

Against Flesh: Why We Should Eschew (Not Chew) Lab-Grown and ‘Happy’ Meat

Forthcoming in *New Omnivorism and Strict Veganism: Critical Perspectives*
(Routledge), eds. Cheryl Abbate and Christopher Bobier

[Penultimate Version]

Ben Bramble
Australian National University
ben.bramble@anu.edu.au

Abstract. Many people believe that if we could produce meat without animal suffering—say, in ‘humane’ or ‘happy’ farms, or by growing it in a lab from biopsied cells—there would be no moral problem with doing so. This chapter argues otherwise. There is something morally ‘off’ with eating the flesh of sentient beings *however* it is produced. It is ‘off’ because anyone who truly understands the intimate relationship that an animal’s body stands in to all the value and disvalue in their lives would not *want* to eat flesh. The chapter concludes by arguing that, as a society, we should not switch over to ‘happy’ or lab-grown meat. Instead, it is imperative that we pursue a public reckoning on our treatment of animals in factory farms, not only for the sake of animals, but for the sake of humanity itself.

1. Introduction

For some vegetarians—including utilitarians like Peter Singer¹—the problem with meat is just the suffering of

¹ Singer (2011).

animals in the farming process (or other harms to animals).² Make farms entirely happy places, where animals lead flourishing lives until old age, when they are killed painlessly without their awareness, and the problem goes away. Meat made in such ‘happy’ or ‘humane’ farms might, such vegetarians claim, be morally acceptable.

Other vegetarians—like Tom Regan³ and Gary Francione⁴—disagree. They believe that such meat is still morally problematic. Why? On the most influential version of this view, it has to do with animals’ *rights* or ‘*inherent*’ *value*.⁵ Since farmed animals are experiencing “subjects of a life” (with preferences, beliefs, a sense of self, and so on), we must not use them merely for our own purposes or as mere means to our ends, just as we must not use other humans in this kind of way. What we owe animals is not to make their cages nicer for them, but to stop caging them altogether. This view entails that we should abolish the use of animals not only in meat production, but for milk and eggs, clothing, research, and other products as well.

I share the view of the second group of philosophers that we should not be farming animals for meat at all, even if such farms could be made entirely happy places. But I disagree with the dominant view of *why*. The fundamental problem with ‘happy’ meat, I believe, is not one of objectionably using

² I will not here summarize these harms. They are already well-known to many readers, and are easily discoverable by everyone else.

³ Regan (1983).

⁴ Francione (2000).

⁵ See Regan (1983).

such animals or failing to respect their rights. It has to do instead with the nature and significance of *flesh*—actually, not just flesh, but bodies more generally. As I will argue, when you fully understand all the value and disvalue that is possible in the lives of these animals, and—here is the crucial bit—*the way in which their bodies are the condition of all this value and disvalue*, then you would not *want* to eat their bodies, even if the animals lived happy lives.

My view has a surprising and important implication: there is something morally problematic or ‘off’ about eating even *lab-grown meat*—i.e., meat grown in a lab from biopsied cells.

I will start, in Section 2, by explaining why it is wrong to consume *human* flesh, even the flesh of humans who have died of natural causes. In Section 3, I will apply this account to the case of ‘happy’ meat. In Section 4, I will apply this account to the case of lab-grown meat. In Section 5, I will consider an important objection to my claims—namely, that even if I’m right that all flesh is morally problematic, we should still pursue or promote ‘happy’ and lab-grown meat, given all the animal suffering these could prevent. In Section 6, I will consider the implications of my account for some interesting cases: eggs, dairy, bivalves, imitation or plant-based meat, and some others. In Section 7, I will sum up.

2. Human Cannibalism

To most people, the thought of consuming the dead body of another human—even somebody who has passed away of

natural causes—is deeply repugnant. We would not do so—we would not *want* to do so—even if we could do so in secret, without causing any harm, or suffering any harm ourselves.

