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THE ETHICS OF EATING AS A HUMAN ORGANISM

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Introduction

Every ethical engagement with the question of eating other organisms depends on presuppositions, often unexamined, about the nature of the human being. Traditional accounts of the ethics of eating – particularly those grounded in an idea of rights extended to animals – often rely on a thoroughgoing exceptionalism with respect to human responsibilities. These draw a sharp distinction between humans and non-human animals on account of the human rational faculty or another feature that entails our unique need to justify eating other organisms. When ethical theories are unreflectively built on this perspective, they risk losing sight of the fact that humans are not only free to choose whether or not to destroy organisms and ecosystems, but we are at the same time participants in natural processes that exceed our agency. In contrast, approaches that seek to jettison human exceptionalism entirely – such as the “paleo diet” heuristic – often err toward the other extreme, naturalizing human behaviors and thereby undermining the possibility of critique. In this chapter I provide an approach to ethical inquiry that seeks to navigate between these two poles. Drawing on the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1990 [1896], 1998 [1907]), I consider the ethics of human food production from the starting point of the human as an organism and human practices as organic activity. By situating human life – and, therefore, morality – within nature, yet not subsuming it therein, this inquiry takes up a perspective more commensurable to food as an object of inquiry that is overdetermined by both nature and culture.

All organisms interact with their environments to create the necessary conditions for life: nourishment, habitat, and so forth. While every organism is structured to pursue a different approach to this project, there are tendencies that emerge: most animals address needs through active mobility, for example, while most plants tend toward more passive strategies. The human animal tends to pursue its objects by relying heavily on the *intellect*, the capacity to analyze matter before dismantling and reassembling it into the appropriate configurations to satisfy our needs.

In the case of nutritive activities, all animals extract nourishment from ingested organic matter through largely unconscious processes of digestion and absorption, and those processes are for the most part determined by the bodily structure of each species. Organisms vary widely, however, as they pursue their food prior to the moment of ingestion. While non-human animals for the most part cognize their meals without recourse to science or intellectual knowledge, the human’s success is dependent on practices such as agriculture, animal husbandry, and cooking.

We feed ourselves by these technological operations of intellect, and thus we seem to approach the production of food in much the same way that we engage in our other activities of fabrication: we organize our activities to impart form onto matter.

While intellect is well suited to the task of shaping inert matter into objects of service to the human organism, Bergson argues that the intellect's approach comes up against a limitation when we apply it to living things. When the intellect turns itself toward knowing and acting on other organisms as its objects, Bergson suggests that it misrecognizes what is living and treats organisms as if they were mere material. This is the source of the sometimes-disastrous ethical and environmental results of human activities. Bergson contrasts the dispassionate, external knowledge that subtends human activity with an organic *sympathy* – an instinctual knowledge from the inside – that has primacy among other species, enabling more synergistic approaches to their nutritive projects. While the intellect typically overpowers this sympathetic instinct in human activities, it seems to be possible for sympathy to reemerge in the form of human *intuition*, which can perhaps bring intellect into attunement with the nature of living things.

In the conventional practices of industrial beef production, the human's clumsy, external approach to other organisms is tragically on display. Yet, the industry has recently begun to shift away from the assembly-line model; contemporary technologies, such as those designed by animal scientist Temple Grandin, have begun to incorporate a form of sympathy into the process of food production. This chapter elaborates on the framework sketched above and uses it to pursue as a case study a critical examination of Grandin's adaptive designs for moving cattle. Drawing on Grandin's own words about her connection to the inner life of cattle, I explore how her designs seem to express that her fabricating intellect is informed by an intuition for life. Yet, Grandin's approach remains embedded within the industry of meat production, which supplies the overarching logic to her technologies in the shape of an indifferent, intellect-driven structure of productivity. Acknowledging that there is some form of organic sympathy present in all acts of eating, I argue that the misrecognition of life that persists even in Grandin's designs is not symptomatic of all acts of turning animals into food, but it is instead a product of turning organisms into commodities, which are only incidentally connected to the human's project of feeding itself. With this example, I hope to show how the expansive organic view of human activity can offer a novel vantage point for critique of our misrecognition of life.

