

Moral Vegetarianism vs. Moral Omnivorism

Abstract

It is supererogatory to refrain from eating meat, just as it is supererogatory to refrain from driving cars, living in apartments, and wearing makeup, for the welfare of animals. If all animals are equal, and if nonhuman omnivores, such as bears and baboons, are justified in killing the members of other species, such as gazelles and buffaloes, for food, humans are also justified in killing the members of other species, such as cows, pigs, and chickens, for food. In addition, it is fair for humans to eat animals because humans are also eaten by animals.

Keywords

Discrimination, Eating Meat, Equality, Omnivorism, Vegetarianism

Park, Seungbae (2017). "Moral Vegetarianism vs. Moral Omnivorism" *Human Affairs* 27 (3): 289-300.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2017-0024>

<https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/humaff.2017.27.issue-3/humaff-2017-0024/humaff-2017-0024.xml?format=INT>

Seungbae Park

Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology

Republic of Korea

nature@unist.ac.kr

1. Introduction

There are rival positions concerning the moral issue of eating meat. This paper is interested in the positions that might be called "moral vegetarianism" and "moral omnivorism" ("vegetarianism" and "omnivorism" from now on). Vegetarianism is the view that we ought to eat plants, mushrooms, and so on, but that we ought not to kill nonhuman animals ("animals" hereafter) for the purpose of eating their meat. In contrast, omnivorism is the view that it is justifiable to eat meat as well as plants, mushrooms, and so forth, and that it is permissible to kill animals for the purpose of eating their meat. There are diverse positions that fall between vegetarianism and omnivorism thus defined, but this paper need not concern them.

Which position should we choose, vegetarianism or omnivorism? Brilliant thinkers on both sides of the debate have put forward powerful considerations in favor of their rivaling positions in the applied ethics literature. In this paper, I introduce the arguments advanced by celebrated vegetarians: John Mizzoni (2002), David Detmer (2007), Tom Regan (2010), and Peter Singer (2009, 2010). Next, I critically respond to their arguments and present positive arguments in favor of omnivorism. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss other vegetarians' arguments, such as those from distributive justice and environmentalism.

This paper attempts to justify omnivorism ironically with the key premise that vegetarians have adduced to justify vegetarianism: the famous vegetarian slogan "[a]ll animals are equal" (Singer, 2009, 2010). Some omnivorians, such as Holmes Rolston, III (2006), Tibor Machan (2010), and Carl Cohen (2010), reject the vegetarian slogan. Unlike those omnivorians, I fully accept and use it to defend omnivorism. It falls outside the scope of this paper to defend omnivorism under the assumption that humans and animals are unequal.

The debate between vegetarians and omnivorians is important for the following reasons. First, depending on the outcome of the debate, we may or may not have to change our daily habit of eating meat. Second, the debate has an implication on our scientific practice of performing experiments on animals, given that some arguments against eating meat can be turned against using animals for scientific purposes. Third, the debate has philosophical value, shedding light on how humans relate to other organisms and what it means for organisms to have a place in the ecosystem.

2. Mizzoni

2.1. Luxuries

Some omnivorians argue that meat contains the vital nutrient, viz., protein, and that we are more vulnerable to certain diseases, such as cancer and myocardial infarction, if we do not eat meat. John Mizzoni retorts that we can survive without eating meat from a nutritional point of view, saying, "Since eating animals is not required for nutrition, then it would count as a luxury, a non-basic need" (2002: 341). We can get protein from beans instead of from meat, so eating meat is merely a luxury we can dispense with. We are inflicting more pain on animals than is necessary for our survival, and hence it is immoral to eat meat.

2.2. Critical Responses

Two critical comments are in order. First, the vegetarian argument implies that it is right to eat meat when that is not a luxury, i.e., when that is needed for our survival. A question arises: is it permissible to kill humans for food when that is necessary for our survival? Some vegetarians would say no because cannibalism is detestable from a moral point of view. If they say no, however, they have the burden to explain why it is permissible to eat animals, but not humans, for our survival. What is the relevant difference between eating animals and humans for survival that entitles them to say that it is permissible to kill animals, but not humans, for our survival?

