CONSUMING ANIMALS AS AN EDUCATIONAL ACT

Dissertation

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Abstract

The main purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that consuming animals is an educational act that warrants sustained attention. The main question I address is: What does the consumption of animals have to do with the life of the educated person? I argue that we should learn more about the lives—which is to say, the deprivation, torment, and death—of the animals we eat. This sort of learning requires a fresh way to think about not only education, but also food, eating, and animals. I aim to illuminate the extent to which we are implicated in systems of immense suffering, and at the same time, provoke us to grow by questioning deeply-entrenched habit of consuming animals. This dissertation is a theoretical exploration that may or may not lead to dietary change, but that does, I believe, hold potential to change the way we think and act in the world.

In Chapter 1, I lay out the reasons why consuming animals is a rich subject for educational philosophy. Chapter 2 is a brief overview of the animal ethics literature to analyze the moral arguments for bringing nonhuman beings into the realm of human moral consideration. Clearly, eating animals is an ethical act and it is important to review who has said what about it. In Chapter 3, I explore John Dewey’s conception of growth and argue that, for human moral growth, we should consider the habit of consuming animals. In Chapter 4, I shift the focus to (mis)education at the cultural level. I argue that it is important to understand the consumption of animals—as a problem of cultural miseducation—so that we are better situated to rethink and resist the cultural forces that
shape the consenting attitudes underlying this fundamental act of consumption. Chapter 5 examines the educational significance of understanding animals-becoming-meat—that is, the agricultural and slaughtering practices that turn living, full-bodied animals into fragmented, edible pieces of meat. This chapter has a broader function, too, as I make a case for extending scholarly inquiry addressing consumerism and commercialism to (re)encompass production and labor. Animals-becoming-meat is a particular form of production and labor that illustrates and exposes the larger problems of distance, ignorance, and alienation in contemporary life; it also demonstrates how the foundational role of production is largely concealed and thus taken for granted in consumer society. I end with Chapter 6 where I argue that the most effective and transformative pedagogical means to understand animals-becoming-meat is to watch the process unfold, with our own eyes. Given the great extent that corporate agriculture goes to conceal the brutality behind its walls, I believe we must be unsettled with disturbing visuals of animals-becoming-meat. I argue that education should unveil the exploitive practices that remain deliberately hidden from public view—even if it is culturally taboo to do so.
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Chapter 1

Food, Consuming Animals, and Language

Introduction

In highly consumerist societies, eating animals has become one of the most atrocious of all human-nonhuman relationships. In the United States alone, with a population of roughly 300 million people, approximately 10 billion animals are killed for meat each year, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. For 2010, that amounts to 8,790,478,000 chickens, 242,619,000 turkeys, 23,627,000 ducks, 34,111,100 cows, 919,700 calves, 110,367,000 pigs, and 2,554,400 sheep and lambs. ¹ Raising and slaughtering this many animals for human consumption is done industrially, on large-scale confinement animal feeding operations (CAFO’s) and in industrial slaughterhouses. The contemporary meat industry is built on confinement, cruelty, and killing. In processing 10 billion animals per year, how could it not be?

Undercover investigations of CAFO’s, often referred to as “factory farms,” and industrial slaughterhouses reveal horrific conditions, abuse, and inhumane treatment of

farm animals. In 2008, for example, undercover investigators of the Humane Society of the United States documented cases of rampant animal cruelty—workers “kicking cows, ramming them with the blades of a forklift, jabbing them in the eyes, applying painful electrical shocks and even torturing them with a hose and water in attempts to force sick or injured animals to walk to slaughter.”\(^2\) This specific investigation (there are many more) resulted in the largest meat recall in the history of the United States.\(^3\) All this from a slaughterhouse that provided meat to Westland Meat Co., the 2004-2005 “supplier of the year,” serving schools in thirty-six states as part of the National School Lunch Program.\(^4\) This is one clear connection between education and consuming animals. I will attempt to make many more connections. The main purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that consuming animals is an educational act that warrants sustained and critical attention. The main question I address is: What does the consumption of animals have to do with the life of the educated person?

I have three points to make before I discuss why food and eating animals are serious questions for educational philosophy. First, by “education,” I am referring to much more than schooling. This dissertation, without neglecting the school and classroom, moves the discussion of education well beyond these spaces. Schooling is a formal institution of teaching and learning, but teaching and learning also happen outside this institution—informally and formally, planned and unplanned, privately and publicly,


collectively and individually. In Chapter 4 I will analyze education at the cultural level because it is meaningful and instructive for all those concerned about education to approach education in varying socio-cultural contexts. Thus, I conceive *education* in the richest and broadest sense of the word, encompassing dynamic, vast ways human beings live, work, consume, play, and teach and learn in the world.

The second point is that humans all over the globe have something insightful to teach us about food and meat eating; there is a plethora of cultural perspectives on the subject. However, this is not a multicultural project, nor will I try to convey a grand narrative of all cultures’ practices toward eating animals. When I use the words “we” and “us,” I am referring to those humans in highly-commercialized, consumerist societies who live, daily, far removed from the animas they consume, which includes the vast majority of Americans. How the majority of Americans think and act toward food is vastly different from other regions of the world (and vastly different from the way *some* Americans think and act toward food). For example, what is considered in India as a “holy cow” is in America something very different—a commodity for mass consumption. Nevertheless, I will attempt to describe and analyze the culture that I am situated within and know best.

