

Consequentialism, Animal Ethics, and the Value of Valuing
Timothy Perrine¹
Journal of Applied Philosophy, DOI: 10.1111/japp.12399

Abstract: Peter Singer argues, on consequentialist grounds, that individuals ought to be vegetarian. Many have pressed, in response, a causal impotence objection to Singer's argument: any individual person's refraining from purchasing and consuming animal products will not have an important effect on contemporary farming practices. In this paper, I sketch a Singer-inspired consequentialist argument for vegetarianism that avoids this objection. The basic idea is that, for agents who are aware of the origins of their food, continuing to consume animal products is morally bad because it leads to not appropriately disvaluing the origins of their food. That is a morally bad outcome that can be avoided by becoming vegetarian.

Given the horrible ways that animals are treated by contemporary farming practices, does consequentialism imply that individual, ordinary people like you or me ought to be vegetarians?² Peter Singer thought so, once saying that he was vegetarian because he accepted a form of consequentialism (1980). However, many others are skeptical. The source of their skepticism is not hard to see. Consequentialism implies that an individual ought to be vegetarian only if by being vegetarian that individual can help make an important change in the world. But an individual being vegetarian cannot make a change to contemporary farming practices; for such businesses are not so finely tuned to the choices of a single person. Thus, proponents of consequentialism may criticize contemporary farming practices for being quite disvaluable, but they cannot argue that this fact implies that we—any particular individual—ought to be vegetarian. If vegetarians want to secure a moral requirement for vegetarianism, they must look beyond consequentialism.

This paper argues that, in an important range of cases, a suitable version of consequentialism does imply that individual agents ought to be vegetarian. The basic idea, developed below, is that most people who are aware of the horrible treatment of animals and persist in a standard meat-eating diet exhibit a great deal of indifference to disvaluable things. Further, such indifference is, itself, disvaluable. By contrast, vegetarians do not exhibit the same indifference. Given consequentialism, this provides a reason for being vegetarian even if being vegetarian does not lead to changes of contemporary farming practices.

In section I, I lay out an argument for vegetarianism inspired by Peter Singer. I then explain the above objection—the “Causal Impotence Objection”—and briefly set aside two responses to it. In section II, I articulate some general principles about value and argue that, in certain cases, failing to have certain attitudes is, itself, a bad thing. In section III, I apply those principles to vegetarianism. I argue that, in certain cases, they imply that people ought not consume a standard

¹ For helpful conversation, I thank Michael Longenecker and Peter Finocchiaro. For helpful feedback on the paper, I thank Hao Hong, Wade Munroe, two anonymous reviewers, and an associate editor for this journal.

² Following standard practice, I focus on being vegetarian, not vegan. However, most of the discussion presented here will work for veganism as well. I also assume familiarity with the treatment of animals in contemporary farming practices (see e.g. Singer (2002), Gruen (2011), Halteman (2011) or Stuart (2011)). For a discussion of the negative economic impact of contemporary farming practices on farmers, see Leonard (2014). I won't have time to discuss that issue.

meat-eating diet. Finally, in section IV, I consider a range of objections and offer a few refinements.

I. Background and Assumptions

A. Singer's Simple Argument

I will use the term 'final value' to refer to what is valuable in and of itself or for its own sake. I will use the term 'final disvalue' to refer to what is disvaluable in and of itself or for its own sake. (Other authors use other terms to refer to the same things including "goodness"/"badness" or "intrinsic value"/ "intrinsic disvalue." These terminological differences will not matter here.) I will define Ethical Teleology as the view that what we ought to do is ultimately determined by appealing to what is of final value or goodness. Ethical Teleological views, by themselves, do not say what exactly we ought to do or even what is valuable. They rather propose that we understand our obligations in terms of facts about value.

Consequentialism is the most well-known version of Ethical Teleology. It maintains that we understand our ethical obligations in terms of bringing about value. Among consequentialist theories, the most well-known are maximizing consequentialist theories. These maintain that we ought to do whatever it is that maximizes value. But there are other forms of consequentialism as well, including some forms of satisficing consequentialism. Satisficing consequentialism does not require that we maximize value. It merely requires that we bring about enough or a sufficient amount of value. (For more on this distinction, see Byron (2004).)

Ethical Teleology, as well as these particular versions of it, do not in and of themselves tell us what is of value. One view of value is hedonism, the view that the only fundamental thing of value is pleasure and the only fundamental thing of disvalue is displeasure. Versions of consequentialism that assume hedonism are normally referred to as utilitarian theories.

Peter Singer is a prominent proponent of utilitarianism. Singer has applied his utilitarianism to a range of issues. Perhaps most famously he applied his view to animal ethics. Singer examined contemporary farming practices, finding that they inflicted a great deal of pain and suffering on animals. Given his hedonism, Singer identifies such suffering and pain as disvaluable. Further, Singer thought that the pain and suffering animals underwent is not necessary for something else of value. For contemporary society has a variety of vegetarian foods. Thus, Singer argued that we ought to be vegetarians. As he once memorably put it (1980: 325):

I am a utilitarian. I am also a vegetarian. I am a vegetarian because I am a utilitarian. I believe that applying the principle of utility to our present situation—especially the methods now used to rear animals for food and the variety of food available to us—leads us to the conclusion that we ought to be vegetarians.

A very basic way of regimenting Singer's argument would be this:

- (1) If we can prevent something bad or disvaluable from happening without giving up something of comparable moral value then we ought, morally, to do that thing.
- (2) By adopting a vegetarian diet, we can prevent something bad or disvaluable from happening without giving up something of comparable moral value.
- (3) Therefore, we ought, morally, adopt a vegetarian diet.

By 'vegetarian diet' I mean a sustained standing commitment to avoiding the purchasing and consuming of animal products. Understood this way, Singer's argument is meant to establish that we ought to adopt a certain kind of long-term life change that is inconsistent with the basic meat consuming diets of most Western people.

