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# Lowering the Consumption of Animal Products without Sacrificing Consumer Freedom – A Pragmatic Proposal

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## ABSTRACT

It is well-established that policy aiming to change individual consumption patterns for environmental or other ethical reasons faces a trade-off between effectiveness and public acceptance. The more ambitious a policy intervention is, the higher the likelihood of reactionary backlash; the higher the intervention's public acceptance, the less bite it is likely to have. This paper proposes a package of interventions aiming for a substantial reduction of animal product consumption while circumventing the diagnosed trade-off. It couples stringent industry regulation, which lowers output and raises prices, with a targeted universal income at a level which would allow typical households to maintain their animal product consumption even at the post-regulation price level. The change of opportunity costs of animal products, however, would induce a shift of consumption away from animal products while enhancing – rather than diminishing – consumer freedom and welfare. The policy package, which is further designed to cohere with traditional value orderings rather than relying exclusively on progressive concerns, is politically ambitious, but psychologically pragmatic. It constitutes an attempt to socialize the endeavor of bringing consumption patterns in line with ethical demands by empowering, rather than sanctioning, individuals, and relevant groups.

## KEYWORDS

Ethically oriented policy; policy acceptance; psychologically pragmatic policy; universal basic income; animal rights; planetary boundaries

## 1. Introduction

The consumption of animal products is harmful in various overlapping ways. Besides harming animals in unredeemable ways, it harms the environment, it harms the climate, it harms the poor, and it arguably harms the consumers, too.<sup>1</sup> Since free markets are unlikely to deliver a significant<sup>2</sup> reduction of animal product consumption<sup>3</sup> any time soon, it is natural to wonder about the prospects of changing the conditions within which the markets operate. Unfortunately, there are formidable challenges to addressing the issue of animal product consumption by way of policy intervention. Firstly, the consumption of animal products, particularly meat, is deeply entrenched in everyday culture. Changing it means changing *us*, and policy proposals with this goal have frequently met with hostile resistance.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, most of the costs of animal product consumption, including but going well beyond the harm it does to animals, are not – in

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some cases: not yet – immediately felt by consumers. This makes it difficult to convince an already reluctant public of the reasonableness of policy aimed at reducing it.

Noting the difficulty of bringing down ethically harmful individual consumption through policy, some scholars have recently turned to the idea of ‘packaging’ policy interventions.<sup>5</sup> ‘Packages’ of interventions bundled together, the idea goes, may have a better chance than free-standing interventions in bringing about change while avoiding backlash. While we applaud this endeavor and seek to contribute to it, we find that the literature on ‘packaging’ contains significant lacunae. For one thing, the ‘packages’ discussed so far have focused on tax- and prohibition-based policy combinations and neglected viable alternatives. For another, there has only been a very thin discussion of the rationales of ‘packaging’. The academic discussion has focused on the expected public acceptance of (a narrow slice of) policy packages and largely ignored more general ethical and psychological reasons for or against certain packages.

In this paper, we will address these issues in the course of proposing and discussing a specific policy package. The package we will put forward consists of two core elements. The first is the implementation of stringent regulation aiming at better aligning the production of meat and other animal products with ethical demands. These regulations will sharply decrease the supply of animal products, thereby raising their prices significantly. The second element is a limited universal income aimed at offsetting the negative welfare impact of animal products’ increased prices. The universal income is tuned such that individual households could retain the pre-policy level of animal product consumption. Of course, though, they can also use the income in different ways. If the opportunity cost<sup>6</sup> of animal products rises sufficiently, households will shift away from animal product consumption. Since the consumption shift is not forced, it will be at least welfare-neutral. This policy combination, which adds a degree of freedom to citizens (rather than diminishing freedom) and which aligns consumption reduction with consumers’ self-interest, is further designed to be compatible with traditional value orderings, rather than appealing only to progressive or ecological concerns. This aspect of the proposal, like the enhanced freedom and the alignment of consumption reduction with self-interest, is meant to avoid backlash and provide further motivational underpinnings to the needed sustained behavior changes.

We are not attempting an empirical study of the likelihood of public acceptance of the proposed package in this paper. We think that proposals which introduce radical changes to opportunity costs, yet which include similarly radical income measures, are hardly amenable to study under laboratory conditions or by survey. The appropriate kind of discussion is of a normative nature, and to that, we seek to contribute in this paper. At the same time, we believe that the proposal can inspire some general hypotheses about appropriate packaging principles, and we shall also discuss those.

In what follows, we will first briefly discuss the problem of reactionary backlash against environmentally or (otherwise) ethically oriented policy, and ideas to circumvent it with policy packages (Section 2). After indicating the literature’s blind-spots, we will introduce the policy proposal, discussing its incentive- and disincentive-structure, differences with competing proposals, and its central design principles (Section 3). Section (4) will be devoted to rebutting some normative arguments against the proposal, and in section (5), we will discuss some general lessons that can be drawn from the proposal and its discussion.

## 2. Ethically Oriented Policy and Its Public Acceptance

The literature on the public acceptance of policy interventions is not new but has recently started to attract increased attention. This is particularly the case with respect to policy in the fields of sustainability and environmental protection, where the recent past has witnessed many cases of backlash against policy aimed at changing individual behavior (c.f. Carattini et al., 2018; Drews & van den Bergh, 2015; Levi et al., 2020). The increasing urgency of combating the climate crisis and other aspects of large-scale and potentially catastrophic ecological degradation stand in the background to this surge in interest.