Why? The reason, I think, is that we implicitly understand the extremely intimate relationship that a human being has to their own body, and in particular *the role our bodies play in all the valuable (and disvaluable) experiences of our lives*. Our body is the thing that when stroked gives us pleasure. It is the thing that allows us (in many cases) to run in the field, swim in the ocean, enjoy a good meal, cozy up in bed on a cold night, and so on. It is the thing that allows us to connect with other beings, physically and emotionally. More fundamentally still, it is the thing that allows us to breathe, stand up and move about, or feel anything at all. It is our inseparable friend or partner throughout our whole life. It is the thing that literally holds us together.

Of course, our body is also the thing that when pricked or prodded gives us pain. It is the condition of all our unpleasant experiences as well, not to mention our incredible vulnerability in this world. To be embodied in the way we are is to be subject to damage or death at a moment's notice. It is a tremendous predicament. Our bodies are not only painful and easily damaged, but confining in the extreme.

In short, a person's body is, for both good and bad, their portal to the whole world. It is what sees us through life, from birth to death. In this way, it has a unique significance.

Now, most of us have a rich—albeit mostly implicit—understanding of this. We understand it simply because we

ourselves are humans, with first-hand experience of (in our own case) the value and disvalue in our lives, and the ways in which our body makes all of it possible. It is this understanding, I believe, that is what makes the thought of eating a dead person's body so disgusting or repugnant to us.

It is similar to how someone who understands the beauty and value of natural environments or particular great works of art naturally feels upset at the thought of their loss or destruction. Somebody who understands and loves nature does not want a redwood grove to be torn down, even if this could somehow happen without harming any sentient beings.⁶ Somebody who understands the beauty and value of The Beatles' music would feel upset at the thought of Paul's childhood home being sold off to developers and bulldozed. Somebody who loves or values humanity would be distraught at the thought of humanity's premature extinction, *independently* of any harms our extinction would cause to the final generation of humans.⁷ Similarly, we, as humans who implicitly understand all the value and disvalue that is possible in our human lives and the role our bodies play in all this, would simply loathe the thought of eating the body of a dead human, even if doing so would cause no harm to anyone. This is the natural, inevitable reaction of somebody who understands the relevant values and is allowing themselves to feel accordingly.

Our bodies are special in this way. They are different from everything else in our lives—for instance, our possessions.

⁶ Hill (1983).

⁷ Scheffler (2013).

While it might be sad to sell or buy a dead person's car, house, or jewelry, it is not disgusting or repugnant in the way that it is disgusting to eat a dead person's body (or to use it in other ways, say, by extracting and selling their hair or teeth). The difference is the extremely intimate relationship we bear to our own bodies, their intimate involvement in all the value and disvalue of our lives. People can be attached to cars, but not in the same way.

Now, given that fully understanding the role of our bodies in all the value and disvalue of our lives would cause one to feel disgusted or sick at the thought of eating a human body, I want to say, it *is* disgusting or morally problematic or 'off' in some way to consume a dead human body. It is our reactions here—or more precisely, the reactions of a sufficiently well-informed person—that explains why it is 'off' to do such a thing. These reactions make it the case that it is 'off'. The act is disgusting *because* well-informed people here are disgusted by it.

I want to conclude this section by considering three objections to what I have just argued. First, it might be said: "But surely there is an *evolutionary* explanation available for why the thought of eating dead humans disgusts us. We feel disgust here simply because early humans who did not feel such disgust went too close to corpses, caught diseases, died, and did not reproduce. We are descended from those who (purely irrationally) did not want to get too close to corpses."

I agree that at least *part* of our disgust reaction at the thought of eating the dead probably evolved in this way. But I believe there is more to it than this. Our disgust is also,

significantly, due to our awareness of the intimate role of a person's body in all the value (and disvalue) of their lives. I cannot prove this, at least not in the present piece. But, it is important to point out that these explanations are not mutually exclusive.

Second, it might be objected: "What about people in cultures that *did* eat their dead? Some people, after all, seem to have thought that eating their dead was a way of *respecting* them."

The people in these cultures were mistaken. They did not sufficiently understand the value and disvalue that is possible in human lives, or the way in which our bodies are the special condition of this, our intimate companions throughout our lives. *Some* members of these cultures might have understood this, but if they joined others in eating human flesh, they ignored or repressed it for one reason or another—say, from a misplaced allegiance to a dubious science or religion. Or perhaps they were simply bullied or conditioned by their culture into putting such thoughts out of their heads some of the time.