The first principle is consistent with a consequentialist, and utilitarian, moral theory. It is also one Singer used in other work (1972, 2010). I will not defend or discuss it at any length here. Singer's defense of the second premise naturally turns on his defense of the great disvalue of contemporary farming practices. The premises deductively imply the conclusion. Call this argument 'Singer's Simple Argument.'

This paper will defend Singer's Simple Argument, specifically, the second premise. I focus on this argument for several reasons. First, Singer's Simple Argument is, well, *Singer's*. Or, at least, it a natural way of formulating or distilling his thought. Given Singer's status as an important proponent of moral vegetarianism, it is an appropriate object of discussion. Second, Singer's Simple Argument is, well, *simple*. It might be that the starting point for a successful argument for moral vegetarianism would have to be incredibly complicated. But I'm not confident that we've fully explored this argument yet.

Finally, consequentialist approaches are sometimes portrayed as cold and uncaring, removed from our affective or emotional lives. As I see it, this is incorrect. Our attitudes and omissions of attitudes are important and can also be valuable and disvaluable. Additionally, our attitudes and omissions of attitudes help determine whether we are compassionate and kind or cruel and uncaring. Any plausible form of consequentialism should recognize these points. My defense of Singer's Simple Argument will utilize these points. Thus, my defense of Singer's Simple Argument suggests a way that consequentialist approaches to vegetarianism are consonant with ordinary moral thinking about compassion and vegetarianism.

B. The Causal Impotence Objection

Singer's Simple Argument is open to a well-known objection. I will call it the "Causal Impotence Objection." The objection is simple. Any individual person's adopting a vegetarian diet will not affect the production of animal products. Contemporary businesses are simply not fine-tuned enough to the purchasing habits of a singular consumer. Thus, by adopting a vegetarian diet, a single person would not prevent anything disvaluable from happening without giving up something of comparable value. Thus, the second premise of Singer's Simple Argument is false. (For versions of this objection, see Hudson (1993), Shafer-Landau (1994), Almeida and Bernstein (2000), Chartier (2006), Harris and Galvin (2012).)

Several kinds of responses have been offered on behalf of consequentialists to the Causal Impotence Objection. I will highlight two. (For others I won't discuss see Nobis (2002), Garvey (2011), and Lawford-Smith (2015).)

One response points to considerations of health. In general, adopting a vegetarian diet over a standard meat-consuming diet results in a longer and healthier life. So by adopting a vegetarian diet people can prevent something disvaluable from happening without giving up something of comparable value, namely, a shorter, less healthy life. This response is, essentially, the response of Garrett (2007).

This response is plausible. But it is disappointing. For this response does not assume that contemporary farming practices are morally problematic. Even if all contemporary animal products were produced in a lab, without any animals suffering, in an environmentally sustainable way that did not exploit contemporary farmers, it would still be the case that (in general) a vegetarian diet would be superior for one's health than the standard meat-eating diet. Thus, the morally problematic nature of contemporary farming practices is independent, arguably superfluous, to this response. For this reason, I will set this response aside. Instead, I will focus on whether there are any responses to the Causal Impotence Objection that turn on facts about the moral status of contemporary farming practices.

A second response appeals to so-called “expected value” and thresholds. (See, e.g., Singer (1980: 335ff.) Matheny (2002), Norcross (2004), Almassi (2011), Rachels (2011: 886f.), Kagan (2011) Morgan-Knapp and Goodman (2015).) The basic idea is that while contemporary farming practice may not be sensitive to an individual’s choices, they *would be* sensitive to a group of individuals who together surpassed some threshold. These thresholds might trigger the building of additional factory farms or keep open a factory farm that would have closed. Authors might then appeal to *expected value (or utility)* to argue that an individual ought to adopt a vegetarian diet. Suppose there is a very small chance that one’s consumption does result in crossing the relevant threshold. Then a factory farm will be built or kept open. And such a factory farm would produce a great deal of disvalue. Thus, the expected value of one’s consumption will be negative—since it has a very slim chance of producing something of a great deal of disvalue. By contrast, the expected value of adopting a vegetarian diet will not be negative (or so the reasoning goes). So, one ought to abstain from the purchasing and consuming of animal products.

This response fails to defend premise (2) of Singer’s Simple Argument. In fact, the following two claims are consistent: (i) one’s consumption of animal products has a negative expected value that is below the expected value of abstaining from purchasing and consuming animal products (this response), and (ii) as a matter of fact, abstaining from purchasing and consuming animal products will not prevent anything disvaluable from happening without sacrificing something of comparable value (denial of premise (2) of Singer’s Simple Argument).

As I see it, this failure is not an accident. Rather, it reveals an important dispute among Ethical Teleologists that is sometimes, even frequently, ignored. Some Ethical Teleologists focus on a comparison between potential outcomes of our actions—what could or would happen if we acted in various ways. Others focus on a comparison between *expected* outcomes of our actions—what we might expect if we were to act in various ways. But what could or would happen if we acted and what we might expect to happen are not the same thing. Further, the first premise of Singer’s Simple Argument is formulated in terms of what *would* happen if we were to perform some action, not what we might *expect* to happen. Thus, that premise—and argument more generally—does not sit well with an appeal to expected outcomes. Since my focus here is on actual or potential outcomes and not expected outcomes, I won’t defend or further discuss the appeal to expected value.³

II. Value and Some Principles about Value

When something is of final value it is valuable. And to say something is valuable is to say that it is worthy of valuing. So when something is of final value, it is worthy of valuing. Valuing is a cluster of psychological attitudes; they are intentional states that are about something or directed towards something. Valuing X may include attitudes like: liking X, loving X, respecting X, desiring X, promoting X, being pleased with X, etc. So when something is of final value, it is worthy to hold these psychological attitudes towards it—such attitudes would be appropriate responses to things of value. (Similar points will apply to disvalue. If X is of final disvalue,

³ Some authors are sensitive to this point and recognize that their arguments may not establish claims about actual or potential effects (see, e.g., Kagan (2011: 120, fn. 8)). As a matter of fact, I think the best motivation for expected value approaches—the opacity of the future—fails for reasons found in Feldman (2006). And I think there are other problems with the expected value approach—see Driver (2012: chp. 5). This is an additional reason why, assuming Ethical Teleology, I focus on Singer’s Simple Argument and not one based around expected value. Though I leave open that there is a threshold based argument for vegetarianism that does not require the expected value approach.

disliking X, hating X, desiring not-X, opposing X, being displeased with X, etc. will be appropriate attitudes to hold.)