Much of the literature on the public acceptance of policy measures addressing ethically objectionable consumption corroborates the existence of a trade-off: the more bite an intervention has, the more likely it is to meet with public hostility. Conversely, the higher the expected acceptance, the lower the likelihood that it will make an actual dent.<sup>7</sup> The thesis of such a trade-off, variants of which have been established in different fields of policy,<sup>8</sup> poses an obvious challenge for scholars and activists alike. Is there any way to circumvent the trade-off?

General studies of factors increasing or decreasing the likelihood of public acceptance of individual policy measures have yielded some useful data,<sup>9</sup> but have not been able to identify clear paths around the trade-off.

Recently, scholars have turned to this challenge by discussing ‘packages’ of policy interventions. Bundled together, the idea goes, policy measures may have a better chance than free-standing interventions to provide feasible pathways to ethically superior states.

Most of the relevant literature in the fields of public economics and behavioral and political science takes carbon taxation as the core policy instrument and analyzes the public acceptance of different ways of spending the tax revenue (Bachus et al., 2019; Beiser-McGrath & Bernauer, 2019; Carattini et al., 2018; Klenert et al., 2018; Maestre-Andrés et al., 2019; Raymond, 2019). All these studies support the claim that the ‘recycling’ of revenues can increase public acceptance of carbon taxes. Regarding the optimal scheme for the recycling of tax revenues, there is no clear evidence, suggesting that the design of a particular spending scheme depends on particular political circumstances (c.f. Beiser-McGrath & Bernauer, 2019; Klenert et al., 2018; Raymond, 2019). At any rate, the findings are in line with the conclusions of Bicket and Vanner (2016), who argue that a cost or tax is more likely to be accepted if the generated funds flow into visible and defined programmes.

There are also critical voices with regard to tax-based approaches to climate policy, of course. For example, Rosenbloom et al. (2020) criticize such approaches by arguing that carbon taxation is not the most effective climate policy, concluding that it should not be considered as the primary policy strategy.

Regarding packaging options for food policies, the literature is much more scarce. Grimsrud et al. (2019) provide some evidence that an individual’s willingness to pay a tax on red meat increases if the tax revenue is earmarked for environmental protection projects. In a recent study, Fesenfeld et al. (2020) analyze which policy packages aiming to reduce meat consumption circumvent the trade-off between effectiveness and political feasibility by the means of behavioral experiments. They examine individuals’ preferences about packages consisting of six randomly assigned food policy instruments and end up supporting the claim that ‘combining costly and beneficial policy instruments into policy

packages can mitigate (the dilemma) between effectiveness and political feasibility' (Fesenfeld et al., 2020, p. 179).

It is safe to say that although it has produced some new and valuable knowledge about influences on public acceptance, the existing research has not yet yielded a breakthrough answer to the question which precise combination of policy instruments directed at a reduction of animal product consumption avoids the trade-off, combining a high degree of impact with a high degree of public acceptance.

We believe that an answer to this question cannot be furnished by empirical research alone but needs to be looked for in the field of normative considerations. This is so for three reasons. Firstly, typical empirical approaches in microeconomics or psychology would concentrate on people's given preference structures. Preference structures, however, are referenced to, and limited by, practical surroundings. Introduce radical changes to these surroundings, and preferences lose their stability (c.f. Bowles, 1998; Dietz & Hepburn, 2013; Mattauch & Hepburn, 2016). Arguably, the change of possibilities and opportunity costs effected by the policy package sketched in this paper's introduction would be sufficiently radical to render preferences, and hence research on preferences by survey or in lab conditions, unstable. We may not know now how we would react under conditions created by the policy package, and we may also not know whether we would prefer these conditions to the status quo, or vice versa. Secondly and relatedly, when confronted with scenarios radically unlike the status quo, our deliberation switches from introspection about preferences to normative reasoning. When asked whether we would like or choose such a state, we parse the question about the proposal's acceptability as one about its reasonableness or justice. Thirdly, normative or moral considerations are always implicit in policy design and deliberation, going far beyond the policy's ultimate goals. Unless they are turned explicit, it is impossible to inspect, discuss and improve upon them.

The importance of taking the moral dimension seriously in the field of sustainability policy has recently been acknowledged by Creutzig (2019). However, the place of morals in Creutzig's proposal is mainly that of a psychological motivator: besides the two 'pillars' of carbon taxes and the use of their revenues for infrastructure building, Creutzig argues that further moral pressure to divest from fossil fuels is needed to achieve sustainable change. While we agree that the moral dimension is paramount in policy justification, and even that there is an important place for moral pressure in various arenas of political life, we take it to be an advantage of this paper's particular proposal to work *without* moral pressure as a motivator. With this in view, let us introduce the promised proposal, offer elements of its normative justification, and show how it respects the moral nature of the matter at hand in a way which goes beyond previous discussions of 'policy packaging'.

