

PHILOSOPHY 105

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MORAL VEGETARIANISM

PAIN & REASONS

- Causing pain is acceptable only when there is good enough reason

Good reason

a decaying tooth needing extraction by a dentist

Bad reason

a sadist wanting to extract a tooth

THE BASIC ARGUMENT

1. It is wrong to cause pain without a morally good reason.
2. If it is wrong to cause pain without a morally good reason, then it is also wrong to support practices that cause pain without a morally good reason.
3. If we can nourish ourselves without eating meat, then nourishment is not a morally good reason to cause pain to animals or to support practices that cause pain to animals.
4. We can nourish ourselves without eating meat.
5. \therefore Nourishment is not a morally good reason to cause pain to animals or to support practices that cause pain to animals (from 3,4)
6. \therefore It is wrong to eat meat (from 1–2, 5)

LIMITATIONS OF THE BASIC ARGUMENT

- The argument isn't an argument for *vegetarianism* as much as it is for less cruel meat production
- The argument doesn't obviously apply to animal testing
- The argument allows that some consumption of animals may be ok (e.g. shrimp or scallops)

OPTIONS FOR REJECTING THE BASIC ARGUMENT

(2). If it is wrong to cause pain without a morally good reason, then it is also wrong to support practices that cause pain without a morally good reason.

- If our actions are causally impotent with respect to the meat industry, then we can reject (2)

(4). We can nourish ourselves without eating meat

- Perhaps eating meat *is* nutritionally necessary, in which case premise (4) is false
 - If (4) is false then we can reject the conditional argument made by (3), and so the conclusions stated by (5) and (6)

(3). If we can nourish ourselves without eating meat, then nourishment is not a morally good reason to cause pain to animals or to support practices that cause pain to animals.

- If animal pain is bad, but not *morally bad*, then we can reject (3) – i.e. sentience isn't sufficient for moral status

BAD VS. MORALLY BAD

- We use terms like "good" and "bad" as modifiers of kinds – nothing is simply good or bad
 - Good vs. bad watch; good vs. bad thief; good vs. bad *person*
- We tend to think of moral goods/bads as the most important – their consideration "trumps" or outweighs consideration of non-moral goods or bads

PAIN IN ANIMALS

- Pain in animals is bad (i.e. the animal is harmed), but it isn't *morally* bad.

A harm is just a setback to one or more of a being's welfare conditions, with the harm of pain consisting in the impairment of a subject's physical and mental well-being. (Hsiao, 283)

HSIAO'S DEFENSE OF EATING MEAT

Since the interests of animals are not moral interests, it is not morally wrong for us to use them for the sake of providing food for us. Since nutrition is one of our welfare interests, and eating meat is one way of meeting that interest, then our wanting to eat meat is a sufficient reason to use animals for that purpose. Since moral welfare interests take precedent over non-moral welfare interests, it is permissible to eat meat even if eating meat is not necessary to meet the end of nutrition. (Hsiao, 290)

1. Moral welfare interests trump non-moral welfare interests.
2. Human consumption of meat for the sake of nutrition is a moral welfare interest.
3. The interests of non-human animals in not feeling pain is a non-moral welfare interest.
4. \therefore Human consumption of meat for the sake of nutrition trumps the interests of non-human animals. (by 1-3)
5. \therefore It is morally permissible to eat meat, even industrially farmed meat (by 4)

OBJECTIONS TO HSIAO'S ARGUMENT

- 2. *Human consumption of meat for the sake of nutrition is a moral welfare interest.*
- Human *nutrition* is a moral welfare interest, but why should the consumption of *meat in particular* be a moral interest?

- *3. The interests of non-human animals in not feeling pain is a non-moral welfare interest.*

- Argues that animals lack moral status because they are not rational agents
 - Marginal cases problem
 - No clear link between rational capacities and moral status
 - Irrelevance of pain/pleasure to morality

