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Have you ever sat down to a meal and looked at your plate and said, “Wow this is a dead animal.” No, well me either, but some people do. We call most of those people vegetarians or animal rights activists. Maybe a more important question would be, “Should I be a vegetarian?” With selected works of Peter Singer, Tom Regan, Carol J Adams, and Ralph R. Acampora I will explore the infrequently asked question “Do we have an obligation to become vegetarians?”

Carol J. Adams offers some compelling reasons that can be applied to answering why obligatory vegetarianism should be the way to go. Purely physical reasoning includes the evolution of the human species. When earlier forms of humans are studied and compared with modern physical structures we find that the teeth of modern humans seem to be adapted towards a non-meat based diet. The recession of the “K-9 teeth” and flattening of the molars is commonly accepted as an adaptation to better process foods high in fiber, like vegetables and grains. To the statement that killing and eating animals is “natural” Adams would offer that humans consume animals “quite differently from any other animals” (Adams, 11). While other animals typically devour their meat at the moment of capture and raw, Adams correctly states humans do not follow that pattern. The key to Adams’ argument is the concept of “absent referent.” Where animals become invisible and humans do not see that they are eating animals. The absent referent in action can be demonstrated in the vocabulary we use to talk about cow meat; beef. Perhaps if humans referred to cow products as “cow” instead of beef, or steak the ontologizing mind set would dissolve.

While all of the defenses' of eating animals I find in Adams are compelling for her, I still dispute them. I think you would have trouble finding very many people who did not know where "beef" comes from. The problem in some cases is not that people do not know where their food is coming from, but that they do not care. "Absent referent" should refer to the absence of emotion and compassion for animals. What if the problem is not the meat itself but the farms and treatment of animals? If this is the case then the "absent referent" of Adams can still be valuable as a tool to realize the ignorance of the masses, but this would not trend towards a compulsory vegetarianism. As Adams herself points out, the physical adaptation argument is not sufficient because if humans were meant to be herbivores our internal organ structure would more closely resemble that of an herbivore (10). Humans lack the double stomachs and gizzard or grinder stones almost always associated with strictly herbivorous animals. Why, if humans have an obligation to be vegetarian, has our system not adapted to resemble current herbivores? I would also ask why is it necessary that humans consume their meat the same way as other animals to be considered natural? The answer; it is not. Humans are different than all other animals, and as such should be expected to act differently in many ways. Natural is a relative term and may be applied in several ways. Adams clearly applies it in a way that benefits her stance as I employ it in a way that benefits mine.

In Richard R. Acampora's discussion of ecotourism he offers one key portion that can be applied to encourage obligatory vegetarianism: etiquette. Acampora refers to zoos and the exhibition of animals, but I feel his argument is valuable. Mostly the idea that animals are not permitted to "engage or break off" the interaction with humans is what bothers Acampora, amongst other things (Acampora 3). This can be applied to a

discussion of vegetarianism. This can be interpreted to say that if animals wanted humans to eat them then they would, on their own accord, offer themselves to humans. This is a hard line to take because it seems unreasonable, from a human standpoint that an animal would actually offer itself up as food. Since no human would likely make this offering of itself as food to another human, unless in rare extreme conditions, it is difficult to accept. This shows the need to acknowledge cultural relativism. Viewing events through the eyes of the participants. Acampora may rebut that it is not clear if animals are offering themselves to humans, and to that I would say any animal that has become domesticated has offered itself to the luxuries of being taken care of by humans, and thus then must offer itself to humans in turn. Nothing in life is free.

Tom Regan offers more general points to why vegetarianism may be the only way to go. Things, or animals in this case, that are experiencing subjects of a life have, for Regan, an inherent value (EEP 148-9). These beings with inherent value can be established based heavily on consciousness, and then less so on awareness. So, if we take this trend backwards and accept that animals have consciousness, then they must have an inherent value and from inherent value they must be experiencing life and then humans have a direct duty to protect, or at least not harm these sort of beings (EEP 144). By comparing infants and children to animals, one may not be able to discern a difference in direct duty. To extrapolate, if children fit into a category and animals fit with them then we, humans, should, for the sake of reason and consistency, treat them alike. Children, though, have the ability to remove themselves from this category over time, with education, animals do not have any potential for removal.