### **3. A Pragmatic Proposal: Less Animal Product Consumption, but More Freedom**

#### **3.1. The Proposal and Its Mechanics**

The proposal we wish to put forward consists of two core elements. The first element is stringent ethically oriented regulation of the supply of animal products, which aims at better aligning production with the demands of animal rights and intergenerational justice. Demands of intergenerational justice require at least that humanity does not

transgress the so-called Planetary Boundaries (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015) – i.e. thresholds in certain critical natural systems – for their transgression jeopardizes moral rights of future generations. Livestock keeping has significant direct impacts on at least two natural systems which are already close to the threshold values of Planetary Boundaries: climate change through the emission of greenhouse gases, and biogeochemical flows (nitrogen and phosphorus flows) through manure runoff.<sup>10</sup> This justifies regulation with the goal of reducing greenhouse gases, nitrogen, and phosphorus emissions from livestock farming to a level which would be consistent with humanity's staying within the Planetary Boundaries. What exactly such a regulation would imply for livestock husbandry is not relevant here, because the demands of animal rights justify much tighter restrictions. Respect of animal rights requires providing animals the opportunity to lead decent lives according to the needs and typical behaviors of their respective species, which implies at least the granting of sufficient space for movement, adequate feed and refraining from bodily interferences such as castration (unless required for the animal's health). Specifying the exact content of what animal rights amount to lies beyond the aims of this paper and would require its own discussion.<sup>11</sup> However, it is clear that regulation aiming to respect animal rights would drastically lower the supply of animal products. For the sake of argument, let us assume that the overall production of animal products will shrink by a range of 80% relative to today's levels. This will cause a drastic increase in the prices of animal products.

This is where the second ingredient of our package comes in: the introduction of a limited unconditional income. The idea of an unconditional basic income, or negative taxes, has been discussed in policy circles for a few decades now. Today, a rich normative (Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017), theoretical (Ghatak & Maniquet, 2019), and empirical literature (Delsen, 2019) on the topic exists. The idea of an unconditional income is certainly controversial, both with regard to its normative justification and with regard to its empirical feasibility. We shall not dive into these debates, however, since the policy instrument we are suggesting is more modest than the scheme usually discussed in the literature and is supported by independent moral reasons. In particular, the most pressing normative objection against an unconditional income – the reciprocity objection, which states that unconditional income allows (or even encourages) free-riding – is not decisive against the policy, if the considerations of animal rights and ecological protection are sound.<sup>12</sup>

The idea we want to put forward, then, is to introduce, as part of the intervention package under discussion, a limited universal income at precisely the level that the average household would need in order to maintain the pre-intervention level of animal product consumption at the increased prices of animal products due to the package's regulation element.

The financial effect of the two interventions in combination are added material resources for each household to choose its consumption bundle. Individual households can choose to remain at the status quo, with an unaltered level of animal product consumption (while the produce will presumably be of higher quality due to the imposed regulations). But they can also choose to spend their additional income on things other than animal products. Abstracting from the question of how to finance the universal income (we shall turn to this issue in [section 4.2](#)), households will hence gain – rather than lose – a degree of freedom in their consumption and saving decisions. A better-than-welfare-neutral reduction of overall animal product demand is expected, as the rise of animal products' opportunity

costs will lead households to shift their income to other consumption or saving without being forced to do so.

We accept that the policy package, as sketched here, most probably cannot be implemented in one step. Regulation requiring the keeping of livestock in compliance or near-compliance with animal rights substantially reduces production potential for animal products (we assumed a range of 80%). If consumers initially stick to their consumption habits after the introduction of such a regulation, prices for animal products will rise infinitely. Practically, there will just not be enough animal products in order to meet consumer demand, and no basic income would be capable of bridging the gap. As acknowledged above, this shows that our proposal involves the assumption that demand for animal products is sufficiently elastic with regard to prices, at least at the levels we propose. But there is another assumption in play: we take it that the price elasticity of demand for a particular kind of product is not a constant.<sup>13</sup> Consumers' price elasticity of demand varies over time, it depends on consumers' knowledge of available substitutes and relative prices of the latter. Both these determinants of price elasticity of animal products will vary as a result of restrictions on livestock keeping, and they can be additionally influenced by further policy measures. Relative prices of vegetable alternatives to animal products will be reduced if prices for animal products rise. If consumers get acquainted with vegetable substitutes, animal products will become much more price elastic. Such a societal learning can be supported politically. Since, at any rate, the buildup of price elasticity is not instantaneous, it may be necessary to implement the policy package in several steps, which are spread out over some time. This should be possible, as one of the proposal's theoretical benefits is its scalability, and hence its adjustability.

We should also acknowledge that setting the level of the universal income to correspond to an *average* household's consumption level is a pragmatic decision which may not be suitable in all contexts.<sup>14</sup> There may, for instance, be societies in which consumption of animal products is much less evenly distributed than it is in a typical Western country like Germany, and in which animal product consumption may be particularly strong in disadvantaged sections of society. In such a society, the benefit of the ease of calculation may be outweighed by the injustice of setting the calculation base at the average consumption level. With a view to simple presentation, we will continue to go with a calculation with average household consumption but note that several competing models exist.

Independently of the calculation base for the universal income, the policy package proposed here would be costly if it is to be effective. We shall turn to this issue in [section 4.2](#), which argues that the proposal should be implemented despite its high cost.

### **3.2. How Does the Proposal Compare with Other Policy Packages?**

The policy package we are suggesting consists of two main policy instruments. The first directly aims at bringing about a morally better state of the world. Since policy instruments aiming at changing behavior toward morally justified patterns alone meet public resistance which often renders policy ineffective – this problem is shared with 'stick' elements of carrot/stick motivational policy pairs – a further policy instrument is needed which influences people's motivation to accept the morally desired changes. This latter compensatory, or restorative, element will assuage opposition; it shares this feature with



'carrot' elements of carrot/stick motivational policy pairs. Much of the academic literature accepts that these two types of instruments – limiting and compensatory – are needed for a policy package to be successful (c.f. Fesenfeld et al., 2020; Klenert et al., 2018). The disputed question is what instruments of these two types should be combined.