I believe some further claims are plausible. Suppose my dog is enjoying running around the backyard. I hold that this is of some final value. Thus, it would be appropriate for me to value it, e.g., for me to be pleased that she is enjoying herself. Suppose, as a matter of fact, I am pleased that she is enjoying herself. Is my being pleased that she is pleased of any final value? It is plausible that it is.

More generally, the following kinds of principles are plausible:

- (4) If something is of final value and an agent adopts an appropriate value attitude towards it, then the agent's valuing attitude is also of final value
- (5) If something is of final disvalue and an agent adopts an appropriate disvalue attitude towards it, then the agent's disvaluing attitude is of final value.
- (6) If something is of final value and an agent adopts an inappropriate disvaluing attitude towards it, then the agent's disvaluing attitude is of final disvalue.
- (7) If something is of final disvalue and an agent adopts an inappropriate valuing attitude towards it, then the agent's valuing attitude is of final disvalue.

A number of philosophers have endorsed claims like these (see, e.g., Moore (1903: chp. VI), Ross (1939: chapter XII), Hurka (1993: chp. 1), Lemos (1994: 74ff.), Zimmerman (2001: chp. 6)). Though, I must admit, such philosophers often times add refinements or qualifications. But they agree that something like these principles are quite plausible. And these principles could be understood as filling in the idea that appropriate response to the realm of value are, themselves, good or valuable. That idea is one I find plausible.

Those principles state conditions for when an agent's attitude—valuing or disvaluing—is itself of final value or disvalue. However, sometimes an agent doesn't have an attitude; she omits a valuing or disvaluing attitude. These principles say nothing about such omissions. Yet, it is plausible that sometimes omissions of attitudes are also of value or disvalue. For instance, suppose my partner sees that my dog is enjoying herself as well as me enjoying the fact that my dog is enjoying itself. If my partner is entirely unmoved by this—e.g., does not like it or value it, is not pleased by it, etc.—then that is itself a disvaluable thing. For my partner is cognizant of something of value and is unmoved by it. That is a kind of indifference or callousness that is problematic.

To be clear, frequently people omit attitudes towards things of value and disvalue. In fact, most people most of the time are unaware of most things of value and disvalue. That's just a result of living in a world with billions of people. The problem with my partner is not the failure to adopt appropriate attitudes towards value. After all, all of us do that all of the time. The problem is that my partner is, in some sense, aware or cognizant of something of value and still omits having a relevant attitude. I will propose understanding this awareness as having a reasonable belief. My partner reasonably believes that both my pleasure and my dog's are valuable. Nonetheless, my partner omits relevant attitudes.

With that in mind, I propose the following principles:

- (8) If X is valuable, S reasonably believes that X is valuable, and S fails to value X, then S's failure to value X is of final disvalue.
- (9) If X is disvaluable, S reasonably believes that X is disvaluable, and S fails to disvalue X, then S's failure to value X is of final disvalue.

Notice that these principles only apply to cases where an agent has a reasonable true belief that something is of value. The principles have no implications where an agent has a belief, but it is

unreasonable, or an agent has a reasonable belief and it is false. These principles have no implications where agents have no beliefs one way or another. I will refer to an agent's failure to have these relevant attitudes as "omissions."

These principles are inconsistent with hedonism. Hedonism states that the most basic thing of final value is pleasure, and the most basic thing of final disvalue is displeasure. However, valuing something is not necessarily the same thing as experiencing pleasure in it. And the omission of an attitude is definitely not the same thing as experiencing pleasure or displeasure. In this way, these principles are inconsistent with hedonism. Nonetheless, they are consistent with the idea that pleasure can be of final value and displeasure is of final disvalue. Further, notice that while Singer used hedonism to defend Premise (2) of Singer's Simple Argument, that defense does not require hedonism. One can agree with Singer and the hedonist that pleasure can be of final value and displeasure of final disvalue while disagreeing with the hedonist that those are the only kinds of things of final value or disvalue.

Instances of these principles can be "nested." And further, the fact that they can be nested is a virtue of them. To illustrate, I might be pleased that my dog is pleased; my partner might be pleased that I'm pleased that my dog is pleased; and I might be pleased that my partner is pleased that I'm pleased that my dog is pleased. I think each case of pleasure in this chain is valuable. These principles—specifically (4)—can be used to generate this result. It is a virtue of the account that it allows for value to be nested in this way.⁴

The same is true of principles (8) and (9) and omitted attitudes. Suppose a child does something bad but bears no negative attitudes towards it—he feels neither sadness nor remorse. Suppose the father of the child has a justified true belief that it is bad the child feels neither sadness nor remorse and yet does not adopt any disvaluing attitudes towards the son's omission of attitude. I think it would be appropriate for a third party—say, a mother or a teacher—to adopt disvaluing attitudes towards *both* the child's omission and the father's omission. These principles could be used to generate this result

Finally, an interesting issue is what determines the disvalue of an omission. Perhaps the most important thing that determines the disvalue of an omission is the value or disvalue of the relevant thing under discussion. Omitting a relevant attitude towards something of great disvalue will, all things equal, be worse than omitting a relevant attitude towards something of much less disvalue. To illustrate, it is worse to be entirely indifferent towards the death of a young child than it is to be indifferent to a person undergoing a painful surgery.