Second, there are other luxuries that some vegetarians would be reluctant to give up, such as cars, houses, cosmetics, and shoes. We can walk instead of driving cars. We can live in caves instead of in apartments. We can survive without wearing makeup. We can walk barefoot instead of wearing shoes made of leather. Such a list of daily luxuries can be extended *ad nauseam*. Our daily life would look radically different without them. Thus, if we should stop eating meat because it is merely a luxury to eat meat, we should also stop using myriad other luxuries, and our daily life will become unpalatable even to some vegetarians.

Vegetarians might reply that there is a fundamental difference between eating meat and enjoying other luxuries. We must kill animals to eat meat, but we do not have to kill animals to pursue other luxuries. For example, cows must be slaughtered for us to eat beef, whereas no animal must be killed for us to drive cars. Therefore, it is wrong to eat meat, but permissible to enjoy other luxuries.

This reply, however, is countered by the fact that using other luxuries *often* incurs taking animals' lives. Many animals are killed on the road by cars. Some animals are killed to produce cosmetics and leather. When building apartments, we encroach upon the natural habitats for wild animals, thereby pushing them toward extinction. In short, we cause unnecessary pain and death for animals by living in apartments, wearing makeup, and driving of cars.

Many animal activists would then retort that it is simply wrong to drive cars, to live in apartments, to use cosmetics, and so on. It is wrong to assume that these human activities are moral. They all belong to the category of immoral actions along with eating meat. We cannot prove that eating meat is moral by saying that it belongs to the same category as those

immoral actions.

The preceding vegetarian position, however, embeds a questionable standard of morality. Of course, we are saintly and admirable if we abstain from the aforementioned luxuries, eating meat, driving cars, and living in apartments, to protect the welfare of animals. But it is dubious to say that it is immoral to enjoy them. It seems to go beyond the call of moral duty to live without them. In short, it is supererogatory, not mandatory, to abstain from eating meat.

This response to the vegetarian position echoes one of the standard objections against utilitarianism. This standard objection holds that utilitarianism is a problematic theory of morality because it fails to recognize supererogatory actions (Rachels and Rachels, 2010: 115-116). Instead of watching movies and buying new clothes, we might donate the money to a charitable agency so that third-world children can be relieved of starvation. Such an action is supererogatory. We are not morally required to do it, but if we do it, we are morally admirable. Utilitarianism asserts, however, that we have the moral obligation to do it on the grounds that it maximizes happiness. Therefore, utilitarianism contains too high a standard of morality to guide our daily actions.

3. Detmer

3.1. Cannibalism

David Detmer argues that it is illegitimate to eat animals because it is morally “wrong to kill humans for food” (2007: 42) and because there is no morally relevant difference between eating humans and eating animals. Omnivorians might retort that humans can speak languages, but animals cannot, so it is permissible for humans to eat them. Detmer (2007: 42) replies that it is not ethical to hurt animals any more than it is ethical to hurt humans who cannot speak languages; what matters in the context of morality is not whether target agents can speak languages or not, but whether they can suffer or not.

So far as I can tell, this argument, which I call the argument from cannibalism, is the most compelling argument for vegetarianism. We kill animals, but not humans, for food. This practice seems to be arbitrary. So omnivorians have the burden to justify it. Let me show how forceful the argument from cannibalism is. Rolston, III (2006: 333) argues that if humans stop eating beef, cows in animal farms will have to be released into the wild. In the wild, they will be an easy target for predators and will struggle to find food and shelter. Their population will decrease significantly or they will go extinct. It follows that humans are doing something good to cows by raising them in animal farms and by killing them for food. Slaughtering cows is justifiable because the group of humans and the group of cows benefit each other in the long run. Vegetarians would respond to Rolston, III’s argument as follows. Imagine that a group of humans lock up, raise, and kill another group of humans for food. The first group claims that the second group is weak, so if they are set free, they will be unable to live on their own. Thus, the first group is in a sense giving benefits to the second group. We would rightly dismiss this argument as self-serving, and demand that the first group should compensate the second group for their wrongdoing. Analogously, we should reject Rolston, III’s argument as self-serving, and demand that humans should compensate animals in animal farms for their wrongdoing.