There are several limiting policy instruments aiming at changing individual's behavior in a politically intended direction (c.f. Garnett, 2014, Table 2; Lemken et al., 2018; Green & Gambhir, 2019, for a review of available policy instruments): regulation and legislation; fiscal measures (taxes and subsidies); nudging; social marketing. Similarly, there are also several compensatory policy instruments motivating individuals to accept the desired behavioral change: education; financial incentives; unconditioned financial compensations (negative tax). As a matter of principle, all these instruments can be combined with each other, giving rise to the normative question what the best combination of the instruments of each type is.

The literature has not systematically discussed this normative question yet. So far, scholars have focused on a specific instrument (taxation and 'revenue recycling', c.f. Klenert et al., 2018, neglecting further options for combination) or they analyzed which combinations of instruments align with consumers' preferences (Fesenfeld et al., 2020), or they suggested general policy strategies (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). Indeed, our proposal can be seen as a specific working-out of Rosenbloom's et al. strategic observations, namely by combining those instruments with the highest efficacy from both types.

The most direct way to realize the morally intended social state – the one in which animals are treated in compliance with their rights – is to enforce regulations and laws restricting the treatment of animals accordingly.<sup>15</sup> This regulation will lead – as discussed above – to substantially increased prices for animal products, thereby negatively impacting consumers. The most direct way to counterbalance these potential disadvantages for consumers is financial compensation. Thus, we suggest a negative tax or unconditional basic income in an amount that compensates the additional expenditures as the second element of the policy package.

We contend that packages consisting of a tax on animal products and redistribution of revenues do not provide an optimal solution to the moral-motivational problems. Firstly, they cannot guarantee that the revenues from the taxation suffice in order to compensate the consumers by an amount which would allow them to keep their habitual consumption patterns (if that is aimed for at all). Secondly and more importantly, by putting a tax on animal products, the limiting element of such packages addresses the proper moral goals indirectly rather than directly: the harm is inflicted on animals in the course of the production process of animal products whereas taxation of animal products targets individual consumption, thus delegating to consumers the task of addressing the moral root problem arising at the production side.

We concede that our proposal imposes higher costs on public budgets relative to other packaging proposals, especially compared to the package consisting of taxation and revenues-recycling – an instrument that does not impose any additional costs at all. But we believe that there are strong reasons to support the socio-ecological transformation of established food practices with public expenditure. We shall come back to these reasons below (c. f. section 4.2). For now, we wish to register that a publicly financed income as part of the policy would amount to treating the problem as a public problem in whose solution everybody should have a stake.



### 3.3. *Compatibility with Traditional Values*

One liability of many policy interventions is their disconnect, or perceived disconnect, from traditional ways of prioritizing values. If social or intergenerational justice, or the respect for animal rights, does not figure highly on the priority list of normative considerations of a large section of society, then an exclusive reliance on such considerations can weaken the intervention's level of public acceptance.

The policy package proposed here is not exclusively reliant on such values but can be defended by reference to more traditional considerations, too. Besides preserving – indeed: furthering – individual freedom, the package can plausibly be described and interpreted as being in the service of (other) values such as *quality* (the changed production system allows for produce of superior quality), *health* (both better meat, and less meat, have positive health outcomes, as does less intensive agriculture), *rural welfare* or *fairness to the farmers* (who produce less, but at higher prices, and – if this is aspect adequately heeded by the regulation – under better working conditions) and *tradition* (as lower production and better produce are marks of agriculture prior to the introduction of factory farming).

All these normative considerations – individual freedom, quality, health, fairness to farmers, and tradition – should appeal to persons of a politically conservative mind-set and do not require the acceptance of recognizably 'liberal' or 'ecological' values. Reference to them is not meant, in the first place, as a selling strategy within a political marketing campaign. At the same time, however, the possibility of internal justification – justification of the policy package in terms of values which are already widely accepted by the public, rather than in terms of values which are themselves in need of explanation and justification – may well be drawn on in political communication. A plausible linking with already held values can be a potent barrier to identity-based opposition to the policy package.

We should make explicit that we do not argue that the proposed policy package will not be opposed on normative grounds. For instance, persons of a libertarian bent may find little to like about the proposal. Not only the regulation, which curtails the liberty of producers, but also the basic income element, which is often criticized as subsidizing free-riding,<sup>16</sup> may well be incompatible with their normative intuitions. Our claim here is more modest. It is that the proposal is geared to assuage some of the key concerns, and take into account the psychology, of consumers. The possibility of justifying the proposal by reference to certain traditional or conservative values is to be seen under this heading.

### 3.4. *Design Principles to Counter Motivation-based Acceptance Barriers*

Before moving on to an explicit normative discussion, let us highlight two design principles which – along with the respect of individual freedom and the compatibility with traditional value orderings – give rise to the hope that the package can break the trade-off between public acceptance and efficacy. Firstly, the proposal aligns self-interest with the ethical aims of the policy; secondly, the proposal allows for incremental behavior changes at each individual's own chosen speed. Let us begin with the first of these two principles.

Every Euro received by way of the universal income handed out in compensation for increased prices of animal products can be spent either on animal products or on other things. For this reason, it can realize a higher marginal value than a quantity of animal

products worth one Euro, and so utility, or welfare, can increase if overall spending moves away from the previous consumption pattern.

In providing monetary motivation for giving up animal products without mandating any particular point on the spectrum between no consumption and full previous consumption of animal products, the universal income also allows each person to determine the size of their steps in a potential longer term consumption change, and thus behavior change. A household can choose any point on the continuum between the status quo and full animal product abolition, and it can progress on the spectrum in both directions and at any speed.