It is plausible that the disvalue of omissions will, in general, lack the same *volume* of value as the subject matter of the relevant omitted attitudes. That is, if a given thing is greatly disvaluable, then a subject failing to adopt a relevant attitude towards it can, in some situations, be of disvalue. But the disvalue of that omission is unlikely to be as disvaluable as the thing of great disvalue. For instance, it might be a bad thing that the child has no remorse for what he has

⁴ None of these principles give rise to an infinite regress of attitudes by themselves. (In this way, they differ from the axioms of arithmetic which *do* give rise to an infinite regress of numbers by themselves.) This is because the consequents of these principles do not imply the antecedents. (E.g., from the mere fact that it would be good to have an attitude, it does not follow that one does; from the mere fact that one omits an attitude it does not follow that one has a justified true belief that one has omitted that attitude.) Nonetheless, the principles do imply that if you have an infinite chain of attitudes (or omitted attitudes) of the right sort, then each link of that chain might be of value or disvalue. I do not think this is problematic, though I think it is psychologically unrealistic that there could be such an infinite chain of attitudes generated by an iterating operation. (I discuss this briefly, in a different context, in Perrine (2018: 518-220).)

done; but it is likely that what he did was worse than his omission of the relevant negative attitude.

III. Application of the Principles

I will now apply these principles—specifically (8) and (9)—to the case of animal ethics. I will begin by describing a kind of case that I think is widely exhibited. I will then argue that the subject in that case, Wilfred, has an obligation to avoid a standard meat-eating diet. I will then generalize this case.

A. Wilfred

Let us begin with Wilfred. Wilfred is familiar with contemporary farming practices. Perhaps he learned about them in school, or read about them on his own, or watched a documentary. Unlike some of his acquaintances, Wilfred believes that animals genuinely suffer. And unlike other acquaintances, Wilfred believes that their suffering is morally significant. Further, we will suppose, Wilfred's beliefs are reasonable. They are not based on silly ideas or wishful thinking. He acquires these beliefs in reliable and responsible ways.

Despite Wilfred's beliefs, Wilfred continues to consume animal products in the standard way. When he dines out, he eats chicken, pork, and beef. When he shops at the grocery store, he buys peppered sausage, roasted duck, or fresh eel. In other words, Wilfred's habits of consumption—his habits of using animal products—does not change even given his beliefs.

Finally, Wilfred fails to exhibit any relevant disvaluing attitudes towards the fact that he is consuming animal products that originated in a bad or cruel way. That is, he does not hate that he is consuming products originating in a bad or cruel procedures. Nor does he dislike or despise it. He simply consumes such products without concern. In this way, he omits having a negative attitude toward the fact that he is consuming products that originated in morally problematic ways.

In what follows, I'll talk about Wilfred's dietary practices. I mean to include not just the particularities of what he eats, but also the fact that he omits relevant attitudes.

B. Disvalue and Wilfred

Our earlier principles about value imply that Wilfred's omissions of attitudes are of disvalue.

First, Wilfred has general beliefs about the production of animal products. He has beliefs that the products he consumes, in general, originated in bad and otherwise cruel ways. This general belief puts him in a position to reasonably believe, of any given animal product that he is about to consume, that it originated in a bad and otherwise cruel way. Additionally, those more particular beliefs are true. It is true of the pork sausage in his morning omelet that it came from a pig that suffered greatly; it is also true of the steak he has for dinner that it originated in a very cruel and painful way. So, for the various animal products Wilfred consumes, he has a reasonable true belief that each originates in a cruel and painful method.

Second, given the setup of the case, Wilfred does not adopt any negative or disvaluing attitudes towards the fact that these various animal products originated in cruel and painful methods. He simply consumes the animal products without concern.

From our principles about value, it follows that Wilfred's omissions of attitudes are disvaluable. Now it is important to be clear about the scope of this result. It is disvaluable for Wilfred to omit some attitudes for any animal product that he has a reasonable true belief that it originated in a bad way. Thus, it is bad thing that he lacks relevant negative attitudes about the sausages in his morning omelet, the chicken in his lunch salad, and the steak for his dinner. To

be sure, the badness of his omitted attitudes is not as bad as the badness of the suffering those animals went through; but the badness of his omitted attitudes is not non-existent either.

Earlier, I said Wilfred's dietary practices include not just what he eats but the fact that he omits various relevant attitudes. Thus, Wilfred's dietary practices include a great deal of disvalue. To be clear, they include a great deal of disvalue *in virtue* of his omitted attitudes about what he is consuming.

Now presumably by becoming a vegetarian Wilfred can avoid those disvaluable omitted attitudes. (If Wilfred is not consuming an animal product, he cannot be faulted for lacking an attitude about consuming an animal product.) However, given the first premise of Singer's Simple Argument, and this claim, it does not yet follow that Wilfred ought to switch from his current dietary practices to vegetarian dietary practices. If by switching diets, Wilfred gives up something of comparable value—something comparable to the disvaluable omitted attitudes—then it does not follow that Wilfred ought to switch his dietary practices. To use an analogy, I can avoid a certain amount of pain by avoiding a doctor's shot. But by avoiding the doctor's shot, I give up something of greater value, being healthy. Likewise, by changing his dietary practices, Wilfred can avoid something of disvalue (his omitted attitudes). But if by changing his dietary practices, Wilfred gives up something of greater value, then the first premise of Singer's Simple Argument does not imply that Wilfred ought to change his dietary practices.

C. *Greater Values?*

What is disvaluable in Wilfred's dietary practices are his omissions of negative attitudes. Those omissions occur at each point of consumption. Thus, if Wilfred's dietary practices contain something of greater value, it will presumably be value that occurs at each point of consumption. The most obvious proposal is Wilfred's enjoyment of his consumption of animal products. Can the enjoyment Wilfred gets out of his consumption of animal products be sufficiently valuable that it outweighs the negative value of Wilfred's omissions? More generally, can the value of his enjoyment of animal products undermine this version of Singer's Simple Argument?