Organisms in action

In *Matter and Memory* (1990 [1896]), Bergson describes how life is organized according to the relationship between perception and action. By means of perception, all organisms identify particular relevant aspects of their surroundings, and, through the mobilization of consciousness, they respond to their perceptions by acting appropriately. In the simplest forms of life, such as amoebas, the moment of perception automatically incites a mechanism of action; the organism is limited by its structure to simply receive stimuli and reflect them into external mobility. In complex organisms, however, there is a hesitation between perception and action, as a result of an inner life that is not present in the amoeba. Organisms with central nervous systems interpret the perceptual experience, formulating external actions in response only to those perceptions recognized as being of vital interest to the organism. For these complex organisms, the mobilization of the body never responds to the full content of perception: some perceptions are not reflected outward into action, but rather are absorbed into consciousness. This produces affections that take the form of sensations, emotions, or even knowledge in the inner life of the organism. In short, as the organism inhabits its environment, every perceptual encounter produces some combination of internal affections and outward-facing action in the physical world.¹

In *Creative Evolution* (1998 [1907]), Bergson proposes two broad tendencies – instinct and intellect – that shape the work of selecting actions in response to perception. These two tendencies always coexist in an organism, but they differ in priority from one species to the next. Both provide the resources an organism needs to select and respond appropriately to the perceptions that bear upon its survival. Most non-human animals are characterized by instinct; they select actions for the most part unreflectively, in direct response to the environmental processes that stand out as relevant in the foreground of their perceptions. In these animals' responses to other living things – to potential food, to predators, and so forth – there can be seen a kind of *sympathy*: a responsiveness among organisms that share a vital interest in one another's lives.²

Bergson illustrates organic sympathy by describing the behavior of several genera of wasps that obtain nutriment through a particular form of predation (Bergson 1998 [1907]: 171–175). These wasps organize their activities around the need to secure living prey on which to feed their larvae, and each genus accomplishes this end by administering a series of paralytic stings to a particular type of victim. To strike the delicate balance of immobilizing without killing, each genus uses a procedure that befits the physical organic structure of the intended prey. So, the sphecx that feeds on a certain cricket stings at each of the three primary nerve centers controlling the cricket's legs, while the sand wasp that feeds on a caterpillar stings at nine nerve centers. Even from the perspective of contemporary science, the surgical precision of these paralytic wasps is difficult to explain. According to Bergson, this is because science understands knowledge always according to the paradigm of intellect, in which an observer gathers information from the outside and then formulates actions accordingly. On this view, it seems impossible for the wasp to know how to direct its actions without undergoing a process of trial and error. Yet, as Bergson notes, research shows³ that the wasp has no process of scientific deduction that precedes its behaviors. Rather, in the urgent matter of life or death for these wasps, instinct alone enables success. As the organisms work to establish the conditions for life befitting their structure, their activities are directed by an innate form of consciousness, different from our own. Rather than gather knowledge through extrinsic observation, these wasps do not properly know at all; their accuracy arises from the sympathy they share with the organisms they take as prey. Thus, the wasps do not interpret the activities of the living organisms they need for their survival; rather, the wasps participate directly in those activities.

Like these wasps, human beings continually undertake activities to further the survival of the organism. In contrast with the wasps' vital participation led by instinct, however, such human activities are for the most part directed by a reigning intellect. The human consciousness is structured to reflect on that which it perceives, and the human organism generally puts its thoughts into action strategically to generate effective results. With only a few exceptions – such as the newborn reaching for its mother's breast (Bergson 1998 [1907]: 162–163) – even the most necessary activities for human sustenance are regulated according to this reflective faculty; in the case of food, the intellect is the means by which we cultivate or capture other organisms and prepare them to meet our needs, before we ingest them into the body and subject them to the unreflective processes of digestion, absorption, and redistribution of nutrients.

In all such efforts to sustain its life, the human animal succeeds by planning efficient procedures and fabricating effective tools. Bergson attributes the prosperity of the human to the intellect's native ability to grasp abstract relations, even as the intellect cannot understand directly – that is, without investigation – the objects it encounters.⁴ The intellect's talent for abstraction makes it possible for us to recognize that our tools for life are made more effective when they are produced using other tools; through this logic the intellect expands human activities of fabrication to ever-higher levels of instrumentality. This approach reaches its apotheosis in the methods of science, which seek through analytic knowledge to put at the disposal of the human being the whole

of the material world. The human organism maximizes its mobility, captures its nutriment, and evades its predators through the amazing, refined efficiency of technologies based on scientific knowledge, which has been deduced from observation and then codified in language for transmission across generations.