These two principles, along with the possibility of internal justification in terms of traditional values, give individuals positive resources to change themselves without losing their agency, or a sense thereof, and without experiencing failure, or risk thereof. Both the feeling of heteronomy and the prospect of failure risk lowering a policy's acceptance rate by introducing motivational problems.

It is noteworthy in this context that the policy's main moral goals – respecting the rights of animals and future generations – are broadly accepted by the public (at least in Germany, c.f. BMU, 2019, Figures 19 and 20). The problem for the realization of these broadly accepted goals lies in the fact that their implementation requires changing deeply entrenched habits, customs, and practices. This issue is intimately linked with what psychologists refer to as 'cognitive dissonance', and our responses to such dissonance.<sup>17</sup> It is well established that people who experience a mismatch between normative goals – even goals which are intellectually accepted by the agents in question – on the one hand, and their own capacity of living up to them on the other, have a higher propensity to change their normative opinions (and even their view of the relevant facts) than to increase their efforts to attain the goals. Put bluntly, rather than foregoing their Sunday roast, people tend to reinterpret normative and non-normative facts, or their dialectical weight ('animals do not really suffer', 'keeping animals as a food-source helps the conservation of their species' etc.) or entrench their identity with respect to the incriminated conduct ('we are meat eaters, and we are proud of it', 'bullfighting is an ancient tradition, and no one is going to take that away from us' etc.). The policy's enlisting of traditional values, its alignment of self-interest with behavior change, and the granting of freedom with respect to each individual's steps in a potential longer term change, are to be understood as means to counter this propensity.

#### 4. Addressing Some Arguments against the Proposal

So far, we have outlined the proposal and some of the main construction principles behind it. In the discussion, we have already (inevitably) hinted at some of the normative justifications of the proposal.

It should already be clear that the main justification of the proposal lies in the multi-faceted wrongness of consuming animals. Further justificatory points specific to the proposal at hand include the prominence it gives to individual freedom and the fact that its individual elements are the most direct instruments in the toolbox of possible interventions. In the previous section, we have also pointed to the expected psychological workings of the proposal. In this section, we want to counter some anticipated normative arguments against the proposed policy package. We will start with an argument which

targets the enterprise of policy packaging in general, and then continue to more specific arguments against the proposed package.

#### ***4.1. Is the Policy Package Manipulative (Because Its Parts Do Not Require Each Other)?***

On the face of it, a universal basic income could be introduced in the absence of regulation targeting animal products. And conversely: animal products could be more strictly regulated without the introduction of a universal basic income. Moreover, even if these two interventions are introduced together, the legislature could take one of them back later. The mutual independence of the package's elements may strike observers as manipulative: why not discuss and – if viewed positively after discussion – introduce its parts separately?

It is true that there is a sense in which the package's elements are mutually independent. Each could be given multiple kinds of justification, and no doubt, each would have a complex set of consequences which could also be studied separately. It might also be that each could persist without the other.

On the other hand, packaging them has motivational added value, as we have attempted to show above. It is only conjointly that the package works in the way sketched above, and conjoining its elements strikes us as no more manipulative than designing a machine with several parts which also have an effect individually, but which have particular – and particularly desired – effects when employed together.

Things would be different, of course, if the policy package were only a device for the stealthy introduction of only one of the package's parts, while the other one is repealed soon after the introduction. For example, the package is imaginable as a trick to make meat production all but impossible, with no true intention of sticking to the universal basic income. Or it could be seen as a maneuver to introduce a universal basic income, with no particular intention to do something about animal product consumption. As it happens, neither of these plans is behind the proposal presented in this paper, but even if it were, it would hardly be a valid counter-argument against the content of the proposal, if there are other reasons for the packaging. We take ourselves to have shown that such other reasons exist.

#### ***4.2. Is the Policy Package Too Expensive?***

As already touched upon above, an important advantage of the policy proposal sketched in this paper is its scalability. In principle, it could be introduced at very different scales: very modest price increases would necessitate only a very modest universal income, and more significant price increases would necessitate a higher universal income.

However, important though this point is, we do not want to deny that if the policy is to have a significant effect on animal product consumption, its income component would be costly. Let us roughly estimate what our proposal could cost. The disposable income in Germany amounted to 2400 billion Euro in 2019,<sup>18</sup> private consumption expenditures accounted for 1720 billion Euro.<sup>19</sup> About 4% of private consumption expenditure was spent on animal products in the last 15 years<sup>20</sup> which amounts to an expenditure of about 70 billion Euro annually for animal products. If we assume that the prices of animal

products will be driven up roughly five-fold by the envisaged regulation, then the additional burden on households would be 280 billion Euro (350 billion minus 70 billion) if they are to keep their consumption habits of animal products. This sum would have to be handed out as universal basic income in a country like Germany. A more moderate scenario, with a threefold price increase, would see an additional burden of 140 billion Euro.

In light of the fact that federal tax revenues in 2019 comprised 329 billion Euro<sup>21</sup> in Germany, and the fact that revenues of the overall public budget were 1500 billion Euro in 2019 in Germany,<sup>22</sup> it is quite clear that implementing the proposal – even in its modest form – would constitute a heavy financial burden on the public.

