criticised for having a very large water footprint, but its footprint is still two times lesser than the lowest animal product!<sup>4</sup> Animal farming is way more massively destructive to the environment and sticking to a plant based diet would definitely save our planet from pollution and imbalance.<sup>5</sup>

## IX. Conclusion

One might say that God made this world, the mountains, the rocks and the animals so we humans could exploit it for our benefit. But we, more often than not, forget that **we also have a responsibility to care for our environment.** The earth provides us with the essentials of life and a home to live in, and in turn, we have a moral obligation to use its resources judiciously and sustainably. The argument that God made animals for us to eat basically boils down to:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/creating-a-sustainable-food-future.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://theecologist.org/2019/may/09/environmentalists-go-nuts-over-almonds-writes-markbanahan>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.greenpeace.org/international/press-release/15111/greenpeace-calls-for-decrease-in-meat-and-dairy-production-and-consumption-for-a-healthier-planet/>

L1: God made animals for us to eat. So we should eat them. Even if it is killing our planet and ruining the ecological imbalance, we should still eat them because God made them for us to eat.

Such an argument is certainly not sound because it is not a strong enough reason for one to eat meat.

Yes, if someone living in the forest did not have any plant based food available and had to eat meat for survival, then it would be ethically justified for him to consume meat, because his survival is at stake. But just because it is ethically justified for the man in the forest does not imply that it is ethically justified for a man living in a civilised city to eat meat.

One might say that people who survive on a plant based diet are hypocrites because they end up buying clothes from big corporations, which involve human exploitation and cause a great deal of suffering to the poor. But this argument boils down to:

L2: Luke says that eating meat is wrong because it involves the suffering of sentient animals. But Luke buys unethical clothes from the corporations himself, which support human exploitation and cause pain to the people in the poor countries. Since Luke is supporting human exploitation, it is fine for me to consume meat and support animal cruelty. Since one wrong action is already being performed, it is acceptable to perform another wrong action.

Yes, we should stop buying clothes from such companies. **But just because one ethically incorrect action is taking place doesn't mean it is ethical for another incorrect action to take place, for one wrongdoing cannot justify the other.** It's like saying:

L3: Luke is harming the planet, so why shouldn't I?

**We must try to reduce the amount of pain and suffering to both, the environment and the animals, and cause as less harm as possible. For lesser the harm, lesser is the sadness and therefore, greater is the happiness.** There is no 'all or nothing' principle that we can follow. Consider L4.

L4: We kill many mosquitoes everyday. Mosquitoes are also sentient beings capable of feeling pain. We are inflicting pain upon them, so it is okay to kill all other animals for food.

This is the basis for the 'all or nothing' principle, which in essence says that one wrongdoing can justify all the other wrong doings. That we either do not cause any harm whatsoever, or cause all the harm possible in the world. This is very extremist as there is no middle-ground. **There can be no absolutist principle in the world as there will always be an inevitable amount of harm being caused to the animals and our environment.** But we can choose to limit that harm and minimise the amount of sadness in the world. **One**

**does not have to either do ‘all’ or ‘nothing’.** There are always middle-grounds, with increasing levels of moral goodness. For instance,

A: Luke eats meat everyday of the week.

B: Luke eats meat only twice a week, and relies on a plant based diet for the rest of the week.

C: Luke only eats a plant based diet.

It is evident that action C is the most morally acceptable action as it causes the least amount of environmental damage and does not inflict pain upon sentient beings. However, what about actions A and B, are they at the same level of morality? No, they certainly are not. Just because Luke is eating meat in both the scenarios does not imply that both actions are at the same level of moral acceptance. Action B is indubitably **more** morally acceptable than action A because fewer animals were caused harm and it accounted for a lesser amount of damage to the ecosystem. It would be wrong for someone to say, “Hey John, you eat meat twice a week as it is, why don’t you eat it every day of the week?” because such an action would cause a greater deal of harm. It is known that animal agriculture is the biggest cause of habitat loss.<sup>6</sup> We must choose the actions that cause the least amount of suffering. **As human beings, it is our duty to our planet and the environment to cause as little harm as possible.**

We have already seen about how something that is less morally acceptable need not be labelled as ‘ethically wrong’. On a concluding note, I would also like to explore the distinction between ‘morally acceptable’ and ‘ethically good’. We have seen so far that the most morally desirable action is the one that supports a plant based diet. But does that really make it a good action?<sup>7</sup> **Should one feel proud that she does not eat meat or whenever she chooses to not kill an animal?**

As we have seen so far, we have focussed more on ‘minimising sadness’ as compared to ‘maximising happiness’. Of course, the two are inherently related, but **just because someone hurts the environment lesser does not mean that she is helping the environment get better.** Someone choosing not to hurt or kill an animal does not mean that she is saving its life! Macken Murphy talks about theft and says that it would be ridiculous to praise someone for not robbing someone of their money. Not participating in theft is not the same as saving someone from being robbed. There is nothing particularly praiseworthy of someone who would not involve in theft. Being proud of one’s ability to not eat meat is therefore a very preposterous thing to say as it would imply:

L5: Luke is also really proud of himself because he did not rob anyone on the street. Luke also feels he has done a really good deed because he did not go out and murder anyone.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26231772>

<sup>7</sup> <https://medium.com/tenderlymag/veganism-isnt-good-2a59441d6dcc>

The most morally acceptable course of action as we have seen, is to stick to a plant based diet because it involves the least amount of harm. However, that does not make it an ethically great action because in no way are we directly helping mother nature improve. We are just staying away from causing any harm to it, so it's just not ethically bad. We have certain obligations to our environment to ensure the survival of the future generations to come. It is great if we do something to improve the existing condition of the environment. But there is nothing morally great about not causing any harm to it. It's like someone being proud that he did not go out and place a bomb in the city.

**Inflicting no pain upon animals is nothing to be proud of.**

Because caring for our planet and environment is a moral mandate.