Madison Lewis

Dr. Eric Moore

Honors Introductory Ethics

10 October 2016

<center>An Argument Against Moral Vegetarianism</center>

In his article "Moral Vegetarianism and the Philosophy of Mind," C.J. Oswald argues for moral vegetarianism. Oswald evaluates in the article the premise that non-human animals can suffer. In so doing, he determines that the inability to prove Carruthers's Higher-Order Thought theory in relation to animal suffering is sufficient enough to defend moral vegetarianism "in a Pascalian way" (Oswald 72). In this paper, I will first present Oswald's argument; I will then explain Carruthers's Higher-Order Thought (HOT) theory and what it means to defend something "in a Pascalian way" to show how Oswald uses them to rationalize his argument; finally, I will expose on the basis of Utilitarianism why Oswald's premises in favor of moral vegetarianism are weak.

Simplistically, the argument that C.J. Oswald makes for moral vegetarianism is as follows:

1) If animals are capable of suffering, it is morally wrong to eat them.

2) If animals are incapable of suffering, it is morally wrong to eat them.

3) Animals are either capable of suffering or they are incapable of suffering.

4) Therefore, it is morally wrong to eat animals (Oswald 67-72).

While valid, this argument seems peculiar. In order to make sense of it, we must understand Carruthers's HOT theory, to which Oswald turns for rationale. Carruthers's HOT theory basically states that in order to experience pain, a being must be able to report to others

that it is in fact experiencing pain. Carruthers asserts that because animals cannot verbalize their pain, they cannot experience pain, and if animals cannot experience pain, surely there is no need to refrain from eating them. This idea that animals cannot experience pain is anatomically and biologically incorrect, but Oswald claims that even if Carruthers's theory *could* hold water, there would still be a case for moral vegetarianism. That case would relate to Blaise Pascal's Wager. Pascal wagered that when it came to deciding whether or not to believe in God, one's best bet is to believe even in the face of doubt. Pascal's rationale is that believing in God and discovering that God exists will produce the greatest overall personal gain (one would be welcomed to heaven), while not believing in God and then finding out God exists will produce the greatest personal loss (one would be condemned to hell) (Hajek 1). Pascal's wager relates to Oswald's argument for moral vegetarianism, wherein he asserts that since we have to make our own decisions about whether or not to believe the scientific evidence that animals can experience pain, "the preferable solution is to assume that animals have experiences [are conscious] to avoid the rather horrendous results of" discovering that "they were conscious all along and we have unnecessarily caused them suffering" (Oswald 72).

Drawing from the basis of Utilitarianism, I argue that there are certain circumstances where the suffering of animals is so far outweighed by the benefits their deaths bring to the table that there is a case against moral vegetarianism regardless of whether animals can or cannot suffer. Sometimes we eat animals that we have hunted rather than animals that have been raised for slaughter. Take the case of deer, for example. One hugely positive aspect of deer hunting is population control. Overpopulation of a species like deer would lead to that species suffering across the board. Animals need food, water, and shelter to survive just like humans do. When overpopulation comes into play, the majority of the members of the overpopulated species suffer

together simultaneously. When we think of this situation through Utilitarian eyes, we have to consider which of the two following situations produces the highest utility.

In Situation 1, overpopulation of a species is causing the members of the species to suffer across the board due to lack of food (hence starvation) as well as a lack shelter from weather and predators. Additionally, the overpopulation of the species is starting to negatively affect humans as well. The members of the overpopulated species are eating more and more of the humans' crops that are raised for the humans' economic and dietary benefit. They are also more frequently present on highways and are causing more car accidents and therefore more human injury and even human death. In Situation 2, only some of the members of the species are hunted. This provides pleasure and nourishment for humans who choose to eat them, while also alleviating the human economic and dietary suffering caused by the species' overpopulation. The suffering of the rest of the members of the species' is also reduced by the death of only some members because of the resulting population control; the surviving members have a more abundant supply of food as well as shelter from weather and predators.

Clearly, Situation 2 produces a higher utility, because fewer humans and animals are experiencing suffering than they are in Situation 1. Whether animals can suffer is irrelevant in this case as long as, when they are hunted, they are killed quickly and relatively painlessly rather than tortured. If animals are hunted for the purposes of population control, eating them after they have been quickly, painlessly killed would add to the positive utility of the situation by providing nourishment and pleasure to humans. Therefore, it is safe to say that Utilitarianism supports the consumption of animals that were hunted to control overpopulation, and therefore does not support Oswald's assertion that vegetarianism is a moral requirement.

Even if animals suffer just as much as humans suffer due to a quick, relatively painless death, we must consider that the loss of human lives carries a much more negative utility than the loss of animal lives. For instance, it would be ludicrous to say that, to combat overcrowding in schools, we should start quickly, painlessly killing children in order to ensure that remaining children have a better educational experience. The loss of one child's life is so much more significant than the loss of even several animal lives. Think of all the potential good a child could do for society in the future; he or she could cure cancer, help impoverished people, improve the education system, etc. This compared to the potential good even several animals could do for society in the future supports the fact that the loss of a human life would carry more negative utility than the loss of multiple animal lives. Therefore, even if humans and animals suffer equally, my Utilitarian argument against moral vegetarianism still stands.

In conclusion, C.J. Oswald's premise that it is morally wrong to eat animals if animals can suffer is not strong enough to support his argument for moral vegetarianism. Oswald fails to consider the utility surrounding situations such as eating animals that have been hunted in order to control overpopulation. The loss of animal lives does not carry as much negative utility as the loss of human lives; as such, Utilitarianism does not morally require humans to refrain from consuming animals who have been quickly, painlessly killed for overall beneficial reasons, such as population control.

Works Cited

Hajek, Alan. "Pascal's Wager." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition).

Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Web. 9 October 2016.

Oswald, C. J. "Moral Vegetarianism and the Philosophy of Mind." *Stance: An International*

Undergraduate Philosophy Journal. 9th edition. (2016): 67-72. *Philosopher's Index*.

Web. 10 Oct. 2016.