The intellect's misrecognition of life

While the intellect's abstraction makes possible the remarkable success of the human organism, this same mode of thought leads, according to Bergson, to many of our shortcomings in attempting to manipulate living matter. Bergson writes:

We see that the intellect, so skillful in dealing with the inert, is awkward the moment it touches the living. Whether it wants to treat the life of the body or the life of the mind, it proceeds with the rigor, the stiffness and the brutality of an instrument not designed for such use. The history of hygiene or of pedagogy teaches us much in this matter. [...] [In these practices] we are amazed at the stupidity and especially at the persistence of errors. We may easily find their origin in the natural obstinacy with which we treat the living like the lifeless and think all reality, however fluid, under the form of the sharply defined solid. We are at ease only in the discontinuous, in the immobile, in the dead.

(Bergson 1998 [1907]: 165)

Bergson's examples above, health and pedagogy, both continue today to exceed the precision of intellectual inquiry, and to those two I would also add psychology, child development, and, crucially for this volume, nutrition.

Because the intellect is structurally wedded to the work of fabricating instruments for action, Bergson argues, science is doomed to misunderstand the portion of matter that is organic, dynamic, and capable itself of generating novelty. When the intellect deals with living creatures, it reduces them to constitutive parts, naming their components and looking to the possibilities for disassembling and reassembling them for use. Built upon this foundation, science will always reduce the essential motion and novelty of organic life to stasis and mechanical automatism, or at best, as we see in neuroscience and some contemporary biology, to a correlative and probabilistic approximation.

In the technologies through which humans deal with life, there appears a native tendency toward these errors of intellect. As the disciplines of systematized knowledge mobilize human action according to their blueprints, the dynamism of life is invariably suppressed to maximize the pliability of matter in the service of prescribed ends. This has become particularly salient as humans have developed activities that make possible the large-scale production of food for the species; here, the technological fabrication supervised by the intellect is thoroughly designed as if the living were no more than inert.

Sympathetic innovation in raising cattle

Modern practices of animal agriculture, in particular the process of raising large numbers of cattle for food, seem to epitomize the indifference to life that Bergson diagnoses in the fabricating intellect. From the activities of birthing, growing, and finishing to those of slaughter, processing, and distribution, humans manipulate these organisms as the raw material for a larger process of fabrication. The living potential for action present in the cattle is addressed as a problem to be solved; it is a mere attribute of the material, an attribute whose effects must be managed and minimized for the industry to proceed efficiently.

Consider, for example, the feedlot in which beef cattle are “finished” or fattened over the last several months of their lives. As cattle arrive at the feedlot by truck, they must be dipped in a sanitizing bath, vaccinated, and inspected for medical conditions or injuries. To achieve these tasks, handlers move cattle one by one through an enclosure, called a cattle alley (or cattle chute), into a structure in which veterinarians can administer treatments. After medical treatment, in most modern facilities, cattle are tagged and entered into a computer system to record medical history, age, weight, and other biodata useful for assessing monetary value and ensuring appropriate categorization as they progress through the pipeline.

It is clear from this process that the principles that govern the typical cattle feedlot present only a slight variation on industrial conventions for maintaining any inventory. However, the mistake that the intellect makes in this assumption – that living organisms are akin to inert matter – becomes clear by examining more closely the case of the cattle alley.

In the conventional cattle alley, handlers separate cattle and prod them forward through a straight, fenced-in enclosure, marshaling them one by one through the dipping pool. The animals present a challenge to their handlers by becoming unruly, by refusing to keep moving, and by gathering in crowds that block the flow of traffic. It is tempting to consider these difficulties as akin to the challenge the industrial blacksmith faces taming molten iron; from the perspective of the cattle handlers working the alley, the animals seem essentially to be a difficult and dangerous material to manipulate. Such a fabricating view identifies technology as the mediating term between human will and the matter it seeks to shape, as if the right means of separation between the two can enable the human being to overcome the difficulty presented by the material. Yet, Bergson would argue that the difficulty faced when moving cattle is actually a product of the presuppositions of the intellect – the same presuppositions that give rise to the inadequate analogy between cattle handling and smithing. The handler strains against the cattle not because of an archetypal struggle between matter and will, but because the entire technology of producing these animals is designed according to the misrecognition of living organisms as mere inert matter. In fact, the problem of moving cattle is not an extension of the problem of moving any other material object; cattle are actually consciously perceptive organisms that are inclined, as most animals are, to self-locomotion.

