

## How to Help when it Hurts: ACT Individually (and in Groups)

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**Abstract:** In a recent article, Corey Wrenn argues that in order to adequately address injustices done to animals, we ought to think systemically. Her argument stems from a critique of the individualist approach I employ to resolve a moral dilemma faced by animal sanctuaries, who sometimes must harm some animals to help others. But must systemic critiques of injustice be at odds with individualist approaches? In this paper, I respond to Wrenn by showing how individualist approaches that take seriously the notion of group responsibility can be deployed to solve complicated dilemmas that are products of injustice. Contra Wrenn, I argue that to adequately address injustice, *acting* individually, often within groups, is significantly more important than *thinking* systemically.

**Keywords:** animal rights, animal sanctuaries, harming, hunting, respect

## Introduction

In discussions of injustice, it is not uncommon for academics, especially sociologists and social and political philosophers, to criticize the social institutions, structures, and *systems* that permit and perpetuate injustice (Anderson; Ashford; Benton; Blau; Bonilla-Silva; Cudd; Feagin; Gosepath; Hall; Parekh; Pogge; Wilson; Wrenn; Young). On the other hand, philosophers who work in ethics tend to theorize about the concrete justice-based duties and responsibilities (both backward and forward looking) of *individuals* like you and I, who are forced to make difficult choices within unjust systems (Abbate; Bruckner; Fischer; Fischer and Demetriou; Fischer and Milburn; Norcross; Singer; Zwolinski). Arguably, *both* systemic and individualist analyses are needed if we are to respond effectively to injustice. While systems certainly play a role in causing, perpetuating, and sustaining injustices, we cannot forget that these systems themselves are caused, sustained, and perpetuated by *individuals* (Pogge). As Iris Marion Young notes, we, as individuals, participate in the production and reproduction of structural injustice because we act within accepted norms, rules, and practices of harmful systems. Without individual moral agents, there would be no sexist, racist, ableist, or speciesist systems to criticize.

Although many injustices are perpetuated by harmful social institutions and systems, they are ultimately caused and reproduced by a collection of *individual* acts. And because we are forced to make painful choices from within these systems, we need clear answers to these questions: *What are our moral obligations, as individuals, in this world filled with injustice? How should we resolve the moral dilemmas we face that arise from the many injustices in the world?* When it comes to the injustices done to animals, we cannot provide adequate moral guidance to individuals simply by pointing out that speciesist systems are the root culprit of animal exploitation. Surely, morality demands more than just system-critiquing.

The article ‘How to Help When it Hurts: Think Systemic’ by Corey Wrenn and my essay ‘How to Help When it Hurts: The Problem of Assisting Victims of Injustice’ illustrate important differences between systemic and individualist approaches to injustices. Both articles address the moral dilemma animal sanctuaries encounter when they rescue obligate carnivores. As I point out, in order to feed their obligate carnivores, wild animal sanctuaries must, in some

way, participate in the intentional harming of other creatures, whether it be by purchasing animal flesh from the grocery store or hunting wildlife. I argue that the lesser of the two evils is, under certain conditions, hunting, and I advance an animal rights framework that explains why, when feeding their carnivorous residents, animal sanctuaries should take up hunting ‘big game’ (under certain conditions) rather than purchase the flesh of farmed animals. Wrenn counters by insisting that hunting causes more harm than does the purchasing of factory farmed products. In particular, she argues that my individualistic approach overlooks the alleged fact that both individual consumers and animal sanctuaries are embedded in a food system that renders them powerless to effectively combat the harms that occur on animal farms.

In addition to criticizing my empirical claim that hunting ‘big game’ is less harmful than purchasing factory farmed products from the grocery store, Wrenn challenges my individualist methodology and faults me for not providing a systemic critique of the speciesist system, which facilitates the moral conundrums animal sanctuaries face. As Wrenn points out, it’s because of speciesism that animals are exploited in the circus industry and are then in need of rescue. And, by inviting humans to observe their nonhuman residents, animal sanctuaries themselves may perpetuate speciesism, thus it is questionable whether sanctuaries are good in-and-of themselves.

In what follows, I defend my original argument against several challenges presented by Wrenn. In doing so, I critique Wrenn’s systemic methodology and her empirical claim that purchasing factory farmed meat is less harmful than hunting. I moreover draw attention to the ways in which Wrenn is overly pessimistic about the power of consumers to prevent terrible harm to farmed animals, and overly optimistic about the power of individuals to change the speciesist system itself. As I will show, the systemic approach fails to acknowledge that dismantling the speciesist system is impossible without changes in diet and consumer behavior. Consequently, we ought to reconsider seriously my proposal that in order to help, we sometimes ought to hunt.

## On the Alleged Importance of Systemic Approaches

Wrenn is critical of what she refers to as case-by-case ‘individualist’ analyses of moral dilemmas, claiming that they fail to acknowledge ‘the larger system in which these conflicts transpire as malleable’ (150-151). She charges that the individualist moral conflicts, such as my animal sanctuary conflict and Tom Regan’s lifeboat conflict, are ‘wielded unnecessarily to justify continued systems of speciesism’ (Wrenn 153). Citing Marti Kheel, Wrenn claims that Regan and I ‘miss the forests for the trees’ by ‘focusing on moral dilemmas rather than examining root problems’ (Wrenn 159). Philosophical discussions of moral dilemmas, according to Wrenn, ‘exhibit a narrow outlook that obscures the larger environmental forces that initially manifest the conflict and constantly shape the field in which the dilemma operates’ (159).