3.2. Critical Responses

Let me make two critical comments on the argument from cannibalism. First, vegetarianism is not significantly better off than omnivorism vis-à-vis the argument from cannibalism. As I pointed out in Section 2.2., the vegetarian argument that we ought to stop eating meat because it is merely a luxury to eat meat implies that it is permissible to eat meat when it is

not a luxury, i.e., in the desperate situation in which we will die if we do not kill animals for food. Consider, however, that all animals are equal. It is controversial to kill humans for food in the desperate situation, so it is also controversial to kill animals for food in the desperate situation. Vegetarians, then, have no choice but to say that humans are different from animals, so it is permissible to kill animals, but not humans, for food in the desperate situation. But what is the relevant difference between humans and animals that entitles vegetarians to say so?

Second, observe nonhuman omnivores in nature. Bears kill buffaloes, and baboons kill gazelles for food, despite the fact that bear and baboons can survive without eating meat. Interestingly, bears and baboons do not kill the members of their own species for food. If they are justified in favoring the members of their own species over the members of other species, so are humans. After all, humans and nonhuman omnivores are equal, and humans' suffering is as important as nonhuman omnivores' suffering. It is wrong to think that nonhuman omnivores' interest in eating meat is more important than humans' interest in eating meat. It is a discrimination against humans to hold humans, but not nonhuman omnivores, morally accountable for killing the members of other species for food.

One caveat is in order: to favor the members of one's own species over the members of another species does not mean that we can treat animals in any way we want. Animals are raised in inhumane conditions in farm factories. Such a practice is disturbing, and many omnivorians would not endorse it. My only aim in this paper is to refute the vegetarian contention that it is an arbitrary practice that we kill animals, but not humans, for food. The aim can be achieved by the appeal to the core vegetarian tenet that all animals are equal and to the behavioral pattern of bears and baboons that they kill the members of other species, but not the members of their own species, for food.

Singer (2009, 2010) would protest that we usually look down on animals as beasts, so it is odd for me to appeal to the behavioral pattern of nonhuman omnivores for our moral guidance. He says, "it is odd that humans, who normally think of the behavior of animals as 'beastly' should, when it suits them, use an argument that implies that we ought to look to animals for moral guidance" (1993: 71). We should not imitate the behavioral pattern of nonhuman omnivores because their behavioral pattern cannot be the source of our moral guidance.

Recall, however, that I am not merely claiming that humans are entitled to favor the members of their own species over the members of another species as bears and baboons do. My assertion is supported by the central vegetarian tenet that all animals are equal. The tenet implies, although it is not intended by its proponent to imply, that humans' interest in eating meat is as important as nonhuman omnivores' interest in eating meat. Thus, the core vegetarian creed is utilized to avoid the charge that Singer would levy that I am merely modeling human conduct on the conduct of beasts.

Vegetarians might argue that a relevant difference exists between humans and nonhuman omnivores that entitles the latter, but not the former, to kill animals for food. The relevant difference is that the former are moral agents having the capacity to act in accordance with moral rules, whereas the latter are not. So it is wrong to attribute the property of being wrong to the former, but not to the latter, for the action of killing animals for food.

Let me make two critical comments. First, it is dubious to reason that, since humans have the capacity to act morally, they ought not to eat meat. Psychopaths have the capacity to kill innocent people for fun. Does it follow that they ought to kill innocent people for fun? It is one thing that we have the capacity to do X; it is another that we ought to do X. Moreover, it is under dispute between vegetarians and omnivorians whether we ought to refrain from eating meat, and hence whether acting morally entails refraining from eating meat.