A third objection: "What about the bodies of very young humans, say, early fetuses, where there is not yet a self or person at all? These bodies do not stand in the sort of intimate relationship to a self that I described earlier, yet it still seems 'off' to eat them if they have happened to die of natural causes."

I agree that these very young bodies do not stand in such a relationship, and also that it is 'off' to eat them (independently of any harms this might cause to others). On

my account, *it is not necessary that the dead body in question was the body of an actual self*. It is enough that it is *the same sort of stuff* that embodied selves come in. How am I able to say this? It is because of what, on my account, makes it the case that eating human flesh is ‘off’ or disgusting—namely, *the feelings or reactions of a sufficiently well-informed person*.

Somebody who truly understands that the thing in front of them is made of the very same sort of stuff (in this case, human flesh) as that which the bodies that actual human selves come in *would* in fact still feel disgust or repugnance at the thought of eating it.

For this reason, my account has the advantage of being able to explain something that many of us want to say. Namely, that it is also disgusting or ‘off’ to eat lab-grown *human* meat—i.e., biologically human flesh grown in a lab from biopsied cells. If your dinner host brought you out a plate of such meat, you would likely refuse. You wouldn’t incorporate it into your diet. On my account, your reactions here would be entirely proper.

This is because while (just like in the case of the early fetus) this is not the body of someone, it is still the *same sort of stuff* that human selves come in and that (in their lives) is the condition of all the value and disvalue. Physically speaking, it is identical. It was *designed* to be identical. Somebody who fully understands these things *would* in fact feel sick at the thought of eating it, and this is why it counts as disgusting or ‘off’ to consume it.

3. 'Happy' Meat

Let us turn now to animals. It is also, I believe, disgusting or 'off' to eat the dead body of an animal who has led a perfectly happy life. It is 'off' for the same reason it is 'off' to eat the body of a human who has died of natural causes. *Animals' bodies play the same sort of role in all the value and disvalue of their lives.* There is the same kind of intimacy here between animals and their bodies. Animals' bodies are the things that when touched give them pleasure, and when pricked or prodded give them pain, that allow them to connect with other animals, frolic in a field, enjoy a good feed, cozy up and get warm on a cold night. Just as with humans, their bodies are their inseparable companions through life, the condition of all their joys and vulnerability. They quite literally hold them together. They are—to use a metaphor I find helpful—the string by which these selves cling to life and to everything that is important to them.⁸

As we have seen, other philosophers have tried to explain the wrongness of 'happy' meat by appealing to the value of animal lives—I am not the first. But what these accounts miss, I believe, is my emphasis on (i) the intimate relationship of these bodies to the beings in question and how they are the condition of all this value, and (ii) the fact that somebody who understands all this would not *want* to eat such meat. When you understand the relationship in (i)—really richly understand it and hold it vividly in your head—the thought of eating animals' bodies, even the bodies of

⁸ For a rich discussion with examples, see Young (2017).

animals who have lived happy lives, just seems horrible. Understanding it, you would not *want* to cut these bodies up and put them into your mouth. You would regard them with reverence. You would feel the same way about eating them as we all do about eating dead humans. This fact about the reactions of fully informed people is what makes it ‘off’.

When I was a child, I liked the taste of meat but found the thought of eating certain parts of animals disgusting—brains, stomachs, livers, tongues, and so on. Most children feel the same way. We are often told that there is no difference between meat or flesh on the one hand, and these other body parts on the other, and that our disgust is mere squeamishness. But as I have grown up, I have come to realize that while it is true that there is no morally relevant difference between these things, we are not being squeamish. Rather, it is our disgust reaction that is right or fitting, and it is right or fitting to the thought of eating not only brains and stomachs, but all body parts. While I continue to like the smell of certain kinds of meat—say, while walking past a barbeque—it now *also* disgusts me. I feel attraction and repulsion. These feelings of disgust are not something I have *tried* to cultivate or achieve. They have come naturally, as I have come to better understand the richness of animals’ mental lives—and the value (and disvalue) possible in them—and the role of their bodies in all this value.