In the company of Ted Benton, Wrenn calls for a radical anti-speciesist transformation of society, urging readers to ‘think systemically about social problems’ (151). When it comes to injustices done to animals, she advises that, rather than dwell on individual lifestyle changes and choices, we should focus on ‘the larger system of speciesism and its logic that nonhumans are property that can be owned, used, consumed, and discarded for human want’ (Wrenn 152). Her fundamental criticism of my argument is that it focuses on a single sanctuary issue that is created by an oppressive system, ‘without offering a substantial critical analysis of the system itself’ (160). Wrenn predicts that if the system is not addressed, we will forever face moral dilemmas, such as the one I present. We must, as Benton suggests, eliminate the kinds of institutionalized ‘reification’ and ‘commodification’ in our social relations with nonhuman animals.

Yet, in my article, my fundamental goal is to apply Regan’s anti-speciesist framework of animal rights to a moral dilemma faced by animal sanctuaries, thus there is no need to provide a ‘substantial critical analysis of the system itself’. I draw on Regan’s claim that animals have the fundamental right to be treated with respect, and I insist that ‘we should immediately cease the harming of them in the name of human interest, such as when we cause them to suffer and/or die in order to use them for food, medical advancement, entertainment, and so forth’ (Abbate 144). As evidenced by our commitment to animal rights theory, Regan and I acknowledge the

need for ‘system restructuring’, but we also acknowledge the tragic reality that, until we find ourselves in an anti-speciesist utopia, we, as individuals, have difficult moral choices to make, and to make the morally right choices, we require ethical guidance over and above the recommendation that we ‘restructure the system’.

While institutional criticisms can be useful, surely not every academic article that addresses a complicated moral conflict is required to provide a ‘substantial critical analysis of the system itself’. After all, if we demand every article that addresses ethical quandaries involving nonhuman animals to first provide a substantial critical analysis of the speciesist system, we would never get to the question that really matters for individual moral actors and, in this case, animal sanctuaries: *Given the speciesist system that perpetuates so much terrible, unjust harm, how do I, as one individual (or one sanctuary) do my part in making restitution to those animals who are victims of the speciesist system?* Because it is unlikely that speciesism will be abolished in my and Wrenn’s lifetime, it is counterproductive to demand that individuals, instead of critically pondering real-life moral dilemmas, concern themselves only with dismantling the speciesist system. It surely is not the case that ethicists can pursue justice *only* if they drop their moral inquiries into practical dilemmas in order to single-mindedly develop systemic critiques.

It certainly is regrettable that there exist speciesist, racist, sexist, ableist, and homophobic systems that perpetuate injustice to animals (human and nonhuman). But institutional critiques often fail to transcend this descriptive claim. The cause of the injustices in our world is not really a mystery. For example, it is no secret that that we live in a speciesist world in which animals are wrongly viewed and treated as resources and property. Yet, until we develop a rich account of individualist morality, it will remain unclear how individuals like you and I ought to do our part in cleaning up the unjust mess we face, especially when helping may require harming.

In some cases, systemic critiques inform us that we, as individuals, have some vague ‘political duty’ to change oppressive and unjust systems (Young; Sinnott-Armstrong). John Broome, for instance, claims that citizens can fulfill the demands of ‘civic morality’ by engaging in political action to get governments to do what they should, and Young claims that individuals

have political responsibilities, which amount to reforming institutions and transforming structural processes. Yet, neither describe how it is that individuals should go about doing this (Zheng). In her defense, Young claims that political duties ‘carry considerable discretion’, and thus agents can decide for themselves how to discharge their responsibilities (379).

Unfortunately, such advice is unhelpful for individuals who seek clear and feasible action guidance that would enable them to transform larger social processes and structures (Scheffler), especially since some political efforts do more harm than good (Hertel). Thus, some plausibly argue that even if it is true that individuals have a duty to reform harmful systems (i.e., ‘institutionalize’), this duty is arguably ‘hopelessly underdetermined’, insofar as it is not clear how to carry it out (Mieth 179). Given the lack of specificity about the content of alleged political duties and responsibilities, the individualist approach to injustice is indispensable, as it provides clear action-guidance to individuals like you and I who want to make positive change in this world infested with unjustly caused moral dilemmas.

### **On the Alleged Power to Dismantle the Speciesist System**

While I am hopeful that consumers, including animal sanctuaries, can prevent harm to farmed animals through collective purchasing decisions, Wrenn denies that consumers are powerful enough to reduce global production of animal foods. Wrenn thus encourages readers, rather than worry about the consumption behavior of others, to aim at eradicating the entire speciesist system. Yet even if we grant that individuals have a fundamental obligation to change or dismantle the system, Wrenn fails to provide an account of anti-speciesist-system activism, vaguely suggesting that individuals ‘relegate resources to systemic change’ (174). Wrenn, like Young, calls for political action, yet fails to provide an account of what this means.

Presumably, animal ethicists, including myself, and anti-speciesist sanctuary workers wholeheartedly agree with Wrenn that animals are not mere tools for entertainment and that the speciesist system is regrettable. I myself acknowledge that sanctuaries ought to educate the public about the injustices of circuses, zoos, and wildlife ‘pet’ ownership, and many animal sanctuaries make it a point to teach visitors about the wrongness of these practices. What more

should individuals and sanctuaries do to make systemic change? Even if a satisfactory answer is offered, individuals need practical guidance to behave justly *within* this system. After all, instructing individuals to critique the speciesist system does not help sanctuaries solve the real dilemmas they continually face – dilemmas that, as Wrenn rightly notes, are perpetuated by speciesism. While these dilemmas are not, *theoretically* speaking, inevitable, *practically* speaking, they will be unavoidable in the years of injustices to come.