Consequently, the fact that humans are moral agents does not aid the vegetarian cause.

Second, the contention that humans are moral agents whereas animals are not might ultimately help not vegetarianism but omnivorism. In fact, Machan (2010: 143-145) argues that we are moral agents while animals are not, so we are more valuable than animals; that we have the rights to life, liberty, and property, whereas animals do not; and that we are justified in making use of animals for our purposes. My intention in introducing Machan's reasoning here is not to defend it but to show that vegetarians open a new debate if they appeal to the assumption that humans are moral beings whereas animals are not.

4. Regan

4.1. Negative Right

Tom Regan observes that humans and animals are all experiencing subjects of a life, being able to "want and prefer things, believe and feel things, recall and expect things" (2010: 309). Since animals, like humans, are experiencing subjects of a life, they have inherent value of their own, they have the right to not be harmed by humans, and they should be treated with respect just like humans. Thus, factory farming, sport hunting, and scientific experiments against animals should all be banned.

Omnivorians might say that domestic animals, such as cows, pigs, and chickens, have less inherent value than humans because they are less intelligent than humans. Regan replies that even if some humans, such as mentally disabled people, are less intelligent than others, we do not say that they "have less inherent value, less of a right to be treated with respect, than do others" (2010: 309). Similarly, even if domestic animals are less intelligent than humans, we should not say that domestic animals have less inherent value than humans.

4.2. Critical Responses

If domestic animals have the right to not be harmed by humans, gazelles and buffaloes also have the right to not be harmed by baboons and bears. After all, there is no morally relevant difference between the domestic animals and the wild animals, and between humans and nonhuman omnivores. They are all experiencing subjects of a life. Baboons and bears, however, violate gazelles' and buffaloes' rights to not be harmed. It follows that we should hold the nonhuman omnivores morally accountable for eating meat. It is a discrimination against humans to hold humans, but not nonhuman omnivores, so accountable.

Regan might argue that it is not a discrimination against humans to hold humans, but not nonhuman omnivores, morally accountable for killing their preys, because nonhuman omnivores are similar to mentally impaired humans in terms of moral status. We fully punish mentally competent humans, but not mentally incompetent humans, for committing murder. Even so, we are not discriminating against mentally competent humans. Similarly, we are not discriminating against humans, even if we hold humans, but not nonhuman omnivores, morally accountable for eating meat.

My response to the above argument is to point out that we do take certain actions against mentally ill murderers lest they commit murder again. For example, we confine them to mental hospitals or other institutions. It follows that we should also take certain actions against nonhuman omnivores to ensure that they do not kill for meat again. Of course, there is no feasible way to police the wild to ensure that nonhuman omnivores refrain from killing for meat. The point remains, however, that we ought to take such actions, impracticable though it is, if the aforementioned analogy between nonhuman omnivores and mentally ill murderers is legitimate. Our intuition tells us, however, that we do not have to stop them from killing for meat. Therefore, the analogy must not be legitimate.

Vegetarians might now compare nonhuman omnivores to human infants. Nonhuman

omnivores and human infants are similar in that they lack the capacity to regulate their actions in accordance with moral rules. It is wrong to hold human infants morally accountable for releasing excrement on a sofa. So it is also wrong to hold nonhuman omnivores so accountable for killing gazelles and buffaloes. We are not discriminating against adult humans, even if we blame them, but not human infants, for releasing excrement on a sofa. Similarly, we are not discriminating against humans, even if we blame them, but not nonhuman omnivores, for eating meat. Thusly might claim vegetarians.

The analogy between nonhuman omnivores and human infants, however, is flawed. We are parents to our infants, so we have the parental duty to them. We have the obligation to tolerate them when they inconvenience us. By contrast, we are not parents to nonhuman omnivores, so we do not have the parental duty to them. We do not have the obligation to tolerate them when they kill gazelles and buffaloes for food. Moreover, we take certain actions against our infants lest they release excrement on a sofa again. It follows that we should also take certain actions against baboons and bears to ensure that they do not kill gazelles and buffaloes again. Our intuition says, however, that we do not have to take such actions. So the analogy between nonhuman omnivores and human infants is inappropriate.