The third point requires a bit more explaining. For most of my life I consumed animals but for the past several years I have wrestled with the ethics of meat eating. Is killing animals for food immoral? If so, why? Is meat eating wrong because it entails the taking of sentient life? Or is it the pain and suffering food animals undergo before we kill
them that is morally wrong.\textsuperscript{5} In other words, what if animals live relatively pleasant, comfortable, and content lives before they are killed for food? Then would it still be wrong to kill them in order to eat their flesh? These are important ethical questions that I will address in the following chapter. But I do not spend too much time on them because, in my view, there are even more pressing and interesting questions to explore as a philosopher of education. Acknowledging that killing animals for food is an ethical act does not mean that we are bound \textit{only} to ethics, and we certainly should not limit ourselves to constructing moral arguments for or against vegetarianism.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to ethical arguments for the moral consideration of nonhuman animals, but after that, I often stray from the ethicists’ paradigm in detailing why I believe the consumption of animals is an educational act. This dissertation is chiefly a deconstruction of status quo thinking, attitudes, assumptions, and practices; it is more of a critique of the contemporary-industrial modes of raising, killing, and consuming animals than it is an argument for vegetarianism. While the arguments for abstaining from animal flesh can be found in these pages, they are not the primary focus. My critique is, at times, teeming with abhorrence and moral language, yet I am unwilling to universalize vegetarianism as a moral prescription. Why? Because as both a vegetarian and grandson of animal farmers, I find myself very much inspired by those humans who, though small in number, actually kill the animals they eat and do so with great gratitude, respect, and consciousness—and, to the best of their ability, attempt to reduce the amount

\textsuperscript{5} There is an ongoing debate in the animal rights literature between the deontological and utilitarian branches of moral philosophy. The former argue that, even if animals are treated humanely before death, it is wrong to kill and eat animals because it violates the principle of respectful treatment. The utilitarians argue that the suffering and pain that animals endure before killing is wrong, not the killing as an act in of itself. These views will be explored more closely in the next chapter.
of pain and suffering the animal will experience. In Chapter 5, I will share my own experiences with farm animals in order to shed some light on the moral complexities of meat eating and to offer an alternative narrative, albeit a dying one, to the unsustainable methods of consuming animals buttressed by global capitalism and the appetites of hyper-consumerist societies. And, of course, there are some humans, also small in number, who must take animal life in order to sustain human life. My argument is not that everyone should be animal rights activists and give up meat. My aims are more humble, complex, and, I think, realistic.

While I do not offer dietary guidelines or strict moral solutions, I will support two moral ends: the cultivation of human growth and the alleviation of suffering. These aims, when brought together, involve a more mindful relationship with the animals who suffer and die so we can eat their flesh. To be more reflective and conscientious about eating animals does not mean one must become vegetarian or vegan; and to be vegetarian does not necessarily mean that one is a mindful eater. At the very least, I argue that we should learn more about the lives—which is to say, the deprivation, torment, and death—of the animals we eat. This sort of learning requires a fresh way to think about not only education, but also food, eating, and animals. I aim to illuminate the extent to which we are implicated in a system of immense suffering, and at the same time, provoke us to grow by questioning deeply-entrenched habit of consuming animals. This dissertation is a theoretical exploration that may or may not lead to dietary change, but that does, I believe, hold potential to change the way we think and act in the world.
Food and the Consumption of Animals as Educational Encounter

*Food matters and animals matter and eating animals matters even more.*

-Jonathan Safran-Foer

At the 2007 meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, Susan Laird delivered a provocative presidential address, “Food for Co-Educational Thought.” Laird turned the Society’s attention to the philosophical and educational meaning of food—not an easy task considering most philosophers deem food a highly corporeal subject, holding at best a trace of theoretical significance. However, food is not a novel theme of philosophic inquiry. As Laird points out, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke, among others, took up food as part of their projects. Exposing the generous possibilities of “foodways” through a variety of texts, Laird calls on philosophers of education to reclaim food for “philosophical-educational study and for thus rethinking coeducation.”

Since Laird only briefly discussed Rousseau in her essay, let’s take a moment to give him his due and see specifically what he had to say about food and its relation to education. The philosopher thought that making connections surrounding food and farming was fertile ground for contemplation and understanding. His renowned book, *Emile*, is a lengthy and extraordinary work of educational philosophy, in which the philosopher takes the seemingly routine and ordinary of food and transforms it into the philosophical and educational. Rousseau invites his readers to a lavish meal at a financier's “opulent home,” with plenty of “boisterous conversation,” “elegant and fine table service,” and numerous dishes and courses. As the bourgeois guests at the table eat

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and mingle, Rousseau uses the dining table as a pedagogical site for his pupil, Emile. Knowing that this sophisticated and “intoxicating” setting can too easily “go to the head,” the tutor asks Emile, a simple, yet revealing, question: “Through how many hands would you estimate that all you see on this table has passed before getting here?” Emile is suddenly enthralled and wants to imagine what lurks beyond the spectacle immediately before him. Rousseau continues:

What a crowd of ideas I awaken in his brain with these few words!... He dreams, he reflects, he calculates, he worries. While the philosophers, cheered by the wine, perhaps by the ladies next to them, prate and act like children, [Emile] is all alone philosophizing for himself... What an object for his curiosity! What a text for instruction!\(^8\)

Food—“what a text for instruction!” And still, unfortunately, like Laird’s timely invitation, Rousseau’s text of instruction remains ignored by most philosophers of education today.\(^9\) In her response to Laird’s essay, Huey-li Li colorfully comments:

Metaphorically speaking, well-schooled educational philosophers can be compared to well-fed caged chicken. Just as the caged chickens never get to explore the living world outside the cages, it is not surprising that most ‘professional’ philosophers of education have lost their organic connections with the increasingly globalized worlds of food.\(^10\)

Li is right but the disconnection from food stems from deeper roots embedded in Western thought. The often acknowledged, yet ostensibly stubborn, mind/body binary relegates food—through the bodily-centric act of eating—to the “wrong” side of the divide. The abundance of research addressing food may be of little interest to educational

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philosophers because it centers predominantly or solely on issues of nutrition and diet, areas of the body. What impresses me about Laird’s essay is how she joins the intellect with the senses, dissolving the mind/body dichotomy and generating a more substantive discussion of food through contemplative eating and bodily movement. In this study, I also disrupt this binary with an intense focus on human bodies interacting and internalizing animal bodies.