It's not uncommon for social philosophers and sociologists alike to claim that, when it comes to *large-scale* collective action problem P that is caused by a massive collection of individual acts of type X, individuals who perform type X acts don't, by themselves, cause harm, and thus individuals have no obligation to refrain from performing type X acts, despite that type X acts are the very kind of acts that caused P in the first place. For instance, when it comes to the problem of global warming, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong argues that we, as individuals, have no obligation to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, given that our individual emissions do not, by themselves, cause harm. Yet this doesn't mean that individuals are off the hook, morally speaking. After all, individuals have a duty to engage in *political action*. As Sinnott-Armstrong argues, our 'real moral obligations' are 'to get governments to do their job to prevent the disaster of excessive global warming' (312). While we need not refrain from carbon-emitting behavior, we still ought to pressure our governments to change the law regarding carbon emissions, or so it is argued.

But when it comes to political action, we just face another collective action problem. I cannot, by myself, change government policies, nor can I, by myself, dismantle the speciesist system. For political action to be effective we must engage in *group action*. Why, then, are we not required to engage in non-political group action, or, as Broome puts it, 'private morality', when it comes to moral problems like global warming and animal agriculture?<sup>1</sup> Why are we not obligated to coordinate with other individuals to reduce our carbon emissions and meat consumption if we are obligated to coordinate with other individuals to engage in *political action*?

Consider meat eating. Wrenn advances the common argument that individuals and animal sanctuaries are causally impotent when it comes to their purchasing behavior. She claims

that, we, as individuals, or perhaps even as members of groups, cannot reduce harm to farmed animals by adopting plant-based diets, insisting that ‘animal agriculture is minimally impacted by consumer choices’ (Wrenn 172). What, then, is Wrenn’s recommendation to individuals who desire to reduce harm to farmed animals? She advises that we address the structural problem of speciesism (168), acknowledge the role of systems (172), and attack the system itself (173). But how exactly do we do this? Wrenn’s answer is that this requires ‘large scale collective action and the political reform of agricultural management practices to increase democratic access to decision-making in food supply chains’ (173). For systemic change to be realized, power must be somehow removed from corporations and redistributed among consumers (Wrenn 173). Wrenn thus calls for a ‘critical reassessment of the status quo speciesism’ and she advises sanctuaries and their supporters to ‘relegate resources to systemic change’ (174).

Presumably, Wrenn believes that some form of political, anti-speciesist collective activism will reduce, if not eventually eliminate, injustices done to animals. So, essentially, she assumes that (1) we, as individuals, have the power to initiate or promote some form of collective political action, and (2) this collective political action will in fact be effective. As she suggests, by engaging in group political action, we can effectively demand political reform of agricultural management practices to increase democratic access to decision-making in food supply chains (Wrenn 173). Yet she does not seem to believe that even a sizeable collection of individuals, or what Hud Hudson and Larry May refer to as ‘members of loosely structured groups’, can prevent harm to farmed animals by deciding to collectively cease purchasing animal meat.

So, we must ask: (1) Which strategy is more likely to prevent harm to animals: (a) encouraging individuals to refrain from purchasing meat or (b) encouraging people to group together to engage in political action? To answer this, we must ask: (2) are individuals more likely to engage in: (c) meat-abstaining behavior, or (d) political action? And (3) are collective-acting animal rights activists more likely to change (e) the food system, or (f) the speciesist system? Wrenn seems unhopeful that individuals will collectively cease the purchasing of meat, pointing to the coercive influence of food suppliers and the government on consumer behavior. Perhaps, then, Wrenn believes that (d) is more likely than (c). But even if a sizeable collection of



individuals decides not to purchase meat, Wrenn does not seem to think that this will impact the farming industry. So even if (c) is more likely than (d), Wrenn likely believes that (f) is more likely than (e), and thus (b) is more likely than (a). Against this view, I will argue that (c) is more likely than (d) and (e) is more likely than (f), thus (a) is more likely than (b).

## On the Alleged Effectiveness of Collective Political Action

Often, when ethicists advise individuals to group together to engage in ‘non-political’ behavior that may *collectively* make a difference, they ask individuals to *refrain* from performing harmful activities. For instance, ethicists who believe in the power of group action might advise individuals to *refrain* from purchasing animal products. In this case, consumers might ‘lose out’ on something they enjoy, but they gain something just as enjoyable: delightful and nutritious plant-based alternatives. Yet, when we encourage individuals to engage in political group action or fulfill what Elizabeth Cripps refers to as ‘promotional duties’, we ask them to perform *positive action* – social movement action that is emotionally demanding and time consuming, insofar as it requires significant personal dedication (Jacobsson and Lindblom; Mieth). Involvement in the animal rights movement, for example, often dramatically transforms lifestyles, and many people are not willing to make such fundamental changes to their behavior, even if they endorse anti-speciesist beliefs (Herzog).

Surely, it is easier to encourage individuals to refrain from one kind of harm-causing consumer behavior than it is to get them to engage in life-changing collaborative political action. And, surely, it’s easier to motivate people to stop eating animals than it is to motivate people to participate in anti-speciesism activism, as evident by the fact that only a small fraction of vegans participates in animal rights activism. For one, there are several different motivations for becoming vegan that are compatible with speciesist attitudes, such as concern for one’s personal health and concern for the environment (Janssen et al.; Fox and Ward). Some studies find that health is the key motivation for a shift to veganism (Dyetta et al.), which indicates that consumer motivation for adopting a vegan diet does not always stem from a concern for animal welfare.