While it appears from Bergson’s account of intellect that this misrecognition may be inevitable in human manufacturing, recent innovations in the cattle-moving industry suggest that organic sympathy may come to play a greater role. Temple Grandin is an autistic woman who has made significant industrial design interventions into the cattle industry over the past 30 years. Among her first inventions to gain widespread use was a more adaptive design for the cattle alley. Grandin’s design transforms the cattle alley into a space that resonates more closely with the organic structure of cattle consciousness, suppressing perceptual cues that might inspire fear or hesitation and enabling cattle to follow their instinctual tendencies.⁵

Drawing on her awareness that cattle like to stay together in herds and move in circles, Grandin’s cattle alley begins with a wide pathway into a crowd pen that is open and semicircular. After cattle move along this curved pen, they enter an area of the alley that narrows into a long arc. According to Grandin, this design allows the animals to see far enough ahead to know that the alley is not a dead end – which, Grandin says, they would resist entering – but it prevents them from seeing so far as to become frightened by the human activity at the other end (Grandin 1989).

Grandin further controls the cattle’s perceptual experience by replacing the fences typical of conventional designs with solid walls that better hide handlers and other traffic from view. She emphasizes the importance of eliminating all extraneous visible objects such as stray flags or dangling chains that might distract cattle and encourage balking behavior or hesitation. She

even specifies the level of light in a structure – not too dark, since cattle will not move into a dark space – and works with ranchers to reduce shadows that might be perceived as menacing (Grandin 2011 [1998]).

In an industry that has been defined in recent decades by its massive, impersonal scale, Grandin's work stands out as a recalibration that brings into focus the perspective of the individual animal. I do not mean that she treats each cattle as a unique being with its own attributes and identity; this is not the purpose of Grandin's work, which is often implemented on feedlots that process tens of thousands head of cattle at a time. Rather, I mean that Grandin's designs take seriously the singular organism as a consciousness with its own view of the world, albeit a view that is circumscribed by the possibilities entailed by the species' organic structure. By operating at the level of the perceptions of cattle as they move through the alley, Grandin recognizes that life is experienced always at the scale of the individual. This attention to scale is a hallmark of sympathy: the organism is grasped as a particular organism, not conceptualized in the abstract as essentially a mere instance of a larger genus of interest for some task. Even in the efficiency of the sphex stinging the cricket, the outcome is made possible by the vital interest the sphex has in the encounter with the organism it takes as its prey. It is only through an intellectual knowledge that science can say that the sphex is interested in a genus of crickets and not in the particular cricket – with its particular salient features – that is recognized in the moment of predation.

Recall that, according to Bergson, the life of an organism is bifurcated into the affections absorbed and the mobility that is reflected outward in the form of physical expression and action. Contrary to typical intellectual innovation, Grandin's interest in cattle did not set out from a search for more effective means of dealing with the external animal mobility or the efficiency of the production line. Rather, it is clear from the accounts she gives in interviews (see Grandin 2010b; Sutton 2006) that the initial motivation for her work was an interest in the experiences internal to cattle life: how perceptual input leads to the inner affections of cattle – the actual pain and fear that their surroundings inspire in the cattle mind.

She says that, in the wild eyes and incessant lowing of the cattle on the feedlot, she recognized expressions of an emotional state that was familiar to her own experience as an autistic person in neurotypical society (Sutton 2006). Rather than approach cattle as a problem of matter to be mastered, which would be typical of the human intellect, Grandin responds to this insight by working to adjust the perceptions of the animals to improve their qualitative affective experience. While the stirring of empathy that motivates this work is recognizable as a particularly human emotional phenomenon, it structurally resembles the sympathetic discernment that takes place in the instincts of other organisms. This is an example of the human intuition that can arise when the human's organic sympathy with life is heard alongside the voice of intellect. By way of intuition, Grandin recognizes that she and the cattle are implicated in the same organic processes – that they are relevant to one another because of their conscious organic structures. Unlike the purely instinctual wasp, however, Grandin is able to use the considerable power of human consciousness to contemplate her insight and turn her actions toward ends that she formulates. The sympathetic form of her designs, even as they operate on the scale of mass industry, exhibits these intuitive origins.