Laird was primarily concerned with the relationship between food, coeducation, and the range of perspectives philosophers of education might offer. In what could only serve as an appetizer for educational theory, her address did not allow the space to tend the varied questions of food. I now want to build off the conversation started and also reflect beyond food’s archetypal issues of nutrition, obesity, and caloric intake. I will begin by broadening Jane Roland Martin’s theory of educational encounter involving nonhuman animals to include the consumption of dead animals, as meat.

During the session, “Philosophy of Education Thirty Years after Martin’s Radical Presidential Challenge,” at the 2011 meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, several scholars recognized the pioneering contributions of Martin in the areas of gender and educational theory. In her response, Martin highlighted the ways the field of educational philosophy has improved since her time serving as President in 1981—namely, from the rich contributions of women. Yet her broader point was that diversity enriches all areas of scholastic inquiry, not just philosophy of education. In elaborating on the centrality of diverse perspectives, Martin proceeded to take the audience to a place no one anticipated.
When asked by an audience member about what she envisions our field will look like thirty years from now, Martin started talking about animals. Judging by the silence and the conspicuous facial expressions in the crowd, many seemed bewildered, failing to see the direct relationship between nonhuman animals and philosophy of education. The audience seemed confused as to why Martin—who, for decades, has theorized the education of human beings—began to talk about the learning accomplishments of the great ape, Nim Chimpsky. The puzzled reactions were indicative of our field’s glaring omission of philosophical attention to animal lives—to whom human lives are intimately bound. Martin’s view of diversity moved us from the human to the nonhuman realm and she managed, just as she did thirty years prior, to challenge philosophers of education to consider a new radical direction.11

In her most recent book, *Education Reconfigured: Culture, Encounter, and Change*, Martin questions the dominant view that excludes animals “from education’s domain,” arguing that animals are worthy of becoming the “educatees” of more meaningful learning—not the mere training of automatons but more similar to the sort of learning humans typically deem only applicable to *Homo Sapiens*.12 Some animals possess the individual capacities, Martin asserts, to be legitimately included in the educational realm. Her argument for animals assuming a more active role in education is

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11 Nel Noddings has also discussed human-animal relationships as part of her theory of caring in moral education. However, Noddings conceives animals as passive recipients, or those who are “cared-for,” by humans, while Martin sees more transformative potential in animals, as more active participants in human-animal encounters. A major reason for the difference is simply a matter of the species each discusses. Martin discusses animals who are very close, biologically, to human beings, such as chimpanzees, who display a wide range of learning potential; Noddings discusses mostly food, vermin, and companion animals. See Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 148-59.

part of her broader “theory of education as encounter.” Without embracing an animal rights position, Martin argues that, if an individual (human or nonhuman) possesses the capacity to change or be changed through an event—and that event, on some level, brings about a change to culture—then an educational encounter occurs (Nim is an example). Educational encounters necessitate “the capacities of an individual and the stock of a culture become yoked together,” resulting in both “individual learning” and “cultural transmission.”13 Such encounters, Martin posits, are not predetermined by species membership and humans ought to move beyond the narrow anthropocentric view that humans are the only actors in education or transmitters of culture.

I agree with Martin. We should take educational encounters with animals more seriously. There are indeed many instances when animals learn a great deal by interacting with humans, and as a result, change occurs on some level. Even so, I will focus on what we have to learn about ourselves, as humans, in the world. There is a considerable stockpile of ignorance and violence—examples of what Martin calls “cultural liabilities”—passed down from one generation to the next through “cultural miseducation” concerning human-animal encounters.14 Through education, these liabilities ought to be explicitly addressed (as I will do in Chapter 4) and transformed into “cultural assets” that promote humane and free living conditions—for both human and animal.

What is the relationship between Laird’s call to reclaim food as philosophical-educational study and Martin’s focus on nonhuman encounter? The answer I offer is this:

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13 Ibid., 7, 14.
14 Jane Roland Martin, Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002). This work will be cited in the text as CM for all subsequent references.
The most fundamental way we encounter animals is by eating their flesh. If food is philosophical, as Laird urges, and if encounters with animals are educative, as Martin suggests, then we have good reason to believe that consuming animals holds much promise as a philosophical-educational encounter. Laird demonstrates that “food matters,” Martin tells us that “animals matter,” and I want to argue, in the words of Jonathan Safron-Foer, that “eating animals matters even more.”