Indeed, many people choose veganism or reduce their consumption of animal products *even though they embrace speciesist ideologies*.

So, we have at least two options. As members of loosely structured groups, we can, as Hudson advises, devise a decision-making procedure through which we can collectively cease the purchasing of animal products. Or, as members of loosely structure groups, we can devise a decision-making procedure through which we can collectively demand Wrenn's vision of political reform. While Wrenn might grant that it's easier to motivate people to stop eating animals than it is to motivate them to engage in political action, she may insist that it is, all things considered, more effective to focus on wide-scale political action than it is to focus on wide-scale dietary change. Even if it takes longer to form a critical mass of political, anti-speciesist activists, this may be, in the long run, what is needed to effectively reduce harm to animals.

But when it comes to affecting United States (U.S.) government policy, average citizens and even mass-based public interest groups have little or no influence (Gilens and Page). Rather, it is only economic elites and organized groups representing business interests that are powerful enough to substantially impact U.S. government policy (Gilens and Page). As research indicates, 'when a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose' (Gilens and Page 576). For one, business and economic interest groups, as opposed to most public interest groups, are well-established – they have knowledge of the way the system works and established contacts with members of legislature (Allen; Lutz and Lutz). Agriculture interest groups, which are some of the most important interest groups operating in the U.S., are large and well-funded, and thus the agricultural lobby repeatedly defeats the efforts of animal rights interest groups (Ibrahim; Kreuziger; Matheny and Leahy). This perhaps explains why U.S. states with economies that strongly depend on agriculture are less likely to provide legal protection to animals (Lutz and Lutz 2011).

What we can take from this is that so long as economies are dependent on animal agriculture, there will be a strong animal agricultural lobby that impedes the efforts of animal-rights groups to enact policy-level change. To obtain the policy-level change that Wrenn envisions, the animal agriculture lobby must be weakened, and this will happen only if there is a

dramatic decrease in demand for animal products. After all, if there is a sharp decrease in demand for animal-based foods, economies will shift from animal-agriculture based to plant-based, and, consequently, there will be an emergence of well-funded plant-based companies and politically influential economic and business interest groups that aim to promote the interests of plant-based food companies.

Essentially, Wrenn suggests that animal rights activists skip over agents that influence government policies (such as powerful animal agriculture companies and interest groups) and deal directly with the government itself. Yet, empirical research reveals that this strategy is not effective. Animal rights groups will fail to get state legislatures to change the law if powerful economic and business interest groups oppose the proposed changes (Gilens and Page). Significant harm to farmed animals will be prevented most effectively if there is a sharp decline in demand for animal meat.

### **On the Alleged Impotence of Consumer Behavior**

Wrenn objects to my hunting proposal because she believes that hunting ‘may actually cause more hurt than would the purchasing of slaughterhouse byproducts’ (151).<sup>2</sup> As she argues, (1) purchasing factory farmed products does not cause harm, while (2) hunting does cause additional harm. In support of the first claim, Wrenn avers that while public consumption is controlled by producers, consumers have minimal power ‘within a system that is designed to promote and protect speciesist consumption patterns’ (161). One reason that food systems are said to be seller-controlled rather than buyer-controlled is that meat and dairy are allegedly ‘forced on Americans’ (Wrenn 161). As Wrenn argues, artificially low prices, heavy advertising, targeted marketing, and misleading nutritional advice effectively coerce consumers into buying animal products.

What Wrenn says here is not particularly relevant to the moral dilemma I consider. After all, I do not ask whether the average consumer is morally permitted to purchase factory farmed meat, nor do I question whether meat consumers make authentic purchasing choices. I do not deny that some meat consumers are coerced into buying meat due to artificially low

prices, heavy advertising, and misleading nutritional advice, nor do I deny that corporations retain disproportionate power over the food system. I can grant Wrenn's claim that many uninformed and disempowered consumers do not make authentic choices when they purchase meat and still question whether it is morally permissible for *animal sanctuaries* – i.e., entities that presumably, after thinking long and hard about animal exploitation, can see through this alleged coercion – to purchase factory farmed products. Arguably, animal sanctuaries have more moral willpower and ethical awareness than the average consumer, so we cannot excuse the potentially problematic consumer behavior of sanctuaries on the grounds that the meat industry 'coerces' the typical consumer into purchasing animal products.

Wrenn then advances a more plausible argument: the 'vegan boycott' won't cause a decline in the production of animal products, because such boycotts are 'no match for the capitalist system's well-oiled treadmill of production' (161). She thus contends that the purchasing behavior of animal sanctuaries is unlikely to change the food system. Because Wrenn believes that consumer demand and choices can't even *reduce* harm to animals, she predicts that when animal sanctuaries purchase factory farmed meat, it is unlikely that they 'aggravate the injustice already done to food animals, who, regardless of sanctuary procurement decisions, will continue to suffer and die as long as systemic conditions remain unaltered' (162).

Wrenn is not alone in her lack of faith in consumer power. Critics of veganism have long advanced what has come to be known as the 'causal impotence' objection, which essentially claims that because the meat industry is so large, it is insensitive to one person's decision to become vegan. As the argument goes, one consumer's decision to go vegan will not reduce the number of animals raised and killed on factory farms, as the meat industry does not reduce its supply of animals just because one person stopped eating animals (Frey; Harris and Galvin; Shafer Landau). Individual consumers are thus assumed to be incapable of preventing harm to farmed animals. Compelling responses to this causal impotence objection have been thoroughly defended in the literature (Kagan; Matheny; Norcross), so there is no need to rehash them here.