It is a discrimination against humans to suggest that humans have both rights and responsibilities, whereas nonhuman omnivores have only rights. Neither the difference of intelligence nor the difference of the capacity to act in accordance with moral rules can justify the discrimination against humans any more than the discrimination against animals. The fact that the rules governing the behaviors of bears and baboons are different from those of humans does not prove that nonhuman omnivores have only rights any more than the fact that the customs of Korean are different from those of Americans proves that either Koreans or Americans have only rights. This paper has a simple message to vegetarians: humans are not below nonhuman omnivores.

A referee raises the following sharp objection to my contention that, if cows and pigs have the right to not be harmed by humans, gazelles and buffaloes also have the right to not be harmed by baboons and bears. Having a right is usually understood as having a claim against an individual who is a moral agent. So we have the right to not be injured by our fellow humans, but we do not have the right to not be injured by a landslide or earthquake. Baboons and bears are not moral agents any more than a landslide and an earthquake are. Therefore, gazelles and buffaloes have the right to not be harmed by humans, but they do not have the right to not be harmed by baboons and bears.

Note that the referee presupposes that humans are moral agents, while animals are not, and that, even if animals are not moral agents, they have the *right* to not be harmed by humans. It is, however, a controversial issue whether it is legitimate to apply the moral predicate “right” to agents that are not moral. Unfortunately, it would take us too far afield to attempt to resolve this controversy, so I will set it aside for the purposes of this paper. I will instead assume along with the referee that animals, although not moral agents, have the right to not be harmed by humans, and then I will use this assumption to argue that gazelles and buffaloes have the right to not be harmed by baboons and bears, contrary to what the referee asserts.

Consider that mountain lions sometimes attack humans in California. Once a mountain lion attacks a human, the police usually track it down and kill it. Underlying this practice is the notion that humans have the right to not be harmed by mountain lions. If humans have that right, they also have the right to not be harmed by nonhuman omnivores, given that there is no relevant difference between mountain lions and nonhuman omnivores that would entitle speciesists to say that humans have the right to not be harmed by mountain lions, but they do not have the right to not be harmed by nonhuman omnivores. Neither is there a relevant

difference between humans and the preys (gazelles and buffaloes) that would entitle speciesists to say that humans have the right to not be harmed by nonhuman omnivores, but the preys do not. It follows that the preys also have the right to not be harmed by nonhuman omnivores, *pace* the referee.

It is a discrimination against humans to suggest that gazelles and buffaloes have the right to not be harmed by humans, but they do not have the right to not be harmed by baboons and bears, just as it is a discrimination against humans with dark skin to suggest that gazelles and buffaloes have the right to not be harmed by humans with dark skin, but they do not have the right to not be harmed by humans with light skin. Why treat humans with dark skin differently than humans with light skin? Just as there is no relevant difference between dark skin and light skin that would entitle racists to say that one race can harm the preys, but the other cannot, so there is no relevant difference between nonhuman omnivores and humans that would entitle speciesists to say that nonhuman omnivores can harm the preys, but humans cannot.

5. Singer

5.1. Equality

Singer (2009, 2010) also claims that it is morally wrong to eat meat. For him, humans' interests and animals' interests should be given equal consideration because humans and animals have the same capacity for suffering. He says, "No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being" (2010: 127).

Omnivorians might argue that humans are more intelligent than animals, so it is morally permissible for humans to use animals for their ends. Singer replies that even if humans with dark skin are more intelligent than humans with light skin, or vice versa, or even if human women are more intelligent than human men, or vice versa, we ought not discriminate against less intelligent groups. Similarly, even if humans are more intelligent than animals, we ought not discriminate against animals. The difference of intelligence between humans and animals does not justify speciesism any more than any difference of intelligence, if it existed, between human men and human women or humans with light skin and humans with dark skin would justify racism or sexism. In short, just as humans of different skin colors and genders deserve equal consideration of their interests, so too do animals.