It is important to point out that eating meat is not the sort of nonhuman encounter Martin has in mind. Nevertheless, I believe there is room to include the consumption of dead animals as educational encounter for at least two reasons. First, food is inextricably linked to culture. In encountering edible animal bodies, the individual eater connects not only with an artifact of agriculture but with an abundance of cultural phenomena, including “institutions and practices, rites and rituals, beliefs and skills, attitudes and values,” and “modes of thinking and acting” (**CM**, 12). Habits, as John Dewey will demonstrate in Chapter Three, are not individual; they are derivatives of social custom that shape, sustain, and alter social conditions and norms, for better or worse. Food habits are no exception. While the animals we eat are dead, the cultural encounter of eating them is very much alive. Second, food consumption incorporates a number of an individual’s physical and mental capacities—taste, imagination, reasoning, empathy, to name a few—for change of a fundamental kind, that of constitution. Thus, consuming animals furnishes the sort of encounter change involving individuals and culture that
Martin desires and also establishes a context to form “a far more intimate connection between culture and education.”  

Consumerism, Consumption, and Consuming Animals

For the sake of our purposes, the term “consuming”—as in, Consuming Animals as an Educational Act—refers simultaneously to both the literal ingestion of animal flesh as meat and the ideology of consumerism that is ubiquitous in our society, part and parcel of contemporary American life. Trevor Norris writes, “Western society is increasingly oriented around consumption: the act of consumption, the desire to consume, and the extensive communicative apparatus designed to celebrate consumption and elaborate its signification.” Consuming is so pervasive that it has traversed from the functional to the constitutional, to the domain of being. While binding and defining us with certain individuals and social groups, and simultaneously setting us apart from other segments of society, consumption signifies and forms our identities, practices, values, and beliefs. Norris, author of Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics, argues that “consuming is construed as an affirmation of self, a way of acting in the world, of expressing one’s identity and difference and participation in something larger than oneself.” Consuming is much more than purchasing products; it is meaningful interaction, communication, and construction.

As such, consumption works on both the personal and social level. I devote Chapter 3 to meat consumption as individual habit and in Chapter 4 I examine the

15 Martin, Education Reconfigured, 22.
17 Trevor Norris, Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 22.
consumption of animals on the broader societal level. But we have to be careful not to automatically think that consumerism, the ideology, is always synonymous with consumption. Yes, the two overlap but there is still a distinction to make. One way to differentiate between the two—the ideology of consumerism, on one hand, and consumption as the literal act of eating, on the other—is to discuss the ontology of becoming through food. This will help us maintain an embodied view of consumption, even as we analyze the more distant cultural norms of consumerism.

It is important to think of eating animals as a unique—and not unique—form of consumption. Of course, we know that meat is a type of food, and food is not special since we eat every day; meat food, for most of us, is routine, mundane, and not unique in this sense. At the same time, food, and thus meat, is an exceptional form of consumption because, more than symbolically constructing and reifying the self, we physically become through engagement and assimilation of what is edible. “Food stands in an ontological relationship to the self,” writes food scholar Glen Kuehn, because “I know that what I eat will be incorporated into my being.”\(^{18}\) The same cannot be said for other goods or images we consume. For example, students consume messages and advertisements through Channel One in schools, but the television program does not literally become part of their physicality because students do not literally eat the program (though they may consume the food advertised on the program).

Carol Adams, author of the seminal work, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, argues that meat eating is a uniquely horrific form

of consumption because it requires the complete annihilation of the animal body. She writes:

"Meat eating is the most oppressive and extensive institutionalized violence against animals. In addition, meat eating offers the grounds for subjugating animals: if we can kill, butcher, and consume them—in other words, completely annihilate them—we may, as well, experiment upon them, trap and hunt them, [and] exploit them."

As Adams observes, meat eating is not the only way humans methodically deprive animals of their most basic needs, pleasures, and interests; however, the total obliteration of the animal body, coupled with the enormous scale of this institution, is what makes meat eating a uniquely tyrannical human-nonhuman relationship.

I partly disagree. In order to consume animal flesh, a living animal must be killed, not annihilated. Killing a pig for ham indeed puts an end to her life, but we do not completely eradicate her because pork consumption constitutes the integration of dead pig flesh into our living bodies. Through this encounter, more specifically the bodily sense of taste—the “most physically intimate of the five senses”—we ingest and absorb the dead (AP, 235). “Taste,” Kuehn expresses, “cannot be experienced without our taking a bit of the world and putting it into our body… The objects we taste are assimilated, processed, and transformed through the body” (AP, 235). Through the taste-sense encounter, the dead inanimate other, as objectified meat, does not vanish but becomes one with our living self. Most of us are meat eaters: it is not just what we do but who we are, as part of our physical constitution as well as social identity.

Nevertheless, we have trouble grasping the meaning of consuming animals because we are continually taught consumerism’s perennial lesson of conceptual and

19 Carol Adams, The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory, 10th Anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2006), 81. This work will be cited in the text as SPM for all subsequent references.
physical disconnection. At this juncture, I find promising a methodology and literary style that refutes conceptual disconnecting through writing that establishes a more accurate depiction of consuming animals. Connection, through language, will bring the cow back to the center of our thoughts, just as the hamburger is on the center of our plates.

**The Purposes of My Methodology**

This dissertation is theoretical and normative but it is also descriptive. I attempt to describe and analyze the problems that I see in the world and also offer some suggestions for the way things ought to be. But there is an important literary methodology that I employ to complement and support the philosophical *ought*.

Most of us are very detached from the sources of our food and we take it largely for granted that meals have not always been ready for us to purchase at the supermarket or restaurant. We lack food historicity. As meat consumers, we don’t object too much from the modern disconnection from food and have become very proficient in distancing ourselves from farm animals—through both physical distance that keeps the bodily presence of animals remote from our bodies and through metaphorical and linguistic means. While I cannot do anything about the reader’s physical distance from food sources and animals, I hope to eliminate some of the conceptual distance.