Wrenn is certainly correct to say that one individual's choice, or even a group of individual choices, cannot, by itself, 'feed structural change'. But one thing to note is that I do

not think that animal sanctuaries, by hunting and refusing to purchase animal products, will ‘change the structure’. My point is that it is *less harmful* to hunt than it is to purchase factory farmed products. After all, ‘the system’ is, to some degree, *influenced* by consumer behavior. As Alastair Norcross (2004) compellingly argues, there is some threshold at which the number of vegans will influence the market and thereby reduce the number of sentient animals raised and killed for food. And animal sanctuaries can be part of that number. Thus, one or more of a sanctuary’s acts of buying animal flesh may be what Shelly Kagan calls the ‘trigger’ act that causes the harming of some animals.

There is ample empirical evidence that the collective activity of individual consumers is making positive change in the food industry. Consider the recent sharp increase in demand for vegan products in the U.S. alone. Reports by Nielsen Holdings show that from 2016-2017, sales of plant-based foods increased approximately 8%, and from 2017-2018, sales of plant-based foods increased 20%, while overall U.S. food sales rose only 2% (Plant Based Foods Association). Surely, the best explanation for the increased production and purchases of vegan goods is the tremendous growth in collective consumer demand for vegan food. Wrenn, though, believes that as demand for vegan products increases in America and demand for animal flesh decreases, the meat industry will invent new products or expand into new markets. According to this logic, even if consumers collectively cause a noticeable decrease in demand for animal products in America, this will not spare any animal suffering.

There are several problems with Wrenn’s reasoning. First off, we might ask: if it is profitable for meat companies to move into other markets, why haven’t they done so already? Why would they wait for a sharp decrease in demand for animal-based products in the U.S.? Presumably, if it’s possible for these powerful meat producers to capitalize by expanding to international markets, they will quickly seize the growth opportunity. This explains why Tyson Foods has *already*, without waiting for the rise of veganism in the U.S., expanded to overseas markets and now ships its products to 115 countries (Tyson Foods). And one reason why Tyson Foods and other U.S. meat producers haven’t expanded even further is due to the problems of changing global trade policies, trade wars, and the uncertainty of tariffs. Because the international market environment is so volatile and uncertain, it’s not so easy, as Wrenn

suggests, for meat companies to just move into new overseas markets when demand decreases in the U.S. The U.S. in particular faces significant barriers for exporting meat in the global market (Fields et al.). So even if meat companies expand into international markets when demand for animal flesh decreases in the U.S., the operating costs inevitably will rise – costs that are passed on to the consumer, which drives down consumption. And if both the supply and demand for animal flesh decrease (relative to the prior level of supply and demand in the U.S.), this means that fewer animals will be raised and killed, and thus the amount of farmed animal suffering will be lower than it would be if meat companies successfully sold to U.S. consumers.

While Wrenn seems confident that the meat industry's first response to falling demand of animal flesh will be to move into international markets, she fails to consider the likely possibility that the *meat* industry will make new products that cater to adapting preferences of consumers. This means that rather than expand into international markets with high tariffs, U.S. meat companies may produce, or increase their production of, vegan food domestically. Indeed, the animal food industry has already invented new vegan products in response to the growing demand for vegan food products. For instance, by the end of 2019, Tyson Foods, America's largest meat producer, is planning to launch a new line of meat alternatives, including plant-based nuggets. According to the CEO of Tyson Foods, Noel White, this decision is in direct response to the rising, demand for vegan products compared with beef, pork, and poultry products. As White puts it:

That's where the growth is at. There's a growing number of people that want to eat a product that they view as being healthier for them and it may be non-animal protein... We have teams of people committed to bringing these products to market quickly. It's an area that we are investing in sizably and we will be in the market this calendar year – and maybe sooner than you think. (Mercy for Animals)

The growth of the meat alternative sector was predicted back in 2017, when the former CEO of Tyson Foods, Tom Hayes, remarked that, 'plant-based protein is growing almost, at this point, a little faster than animal-based, so I think the migration may continue in that direction' (Mercy for Animals). Perhaps, then, this is why Tyson Foods invested in the plant-based company

Beyond Meat in 2016 and still invests in the clean meat companies Memphis Meats and MycoTechnology.

Tyson Foods is not the only animal-based company to launch vegan products. In 2019, Chobani released a new line of plant-based yogurts and Hellman's released a vegan mayonnaise alternative in 2016. In fact, before releasing their vegan mayonnaise alternative, Hellman's (Unilever), the world's largest condiment company, launched a lawsuit against a vegan startup company, Hampton Creek (now JUST), for 'false advertisement'. Hellman's claimed that Hampton Creek led customers to believe that their plant-based 'Just Mayo' product was traditional mayonnaise, which, by definition, includes at least one egg. In response to the lawsuit, celebrity Andrew Zimmern started a Change.org petition against the lawsuit that garnered over 112,00 signatures. This petition raised public awareness about and incited backlash against the lawsuit, which pressured Hellman's to altogether drop the lawsuit (Kaufman). After dropping the lawsuit, Hellman's produced their own vegan mayonnaise spread under the label 'Best Friends Carefully Crafted Dressing and Sandwich Spread'.

This event, which involved a small start-up vegan company prevailing over 'Big Food', serves as a counter example to Wrenn's claim that corporate elites have complete control over both supply and demand in the food industry. And it serves as a counter example to Wrenn's prediction that when demand for animal-products decline, animal food companies will just invent new animal products or expand to other markets. As this event indicates, traditional animal-based food companies may themselves produce vegan products in response to changes in consumer behavior – a decision that is surely to the benefit of farmed animals. While this event certainly demonstrates the uphill battle vegan companies endure in a currently animal-product dominated food industry, it also demonstrates the power that small start-up companies and individual consumers have, when they act in groups, to gain some control over the food industry.