5.2. Critical Responses

Humans and nonhuman omnivores have more or less the same capacity for suffering, and nonhuman omnivores kill animals for the purpose of eating their meat. Humans' interest in eating meat is as important as nonhuman omnivores' interest in eating meat, and humans' suffering should be counted equally with nonhuman omnivores' suffering. It is a discrimination against humans to suggest that humans' suffering weighs less than nonhuman omnivores' suffering. Thus, the vegetarian view that all animals are equal can be utilized to support omnivorism.

Note that I do not argue that humans are justified in eating meat just as are lions and tigers, animals classified as carnivores, not omnivores. I do not so argue because vegetarians object that lions and tigers cannot survive without eating meat, whereas humans can. In the light of their objection, I appeal to the eating practices of bears and baboons as opposed to those of lions and tigers. Bears can survive without eating buffaloes, and baboons can survive without eating gazelles. There is no relevant difference between humans and nonhuman omnivores that would entitle vegetarians to say that nonhuman omnivores' suffering is more

important than humans' suffering.

How would Singer criticize my foregoing argument for omnivorism? He would contend that his slogan that all animals are equal does not entail that humans and animals have exactly the same rights. He says, "The extension of the basic principle of equality from one group to another does not imply that we must treat both groups in exactly the same way, or grant exactly the same rights to both groups" (1993: 2). For example, humans and dogs are equal, but humans have the right to vote while dogs do not because humans know the significance of voting, but dogs do not (Singer, 2009: 2). Analogously, Singer would say, humans and nonhuman omnivores are equal, but they do not have exactly the same rights. Specifically, nonhuman omnivores have the right to eat meat, but humans do not.

It is not clear, however, what justifies the vegetarian position that nonhuman omnivores can eat meat, but humans cannot. Nonhuman omnivores' suffering deserves no greater consideration than humans' suffering. Impartiality requires that we should treat nonhuman omnivores' suffering and humans' suffering alike. Singer cannot appeal to the difference of intelligence between humans and nonhuman omnivores because he earlier objected to the discrimination between humans and animals based on the difference of intelligence. His previous objection entails that the difference of intelligence between humans and nonhuman omnivores does not justify the discrimination against humans any more than the discrimination against nonhuman omnivores.

Moreover, there is a fundamental flaw with Singer's use of the slogan that all animals are equal. If you truly embraced the slogan, you would believe that humans can eat meat just as nonhuman omnivores can. Imagine that some men chant the slogan that all humans are equal, but they believe that men can eat meat, but women cannot. We would point out that what they speak is incongruous with what they believe, and that their slogan is misleading or hypocritical. We might even recommend a more accurately representative slogan: men and women are unequal. Similarly, imagine that some vegetarians chant the slogan that all animals are equal, but they believe that nonhuman omnivores can eat meat, but humans cannot. We would point out that what they speak is incongruous with what they believe, and that their slogan is misleading or hypocritical. We might even recommend a more accurately representative slogan: human and nonhuman omnivores are unequal, and nonhuman omnivores' interest outweighs humans' interest in eating meat.

Let us set aside the terminological issue. The speciesist position that nonhuman omnivores can eat meat, but humans cannot, is as objectionable as the sexist position that women can eat meat, but men cannot, and as the racist position that humans with dark skin can eat meat, but humans with light skin cannot. If vegetarians think otherwise, they owe us an account of why the former is reasonable while the latter are not. When they give such an account, however, they should keep in mind that humans of different genders, humans with different skin colors, bears, and baboons have more or less the same capacity for suffering, and that their respective interests should be weighed equally.