There are three possible sources for financing the basic income: (i) redistribution of public revenues; (ii) additional taxes (iii) deficit financing (which implies additional costs borne by future generations). These three sources can be combined in various ways to generate the required additional public revenues. Here, we cannot discuss in detail which combination of sources should be chosen. Since the moral justification of our policy package is derived from the moral demands of both future and currently living beings (c.f. [section 1](#)), there is some *prima facie* reason for a model of sharing the burden (implying a mix of deficit spending (iii) and the other two sources (i) and (ii)). To specify how exactly to distribute the financial burdens among generations, in particular whether to assign a higher burden to the currently living generation to reflect its responsibility for the crises which are one of the motivations behind the proposal, would require a more detailed normative and empirical analysis than we can provide here. The resulting financing models may differ between states due to the differences in their systems of public finances. Additionally, possible injustices in the systems of public finances of particular states would need to be addressed when tailoring a financing model to a particular economy.

The key moral justification for implementing the policy even if it would cost as much as estimated above is its potentially significant contribution in the fight against crass injustices causing severe suffering of non-human animals and of the world's poor, in current and future generations. Apart from the harm it does to animals, current consumption of animal products contributes significantly to changes in natural systems which are transgressing Planetary Boundaries (c.f. [section 3.1](#)). The negative welfare effect of their transgression is notoriously difficult to calculate, but it is seriously possible that it dwarfs that of catastrophes hitherto experienced. If the policy package succeeds in reducing animal product consumption significantly, then it will reduce the probability of catastrophic outcomes from changes in critical natural systems. The expected welfare effect may well be magnitudes higher than the estimated costs (and this calculation does not even take benefits from health impacts into account). In general, the main effect of the package's regulation side is to internalize externalized costs, while the basic income is simply an attempt to share them at the society level. The costs, of course, may come down. If or when consumption habits change, the universal income part of the package could even be phased out entirely.

Of course, there are other defects of justice demanding our attention and resources besides animal product consumption and the harms it engenders. We cannot, in the space of this paper, provide and defend a ranking of causes on which the necessity to curb animal product consumption comes on top. At this point, we would only want to make two points. Firstly, while the measure is costly, it still leaves us able to pursue parallel

policies aimed at other problems. Secondly and more importantly, a universal income can be designed such that it involves a significant redistribution of wealth. This in itself would likely make headway in the solution of a number of other important social ills.

### ***4.3. Does the Policy Amount to Bribing People to Behave according to Moral Norms?***

One might argue that it is wrong to give people money for the non-violation of moral norms. It is, after all, arguably wrong to prevent a thief from stealing by paying her/him the value of the goods s/he would have stolen otherwise.

We agree that in an ideal world – a world in which no time constraints exist, and in which all people are adequately informed and act rationally upon their information – our proposal would be morally unjustified. However, the existing world is not ideal in this sense: there are informational and cognitive hurdles (many people do not have access to the information figuring in this proposal's premises, or do not process it correctly), there are motivational hurdles (people do not do what they believe they ought to do), and there are serious time constraints (some Planetary Boundaries have already been transgressed). In such a non-ideal world, it is appropriate to employ non-ideal normative theories. That is what our proposal amounts to: we do suggest to provide a financial incentive which allows individuals to keep the status quo of their well-being and which provides them with resources in order to learn how to live in accordance with moral demands which, so far, have not yet been internalized in the form of broadly accepted customs and habits.

### ***4.4. Is the Policy Package Unfair to Non-Vegetarians?***

There are two reasons for which one might think that our proposal is unfair to consumers of animal products. Firstly, one might argue that it is unfair that our proposal aims at influencing the consumers of animal products and not the vegans. However, even if our proposal discriminated between veganism and carnivorousness, it still would not be unfair, for there are moral reasons for the discrimination. Moreover, our proposal does not offer any basis for claiming that some groups of persons benefit unfairly, because it leaves everybody the opportunity to keep their dietary habits, and indeed empowers them to do so.

Secondly, one might argue that the policy package is unfair because vegans and vegetarians benefit from it more than carnivores do. Since vegans do not consume animal products at all, the basic income just constitutes an additional income for them: they are fully free in spending the money and gaining additional welfare. In contrast, people who have a habit of animal product consumption will need the additional income just to keep their welfare level at the same level. Thus, although everybody gets the same monetary income, in terms of welfare gains, vegans and vegetarians benefit stronger than meat consumers.

This objection does not convince, either. Welfare gains do not depend on dietary habits of individuals. The difference between consumers of animal products and vegans lies in the fact that the former will experience welfare losses from regulation of the production of animal products whereas the welfare of the latter won't be changed by the regulation. However, the regulation will merely ensure that the production proceeds

in accordance with moral norms. It is not unjust to experience welfare losses from regulation which secures compliance with principles of justice or other ethical demands.

#### ***4.5. Is the Policy Package Manipulative (Because It Employs Motivational Tricks)?***

We anticipate two kinds of argument to the effect that there is something manipulative about the proposal. Firstly, while its fundamental aim is a reduction of animal product consumption, the policy proposal employs a rather complicated machinery to get people to reduce their animal product consumption, rather than openly appealing to citizens, or presenting normative arguments to them. Secondly, the claim of compatibility with traditional, or conservative, ways of prioritizing values could be interpreted as manipulative, because it obscures the fundamental reasons for which legislators or policy advisors will find the policy attractive (to the extent that they do).

Let us play with open cards. The most important normative reasons for the policy, in our view, are the avoidance of harm to animals, and the preservation of conditions for humanity's survival. Further, we do think that as things stand, preaching these aims and showing what follows from them, may have insufficient motivational impact. Even those who accept these aims intellectually cannot be expected, for the reason of their intellectual grasp or acceptance of the aims alone, to act in accordance with them. We do think that further motivational help is needed, and we take both the inclusion of a universal income and the compatibility with conservative values to constitute such help.