I have been arguing that just as there is something disgusting or ‘off’ with eating the dead body of a human, there is something disgusting or ‘off’ about eating the dead body of an animal, even an animal who has been raised in

happy conditions. I now want to consider a different question: Should we refrain from eating such meat? Is there a *reason* not to eat it?

You might say the answer is obvious: If such meat is disgusting or ‘off’, then *of course* we shouldn’t eat it. Its ‘offness’ is reason enough. But I do not want to say this, exactly. Suppose there was some meat product hidden (unbeknownst to me) in my veggie burger. Do I have a reason not to eat this burger, because there is meat in there and eating meat is ‘off’ or ‘disgusting’? (Assume I will never find out about the meat.) No, I do not want to say that. My view is not a *Humean* view, on which our reasons to act are grounded in or provided by what we would want (or would not want) to do were we fully informed. More precisely: I am not saying that in this sort of case I would have a reason not to eat the veggie burger because, given the presence of meat in it, if I were fully informed I would not want to eat it.

My view is subtly—but importantly—different. My fundamental concern here is not with what we should *do* at all. It is with what sort of people we should *be*. We should want to be the sort of people *who richly understand the relevant facts and feel accordingly*. Understanding the facts here—about animals and their bodies—we would not *want* to eat even ‘happy’ meat.

Why should we want to be the sort of people who understand the relevant facts and feel accordingly? To start with, there is great value for *you* in being the sort of person who is curious enough, as well as honest enough with yourself, to see things for what they are, even when it is

uncomfortable or inconvenient to do so. The relevant facts here—that there is significant value and disvalue possible in the lives of animals, and that their bodies are the condition of all this—are easily digestible by the average person, providing they are curious, thoughtful, and open-minded. We already understand that these facts are true of human beings and even our pets like cats and dogs. It is a small leap to understanding that they are true also of pigs, cows, and so on. If you cannot make this leap, you are likely also hiding other things from yourself, self-deceived in various other ways.

People who are self-deceived—in this case, unwilling or unable to exercise basic empathetic capacities—are, for this reason, likely to have worse relationships with other people. Honest and open exercise of our empathetic capacities is invaluable to the health of our relationships with other humans. If we cannot stretch our minds to clearly beholding the lives of animals and the role of their bodies in their value, then we may be less likely to stretch them to clearly understand our friends and loved ones, or acquaintances or strangers, in daily affairs or when they need our help. If we cannot think clearly and are not honest, then we will have real trouble understanding and communicating with each other. This is bad for ourselves and others.

Moreover, somebody who is unable or unwilling to exercise such capacities thereby greatly restricts the sort of enjoyments and good experiences they can have in their own life. They might be closed off to all sorts of new experiences, forms of art, inquiry, and so on. More generally, they might have

trouble understanding themselves and their own needs, problem-solving, and even navigating the world.

And of course, when *many* people are like this—willing to shut their eyes to uncomfortable or inconvenient truths—this can cause or worsen big social problems like poverty, inequality, and climate change. It is vital for social progress that we be the sorts of people who can confront uncomfortable truths, honestly and openly, and work together to try to find solutions to them.

Note that I am not saying that it is *always* best for us to honestly and openly confront reality. Sometimes the truth is too terrible, and beholding it would crush us. But in the case of animals and meat, it needn't do so. There are many good alternative food sources available. What is awful here is just the way we treat animals and our consumption of their bodies, and this is something we can stop simply by deciding to. If we still lived in a world where we had to hunt in order to survive, then it might make sense for us to suppress our understanding of the value of animals' lives and the role their bodies play in it, or to attempt to stifle our natural feelings that come from such an understanding. But in the present world, it makes no sense to do so, given the possibility of living healthily without meat. How absurd to suffer this price, simply for the pleasures of meat.

Return now to the question of whether there is a *reason* not to eat 'happy' meat. Take somebody who is failing to exercise their empathetic capacities to understand animals and the significance of animals' bodies for value in their lives—failing, in other words, to see the meat in question for what it

really is. This person feels no disgust at the thought of eating such meat. Do *they* have a reason to knock back the ‘happy’ pork chop? This, I think, is the wrong question. What they have reason to do is exercise their capacities, and better inform themselves about animals. If they were better informed, they *would* knock back the ‘happy’ pork chop. Note that in saying this, I am not exactly saying they are *permitted* to eat it on this occasion. It is not to excuse their action. On the contrary, it is to call for something even more radical and demanding—a fundamental re-examination of themselves and their stance on the world.