I will use a form of critical discourse analysis to deconstruct the symbols and language that have become ubiquitous and normal in referring to meat and meat eating. I am inspired by Adams, whose work primarily focuses on the intersection of the exploitation and objectification of women and animals. Her discussion of the “absent referent” is central to my literary approach. The absent referent, Adams explains, “is that
which separates the meat eater from the animals and the animals from the end product” 
(SPM, 14). The absent referent works on both literal and metaphorical levels. Humans 
make food animals absent from view by killing them, dismembering them, and then 
turning them into edible, disembodied products. We don’t eat full-bodied animals. 
Figuratively, animals are “made absent through language that renames dead bodies before 
consumers participate in eating them” (SPM, 51). The absent referent demonstrates how 
our language enables conceptual disconnection and mirrors physical and spatial distance. 
For example, we use safe, inaccurate terms, such as “bacon” and “veal,” instead of using 
more accurate, descriptive language, such as “cuts of pig stomach” or “carcass remains of 
calves.” If we look at the way we talk about meat, we see how we avoid emotional 
complication and evade deeper thought about the full history of animals-becoming-
meat—that is, the agricultural and killing practices that turn living, breathing creatures 
into edible pieces of meat. As long as we see, think, and speak of only the final product 
(the meat) and not the agricultural practices or slaughter (the animal-becoming-meat), the 
façade and symbols of mere “meat” will prevail as understanding and change will elude 
us.

My writing exposes and challenges the discourse that distances humans from farm 
animals and also from the rearing and killing processes that turn animals into meat. I will 
try to describe, as accurately and honestly as I can, all that is involved in animals-
becoming-meat. For example, instead of “meat eating,” I often use the phrases 
“consuming animals” or “eating animals.” But these terms are also too vague to suffice 
for precise depictions. I want to be authentic, so as I use even more accurate phrases, 
such as “murdered, dismembered flesh of animals” or “pieces of animal carcass,” know
that my intent is not to be vulgar. I use these terms to bring attention to the literal killing and dismembering of the animal, which is easier to forget about when we remove animal bodies by fragmenting our language with misleading terms such as “pork chop” or “steak.” We should not cut the truth into pieces with language that devalues animal lives and deceives human beings.

My choice of words will at times seem more applicable to the farmer than to the classroom teacher. This is a deliberate move. We have become accustomed to discourse that allows us to forget that meat is primarily a subject of farming and the land, of plants and animals, of labor and work—not of obesity, cholesterol, heart disease, or colon cancer. And since prose and methodology are irrevocably interconnected with substance and content, no matter what field of study, we will be heading into unsettling, yet enthralling, ground. In order to take the consumption of animals seriously, we must take animal farming and slaughtering seriously—for it would be impossible to consume meat if humans did not make meat consumable. I will try to bring out all the real, felt qualities of meat production—the suffering, confinement, agony, butchering, dismembering and killing that makes meat possible. This will help us bring more consciousness to the act of consuming animals and thus better situate my main argument that consuming animals is an educational act brimming with potential and meaning.

If nothing else, after reading this dissertation one should think of meat eating in a new, more serious way. But beyond this aim, I also hope that the graphic language and the repugnant details of animals-becoming-meat, coupled with the theoretical arguments, taunt the reader’s conscience. “The desire of an individual,” writes Dewey, “to keep his own conscience stainless by standing aloof from badness may be a sure means of causing
evil and thus of creating personal responsibility for it.” Conventional words and ways of thinking about food, education, and meat will keep us aloof, impeding meaningful self-examination and change. Conventional language will only reinforce the status quo, the docile consumption habits that give force to rampant animal suffering and death.

**Conclusion**

Consuming animals is an educational act but most of us do not see it as such. Before, during, and after this intimate encounter—the ritual of eating flesh—we remain largely unaware of the plight of farm animals, largely ignorant of how they live and die. Consumerism allows us to eat from a place of distance, detachment, and ignorance. This explains why it is so common for caring and intelligent people to live their entire lives without ever questioning or showing any sympathy for the methodical and brutal domination of billions of farm animals. I am aware that acquiring new knowledge and understanding about this domination does not mean that a person will eat more mindfully and compassionately. I am also aware that it can be incredibly difficult to change deeply-entrenched habits, especially food habits that involve so much pleasure, comfort, and familial and cultural tradition. Moreover, in directly upsetting and challenging animal consumption, I cannot help but directly challenge the readers’ personal habits and cherished traditions. I also know that what one eats is not the whole of a person; this theoretical exploration simply pushes the reader to begin to think that it constitutes an important part. Part of this push involves retracing the history of philosophical thought pertaining to the moral status of animals.

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Chapter 2

Animal Ethics: A Brief Overview

Those concerned about the extension of the moral community...must become educators.
–Bernard Rollin

Introduction

Before we look to the educational possibilities that arise in consuming animals, it is important to explore how philosophy has shaped both the restriction and the extension of the moral community concerning animals. I will begin by briefly showing how the Western philosophical tradition has justified human dominion over nonhuman beings as well as laid the groundwork for attributing nonhumans with moral worth. Then I outline the main contemporary arguments of animal ethics, the branch of moral philosophy addressing human obligations to animals. Finally, as a way to conclude the chapter, I discuss why I endorse the ethical approach of the “pragmatic pluralist,” which is a version of moral pluralism that can be traced back to John Dewey’s reconstruction of traditional ethics. Compared to the conventional ethical theories of, for instance, deontology and consequentialism, Dewey and several contemporary pragmatists present a more experiential, nuanced, and dynamic approach to analyze moral problems that

honors the coexistence of several moral values and ends. I see the purpose of a philosophical-educational project dedicated to the complex moral act of eating animals working toward multiple—and, at times, conflicting—aims. By traversing the expansive field of animal ethics as a pragmatic pluralist, with a particular interest in eating animals, I hope to make clear some of the main values that motivated me to write this dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to establish an adequate theoretical and moral footing—because it surely cannot be comprehensive—before discussing the consumption of animals as an educational act.