Perhaps, though, Wrenn is worried that animal-based food companies will, in addition to creating vegan products in America, expand into international food markets. But even if meat companies expand to emerging markets, they may produce *vegan* products for these markets.

For instance, although Tyson Foods has facilities in India, they boast on their website of having ‘a vegetarian protein options as well’ to serve the demand of consumers in India. Because it’s predicted that, by 2040, 60% of meat will be cultured meat or plant-based meat (AT Kearney), we can expect that other meat companies will follow in Tyson Foods’ footsteps.

And even if the meat industry, as Wrenn predicts, tries to expand its animal-based products to Asian and African markets, the alternative meat industry can do so, too, and, in many cases, more successfully. After all, veganism is an increasing global trend (Davis and Melina; Radnitzer et al.), and the market segment of meat alternatives is rapidly growing. For instance, surveys indicate that people from the Asia Pacific region and Africa are still more likely to follow a vegan diet than Americans (Statista). Moreover, a 2019 study on consumer behavior shows that there is a higher acceptance of clean and plant-based meat in India and China compared to the U.S. (Bryant et al.). 62% of Chinese respondents and 62% of respondents in India indicated that they were likely or very likely to purchase plant-based meat, while only 32% of participants from the U.S. said that they were likely or very likely to purchase plant-based meat (Bryant et al.). This indicates that, due to the growing popularity of veganism, the India and China food markets are perhaps the best markets for plant-based meats, as this is where we can expect the vegan food market to grow the fastest.

Because of the rapidly increasing global interest in plant-based foods, Western vegan companies have already expanded into Asian markets. For instance, the plant-based Impossible Burger is sold in more than 100 restaurants in Hong Kong and Macau, and Impossible Foods plans to expand its presence into mainland China by 2021 (Yau). JUST and Beyond Meat both plan to start distributing their vegan products to China by the end of 2019 (Yau). Because the Chinese government recently announced a plan to reduce domestic meat consumption, it is likely that other vegan Western start-up companies will expand into China’s market. As the global vegan meat market grows, we can expect to see a proliferation of vegan food companies enter both domestic and international markets.

Finally, because the global vegan market is growing rapidly, we can expect to see an increase of local Asian and African vegan meat companies entering emerging markets. For



instance, the company JUST (formerly Hampton Creek) is currently working with Hong Kong-based Brinc's Food Technology Accelerator to help plant-based food businesses bring their products to market in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, Dao Foods, a Chinese venture established to introduce plant-based and clean meat into the China market, is assisting New Crop Capital, a U.S. specialized private venture fund, to source and invest in Chinese plant-based ventures, effectively helping Chinese plant-based meat manufacturers go mainstream. At first, Dao Foods considered introducing Western meat alternative companies to the mainstream market in China, but upon reconsideration, determined that there are at-home opportunities to take advantage of – Chinese alternative meat companies that are equivalent to Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods (Yau).<sup>3</sup> The movement to bring the alternative meat market to China likely comes in response to a poll that indicated that between 2015-2020, the Chinese vegan market was expected to grow by more than 17% (Moon). Indeed, the vegan movement is just beginning, and we can only expect future vegan meat market growth both domestically and internationally.

### **On the Alleged Causal Efficacy of Hunting**

Having argued that animal agriculture is impacted by consumer behavior, I will now argue that hunting itself might be causally inefficacious. First, recall that Wrenn insists that purchasing farmed animal meat 'pulls from an existent system of harm, whereas "hunting" creates additional harm' (164). Relatedly, she claims that hunting increases harm to animals and perpetuates a system of oppression, but that purchasing the flesh of farmed animals is not likely to increase harm because farmed animals are 'destined for death' in a seller-controlled food market. She then concludes that purchasing animal meat is 'significantly less harmful than "hunting" because it capitalizes on harms that will be committed regardless of sanctuary choices' (Wrenn 166). On the other hand, Wrenn suspects that my hunting proposal would initiate 'new lines of oppression' (165). She thus proposes that 'taking advantage of preexisting oppression is preferable', as sanctuaries allegedly do when they purchase farmed animal flesh (165).

In support of the claim that hunting perpetuates oppression, Wrenn says that wildlife 'management' departments, which have control over 'big game' populations, 'maintain a

constant supply of victims for paying consumers' (154). Inflated populations are essentially a product of 'human engineering', as 'management' efforts intentionally and artificially promote increased 'big game' reproduction for hunting purposes. As Wrenn charges, hunting 'management' programs are profit-driven, resulting in millions of dollars for the hunting industry each year.

One might wonder why she finds it problematic for animal sanctuaries to capitalize on the hunting system of artificial population growth, but grants sanctuaries permission to capitalize on the system of factory farming, which also involves the active renewal of animal communities for public consumption. Wrenn's response is that there's a relevant difference between capitalizing on the hunting system and capitalizing on the animal agriculture system: if sanctuaries were to adopt my hunting proposal, they would, unlike typical consumers of animal flesh, increase the death toll of animals.