6. Fair Game

Humans are playing a fair game in the natural world when they butcher cows, pigs, and chickens for food, the reason being that they themselves are also killed and/or eaten by other organisms. Some humans are bitten by poisonous snakes and go through excruciating pain before dying. Humans' bodies are torn apart by hungry maggots, insects, and vultures. Humans' bodies, properly buried, are consumed by small organisms, such as bacteria. We are constantly plagued by diseases throughout our lives. Many diseases are caused by germs, which eat parts of our bodies and lead to our death. In a sense, they eat us alive. Thus, humans do not enjoy the privileged status of never being eaten by other species. Being eaten

by other organisms is the ultimate price all organisms, human or nonhuman, pay for their participation in the ecosystem.

How would vegetarians respond to my foregoing argument for omnivorism? They might assert that it is just for us to kill microbes because microbes eat us, but it is unjust for us to slaughter cows because cows do not eat us.

My reply is that humans indirectly eat microbes by eating cows, given that cows eat plants, and plants absorb microbes after microbes die in the soil. Cows also indirectly eat humans by eating plants, given that plants derive nutrients from humans after they are cremated or buried in the soil. In short, humans eat microbes via eating cows, and cows eat humans via eating plants. Every organism indirectly eats its predator by eating its own prey, for all organisms in our ecosystem are connected with each other, directly or indirectly, through the food chain. In that sense, all organisms are equal. If cows have the right to eat their predators by eating their preys, so do humans. It is a discrimination against humans to suggest that cows have such right, but humans do not. Humans are not invoking a privilege when they eat microbes via eating cows.

The referee raises the following interesting objection: it is probably incorrect to apply the concept of fairness to relations with other organisms. How can we apply the concept of fairness in these domains? Why should we include microbes in our moral analysis? This paper would seem to endorse a sort of holistic understanding of nature according to which every organism is entitled to do whatever is ecologically necessary. Attributing a moral predicate to relations with microbes amounts to a moralization of nature.

Let me make two critical comments. First, as noted in Section 4.2., the referee claims that animals have the right to not be harmed by humans, attributing the moral predicate 'right' to animals, and yet insists that they are not moral agents. In this section, the referee takes issue with my attribution of the moral predicate 'fair' to the relation between humans and microbes. A question arises. Why is it that to say that animals have the right to not be harmed by humans does not entail that they are moral agents, but to say that it is fair for humans to eat microbes via eating cows entails that animals are moral agents? Why is it that treating animals as if they have the right does not presuppose that they are moral agents, but treating animals fairly presupposes that they are moral agents? In sum, just as to say that animals have the right to not be harmed by humans does not presuppose that animals are moral agents, so to say that it is fair for humans to cows via eating cows does not presuppose that animals are moral agents.

Second, the essential point of this section can be recast without the notion of fairness and with the notion of right. Just as cows have the right to eat humans via eating plants, so do humans have the right to eat microbes via eating cows. It is a discrimination against humans to say that cows have such right while humans do not. There is no relevant difference between cows and humans that would entitle speciesists to say that cows have the right, but humans do not. After all, humans and cows are equal, and they are all experiencing subjects of a life. Note that this response to the referee's objection does not presuppose that cows and microbes are moral agents; it only presupposes that cows have the right to eat humans via eating plants.

Vegetarians might now admit that humans can indirectly eat their predators by eating their preys just as can animals in nature because all animals are equal. But, it does not follow, they might point out, that humans can raise animals in miserable conditions of factory farms. No animal in nature locks up other animals in small spaces, castrates them for the improvement of their flesh, and slaughters them for food. Humans should put an end to the practice of factory farming.

Consider, however, that the cattle can be raised in humane conditions in which they are

allowed to graze freely outdoors, and they can be provided with pleasant shelters to protect them from rain and snow. Humans cause suffering to them only when slaughtering them. Many measures can be taken to enable the cattle to live longer than they would in the wild. Of course, raising the cattle in such conditions is costly, and consumers would have to pay much higher prices for beef. But, if the cattle are raised in such conditions, it becomes doubtful that it is immoral to eat the beef from those cattle.