I have three points to make before I move on with my analysis. First, the field of animal ethics is very large, encompassing a wide range of topics and questions. As interesting as other ethical practices involving animals are, such as animal experimentation, vivisection, zoos, pet ownership, and hunting, I will keep the analysis on the act of meat eating. I discussed the reasons for this in the Chapter 1, and each subsequent chapter gives further justification for why I chose this topic of study. But for now it would be apt to mention that consuming animals matters greatly, especially from the lens of an applied ethicist, because of the global scale of systemic suffering and killing it sustains. Through meat eating, individuals support the institution of industrialized intensive animal agriculture and slaughtering, and this institution is the leading cause of suffering among all sentient creatures on this planet, including humans.

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22 See Kerry S. Walters and Lisa Portmess, eds., Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999). This is a collection of primary sources advocating a vegetarian diet for moral reasons, including the writings of Pythagoras, Porphyry, Percy Shelley, Richard Wagner, Leo Tolstoy, Henry Salt, Mohandas Gandhi, Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Carol Adams, and France Moore Lappe.
Second, philosophers who work in animal ethics come from a number of moral and theoretical traditions and employ varying methodologies. It would be impossible to do justice to the diversity of theories and arguments in animal ethics, for they have not developed under a single unified lens or sub-branch of philosophy. Here I can only sketch some of the prevailing commonalities of some of the most influential figures who attempt to answer the field’s guiding question: Why should we, as human moral agents, have ethical obligations to nonhuman animals? I suggest that this question is both provocative and instructive for philosophy of education, and that it is fundamental to ask in order to broaden our intellectual and moral perception—as not only scholars but as human persons living and interacting daily with nonhumans in the world.

And finally, in remaining true to value pluralism, I have no single overarching moral theory encompassing the moral principles and values that I hold integral to this project. In other words, I don’t label myself a deontologist, for example, and then continue to analyze the moral question of meat eating solely from the arguments of rights and inherent value. What attracts me to pragmatic pluralism is that it is an approach (and not so much a theory, as I’ll explain later) that requires we proceed in inquiry from a variety of theoretical and ethical standpoints, always with an open mind for discovering a multiplicity of moral ends. I emphasize the word “discovering” because the pragmatic pluralist does not hold strictly to that one authoritative moral rule to universalize; instead the pragmatic pluralist seeks to unearth multiple goods in any given moral situation. While, for the sake of clarity, I will eventually argue for human growth and the alleviation of suffering as morel ends, I offer several theories and thinkers in the upcoming pages in order to highlight a range of perspectives, arguments, and values that I
want readers to see as important when thinking about animal ethics in general and consuming nonhumans in particular.

**Philosophy and the Moral Status of Animals**

*Classical and Historical Interpretations*

It is necessary to familiarize ourselves with a brief, though sure enough insufficient, account of the Western philosophical tradition concerning human moral obligations, or more precisely, a lack thereof, toward nonhuman animals. Coupled with the Judeo-Christian religious tradition of human dominion (Genesis 1:24-28 and 9:1-3), the canonical figures in philosophy have essentially legitimized human superiority over the nonhuman world. Since the philosophical history of animal worth is not the topic of my dissertation, and since my aim is to directly connect the moral status of animals to educational theory by elaborating on the arguments for the ethical treatment of animals, I must get straight to the point concerning philosophical positions denying moral worth to animals.

Remaining dear to two of the most renowned and influential thinkers in Western civilization, Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant, modern philosophy has, for the most part, validated the view that human beings are of moral worth because we possess a unique capacity for rational thought, a capacity that other creatures lack and that the foundation of human morality rests. Often acknowledged as the founder of modernity, Descartes was a revolutionary philosopher and the basis of his view on animals adheres to his larger philosophy that ushered in a revolution in Western culture, the Enlightenment. Descartes espoused a radically dichotomous view (even further than

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Plato) that split the body and mind; the material matter and automatic functions of bodies on one side, and the rational immortal human soul on the other. Since animals do not and cannot possess rational thought like humans, they are soulless, mechanistically imprinted beings. Without thought or language, limited and subservient to the physical realm, it is in animal nature, Descartes argued, to be mere automata and function like clocks:

> I know that animals do many things better than we do, but this does not surprise me. It can even be used to prove they act naturally and mechanically, like a clock which tells the time better than our judgment does. Doubtless when the swallows come in spring, they operate like clocks....if they thought as we do, they would have an immortal soul like us. This is unlikely, because there is no reason to believe it of some animals without believing it of all, and many of them such as oysters and sponges are too imperfect for this to be credible.24

Today we know how diverse and complex the animal kingdom is; we know that there is a big difference between a pig and an oyster, between a sponge and a bird; and that, as Charles Darwin and many, many scientists and philosophers since have demonstrated, we are much more similar to many animals than many animals are to each other. In other words, we, as human animals, are much more similar to dolphins than dolphins are to “imperfect” oysters.