In arguing for a policy which furnishes such motivational help, there is a sense in which we treat citizens as 'less' than fully rational deciders without any motivational friction. But doing so need not be manipulative, and not merely because the view of humans as fully rational creatures, who never display the psychological defects sketched above, is an illusion. We would argue that manipulation, correctly understood, obtains if subjects, once fully informed about the workings of the policy – and perhaps the ultimate aims of its backers –, would reverse their erstwhile acceptance. We do not see that this is the case. Firstly, there is nothing actually undesirable about being afforded an additional degree of freedom, as the combination of price-raising regulation and universal income does. Secondly, the claim that the proposal is compatible with conservative values is true. As we tried to make clear, the point is to be seen under the heading of internal justification, not marketing. And internal justification, i.e. justification in terms of the values of one's interlocutor, is not manipulative as long as the justification is transparent. Thirdly, the 'conservative values' are (typically) not actually rejected by non-conservatives. They may be afforded lower priorities in the ordering of normative considerations of persons who would self-identify as 'progressives', thus potentially losing out against other considerations when a choice is forced. But health or quality considerations, even considerations of tradition, may be fully accepted even by non-conservatives as respectable reasons in political debate. For these reasons, a fully informed citizen would have no reason to change their view of the proposal's acceptability or to complain about it.

#### ***4.6. Is the Policy Package Politically Unrealistic?***

It is quite clear that the introduction of the policy package discussed in this paper faces significant hurdles.

One obvious example of a legal hurdle is the existence of rules and systems enshrining the openness of markets. With cheap meat and other animal products flowing into a country unhindered, however, the policy package is a nonstarter: it would kill much of the domestic agriculture sector, while doing nothing to change consumption. Here, a reform allowing environmentally or ethically mandated import restrictions (like import of alcohol or drugs) would indeed be needed for the proposed policy package to work. And of course, organizations like the EU or even the WTO are notoriously difficult to reform. At this point, all we can do is accept these barriers, but point out that they are not insurmountable, particularly given the urgency of the fight against climate change, and the growing awareness of the latter.

Let us also register the reminder that not all the aspects of the practical outlook for the implementation of the proposed policy are bad. One not yet discussed aspect of the proposal is its potential of enlisting the support of the farming community due to its expected positive impact on farmers' earning and working conditions. This may not be the case for all sections of the farming community. For those who are strongly invested in intensive and technology-heavy farming, it may well be difficult or impossible to change production modes – and downscale production – without investment losses. There would, in other words, be losers. But smaller farms with less such investment, higher diversity of produce and higher flexibility, may well be significant winners of the policy introduction in different dimensions. This, in turn, could yield a breakup of the current coalition of the farming community on the one hand, and large agro-business and meat processing on the other hand. The support of farmers, freed from their current coalition with agro-business, would not only be an asset in the endeavor to implement the policy. Due to the immense financial might of agro-business and meat-processing, and the latter's current public relations strategy of benefiting from the positive public image of farmers and farming, this breakup could also be valuable for other ecological causes.

In short, it does little help to deny that the policy proposal faces significant legal obstacles and powerful coalitions opposed to it. However, laws can be changed democratically, and reactionary coalitions can be broken up given the political will.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The policy package described in this paper follows construction principles on different levels. In order to further clarify them, but also with a view to possible uptake in neighboring or more general policy debates, let us conclude this paper by summarizing the central principles along with their justificatory interrelationships.

We have already emphasized that an important aspect of the proposal is the commitment to align individual consumption change with individuals' self-interest. We have also emphasized the principle of freedom, which corresponds with the preference for inviting change over enforcing it. Moreover, we have stressed the importance of allowing people to set their own speed in their adaption to the policy and to ethical demands, and of avoiding exclusive reliance on the acceptance of progressive values.

These principles may be thought to be distinctly 'soft'. We agree that their motivation lies in taking people as they are, with their – our – human psychology as it is, rather than assuming a psyche more amenable to intervention by moral appeal. We prefer to describe this aspect of the proposal as psychological pragmatism and see in it an important



principle on a higher level. A proposal which is pragmatic in the sketched sense need not be lacking in political ambition. And indeed, while we embrace psychological pragmatism, we are under no illusion regarding the ease of implementation. On the contrary, implementing it would probably require shifting the boundaries of the ‘conceivable’ quite some way out into what is today regarded as ‘radical’.

If its psychological pragmatism is a key higher order principle of our proposal, so is the commitment to socializing the endeavor to change consumption patterns. While some might argue that individuals have never been taken seriously enough by mainstream politics – governments have frequently allowed or even contributed to disinformation campaigns about the direct and indirect harms of individual consumption – and that presenting clear information to citizens is all that is needed to turn them into agents of change, we think that it is warranted to do more and employ communal resources to help individuals to live up to the moral demands they face collectively and individually. While tasking the community as a whole may not be mandated by considerations of justice (though it may well be, too), doing so may have the distinct advantage of working where other avenues have only led to backlash. By employing communal resources to empower individuals, the policy package under discussion does not let individuals off the hook but helps them to act in accordance with reasons which a large majority already accept.

Finally, let us state clearly that the proposal to seek solutions in the field of psychologically pragmatic policy options is not, in itself, a decision against other kinds of policy design. Different kinds of ethically objectionably human behavior may demand different policy responses, and there is no reason to think that all responses need to follow the principles discussed here.