Yet, this wouldn't always be the case. Consider, for instance, that, in most Colorado 'big game management units', there is a limited number of big game hunting licenses, and each license grants a hunter permission to kill only one animal (Colorado Parks and Wildlife). In most cases, hunters are limited to two 'big game' licenses per season (Colorado Parks and Wildlife). Perhaps Colorado animal sanctuaries could work with Colorado Parks and Wildlife to secure a number of these limited licenses each hunting season. For instance, say one game unit sells only 1,000 deer licenses each season. If a sanctuary purchased 250 of these licenses, how would it, as Wrenn puts it, 'create a measurable increase in speciesism' (173)? After all, if the sanctuary doesn't purchase the licenses, 250 other hunters will, thus resulting in 250 deer death all the same. If wildlife 'managers' are in the hunting business just for monetary reasons, they likely wouldn't care whether the revenue from hunting licenses comes from recreational hunters or from sanctuaries.

Perhaps, though, Wrenn might say that there's a chance that no one will buy these 250 hunting licenses. It's plausible that only 750 licenses will be sold a given season, so if a sanctuary purchases the 250 licenses, 250 deer who would not have otherwise been killed will be shot dead.<sup>4</sup> But if it is anticipated that the demand for hunting licenses will be less than 1,000 in a

given season, why wouldn't the hunting industry 'expand to other markets', for instance, by using targeted marketing in an effort to encourage women and children to hunt? In fact, this is already happening in some areas. For instance, in response to an anticipated decline in demand for hunting licenses, Colorado Parks and Wildlife recently implemented over a dozen events that aim at teaching women how to hunt (Ogburn).

It's worth noting that Wrenn grants that there are some cases of deer overpopulation, although she emphasizes that this problem was created artificially. Wildlife managers have, for instance, eradicated natural predators and artificially increased deer reproduction. But even if the overpopulation problem stems from questionable wildlife 'management' practices, it's unclear why Wrenn refuses to grant sanctuaries permission to benefit from the problem, yet supports their decision to benefit from the artificially created problem of animal agriculture.

If the structures of animal agriculture and hunting *in at least some big game management units* are morally comparable and sanctuaries, in order to feed their obligate carnivores, need to participate in one of these practices, they should opt for participating in the least morally objectionable practice. Surely, hunting in specific units where there are limited hunting licenses (and each license permits hunters to kill only one animal), is the lesser evil of the two. As Wrenn herself notes, deer are not confined to feedlots or artificially inseminated, and they have the relative privilege of residing in wild spaces, enjoying some degree of freedom. Meanwhile, farmed animals are imprisoned on farms for their entire lives and are made to suffer horribly. They are victims of what Michael Huemer rightly calls 'the world's worst problem' (51).

### **On My Alleged Speciesism**

Throughout her paper, Wrenn suggests that my hunting proposal is speciesist, insofar as it promotes the killing of *only* deer (and other 'big game'), thus failing to consider the option of killing 'privileged species', such as cats and dogs (156). According to Wrenn, deer, unlike cats (big or small) and dogs, are 'traditionally devalued animals' and 'the most marginalized', and this explains why they, and not charismatic animals, are frequently 'designated for systematic killing' (157-158). She insists that 'large carnivores are at a distinct advantage as they represent

species that are frequently granted some semblance of personhood and reverence in many cultures and rarely are they categorized as a normative foodstuff' (158). The implication is that my alleged speciesism (i.e., my alleged preference for charismatic animals) is what drives me to argue that we ought to save big cats in sanctuaries, even if it means killing deer.

Wrenn is right to suggest that many humans, especially in Western countries, adore cats and dogs. But this means little when it comes to the wellbeing of these animals, and it certainly does not entail that they are 'privileged'. Most cats in the U.S., for instance, are confined to the indoors *for their entire lives*. Surely, the fact that much of the suffering cats endure stems from 'well-meaning' human adoration does not make a difference to the wellbeing of the cats permanently imprisoned in human homes, deprived of the opportunity to exercise their basic hunting and territorial capacities and sentenced to a life of boredom and frustration. If Wrenn sees feline imprisonment as a privilege, then she must believe that life in the 'wild' is so unpleasant that permanent confinement is preferable, which undermines her claim that free-living animals, such as deer, do not, as I suggest, endure extreme hardships in the wild.

Moreover, the 'charisma' of megafauna, such as big cats, puts them at a severe *disadvantage* relative to deer, insofar as this 'charisma' is the reason megafauna are regularly confined and put on display in zoos and circuses. Relatedly, charismatic animals are often victimized through 'trophy hunting', as evidenced by the fact that lion populations are sharply declining throughout the world due to hunting safari parties. Currently, lions are listed as 'vulnerable', which is just one step from endangered, and all tiger species are listed as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, thanks to habitat destruction and poaching (Braun). Tigers now occupy only 7 percent of their historical range, and, regrettably, the majority of the world's tigers live in confinement (Dinerstein et al.).

Tigers are moreover killed for traditional Chinese 'medicine', and the use of tigers for this purpose is intimately connected to the awe and reverence they inspire – the very awe and reverence that supposedly gives them 'privilege'. Tigers were historically worshipped by tribal cultures for their power and mystery and were viewed as having magical powers and important medicinal properties. By using tigers in medicine, it was thought that people could absorb the

tiger's life force, vigor, strength, and attributes (Guynup). Although tiger killing is now illegal, this has not stopped tiger poaching and the selling of tiger bodies for 'medicinal' purposes (Graham-Rowe).