I have emphasized the role played by something akin to sympathy in Grandin's work to highlight the way in which her innovations depart from the conventional human approach, i.e., to conceptualize organic matter through the intellect. I make no claim, however, that intuition is the dominant force in her work. Intellect and scientific inquiry play an important function in Grandin's design process. To produce viable new designs for cattle management, her original intuition – that she and the cattle experience similar emotions – had to be intensified through an intellectual process of scientific study. After the initial recognition of kinship, she began research,

taking cattle as her object, to deduce causal relationships between animal perceptions and particular behaviors. In this scientific stage, superior attention to detail – something she attributes to her autism (Grandin 2010a: 9:30) – allowed her to get to know cattle behaviors in a way that was increasingly accurate in its predictions, and therefore more useful for fabricating a technological intervention. Through this process of observation and rational deduction, Grandin gathered the knowledge that enabled her to act on her intuited interest in minimizing cattle distress, with the byproduct of encouraging predictably calm cattle movements. Thus, Grandin was capable of producing sympathetic designs adapted to the structure of cattle consciousness only through an activity that was intellectual in process, but intuitive in motivation.

The industry has embraced Grandin's work because her intervention, though targeted toward the absorptive side of cattle consciousness, reverberates outward in changed behavior, maximizing cattle's active mobility through the system and minimizing interruptions caused by balking or rearing. Grandin's designs draw out productivity from the inner experience of the cattle, encouraging their organic activity to align with the human project of fabrication. This goes well beyond simply exerting the human will from the outside, like yoking oxen to pull a plow. Just as the wasp's paralyzed prey continues to metabolize and maintain its flesh as food for the larva, the cattle in Grandin's system mobilize themselves in support of the human technology that will ultimately turn them into food. This leads to increased efficiency in terms of both human labor and time, thus dovetailing perfectly with the goals of the fabricating science of beef production.

Moving from phenomenology to critique: the slaughterhouse and the ethics of food

By making the meat industry more efficient, Grandin's sympathetic designs facilitate increases in both volume and profit. The industry in the US continues to slaughter around 33 million cattle per year – a number that has remained stable for the past ten years and is down slightly from the ten-year period prior to that (USDA 2014) – but the growth of the production of beef globally during that same period has raised serious nutritional, ecological, and climatological problems. In addition to these human and environmental questions, the flourishing of the industry intensifies a challenging situation for animal ethics, one to which Grandin, despite her interest in the inner lives of cattle, provides responses that are unsatisfying from a philosophical standpoint. When asked the ethical question of why it should be acceptable to kill cattle for food, Grandin often responds, "The cattle would have never been born if we hadn't raised them" (Sutton 2006: 19:00). It is likely self-evident to a philosophical reader that this response represents a fallacy: existence cannot be judged as more or less valuable than non-existence, because existence is the condition of possibility of all value, whether positive or negative. In light of this, I consider Grandin's unreflective response to actually be consistent with the logic of her relationship with other organisms. Because her attention is focused on the inner affections – emotions and sensations – of cattle, philosophical questions of existence and justification are outside the scope of her interest. She goes on: "I feel very strongly we've got to give the animals a decent life. And of all the meat animals, beef cattle when they are done right probably have the best life" (Sutton 2006: 19:05).

Part of the process of making sure cattle are "done right" is the final stage in the life of the animal, "processing" at the slaughterhouse. Before Grandin's rise to prominence, cattle workers often attributed the unruliness of cattle at the entrance to the slaughterhouse to the animals' sense that death awaited. Through her sensitivity to the individual scale of cattle affections, however, Grandin had the insight that cattle in the slaughterhouse do not know that they are in mortal danger. Lacking the intellect's capacity for abstraction, cattle can discern no structural meaning for the exercises through which they are driven every day, nor for the particular cattle alley that leads

to the final blow of the stunner. Grandin observed that cattle became distressed in response to the same types of visual cues at the slaughterhouse as in the feedlot. Her response to this recognition was to devise a new, sympathetic design, nicknamed the “Stairway to Heaven,” for moving cattle through the slaughterhouse in a manner that minimizes fear and pain experienced along the way. The resulting product is now used to process half the cattle raised for beef in North America (Phifer n.d.), and it has been widely lauded by animal welfarists for reducing suffering as cattle participate in the final stages of the beef production pipeline.