But assume, for the sake of argument, he was right that animals do not think rationally. How does Descartes know that animals lack thought and thus a soul? (An equally interesting question: How does he know that rational thought is a precondition to an immortal soul?) His answer is because animals cannot speak and humans can. Speech is the requisite for soul possession; it is the realm of rational thought that transcends the physical and material. No “brute animal reached the stage of using real speech, that is to say, of indicating by word or sign something pertaining to pure thought and not to natural

impulse. Such speech is the only certain sign of thought hidden in a body.”  

Humans, not animals, are abstract, linguistically-capable beings, and ultimately the only beings who possess a soul. Consequently, Descartes maintained that animals, since they cannot think or speak like humans, cannot really feel pain or suffer like humans. Thus, human beings are the only beings deserving of membership in the moral community.

We now know that the seventeenth-century Descartes was wrong about nonhuman intelligence. In fact, he would most likely be astounded by just how wrong he was; he would be astounded by “the whole range of animal studies now suggest that the roots of [animal] cognition are deep, widespread, and highly malleable.” Many nonhumans not only have the capacity to think, suffer, and feel pain but also to experience joy, grief, fear, empathy, and sorrow. All these are important moral traits. Nevertheless, the arguments denying animals moral worth, emanating from the philosophical founder of modernity, would gain even stronger momentum.

Kant, whose influence on moral theory remains unparalleled, may represent the most commonly held view among philosophers working in ethics. He believed that animals deserve our attention and responsibility, but in an indirect way: “so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious, and are

there merely as a means to an end. That end is man.”28 It is human rationality that gives us moral standing as persons, which must be denied to animals since they are not rational creatures. But denying animals status as persons, Kant argued, does not mean humans should not be indifferent regarding the treatment with animals since our “duties toward animals…are indirect duties toward mankind.” He offers the example of vivisectionists, those who dissect live animals, to support this view. Vivisectionists who “use living animals for their experiments, certainly act cruelly, although their aim is praiseworthy, and they can justify their cruelty, since animals must be regarded as man’s instruments.”29

As moral agents, there are some limitations in our behavior with animals for Kant. We should not be cruel to animals or abuse them, without good reasons—that is, there should be some morally significant human benefit that is the product of the animal cruelty—because the cruelty could possible affect our morality for the worse by either (1) degenerating one’s own character, or (2) by running the risk of infringing on the respect of another rational human. I should not beat my dog, not because abusing dogs is intrinsically wrong, but because that act might damage my morality or may desensitize me to treating other humans in abusive ways. Julia Driver highlights the weakness of the Kantian indirect duty view:

If someone tortures a kitten, what makes that wrong is that it harms the kitten unnecessarily; it may also corrupt that person’s character further, and that is a bad thing too, but that all by itself does not exhaust the immorality of the action. It is

29 Ibid., 241.
wrong because it harms the animal. This problem is a fairly significant one for the Kantian.  

Under Kant’s view, my actions toward my dog or cat are to be judged on how they relate to human beings; my pets are instruments for some other end (human morality). The moral question at stake is not one of animal happiness, interest, respect, or life, since the morality of an action is solely determined by its impact on rational beings, who for Kant, animals are not.

The rationalist views of Descartes and Kant, while different in some ways, are representative of the prevailing view in Western philosophy concerning the moral status of nonhumans. Ultimately, without direct moral value, like that of a human being, animals continue to be the objects and instruments of human utility. Since this has been the norm—and at least until the late 20th century, a largely unexamined one at that—we should concern ourselves with the bold, forward-thinking exceptions, which philosophy never fails to provide.

Prior to modernity, most philosophers in ancient Greece held positions that considered animals as inferior to humans and lacking moral dignity. However, there were a few pre-Socratic philosophers in antiquity Greece and Rome—most notably, Pythagoras, Plutarch, and Porphyry—who espoused human obligations to nonhumans, and even for the moral equality and kinship of all living things. Pythagoras (570-490), best known for his contributions in mathematics and music, was the first of the philosophers in the West, as far as we know, to condemn eating animals for moral and spiritual reasons. A vegetarian life-style, termed in ancient Greece as “Pythagoreanism”

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or the “Pythagorean Diet,” was rooted in a spiritual basis of “soul transmigration.” For Pythagoras, the human soul may migrate into other human or animal bodies after we die. To eat animals, then, would amount to eating human souls. But motivation for the Pythagorean Diet didn’t stem from spiritual reasons alone. Kerry Walters and Lisa Portmess, editors of *Ethical Vegetarianism: From Pythagoras to Peter Singer*, write that Pythagoras held the conviction—indeed, preached this conviction—that animals deserve justice: “An intricate conjoining of both cosmological and moral reasons for abstinence, Pythagoras’s vegetarianism springs from a sense that we do justice both to ourselves and to our ancestors, as well as to animals themselves, when we abstain from eating their flesh.”

Since Pythagoras, like Socrates after him, never wrote anything down himself, we are left to piece together his thought from the writings of his disciples, other antiquity poets and philosophers.

Iamblichus wrote that Pythagoras “forbade men to kill animals at all, much less could he have allowed his disciples to eat them, since they have a right to live in common with mankind.”