Arguably, our awe for cats (big and small) is not doing them any favors. But even if we grant that it does, we must ask: why should cats in animal sanctuaries, i.e., cats who have been treated unjustly, pay the price? Why should they be sentenced to death just because they are members of a species that is often characterized as 'charismatic?' Here, we face a similar question that Wrenn asks: why should deer pay the price of the injustices we've done to big cats? It is certainly unfair that either cats or large-bodied prey like deer must be killed in order to clean up one of the very many unjust messes our species has caused. But one important difference between free-living deer and captive cats is that cats in captivity have been *unjustly* denied the opportunity to fend for themselves, insofar as humans have wrongfully *taken from them* their capacity to hunt. And were these cats able to hunt on their own in the 'wild', they would kill and eat deer and other large-bodied prey. Thus, we might consider my proposal to be one of 'killing by proxy'. The very least we can do for captive animals is provide for them what they would have taken for themselves, had they not been victims of injustice.

## Lessons from Wrenn

Despite the noted difficulties with her systemic approach, Wrenn offers important practical advice for sanctuaries to follow. For instance, she urges sanctuaries that refuse to accept roadkill donations to revisit their roadkill policies, and she rightly suggests that sanctuaries make use of the billions of pounds of consumable food that is disposed of as 'garbage' each year in the U.S. alone, much of which is animal protein. Surely, if sanctuaries did these things, they would drastically reduce the hurt they cause.

Wrenn also rightly draws attention to the stress that animal sanctuary residents likely endure as a result of 'forced human interaction' (168), the problem of 'pseudo-sanctuaries' (169), and the suffering big cats might endure in sanctuaries due to their inability to range and hunt.<sup>5</sup> It's worth noting, though, that Wrenn lumps all big cats together, despite the fact that

lions and tigers are very different from one another. For one, lions are more likely to fare better in animal sanctuaries than tigers, due to the social nature of lions. To see why this is, consider the following.

At the Wild Animal Sanctuary in Colorado, all newly rescued big cats must be ‘rehabilitated’ before they can enter large acreage natural habitats. Big cats are thus first confined to rehabilitation areas, where they can adjust to the sanctuary environment and socialize with other feline residents. The big cats are not moved from the rehabilitation areas until they have built relationships with other cats, as when they are moved to the large acreage habitats, they must be moved in ‘cohesive groups’. Because of their social nature, lions move relatively quickly from the rehabilitation area to their large acreage habitat. But because tigers are solitary, less social animals, it is difficult for them to form bonds with other tigers, thus they are more likely to spend more time, if not their entire lives, in the ‘rehabilitation area’, which is much smaller than the large acreage habitats. So while there is some truth to Wrenn’s claim about the suffering of big cats in sanctuaries, we must remember that some are more capable of flourishing in confinement than others, and this ought to be taken into account when we make heart-wrenching decisions about who lives and who dies.

Despite the many obstacles sanctuaries inevitably face as they attempt to promote the well-being of their residents, sanctuaries can take steps to reduce, if not eliminate, the frustrations that Wrenn mentions. The Wild Animal Sanctuary in Colorado serves as a model sanctuary when it comes to promoting the well-being of its animal residents, who reside peacefully in large acreage habitats. Acknowledging that human visitors cause stress to animals when they approach animal enclosures, the Wild Animal Sanctuary built mile-long elevated walkways and decks over the animals’ habitats, and they permit visitors to view animals only on these walkways. Because these animals do not consider the air or sky to be their territory, visitors can now observe animals without inflicting stress upon them, according to the Wild Animal Sanctuary.

As for sanctuary visitors? We can do our due diligence to avoid supporting unethical and pseudo sanctuaries by thoroughly researching sanctuaries before providing them with financial

support. And, as the Wild Animal Sanctuary advises, we can spread the word to other sanctuaries so that they will change their systems such that they better accommodate the needs and desires of their residents, who are due our utmost attention and care.

## **Conclusion**

If we dismiss real-life moral dilemmas and *think* only ‘systemically’, then we will deprive ourselves of important opportunities to reflect upon the real, concrete ways in which we can *act* to make restitution to the nonhuman victims of injustice who enter our lives. To act justly, we must not only think systemically, but we must also *act* individually, often within groups. And we must acknowledge that, because our world is so unjust, we may not be able to keep our hands clean. Some may get hurt. Others may be left behind to fend for themselves. It is a tragic reality that there is no ‘feel good’ solution to the havoc our species has wreaked upon other animals. As Regan has warned, ‘the fate of animals is in our hands. God grant we are equal to the task’ (26).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> By ‘nonpolitical’ group action, I mean coordinated changes in everyday behavior, such as the collective decision to stop eating meat-eating or the collective decision to reduce carbon emitting behavior.

<sup>2</sup> It’s unclear why Wrenn talks in terms of ‘byproduct’ when sanctuaries purchase *animal flesh*, and not just the secondary parts of animals, i.e., animal byproduct.

<sup>3</sup> In China, the vegan company Whole Perfect Food, with the aid of government officials, created a national-level research institute at Shenzhen University for soy protein isolate and other vegan products (Yau 2019), and in Hong Kong, a company called Right Treat has just launched Omnipork, which is a plant-based pork alternative.

<sup>4</sup> In Colorado, if there are left over limited licenses, these licenses are sold, and deer and elk hunting applicants have the first choice of the limited licenses, before they go on sale to the general public. Since, in most units, hunters are limited to two limited big game licenses per season, presumably a good number of hunters welcome the opportunity to purchase the leftover licenses, so that they can kill more than two ‘big game’ animals per season.

<sup>5</sup> It’s worth noting that Wrenn (2018) claims that those who insist that cats need to eat meat promote ‘the romanticized notion that lions and other big cats must feed on “wild caught”, “hunted” prey to serve their primal essence’ (162). Perhaps by insisting that big cats need to hunt, Wrenn is guilty of doing the same.



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