Thus, it seems that Grandin’s model treats living things as living up until the decisive moment when they are treated as things – that is, when they are killed and turned into steaks and other beef products to circulate in the global market. As we see with the “Stairway to Heaven,” Grandin remains consistent in her approach even in the most intimate engagement with the ultimate fabricating purpose of the beef industry. She seems to consider the broader purpose and structure of the meat industry to be static, but she mobilizes organic sympathy to redesign the variables that govern how the cattle are conducted through that structure.⁶ In response to her intuition of cattle affections, she designs technologies that minimize the disturbance to the inside consciousness, while manipulating the outside of the animal in the way prescribed by the industry’s goals. It could be said that Grandin treats a living thing accordingly as living in the means, but the end is still to render that living thing inert. This reflects the fact that the process of commercial beef production is guided by a logic that assumes the living to be indistinguishable from other raw material, even as Grandin shows a kind of sympathy toward the animal in fulfilling that telos.

Yet, perhaps this interpretation is guilty of an overly simplistic assumption about the phenomenon of food. It is unsatisfactory to say that the inherent character of technologies that raise animals for food is to treat the living as lifeless. Rather, it is a fundamental characteristic of nutriment – across nearly all organisms – that what is absorbed into the body as food is made up of organized matter. We eat from the realm of matter that at some point has lived, although in the process of doing so we render matter no longer living.⁷ In a sense, instrumentality is a part of the natural shape of food: there is a nutritive necessity, universal among organisms, that requires us to destroy living matter to achieve our own survival. The material we take into our bodies as food is only desirable because another organism has rearranged it into molecular forms – proteins, carbohydrates, lipids – that are indispensable for human survival. When an organism eats another, its body biologically discerns and benefits from the work done by the living thing that is no longer living. The organic generativity that was actual in the organism that is destroyed – the eaten – is extinguished and appropriated to maintain the novel potentiality of the eater. Thus, a sympathetic relationship – a proper recognition of life as life – exists between eater and eaten, prior to the interpretive mediation of intellect.

When organisms kill to create the nutritive conditions for survival and for surviving well, they do not render the living inert as a part of the endless chain of fabrication that Bergson critiques. Thus, while intellect suppresses novelty by treating the living as matter that can be fabricated into instruments for further purposes, there is some form of sympathy that subtends the relationship with food for all animals. This nutritive sympathy does not suppress the novelty expressed by living things in pursuing its ends; rather, it recognizes the generative power of the living organism as what makes the organism potentially food.

In light of this structure of organic life, I argue that the misrecognition of the living takes place not insofar as an animal is rendered food, but insofar as that food is itself reduced to being a mere *thing*. So, when cattle is made into steak, that steak can actualize its organic value if it is eaten by another organism that seeks to reintegrate its once-living tissue into new possibilities for life. However, from the perspective of the commercial meat industry, the steak is only incidentally food; primarily, it is a commodity that fulfills its purpose merely by being converted into money –

the most abstract intellectual instrument of fabrication – regardless of whether it is ultimately eaten. Thus, in the science of beef production, the living organism is treated as inert because its ultimate purpose is to be processed into a form that can be efficiently exchanged – to become absorbed into the intellectual genericism of a commodity. When the industry achieves this outcome, the organic activity of the animal that has become the food disappears. The living cattle is objectified as if it were merely inert material to be harnessed for an end (namely, profit), and the same is true of the human organic activity – i.e., labor – that is objectified in the commodity foods that are produced. This remains the case even with the use of sympathetic technologies, such as Grandin's, that are more appropriate to the organism's structure. As long as it is not truly engaged in the project of feeding the human organism, animal agriculture is guilty of the tragic mistake of the intellect: destroying the novelty of living things by misrecognizing life as mere material usable for some further end.

Conclusion: the need for critique of the human organism

My account of food and its attendant technologies in this chapter has descended from an understanding of the human need to eat that is shared with all organisms, to the fabricating methods of human food production that treat animals as mere matter, to Grandin's sympathetic interventions that are ultimately reabsorbed into the service of the commercial telos of the meat industry. In response to the ethical inadequacy of Grandin's approach, I examined how the organic activity of turning living things into food does not in itself replicate the intellect's error; I argued instead that only insofar as food production takes on a commoditized structure does it misunderstand life as inert matter.