There are reasons for thinking they cannot. First, it is doubtful that his enjoyment of some particular animal product is more valuable than the disvalue of his omitted attitude. This is because the disvalue of the origins of his food is so great. The animals that ultimately made possible some particular consumption of Wilfred's food suffered a great deal across time. Their lives were not worth living. The appropriate attitude would be great displeasure and disappointment at such a state of affairs. Plausibly, the disvalue of an omission increases with the disvalue of the object that the relevant agent fails to have a negative attitude about. Thus, Wilfred's omission is much worse than an omission of a less horrible state of affairs. And while Wilfred's enjoyment of that meal is not trivial or non-existent, the lack of compassion or concern does seem to be worse. But I recognize that this kind of judgment may be hard to make. So let us consider an additional response.

Second, let us suppose that the enjoyment Wilfred gets from his animal products has more value than the disvalue his omitted attitudes have. It will still be the case that by changing his dietary practices he can prevent something disvaluable without giving up something of greater value.⁵ For by changing his dietary practices to a vegetarian practice, Wilfred not only avoids certain disvaluable states of affairs, he also brings about other valuable states of affairs, namely, his enjoyment of vegetarian food. (After all, even if in general vegetarian diets are not quite as enjoyable as meat eating diets, vegetarian diets are quite enjoyable.) So, Wilfred's current dietary

⁵ Again, we are setting aside issues arising from health considerations. If we included them, the comparison would be easier to make for the proponent of ethical vegetarianism.

practices are only necessary for the *difference* of pleasure between his current practices and the pleasure he would get from vegetarian dietary practices. And that difference of pleasure is not very large and much smaller than the disvalue of his omitted attitudes.⁶

I've just given two arguments that Wilfred would produce more value by switching from a standard meat-eating diet to a vegetarian diet. In both arguments, I appealed directly to intuitions about comparative value. Those arguments can be supplemented with arguments that don't appeal directly to intuitions about value but rather comparisons between appropriate attitudes. Specifically, it is plausible that the *strength or intensity* of an appropriate attitude correlates with the value of an object. For instance, if A is more valuable than B, then it is appropriate to adopt stronger or more intense attitudes towards A than B. Using this idea, I will provide two supplementary arguments.

Suppose Wilfred orders a chicken sandwich for lunch instead of a tofu sandwich. And Wilfred gets a certain amount of pleasure from eating his chicken sandwich. It would be appropriate for me to adopt a certain amount of a valuing attitude towards Wilfred's pleasure. For instance, I might be pleased that he is pleased with his food. But suppose Wilfred also has a justified true belief that his chicken sandwich originated in a morally problematic way (e.g.) from a chicken who had a life that was not worth living. Nonetheless, Wilfred fails to have any negative or disvaluing attitudes towards that fact. It would be appropriate to adopt a negative attitude towards his omission of an attitude. For instance, it would be appropriate to be saddened or disappointed by Wilfred's omission. Further, it is plausible that the *strength or intensity* of the negative attitude (e.g. disappointment or sadness in his omission) would be greater than the *strength or intensity* of the positive attitude (e.g. pleasure in his pleasure). This difference in the strength or intensity of the attitude gives us a reason for thinking that the disvalue of omission is *greater* than the value of his pleasure.

Additionally, let us compare (i) Wilfred's pleasure in his chicken sandwich and Wilfred's omission of a relevant negative attitude regarding that sandwich vs. (ii) Wilfred's pleasure in eating the tofu sandwich. First, it would be appropriate to adopt some positive attitude to Wilfred's pleasure in the chicken sandwich; it would also be appropriate to adopt some positive attitude to Wilfred's pleasure in the tofu sandwich. We've been assuming that Wilfred's pleasure in the chicken sandwich is greater than his pleasure in the tofu sandwich. Thus, it would be appropriate to adopt a slightly stronger positive attitude to that pleasure. That is, there is a "positive difference" in strength of attitude to adopt towards Wilfred's consumption of the chicken sandwich. But now let us compare this positive difference in attitude with what attitude would be appropriate to adopt towards Wilfred's omission. Clearly, it would be a negative attitude. Further, the *strength or intensity* of this negative attitude would be greater than the "positive difference" that is appropriate to adopt towards Wilfred's consumption of the chicken sandwich. Thus, the *overall* strength or intensity of appropriate positive attitude to adopt to (i) is

⁶ Given consequentialism, it is important not to neglect the contrast. That is, it is important to pay attention not only to what is lost when one abandons a meat-eating diet but also what is gained by adopting a vegetarian diet. Arguably, Lomasky (2013) runs afoul of this. He points out—correctly—that eating is about more than providing sustenance. It involves other values (e.g., dining can be a rich aesthetic experience, preparing food can involve creativity, dining can be a way of exploring other cultures, etc.). Further, eating meat plays an important role in some of these values. He incorrectly draws the conclusion that the lives of people whose diet lacks meat are significantly inferior (2013: 186). Many of the values he identifies play just an important role in vegetarian or vegan diets. In fact, my own anecdotal evidence is that many vegetarian/vegans may actually lead more enriching culinary lives because they are forced to cook more of their meals and, frequently, embrace more types or styles of cuisines. But I won't press this issue here. For additional discussion of Lomasky's paper, see Gill (2013).

less than the *overall* strength or intensity of appropriate positive attitude to adopt to (ii). This gives us a further reason for thinking that Wilfred eating the chicken sandwich while omitting relevant negatives attitudes will have less value than Wilfred eating the tofu sandwich.

Summing up, I've argued that while Wilfred might get some pleasure in his meat-eating diet and perhaps more pleasure in that diet than a vegetarian one this does not outweigh the disvalue of his omission. Thus, Wilfred ought not engage in his consumption. Rather, he ought to adopt a vegetarian diet.

D. Generalizing

So far I've argued that Wilfred ought to abandon his current dietary practices in favor of vegetarian dietary practices. This result generalizes to anyone who is relevantly similar to Wilfred. That is, this result also applies to anyone who has reasonable beliefs about the bad origins of their animal products and fails to adopt any disvaluing attitudes towards their consumption of those products.