I want to finish this section by considering an objection. Namely, that it cannot be true that those who are fully informed about animals would be disgusted at the thought of eating ‘happy’ meat, since *farmers* of such meat know these animals better than anyone, and presumably are not disgusted by it.

But working closely with these animals is no guarantee of understanding them well. Since such farmers depend for their livelihoods on *not* having the sort of emotional reactions I have been talking about, they have powerful reasons not to think too deeply about the value in these animals’ lives and the role their bodies play in it. Farmers are not only culturally, but professionally, conditioned to put this out of their heads.

That said, I suspect some of these farmers do have moments where they glimpse these facts and feel the corresponding emotions. But when they do, they turn away. (Some, of course, delegate the slaughter to others.) In these

ways, they are like the cannibals of past times I mentioned in Section 2.

4. Lab-Grown Animal Meat

Turn now to lab-grown *animal* meat. While this meat was never the body of a particular animal, it is, again, still *the same sort of stuff that animal selves come in*, and hence, on my account, there is still something ‘off’ or problematic about it. A fully informed person would in fact feel disgusted at the thought of eating it, just as they would feel disgusted at the thought of eating lab-grown *human* meat, or the dead body of a very young human.

It might be objected that this is all just silly sentimentality. “Lab-grown meat,” it might be said, “causes no harm at all. So, get over it! Put your ‘ick’ or ‘yuck’ feelings aside. You can enjoy this meat with a totally clean conscience!”

But as I have been at pains to point out, what is at issue here is not conscience. My point is that, understanding *what this stuff is*, I *cannot* enjoy it. At least, I cannot enjoy it, on balance. Any pleasure I would take from eating it would be outweighed by my sense of disgust at doing so. The only way to put these feelings aside would be to misrepresent to myself what this stuff is, and that is a dangerous business to get into. The last thing I would want to do is start deceiving myself, or stifle the feelings that come naturally upon understanding things.

When the critic tells me to “get over it” and stop being sentimental, I say it is they who are feeling wrongly, for they are not being emotional *enough*. They are suppressing feelings that it is entirely natural (and in this sense proper) to have. They have likely been doing this since childhood, when they chose to ignore the unease they felt on first learning that the meat on their plate was the dead body of an animal, one killed for our pleasure. But their initial squeamishness was well-founded. And so is the disgust I feel toward the thought of eating lab-grown meat. They should acknowledge what this lab-grown meat stuff is, and let themselves feel the emotions that naturally come here.

Lab-grown meat might not harm animals. But what I am urging is that we should reject the idea that disgust or repugnance is appropriate *only where there is harm*. There is reason to feel such things, also, *when somebody who is fully informed would feel them*. And fully informed people feel such things not only where they are noticing or aware of harms. Again, it is like how an understanding of the beauty or value of nature, of great works of art, and of humanity itself, will naturally give rise to emotions or sentiments that are not independently grounded. People who have a rich understanding of the evaluative facts *are* sentimental. They are moved by things that there is no independent reason to be moved by.

So, should we eat lab-grown meat? Again, this is the wrong question to ask. The thing to say here is just that we should want to be the sort of people who would not *want* to eat it. If we feel okay about eating it, we are not understanding things

as they are. And this is something with potentially very bad consequences for ourselves and others.

5. An Important Objection

I want now to consider an important objection: “Even if it is true that there is something disgusting or morally ‘off’ about eating ‘happy’ and lab-grown meat, we should surely still pursue or promote such meat, and encourage carnivores to switch over to it, given how much animal suffering could be prevented by our doing so.”

This *might* be true. But I can also see reasons to doubt it. If we all switch over to lab-grown meat—say, when and because it has become cheaper, healthier, and tastier than traditional meat—then most of us will remain as the sort of people who, not only do not richly understand animals, their value, and the role of their bodies in this value, but are so willfully blind to animals and their value that they are (as they are today) willing to consume *factory-farmed* meat. If today’s carnivores switch over to lab-grown meat, they will remain as the sort of people who would eat factory-farmed meat *if lab-grown meat were not available*. And so they will remain as the sort of people who are willing and able to hide from themselves basic evaluative facts about others—say, when confronting these facts is uncomfortable or inconvenient. Accordingly, they will continue to suffer and cause all the various harms of our being like this (described above in Section 3).

