Harm

This harm argument is a short chapter mostly because the view that I put forward here does not seem to be held by any philosophers but it is a common everyday rherhotical view.

0.1 The argument

> **Fit box (5cm)**
>
> 1)Causing unnecesary harm is bad
>
> 2)Eating animals causes unnecesary harm
>
> →Therefore eating animals is bad

Though the argument is simple enough, it is nevertheless worth clarifying some terminology. **Bad** is used in a strong sense of "we should not do what is bad". In other words bad is supposed to have moral force, if somebody accepts that an action has this property they should be compelled to not take that action. Any one act may have numerous positive or negative effectss and the argument can still have some meaning. The simplest way these effects can be aggregated is through additivity, if one has reason to believe these effects can be added up then one can claim the action is bad in total.

A related example is if the act of helping causes harm that is unnecesary for the consequence one wants. For instance perhaps I want to push you out of the way so that a car won't run you over, but as a consequence you lose your hat. It is true that you losing your hat is not neccesary for being saved. Nevertheless we can judge a posteriori that it was neccesary for the action taken.

Notice that the action doesn't have to always be inadvisable. There may be cases where an

action is good, and cases where an action is bad. As such the above argument can be revised to apply only to certain situations. For example, if the action is "give morphine", it would depend on whether the person in question is in pain or not.

Harm is a better term than the alternatives because of its generality. The argument would also seem to work if we used the words "pain" or "suffering". However the use of alternative words might exclude the concept of "killing". Using those words would then make the argument more open to objections via empirical methods. For instance one could just point to some painless way of killing and the argument would instantly fail. The harm formulation can survive such an empirical point. On the other hand if one attacks a pain formulation that would probably also apply to the harm formulation. This generalization also corresponds to what most vegetarians actually believe. If a very ethical farmer showed up that filmed the painless killing of the animal, it is doubtful that many vegetarians would change their mind and eat this specific animal.

The problem of "harm" is that it may be general enough to encompass non-consious agents, such as killing a plant or tree. The argument as presented makes reference only to animals but somebody might object: "why only animals and not plants?". In this case, the vegetarian may return to the previous standards of "suffering" or "harm". Alternatively they could commit to "mamalianism", that is, arbitrarility discriminate between organic beings based on whether they are mammals or not. However I suspect the most likely position they will take is that it is not a matter of category but a matter of degree. That is, they will agree that harming plants is bad, but not sufficiently bad given the benefits. That is, one may think that the value of plants is high but the value of humans living is higher. I believe this kind of position automatically locks you into additivity.

0.2 Problems

0.2.1 Necesity

The most obvious problem with the argument is the notion of neccesity. A circular definition of the term is: X is neccesay if the presence of X is required for a certain other thing to occur. It makes little linguistic sense to talk of neccesity without a cause, neccesity is a constraint and there must be some objective for the contraint to work on. For instance if I want to make a cake it is necessary that I use the ingredients necessary to make the cake. The sentence "flour is neccesary to make the flour cake" makes sense. The sentence "flour is

neccesary" does not make sense. So then it is clear that vegetarians are assuming that there is some goal(cake), which can be achieved through a variety of means.

What is the "cake" of the harm done to animals? Suppose an agent is trying to get the best "taste" possible, the omega taste. If the omega taste does not require eating animals then the argument works, this would be equivalent to saying "don't eat animals because there are better tastes out there". If on the other hand the "omega taste" must include animal flesh, then the argument instantly fails. That is, if I am trying to have the best taste I can, then it IS neccesary that I eat animals.

I suspect that the herbivores then have a rather different meaning. They are instead re-directing us to look for another cake. A reflexive reaction to this might be "Who are they to tell us what our goals should be?". Perhaps they know better than us, either because they have reasoned better or perhaps they have information we do not.

If it is true that the they have reasoned better than us, then perhaps this reasoning can also be shared with us, and upon bathing in this reasoning, we can be change our goals[1]. If on the other hand they have better experience than us, then they need only try and help us experience those same things [2].

So it seems to me that this argument fails for the simple reason that it begs the question about what people should puruse.

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[1] Perhaps here we might have a Kantian argument, but Kant famously excluded animals from his categorical imperative.

[2] It seems to me like vegans are over-represented in urban environments with low animal contact