This is a difficult position to argue, as it is conceptual. I find that this argument has structural flaws, and is an incomplete chain argument. Since Regan does not reaffirm “experiencing subjects of life” with a like to consciousness, the argument is missing a step here. Even granting to Regan that this is a structurally sound argument, his position is still debatable. Is consciousness really enough to declare life? Wittgenstein holds “we cannot meaningfully attribute states of consciousness to beings without language” (Singer, EEP 137). If awareness is also involved as Regan proposes, how do we know what makes a thing aware? And what should that thing be aware of? There is much ambiguity in this line of reasoning, a little too much for me to accept this argument to be used towards justifying universal vegetarianism.

I have reserved addressing Peter Singer to last as his the most explicit of the selections on the argument for obligation to vegetarianism. Singer starts by establishing that animals are sentient beings. To do this he relies on Jeremy Bentham and accepts that if a being is suffering we have an obligation to consider that suffering (Singer, EEP 136). Yet, humans can consider that suffering and still decide there are more benefits in eating meat. After some discussion Singer decides that we can infer that animals suffer on grounds “nearly as good as the ground of inferring other humans suffer” (EEP 127). Perhaps this is the problem, the suffering. If meat production farms removed the cramped conditions, killed the animals instantly, and (hypothetically) went to all other measures to alleviate the suffering that humans would perceive, then Singer’s “suffering” argument would not be solid enough to call for an obligatory vegetarianism.

Even granting Singer that animals are sentient beings he accuses humans of being bias to our own species (EEP 140). Of Course we are, just as animals are out for their

well-being. The goal of an animal is to live, as it is for humans, we are just far more dominant and disrespectful. It is the nature of beings to be more concerned for their own existence and proliferation of their species than others. All animals may just be a combination of organs that have fixed reactions to stimuli, even humans may even fall into this realm, except we have language to comment about our reactions. I do admire Singer though, as he does not deny that if we were all to go vegetarian that it would be difficult at first and from the get go the “odds are certainly against...” a morally demanded vegetarianism (EEP 142). This is admirable in that it allows whomever the reader may be to see that Singer is realistic and serious about his beliefs. He cannot be discounted as some crazy animal rights activist as some people tend to do.

Do we have an obligation to be vegetarians? No. Although there are many more arguments for and against this position I feel that I have covered many important aspects, in mostly a retaliatory effort. Other less solid reasons against obligatory vegetarianism could be aesthetic; meat tastes good, smells good or has distinct texture. Meat allows what would become an all green diet to have some variety and stimulates the palate. Many chefs say that presentation of food is half the enjoyment; meat would allow a different scope of presentation. Yes, there are perfectly healthy vegetarians, but there are also many perfectly healthy people who do not subscribe to such a strict diet.

My final argument against a human obligation to be vegetarian is relative to Carol J. Adams' article *Ecofeminism and the Eating of Animals*. In section six of the bulk section of the article she claims that a human loosing his or her “I-ness,” autonomy, by not being able to dominate animals and eat meat is not a valid position. I hold that Adams is very much wrong on this point. If a person could possible write a history or

biography of humans one of the main themes, for better or worse, would be the overwhelming ability to dominate and change our environment and surroundings; that is the nature of human beings. If humans began to lose that aspect of life our autonomy would certainly be violated. Unfortunate for many animals and animal lovers humans are currently the one of most forceful and the most influential animal on the planet, and although might does not make right, might does make decisions. If humans ever become a food source for another species then I suspect a moral obligation to vegetarianism will quickly gain notoriety, prestige, and feasibility.