It is hard to say how many such people there are or what percentage of the population they make up. However, I do not think their number is small.⁷ In the last 50 years, more and more people have become aware of the problematic origins of their food while many of those same people have done little to change their lifestyle. This argument would show that such people ought to adopt a vegetarian diet.

IV. Objections and Refinements

At this point, I will consider a range of objections. Many of them will help us refine the argument and ideas here.

A. Vegetarianism and Other Options

In discussing Wilfred, I assumed that the choice was between a standard meat-eating diet and a vegetarian diet. Some might object that this is not always right. For instance, some diets might be mostly vegetarian with periodic consumption of animal products not originating from contemporary farming practice. (Consider, for instance, the person who eat eggs from chickens they keep in their backyard; or the person who collects and eats grasshoppers.)

In discussing Wilfred, I have made a simplifying assumption of the two types of diets. Recognizing that there are more complicated diets does not affect the underlying point. For it may be possible that there are animal products that Wilfred can consume which do not originate in cruel or otherwise bad ways. The argument above does not show that Wilfred ought not incorporate such animal products into his diet. It also does not imply that he should. Whether Wilfred is permitted to include such products will likely be determined on a case by case basis of whether, by so including them, Wilfred is bringing about something disvaluable without giving up some else of comparable value. It is hard to make general judgments about that. Nonetheless, I leave open that the argument above establishes what we might call a "conditional" moral vegetarianism: that one ought to adopt vegetarian dietary practices under the conditions that the animal products one would otherwise consume originated in cruel or otherwise bad ways.⁸

⁷ Interestingly, in the last decade, a well-known philosophy blog did a survey of philosophers' dietary habits and beliefs about those habits. It found that a third of total respondents did not adhere to a vegetarian diet but though it was ethically dubious for them not to. In fact, among the participants who self-identified as eating meat, slightly over half responded that it was morally dubious for them to do so. The survey did not ask about these peoples' attitudes or omissions of attitudes. It is doubtful that philosophers are representative of the general public.

⁸ Again, we are bracketing additional issues involving health and signaling. For instance, while Wilfred may enjoy eating his free-range chickens, perhaps it would be better for his heart if he did not. Or, alternatively, perhaps Wilfred's ability to encourage others to maintain vegetarian dietary practice will be greatly mitigated if he periodically consumes animal products that did not originate in cruel or bad ways. Again, a lot may turn on the

B. Other Outweighing Values

I've assumed that Wilfred does not lose any other outweighing values by adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet over a standard meat diet. But this might not always be the case. Here is one such case. Imagine a single mother who lives in poverty and is raising two young children. Three times a week she takes, for free, leftover food from one of her jobs to feed herself and her children. If she were to forgo that food, and spend money on vegetarian food, she would be unable to pay for other things her children need—say, medicine or heat for their apartment. Thus, in such a situation, if she were to insist on a strictly vegetarian diet for herself and her children, then she would be giving up something of greater value.

Though they might fight over particular cases, consequentialists should permit that this kind of case can occur. Further, consequentialist should say, in such situations, that some consumption is permissible. (Compare: Singer (1980: 327-8; 2011: 122).) What proponents of Singer's Simple Argument should insist is that most people—even many people living in poverty—are not in such a situation. That is, most people can transition to a vegetarian diet without sacrificing such greater values as an ability to afford medicine or pay bills.⁹

C. The Ignorant

My case involving Wilfred explicitly mentioned that Wilfred believes that the production of animal products involves a great deal of pain and suffering and that pain and suffering is bad. But what about people who do not believe this? First, some might simply be ignorant of the relevant pain and suffering of animals in contemporary farming practices. Second, even those who do believe that animals suffer might not regard that suffering as morally significant. Such people might be speciests, for instance.

The argument I've developed does not apply to these people. First, it does not apply to those who are ignorant of contemporary farming practices exactly because they are ignorant. But this result is intuitively correct. It is not disvaluable for people to fail to have attitudes towards certain things that they have no idea about. To illustrate, many young children do not have ideas about the source of their food. This argument does not imply that such children ought to be vegetarian.

Second, the argument developed so far does not apply to speciests who maintain that animal suffering is not morally salient, in particular, not disvaluable. Even so, this does not negate the significance of the argument. For it may apply to a large number of people nonetheless.

Yet I do find it intuitively unacceptable that this argument does not apply to speciests. This is because I regard speciests as having unreasonable attitudes about the moral salience of animal suffering. And it seems intuitively incorrect that one gets a "free pass" for omissions if one has unreasonable attitudes. To compare, a white supremacist might not believe that the suffering of a racial minority is important. Such a person is wrong and unreasonable in holding such an attitude. Consequentially, if a white supremacist is unbothered by a racial minority experiencing pain, intuitively, the omission on behalf of the white supremacist is still morally disvaluable. If anything, it might be even worse given the false and unreasonable opinions of the supremacist.

particularities of the cases.

⁹ It is sometimes suggested that arguments for moral vegetarianism neglect the distinctive challenges facing people other than white Western men (cf. e.g. George (1994)). I'm doubtful that is true, or at least the situation is more complex (cf. Donovan (1995), Bailey (2007)). However, if there are distinctive challenges facing some group in adopting a vegetarian diet, I would appeal to outweighing goods. If those challenges are great enough, then something of comparable value *would* be lost by adopting a vegetarian diet. In this way, Singer's Simple Argument does not imply that *everyone* must be vegetarian *all* of the time, despite how some have interpreted Singer (e.g., Warren (2000)).

If we wanted, we might extend the argument at this point. We might appeal to a principle like:

- (10) If X is disvaluable, S unreasonably believes that X is not disvaluable, and S fails to disvalue X, then S's failure to disvalue X is of final disvalue.

This kind of principle could be used to argue that even those with unreasonable attitudes bring about something of disvalue when they omit relevant attitudes. However, I will not spend anytime defending this principle. I'll simply note that if one agrees that unreasonable attitudes do not allow one a "free pass" perhaps a principle like that can explain why.