Many vegetarians would reply, however, that it does not matter whether the farming conditions are humane or inhumane. No animals raise other animals for food in the natural world. Only humans are engaged in such a deplorable practice. The vegetarian tenet that all animals are equal permits humans to kill wild animals for food, but it does not permit humans to raise animals for food.

My response to this objection is to bring our attention to the behavioral pattern of moles. They are omnivores although they mostly feed on earthworms. When hungry, they eat earthworms upon catching them. When full, however, they inject their toxic saliva into earthworms. The earthworms are paralyzed and remain fresh until the moles become hungry. It seems to me that paralyzing animals is much crueler than raising animals in humane conditions. Therefore, if all animals are equal, and if moles have the right to paralyze earthworms, *a fortiori* humans have the right to raise animals in humane conditions. It is simply an arbitrary position that moles and humans are equal, but moles can paralyze earthworms while humans cannot raise animals in humane conditions.

7. Conclusion

It is supererogatory to refrain from eating meat, just as it is supererogatory to refrain from driving cars, living in apartments, and wearing makeup, for the welfare of animals. If all animals are equal, and if nonhuman omnivores can eat meat, so can humans. It is a discrimination against humans to hold humans, but not nonhuman omnivores, morally accountable for eating meat. Finally, it is fair for humans to eat animals because they are also eaten by animals. In the biological world, an organism is fated to end up in the stomachs of other organisms. Each organism's participation in the ecosystem indicates that its body will ultimately become parts of other organisms. Humans are not exempt from this inexorable and merciless biological truth.

Throughout this paper I relied on the central vegetarian tenet that all animals are equal in order to argue that it is permissible for humans to kill animals for food. Vegetarians may now try to diffuse my strategy by jettisoning that core creed from their position. They might now contend that humans and animals are unequal. This new position, however, opens a new door to omnivorism, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper. Rolston, III (2006), Machan (2010), and Cohen (2010) would argue that if humans and animals are unequal, it is legitimate for humans to eat animals. It requires, however, a separate paper to stake out a position in this interesting territory.

References

Cohen, Carl (2010). "The Case for the Use of Animals in Biomedical Research", In Steven Cahn (ed.), *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press. Originally published in 1986 in *New England Journal of Medicine* Vol. 315.

Detmer, David (2007). "Vegetarianism, Traditional Morality, and Moral Conservatism", *Journal of Philosophical Research* 32: 39–48.

Machan, Tibor R. (2010). "Do Animals Have Rights?" In James Rachels and Stuart Rachels

(eds.), *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*. 5th ed. New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies. Originally published in 1991 in *Public Affairs Quarterly* Vol. 5, No. 2.

Mizzoni, John (2006). "Against Rolston's Defense of Eating Animals: Reckoning with the Nutritional Factor in the Argument for Vegetarianism", In Stephen Satris (ed.), *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Moral Issues*, 10th ed. Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw-Hill Companies. Originally published in 2002 in *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol. 16.

Rachels, James and Stuart Rachels (2010). *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. 6th ed. OH: McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Regan, Tom (2010). "The Case for Animals Rights", In Steven Cahn (ed.), *Exploring Ethics: An Introductory Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press. Previously published in Peter Singer (ed.), (1985). *In Defense of Animals*. MA: Blackwell Publishing Company.

Rolston III, Holmes (2006). "Higher Animals: Duties to Sentient Life", In Stephen Satris (ed.), *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Moral Issues*, 10th ed. Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw-Hill Companies. Originally published in Holmes Rolston III (1988). *Environmental Ethics: Duties to and Values in the Natural World*. Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.

Singer, Peter (1993). *Practical Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

----- (2009). *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement*. New York: HarperCollins Publisher.

----- (2010). "All Animals Are Equal", In James Rachels and Stuart Rachels (eds.), *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*. 5th ed. New York, NY: The McGraw-Hill Companies. Originally published in 1974 in *Annual Proceedings of the Center of Philosophical Exchange* 1, No. 5: 103-11, State University of New York College at Brockport.