There is a better outcome possible: *a public reckoning on meat*. Imagine that the next President of the United States enjoys huge popularity, and becomes highly respected as a statesperson and moral leader of the nation. One day, they announce that they have been looking into our treatment of animals in factory farming, and they have come to realize that we are committing one of the worst crimes in human history. In a national address, they eloquently explain the mental lives of animals, all the value and disvalue that is possible therein, and the meaning or significance of their bodies in all of this value and disvalue. This leads Americans (or many, at least), from all sides of the political spectrum, to finally see how wrong factory farming is, and to recognize how uncurious, insensitive, or self-deceived they have been. This sparks a worldwide ban on factory farmed meat.

Or suppose it is not a new President that drives this change, but a highly charismatic or engaging YouTuber, a popstar, a consortium of corporations, or the head of the meat lobby, etc.

Social media now has immense reach, and the truth is on our side. As Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us, “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Much progress has already been made on rights for women, minorities, and gay and lesbian people. It might be only a matter of time before our better understanding of animals spills out into the mainstream, and catalyzes revolutionary change in this domain.

Compared with a future where we switch over to lab-grown meat because it is cheaper, healthier, or tastier than

traditional meat, this outcome would be *hugely* better for *humanity*.

There is another thing worth mentioning. Switching over to lab-grown meat could actually make it *less* likely that we will come to better understand animals as well as our capacity for self-deception when acknowledging the facts is uncomfortable or inconvenient. Factory farms are already mostly hidden from the public eye. If we switch to lab-grown meat, they will be pushed further from view, into the past itself. While a good thing in one way (for animals⁹), this will make it much harder for us to have some kind of reckoning about our treatment of animals. Lab-grown meat *hides* our crimes, and who we are, from ourselves. If we're no longer harming animals in factory farming, you can't say to people "Look what we're capable of!" They're liable to reply "but we *aren't* doing it anymore. *I* wouldn't do it!" Here, self-deception is all too easy.

Sometimes, we should prioritize averting a catastrophe over helping people to morally grow. But in the case at hand, the failure to better understand ourselves and our treatment of animals *is* a catastrophe. And it is a catastrophe on a scale that is really (I would suggest) difficult to fathom—arguably even greater (in the harms it produces) than the harms caused by factory farms themselves.

Could we come to recognize our capacity for self-deception in other ways? Say, by gaining a better understanding of the harms we are causing when it comes to global poverty,

⁹ Though note it won't actually help *future* animals to prevent them from being born at all.

climate change, or inequality within our societies? Perhaps. But it is possible that our best hope is to recognize the true nature of what is going on in factory farms. After all, these are literally bloodbaths. If seeing the bloody corpses of animals in factory farms is not enough to cause us to wake up to ourselves, then it is unclear whether we have any hope of waking up (until, perhaps, it is already too late and we have reached a tipping point on climate change, when the harmful consequences of our negligence will be impossible to hide from ourselves).

So, I think, if you are a vegetarian who is wondering what stance to take on ‘happy’ or lab-grown meat, I would suggest that you not promote the further development or consumption of such meat—especially not by talking up its health or taste benefits. Every time we do so, we make it more likely that people will remain self-deceived here. We let *them* down, and we make a public reckoning on meat a little less likely.

Instead, we should be continuing to bang the drum on behalf of animals, helping people to understand animals better and all the value (and disvalue) that is possible in their lives. We should add to this an emphasis on the role that their bodies play in all of this value—with a focus, perhaps, on different parts of their bodies. “These ribs were the things that held their little heart in place, helping them to breath in air, air that could be sweet with the dew of morning grass.” “This flesh/skin was the thing that helped them cozy up next to each other in the barn.” “This tongue is what they licked their child with.” We should be actively trying to trigger meat

eaters' disgust reactions by helping them to understand (or remember from their childhood, when it may have been plain as day) the role of animals' bodies in the value of their lives. This is not to manipulate them, but to help them better understand things, and feel accordingly.