D. The Incredibly Regretful Meat Eater

Consider Regis. Regis is just like Wilfred except every time Regis consumes animal products he is deeply upset and disappointed. He feels great hatred towards the way that the animals, which he is consuming, were treated. Since Regis is not omitting appropriate attitudes, one might claim that my argument does not show that the particular way that Regis consumes animal products is morally impermissible.

To be sure, my argument does not show that an "incredibly regretful" meat consumer like Regis is morally problematic (though maybe other arguments would). However, there are incredibly few people who eat like Regis. Though this is an empirical claim, I hold that virtually any person who adopted appropriate attitudes would soon give up their diet and switch to a vegetarian diet. Most people simply couldn't handle such a strong conflict of attitudes every day for breakfast, lunch, and dinner! To be sure, some people might from time to time feel a little bad about their consumption. (Perhaps they experience these negative emotions when watching movies about contemporary farming practices.) But such periodic second-guessing falls far short of the degree and volume of negative attitudes that is appropriate.

E. One Times vs. Many

Some might argue that my argument overextends. Suppose that a person buys an article of clothing that they reasonably believe originated in a sweat shop. Suppose that person also believed this is a morally problematic origin for that clothing. One might object that my argument implies that every day this person wears that article of clothing that person should adopt a negative attitude towards facts about how the article of clothing originated. But, one might maintain, that is absurd.

In its current form, this objection overlooks an important difference. Each usage of an already purchased article of clothing does not require some new amount of suffering. By contrast, given the way most people purchase and consume animal products, it is virtually inevitable that each consumption is made possible only through distinct sufferings. Setting aside leftovers and coincidence, the pork one eats on Thursday almost always came from a different animal than the pork one ate last Thursday. Thus, my principles of omission do not imply that every time one wears such an article of clothing it would be appropriate to adopt a con-attitude.

Some may be surprised that it matters whether one is using the same product or different ones. But on reflection it should not. Contemporary farming practice are cruel to many animals across time, not just one once. It is appropriate to disvalue each distinct occurrence of suffering.

F. The Vegetarians and their Attitudes

So far I've focused on a comparison between the omitted attitudes of persons with a standard meat eating diet and the attitudes of someone who is a vegetarian for moral reasons. But a fuller discussion of vegetarians and their attitudes is needed. Specifically, consider Heather. Heather adheres to a vegetarian diet on the basis of its health benefits. What, if anything, does my views say about Heather's attitudes? There are three main cases to consider.

First, Heather might be unaware of contemporary farming practice. If she is unaware of them, she does not have any attitudes about them. But, as mentioned earlier, my views have no implications about her omissions of attitudes.

Second, Heather might be aware of contemporary farming practice and, as a result, also be motivated to adopt a vegetarian diet on the basis of the morally problematic features of those practices. In this case, Heather's choice of a vegetarian diet is *overdetermined*. She is motivated by both moral and health concerns. Further, presumably in this case Heather would adopt negative attitudes towards the morally problematic features of contemporary farming practices. The principles articulated above would imply that her negative attitudes would be valuable.

Finally, Heather might be aware of contemporary farming practices and be entirely unmoved by them. That is, she does not adopt any negative attitudes towards the morally problematic features of contemporary farming practices. In this case, Heather is a vegetarian solely for health reasons. In this case, Heather's dietary habits will lack the moral disvalue that the standard meat-eating diet has. For the standard meat diet can be disvaluable because it contains omissions of relevant negative attitudes towards the meat that it contains; but Heather's diet does not contain that meat. Nonetheless, with regard to these issues, Heather's life might contain more disvalue than a moral vegetarian's. For there might be other occasions on which Heather omits a relevant disvaluing attitude (e.g. when watching a documentary on contemporary farming practices).

A different issue is that vegetarian diets are not entirely removed from the suffering of animals. For instance, harvesting vegetables and grains might routinely lead to animal deaths. (E.g., voles might be caught in harvesters; rats might get caught in silo grains; small stream amphibians are killed by run-off from pesticides, etc.) I'll call these death 'incidental deaths' since they are incidental to these practices. What sorts of attitudes should vegetarians have towards these?

Incidental deaths raise several complicated issues that I can't hope to fully discuss. (For a philosophical and empirically sensitive discussion, see Fischer and Lamey (2018).) First, it is much harder to know the volume of incidental deaths than the deaths of pigs, chicken, cows, etc. This might complicate the idea that we have reasonable true beliefs about potentially morally problematic facts about the origins of vegetarian food. Second, the fact that these deaths are *incidental* might be morally relevant. The deaths might not be intended, but merely foreseen. And they might actually be caused indirectly by human activity (e.g. few field mice are killed by harvesters, but more are killed by predation caused by a habitat—the field—being changed or destroyed).

However, insofar as vegetarians do have reasonable true beliefs about incidental deaths, it would be good for them to adopt appropriate negative attitudes towards them. I do not think this is a problematic result. Additionally, the existence of incidental deaths does not undermine my argument for vegetarianism. The standard meat-eating diet also includes vegetarian food. Additionally, there are incidental deaths associated with animals' consumption as well. Feed for cows, chickens, and pigs (e.g. corn, oats, barley, wheat, etc.) also originates in fields. So, adhering to a standard meat-eating diet will not avoid these incidental deaths.

G. *Wrong Reason*

A final worry is that the motivations for vegetarianism that I describe here are the wrong motivations for moral vegetarianism. Specifically, if you were to ask many vegetarians for reasons to adopt a vegetarian diet, they are likely to mention animal suffering and pain and *not* claims about omitted attitudes. In this way, one might worry that I have failed to identify the

right reason for being a (moral) vegetarian. This is an important worry and I will say several things in response.

First, there might be several different motivations or arguments for why people ought to be vegetarian. I've defended one potential argument. But there can be others. (For instance, I've mentioned health benefits more than once, and I haven't even discussed the ecological and sociological damages of contemporary farming practice.) The argument I provide here is consistent with there being other arguments for the same conclusion. So it is a mistake to think that there can only be *one* motivation or argument for why one should adhere to a vegetarian diet. There might be several.