Temple Grandin's remarkable interventions show how the use of a kind of sympathy does not divest the fabricating intellect of its tendency to instrumentalize life, even as the technologies of human food production approach the level of intuitive sophistication comparable to the paralytic wasp. Wasp and human share a vital interest to create out of organic matter the conditions for their lives as organisms, but the human overlays on this interest the intellect's desire that potential food, like all matter, serve an instrumental purpose for further fabricating activity. By destroying organisms for the purpose of profit rather than of food, we allow this instrumentalizing intellect to define our relationship with life.

In areas of human activity interested in life, today's technological innovations are increasingly developing integrated, dynamic approaches to fabrication, built upon adaptive models that mold themselves to the shape of the living things they seek to control. In addition to the work of Temple Grandin and of other animal welfarists, we can discern this movement in medicine as psychiatric medications make increasingly sophisticated interventions into brain chemicals, in agricultural technology as plants are engineered to generate pesticides from the inside, and in warfare as so-called enhanced interrogation techniques become increasingly tailored to the particular psyches of the humans they target. In each of these cases, sympathy is achieved not by relaxing the intellectual drive, but by applying an intensified scientific knowledge refined through increasingly exacting measurements, calculations, and manipulations.

Bergson provides an account of the structure of life that helps us situate such practices in perspective within the dynamic, self-expanding whole of organic activity. However, his rigorous descriptive account must be supplemented with a radical ethical approach to pursue the fact that at stake in this failure of intellect – to treat the living as inert – are actual lives that place immediate moral claims on humans. These include both the lives of the non-human animals that are turned into food-commodities and the lives of the humans that are treated as mechanistic assembly-line workers for this process.⁸ Thus, while food ethics requires that we recognize that

the human is an organism inherently implicated in relations with other organisms, we must also augment this expansive perspective with additional political notions. Only from critical analysis both of the political dimension of humans' fabricating pursuits and of the organic dimension of our participation in the novel movement of life can we make ethical demands that are appropriate to our role in the organic totality of Earth.

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Notes

- 1 Despite its appearances, Bergson's account – and by extension my own – is not a thoroughgoing inside–outside/mind–body dualism. The processes of affection and action inform one another and interpenetrate within the organism at all times. Further, action is of course not merely external. Together as a unified whole, action and affection make up the process of what it is to be an organism.
- 2 Note that the term “sympathy” in this discourse lacks the human emotional connotations of the conventional usage. This will become important to keep in mind as the term is applied to animal welfare efforts.
- 3 While the research Bergson cites is today over a century old, his larger point still stands.
- 4 Bergson writes, “The new-born child, so far as intelligent, knows neither definite objects nor a definite property of any object; but when, a little later on, he will hear an epithet being applied to a substantive, he will immediately understand what it means” (Bergson 1998 [1907]: 163). Bergson claims that the child also innately comes to understand the relationships of cause and effect, of like with like, and others. The ease with which humans grasp these abstractions is evidence of the power of the intellect.
- 5 For images showing the organic shape of Grandin's designs, see <<http://www.grandinlivestockhandling.com/ranch.html>>.
- 6 This troubling epistemic blind spot is acutely discernible in a series of videos created by the American Meat Institute, in which Grandin gives tours of various slaughtering facilities. In one video of a turkey slaughterhouse, Grandin walks the viewer through the process of stunning, in which each bird hangs upside down by metal foot restraints with its head submerged in water. The water is then electrified so a current runs the length of the bird's body. The stunning is done ostensibly to ensure that the bird does not have consciousness as its throat is slit (and, more plausibly, to keep the bird immobile so the cutting machine can operate at a higher level of accuracy and efficiency). On behalf of the affections experienced by the turkey, Grandin gives the ameliorative advice that slaughterhouse workers should ensure that the birds are not blinking after they are stunned, since that is evidence that they may still be conscious of pain. She shows no sign, however, of acknowledging the deeper question of whether or not such a practice can be justified in principle (*Video Tour of a Turkey Farm and Processing Plant Featuring Temple Grandin* 2013).
- 7 An exception could perhaps be identified in the case of certain active cultures that continue to live in the gut.
- 8 This dehumanization operates across multiple intersecting dimensions, including race, colonialism, and socioeconomic class. In 2003, 38% of production and sanitation workers in the US meat and poultry processing industry were foreign-born noncitizens. Across the industry, 42% of workers were Hispanic, and an additional 20% were black. The annual mean wage for these workers was about \$26,500 (US Government Accountability Office 2005: 16).

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