We should be working double-fast on this, now that lab-grown meat is likely coming in the near future. Lab-grown meat signals the end of our chance to help people wake up about meat.

If I had given up on a public reckoning on meat, then I would support 'happy' and lab-grown meat, for at least this way much animal suffering would be prevented. But I have not given up.

6. Difficult Cases

I want now to briefly consider the implications of my argument for some other kinds of meat or flesh, as well as products like eggs and dairy.

Let's start with eggs and dairy. While abolitionists like Regan and Francione would have us end such industries altogether, I believe they *might* be morally acceptable, if the animals who are being used are truly flourishing (where this includes cows not being separated from their calves, or being deprived of milk that they need for themselves). If these animals are fully happy, and they are producing a surplus amount of, for instance, eggs and milk, we may take them. (It is not clear whether this is possible, though.) This is because

eggs and milk are not parts of animals' bodies themselves (at least, once they come out). On my account, this constitutes a potentially morally significant difference.

However, I admit that it is possible that somebody who fully understands the harms humans have done to dairy cows and chickens over many years would, as a result of this understanding, feel disgusted even at the thought of eating eggs or dairy produced by animals who are truly flourishing. If this is so, then even such eggs and dairy might be morally 'off'. I do not know what a fully informed person would feel here.

What about *lab-grown* milk and eggs? On my account, there is no obvious reasons why these would be morally 'off'.

What about roadkill? On my account, eating roadkill or other wild animals who have already passed away, does seem morally 'off'. Those who understand the role of these bodies in the value of these animals' lives would not *want* to eat such meat either.

What about imitation or plant-based meat? This is a hard case. I am not sure here what to say. Such meat, unlike lab-grown meat, is *not* made of the same stuff that animal selves come in. But it has nonetheless been designed to resemble it. I do not know what a fully informed person would feel on this matter. Perhaps they would feel okay about eating 'veggie' sausages or patties (since these shapes do not especially resemble animal parts), while feeling disgusted at the thought of eating a veggie steak that is 'bleeding' beetroot juice so as to look 'cooked rare'. I am keen to see what *new* kinds of flavors food scientists can cook up in their labs.

Perhaps these will incorporate or build on some of the flavors of meat. I see no problem in that (providing, of course, that these products do not involve any kind of flesh).

What about the flesh of bivalves? This is flesh of a kind, but bivalves are not conscious and lack selves. Again, I admit I do not know what a fully informed person would feel here. Similarly, I do not know how they would feel toward antlers, snake-skin, and other such things.

Finally, it is worth noting, I see no obvious moral problem in making lab-grown meat for consumption by our pets, providing that these pets need to eat meat to survive. Why is there no problem here? It is because our pets (unlike us) do not have the ability to deeply or richly understand the intimate role of animals' bodies in all the value and disvalue in their lives.

7. Conclusion

The argument of this paper has been simple. It is disgusting or 'off' to eat the bodies of dead *humans*. Why? Because of the intimate role our bodies play in all the value and disvalue of our lives. Well, the bodies of animals play the same role in *their* lives. Someone who fully understands this would not want to eat even meat from animals who lived happy lives. They also would not want to eat flesh that had been grown in a lab, for it, too, is the same kind of stuff. All such meat is morally 'off'.

What's more, we should not promote 'happy' or lab-grown meat as alternatives to factory-farmed meat, even though doing so would prevent a huge amount of suffering. There is still hope for a public reckoning on our treatment of animals. If we switch over to these alternative meats, such a reckoning will become much less likely. And this would be a catastrophe for *humanity*.

References

Thomas E. Hill, Jr. (1983) "Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments", *Environmental Ethics*, 5: 211-24.

Gary Francione (2000), *Introduction to Animal Rights: Your Child or The Dog*. Temple University Press.

Tom Regan (1983), *The Case for Animal Rights*. University of California Press

Peter Singer (2011), *Practical Ethics*, 3rd Edition, Cambridge

Samuel Scheffler (2013), *Death and the Afterlife*.

Rosamund Young (2017), *The Secret Life of Cows*, Faber.