Second, my argument does turn on the disvalue of omitted attitudes. But it is a mistake to divorce that disvalue from the disvalue of the suffering of animals. It is because animals suffer—and suffer greatly—that omitted attitudes are of disvalue. So the fact that animals suffer plays an important role in my argument, albeit not the same role as in previous arguments by other authors.

Finally, and on a more conciliatory point, the argument here is consonant with how some vegetarians might conceptualize their own views. Vegetarians sometimes motivate and conceptualize their position by appeals to compassion. But whether a person is compassionate or not is partly determined by the kinds of attitudes we have or do not have. A fully compassionate person would not neglect the suffering of others. And one way she would not neglect their suffering is, when she is made aware of their suffering, she appropriately disvalues their suffering—in this way, their suffering matters to her. Thus, a person who is both aware that their meat products originated in great suffering and yet is unmoved by that is not a fully compassionate person. Her omitted attitudes reveal her to be less than fully compassionate. Thus, my own argument is consonant with how vegetarians might conceptualize their view. For, if I am right, then the vegetarian diet *is* more compassionate and this is partly because it avoids the morally problematic, i.e. disvaluable, omissions of attitudes that frequently accompany non-vegetarian diets.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Bibliography

Almassi, Ben. (2011). "The Consequences of Individual Consumption: A Defense of Threshold Arguments for Vegetarianism and Consumer Ethics." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 29.4: 396-411.

Almedia, Michael J. and Mark H. Bernstein. (2010). "Opportunistic Carnivorism." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 17.2: 205-11.

Bailey, Cathryn. (2007). "We Are What We Eat: Feminist Vegetarianism and the Reproduction of Racial Identity." *Hypatia*. 22.2: 39-59.

Byron, Michael, ed. (2004). *Satisficing and Maximizing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chartier, Gary. (2006). "On the Threshold Argument against Consumer Meat Purchases." *Journal of Social Philosophy*. 37.2: 233-49.

- Donovan, Josephine. (1995). "Comments on George's 'Should Feminists Be Vegetarians?'" *Signs* 21.1: 226-9.
- Driver, Julia. (2012) *Consequentialism*. Routledge.
- Feldman, Fred. (2006). "Actual Utility, the Objection from Impracticality, and the Move to Expected Utility." *Philosophical Studies*. 129.1: 49-79.
- Fischer, Bob and Andy Lamey. (2018). "Field Deaths in Plant Agriculture." *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*. 31: 409-428.
- Garrett, Jeremy. (2007). "Utilitarianism, Vegetarianism, and Human Health: A Response to the Causal Impotence Objection." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 24.3: 223-37.
- Garvey, James. (2011). "Climate Change and Causal Inefficacy: Why Go Green When It Makes no Difference?" *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*: 69: 157-174.
- George, Kathryn Paxton. (1994). "Should Feminists Be Vegetarians?" *Signs*. 19.2: 405-434.
- Gill, Michael. (2013). "On Eating Meat." : 201-7.
- Gruen, Lori. (2011). *Ethics and Animals*. Cambridge University Press.
- Halteman, Matthew. (2011). "Varieties of Harm to Animals in Industrial Farming," *Journal of Animal Ethics*. 1.2: 122-31.
- Harris, John Richard and Richard Galvin. (2012). "'Pass the Cocoamone, Please': Causal Impotence, Opportunistic Vegetarianism and Act-Utilitarianism." *Ethics, Policy, and Environment*. 15.3: 368-83.
- Hudson, Hud. (1993). "Collective Responsibility and Moral Vegetarianism." *Journal of Social Philosophy*. 24.2: 89-104.
- Hurka, Thomas. (2001). *Virtue, Vice, and Value*. Oxford University Press.
- Kagan, Shelly. (2011). "Do I Make a Difference?" *Philosophy & Public Affairs*. 39.2: 105-141.
- Lawford-Smith, Holly. (2015). "Unethical Consumption and Obligations to Signal." *Ethics and International Affairs*. 29.3: 315-30.
- Lemos, Noah. (1994). *Intrinsic Value*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leonard, Christopher. (2014). *The Meat Racket*. Simon & Schuster.
- Lomasky, Loren. (2013). "Is It Wrong to Eat Animals?" *Social Philosophy and Policy*. 30.1/2: 177-200.
- Matheny, Gaverick. (2002). "Expected Utility, Contributory Causation, and Vegetarianism." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. 19.3: 293-97.

- Moore, G. E. (1903 [1993]). *Principia Ethica*, revised edition. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan-Knapp, Christopher and Charles Goodman. (2015). "Consequentialism, Climate Harm, and Individual Obligations." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. 18: 177-90.
- Nobis, Nathan. (2002). "Vegetarianism and Virtue: Does Consequentialism Demand Too Little?" *Social Theory and Practice*. 28.1: 135-56.
- Norcross, Alastair. (2004). "Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases." *Philosophical Perspectives*. 18: 229-45.
- Perrine, Timothy. (2018). "Justification, Justifying, and Leite's Localism." *Acta Analytica*. 33: 505-524.
- Rachels, Stuart. (2011). "Vegetarianism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, eds. T. L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ross, W. D. (1939). *The Foundations of Ethics*. Clarendon Press.
- Shafer-Landau, Russ. (1994). "Vegetarianism, Causation, and Ethical Theory." *Public Affairs Quarterly*. 8.1: 85-100.
- Singer, Peter. (1972). "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 1.3: 229-43.
- Singer, Peter. (1980). "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 9.4: 325-37.
- Singer, Peter. (2002). *Animal Liberation*. HarperCollins.
- Singer, Peter. (2010). *The Life You Can Save*. Randomhouse.
- Singer, Peter. (2011). *Practical Ethics, third edition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Warren, Karen. (2000). *Ecofeminist Philosophy*. Rowmand & Littlefield.
- Zimmerman, Michael J. (2001). *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*. Rowman & Littlefield.