The proposal is even less to be taken as an implicit statement against political activism, or against activism of the more adversarial kind. Activism of all sorts, we think, is needed, and in many cases, the state of the world and its laws justifies protest, civil disobedience, and also uncivil disobedience. But policy, including policy which is psychologically pragmatic in the sketched sense, may be a useful instrument for the growing tool-box of measures against the harms we inflict on each other, on non-human animals, and on our joint environment. If it is felt that the policy package would not do enough to alleviate these harms (for instance, if one believes that the only fully acceptable end is the total abolition of animal production), then the answer is: let us do more besides. The proposal developed here targets politics in institutions as they currently exist – no more than that, but no less either.

## Notes

1. We take it that the harmfulness of the (production and) consumption of animals is no longer in need of argumentative support. For references, see: (arguments from animal rights and animal welfare:) Coetzee, 1999; DeGrazia, 2002; Foer, 2010; Singer, 1975; (environmental arguments:) Hayek et al., 2021; Nordgren, 2011; Schlottmann & Sebo, 2019; Springmann et al., 2018; (health-related reasons:) McMichael et al., 2007; Willett et al., 2019; (arguments on the relationship between animal production and zoonotic pandemics:) ProVeg e.V., 2020. This essay concentrates on the consumption of animal products, but many of its arguments also apply to other kinds of harmful consumption.
2. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reports a decrease in global meat production in its 2020 report (see Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2020). However, at 1.7%, the decrease in annual meat production is small,

and it is attributed to trade disruptions, animal diseases and the corona pandemic. It therefore hardly signals a long-term trend. Decreases in some European countries due to a shift of consumption to plant-based meat-substitutes are also minuscule. For example, while the production value of plant-based substitutes in Germany increased from 62.4 million Euro to 85.1 million Euro in the first quarters of 2019 and 2020, respectively, the value of quarterly meat production stands at roughly 10 billion Euro. All in all, there are no reasons to expect a significant decrease of demand for meat and other animal products in the absence of policy aimed at curbing animal product consumption.

3. Animal products, in our paper, encompass meat, milk, eggs, leather, honey etc. and their derivative products. However, a policy package of the kind we propose could also be introduced only for a part of this range, e.g. meat.
4. e.g. Bicket and Vanner (2016); Baranzini and Carattini (2017).
5. c.f. Bicket and Vanner (2016), Carattini et al. (2018), and Lemken et al. (2018) for reviews of the research field.
6. In economic theory, the opportunity cost of a good is defined as the foregone benefit caused by choosing the good over its alternatives (taking money spent or kept into account).
7. Diepeveen et al. (2013), Drews and van den Bergh (2015), Carattini et al. (2018), Bachus et al. (2019), and Fesenfeld et al. (2020).
8. Diepeveen et al. (2013) reviewed health related policy interventions (alcohol, tobacco, diet, and physical activities).
9. see e.g. Bicket and Vanner (2016), with evidence that trust of motives increases acceptance, that a perceived risk of free-riding lowers it, and that there is a general preference for 'carrot' over 'stick' measures.
10. Livestock husbandry is also a driver of land-system change to which production of fodder contributes. This provides a further reason why livestock farming jeopardizes rights of future generations. However, due to the indirect effects, the precise justification would demand a more complex treatment than what could be offered within this short paper.
11. We are aware that many would argue that animal *rights*, strictly speaking, are not compatible with *any use* of animals for human purposes. In fact, we ourselves sympathize with this view. If this is the case, the regulation should be read as aiming toward *better* alignment with the demands of animal rights, rather than meeting them in full. Fully meeting the demands of animal rights would then remain a longer term goal. In this paper, we opted against a discussion in terms of animal *welfare*, as this political category is too elastic, and in the usage of most industry representatives certainly far too weak.
12. According to the reciprocity objection (see, e.g. Lister, 2020; White, 1997), an unconditional basic income violates the normative principle of reciprocity in that it allows some people to obtain an income without requiring them to contribute to society in return. In our proposal, the basic income is constrained to, and motivated by, a particular societal goal: the reduction of consumption of animal products, which is in turn motivated by the recognition of animal rights and ecological concerns. Thus, an equivalent consideration justifying the provision of the income exists. For a similar argument to the effect that reciprocity is not a necessary condition for the justice of a policy (proposal), see McKinnon (2003).
13. As already hinted, this is also the reason for which we do not try to estimate its size in order to test whether our proposal is empirically consistent.
14. We thank an anonymous reviewer for emphasizing this point.
15. c.f. Green and Denniss (2018) who argue for this claim, however in the field of climate policy.
16. see footnote 12.
17. See Festinger (1957) and the extensive literature in its wake, for instance, Loughnan et al. (2010); or Bastian et al. (2012).
18. Destatis 2021, National Accounts, Table 81,000–0009 <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online?operation=statistic&levelindex=0&levelid=1609789497347&code=81000>; accessed on 04.01.2021.

19. Destatis 2021, National Accounts, Table 81,000–0120: <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online?operation=statistic&levelindex=0&levelid=1609789497347&code=81000>; accessed on 04.01.2021.
20. Own calculations based on data from Federal National Accounts: <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Consumption-Expenditure/Tables/private-consumption-ngt-evs.html>, data accessed on 04.01.2021.
21. <https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Monatsberichte/2020/10/Inhalte/Kapitel-6-Statistiken/6-1-05-bundeshaushalt.html>, accessed on 04.01.2021.
22. <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Government/Public-Finance/Expenditure-Revenue-And-Financial-Balance-Of-Public-Budgets/Tables/revenue.html>, accessed on 04.01.2021.

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