M. Heimburg

PHIL 308

**The Ethics and Respect of Laboratory Grown Meat**

G. Owen Schaeffer and Julian Savulescu, in their article “The Ethics of Producing *In Vitro* Meat”[[1]](#footnote-0), present and argue against three moral objections against the production and consumption of lab-grown meat, a.k.a. *in vitro* meat (henceforth referred to as IVM). The first moral objection that Schaeffer and Savulescu argue against, which I will be discussing, considers the respect, or lack thereof, given to animals in the process of creating IVM. In this paper I will argue against this objection, as it does not adequately take into account the lack of any actual harm that would come to animals from IVM and the benefits that could be gained from it. I will explore and build on the argument that Schaeffer and Savulescu presented in their articles with my own objections included as well.

Here is Schaeffer and Savulescu’s argument.

1. If creating meat artificially is not disrespectful, then IVM is morally acceptable.
2. It is the case that creating meat artificially is not disrespectful.
3. Therefore, IVM is morally acceptable.

Schaeffer and Savulescu provide three different definitions of “disrespectful”, each of which has different implications for the argument and that they and I have different objections to. These definitions are integral to their and my objections to the argument that artificially created meat is disrespectful.

Schaeffer and Savulescu also in their article list a few assumptions about IVM in the hypothetical scenario that it becomes a valid alternative to natural meat (p.2): 1. The technology is readily and widely available nationwide or worldwide. 2. IVM is equivalent to natural meat in terms of consumer price. 3. Safety of the process for both animal and consumer has been ensured.

The first definition of “disrespect” is that IVM disrespects humans’ relationship with nature (p. 4). This implies that by using animals as simply a tool to obtain more food humans are destroying the relationship they previously had with animals and distancing themselves from the natural world. Schaeffer and Savulescu argue that this is not true on the premise that while IVM may shift the relationship between humans and nature, this is not a bad thing and may in fact have good consequences.

The second definition of “disrespect” is that IVM wrongs animals (p. 5). In other words, this implies that by creating IVM people are violating the animals’ integrity, as they are manipulating their biology in a way that harms the species as a whole. Schaeffer and Savulescu argue this is false because IVM is so different from the original animal that it does have a negative impact on the animal.

The third definition of “disrespect” is that IVM violates animals’ rights (p.6). This implies that IVM is wrong in following with the belief that animals should not be used for experimentation or testing, as they cannot consent to it. Schaeffer and Savulescu argue that because animals cannot consent, it is up to a responsible caretaker to consent to such things for them.

The argument is valid, as the conclusion follows from the premises and is in correct *Modus Ponens*[[2]](#footnote-1) form. Schaeffer and Savulescu argue that these definitions, and therefore the argument overall, is incorrect. I agree with their objections as presented previously and will explain why I believe that creating meat artificially is not disrespectful, building on the objections that Schaeffer and Savulescu posed.

Premise (2) of the argument, that creating meat artificially is not disrespectful, is the premise that has the most plausible objections. These objections stem from the definitions of “disrespectful” as outlined previously.

The first definition of “disrespect” states that IVM destroys humans’ relationship with nature, and that treating meat in a laboratory rather than harvesting it from a live animal means that humans would be treating the animal as a tool rather than the living creature that it is. This is false and illogical. Firstly, in the mass industrial system of modern slaughterhouses, animals are already treated like a tool rather than independent creatures. This is exemplified in the utter disregard for good living conditions and the happiness of the animals in these slaughterhouses. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, moving away from dependence on the natural world could likely be a good thing for the human race as a whole, as Schaeffer and Savulescu said. By growing meat in labs, animals would be free to live healthy and respected lives outside of a slaughterhouse, thus eliminating the cruelty humans are currently putting animals through every day already.

The second definition of “disrespect” states that IVM wrongs animals by violating their integrity, as an altered and reduced version of themselves is being created which is negative to the species as a whole. While it is true that a piece of them is being replicated without their consent, in my opinion, IVM is not enough of an animal to be considered *them*; it is a piece of them. It could be compared to a wig made of human hair; what little the animal loses from the biopsy will either be regrown or not missed. IVM does not create nor affect living, breathing animals.

The third definition of “disrespect” states that IVM violates animals’ rights. This argument is similar to the argument that animals should not be used for things such as testing or experimentation as they cannot consent to this. However, many things are done to animals that would require consent from humans, such as receiving immunizations, and yet are done to the animal anyway because they cause little to no harm but have a greater benefit in the long run. As animals are not able to consent, it is up to a responsible caretaker to allow what the animal can do. So long as the biopsy to collect stem cells causes the animal little to no harm, there should be no objection to allowing it to be done to the animal. Additionally, animals also cannot consent to being slaughtered, and of the two options, a biopsy is infinitely less harmful to the animal both in the short and long term.

In conclusion, the argument that the creation and eating of IVM is disrespectful to animals is altogether untrue as Schaeffer and Savulescu argued. No definition of disrespect can provide a valid argument against IVM. This shows that IVM is a morally acceptable alternative to natural meat. Hopefully in the future this will one day not just be a hypothetical scenario but a better reality for both animals and ethical consumers.

1. Schaefer, G. O., & Savulescu, J. (2014). The Ethics of Producing “In Vitro” Meat. Journal of Applied Philosophy, 31(2), 188–202. Retrieved from http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.longwood.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=phl&AN=PHL2225601&site=ehost-live&scope=site [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. *Modus Ponens:* (1) If *P*, then *Q*. (2) *P*. (3) Therefore, *Q*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)