Ovid, the Roman poet, writes of Pythagoras’s teachings:

> … He was first
> To say that animal food should not be eaten…
> Oh, what a wicked thing it is for flesh
> To be the tomb of flesh, for the body’s craving
> To fatten on the body of another,
> For one live creature to continue living
> Through one live creature’s death...
> Our souls
> Are deathless; always, when they leave our bodies,
> They will find new dwelling-places…
> All things are always changing,
> But nothing dies. The spirit comes and goes,

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Is housed wherever it wills, shifts residence
From beasts to men, from men to beasts, but always
It keeps on living...
I warn you
By all the priesthood in me, do not exile
What may be kindred souls by evil slaughter.
Blood should not nourish blood…
An evil habit, impious preparation,
Wicked as human bloodshed, to draw the knife
Across the throat of the calf, and hear its anguish
Cry to deaf ears!...
One might as well do murder; he is only
The shortest step away…
Let appetite refrain from flesh, take only
A gentler nourishment.\(^{33}\)

To the modern secular mind, soul transmigration may seem dubious and eccentric
grounds for viewing animals as moral equals or for adhering to a meat-free diet.

However, in recording the teachings of Pythagoras, Ovid is demonstrating that abstaining
from eating animals was a defining essence of human morality and spirituality for one of
the founders of Western philosophy. The point is that, if this moral question was
important enough to comprise a central tenet and teaching of Pythagoras, then we, today,
should at least recognize it as attention-worthy and see what happens when we take on
the same question, contextualized and applicable to a contemporary world.

Fast-forwarding over 2,000 years, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the few of
the eighteenth-century philosophers to embrace a position that brought animals into our
realm of ethical contemplation based not on what separates us from them, i.e., degree of
reason, but on what unites human and nonhuman: nature and sentience. The Swiss-born
philosopher was undoubtedly sympathetic toward other animals, explaining why, for
instance, he advocates a vegetarian diet for his student, Emile, in his classic treatise on

\(^{33}\) Ovid, “The Teachings of Pythagoras,” in Ethical Vegetarianism, 16, 17, 19, and 22.
education, *Emile*. Just before he provides a very lengthy excerpt of Plutarch’s evocation of a diet free of animal flesh, Rousseau argues for vegetarianism for both natural and moral reasons. It is “important,” he writes, “not to denature this primitive taste and make children carnivorous.”34 Rousseau also posits sentience, the capacity to feel pain and to suffer, as a starting point in ceasing human mistreatment of animals. “It seems that if I am obliged not to do any harm to my fellow man, it is less because he is a rational being than because he is a sentient being: a quality that, since it is common to both animals and men, should at least give the former the right not to be needlessly mistreated by the latter.”35 While Rousseau never articulated a sophisticated animal rights argument or theory, he was undoubtedly concerned about the moral status of animals—and in not eating them—because humans and animals, both sentient beings, have certain qualities in common that Nature has bestowed upon us. Like-minded philosophers would echo his sentiments.

Utilitarianism has played a salient role in advocating for the moral standing of animals. This English philosopher and “father” of modern utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, allegorized the suffering and exploitation of animals with the suffering of humans (specifically, black slaves). In 1789, Bentham observed that it is not Kant’s rationality that motivates human beings to affirm and treat others with moral respect, but the capacity for suffering, which animals too possess. In what has become a celebrated passage for animal advocates of all sorts, Bentham proposed:

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The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may come one day to be recognized, that the number of the legs, the villoosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line?...Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond the comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old... The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?36

The binding quality of sentience between human and animal would later occupy a foundational role for much more elaborate theoretical models in granting animals with equal moral consideration and eventually rights.

Contemporary Theories of Animal Ethics

I now move to offer a summation of the main contemporary approaches in grounding a theoretical ethic toward animals.37 Again, my intent is not to endorse all of these theories or to fully trace the evolution of animal ethics. My purpose, instead, is to introduce the arguments that challenge the prevailing view that animals do not deserve equal moral consideration, which is not the same thing as equal treatment. Ethical consideration entails reflection and deliberation on competing and/or mutual interests that arise in our moral relationships with others. Consideration paves the way for treatment. Moral treatment is actual conduct or action. It may be helpful to think of a distinction most of us are familiar with, the difference between prejudice and discrimination.

37 I draw heavily on the works of Peter Singer (1946-) and Tom Regan (1938-), who, while no means the authoritative voices on animal ethics, are leading figures in applying philosophical arguments to the moral status of animals. Both continue to impact ethical theory, public debate, and the animal rights movement at large.
Prejudice is an intolerant, biased attitude or way of thinking, while discrimination is acting on that prejudiced attitude. In the case of morals, it is largely acceptable, at the moral consideration level, that all human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, age, sex, etc., deserve a basic level of dignity and respect, merely for the fact that we are human (soon we will question this presumption). However, just because we consider human equality to be the case does not make it the case in the world. It is the case that all humans are treated unequally, even as we believe in equal treatment. I mentioned how diverse the field of animal ethics is, but one thing that all animal ethicists believe in is that we should raise animals up to the plane of equal consideration with humans—and we must acknowledge that doing so does not require equal treatment with humans; that is, animal rights, in practice, look differently than human rights (though there are some common features).

A predominant force behind animal subjugation is species hierarchy—the idea that it is morally acceptable to mistreat, violate, or kill animals because they are biologically of a different and lower kind. But what does “species” mean? And why is it that philosophers hold species up as a defining morally-relevant characteristic? While human dominion did not begin with the emergence of species, and while the question of animal oppression could be approached from a number of philosophical, scientific, historical, or religious angles (e.g., Cartesian and Kantian moral philosophy or Christianity), it is key to expose how structural domination is reinforced through
species—a broad construct encompassing plant and animal life—in which humans have placed ourselves at the apex of the taxonomical order of all life.\(^{38}\)

In his important article, “Species as a Social Construction: Is Species Morally Relevant?” Daniel Elstein writes, “to make moral distinctions based on species in itself, without reference to what species consists of, is to make distinctions based on nothing.”\(^{39}\) The phrase “social construction” does not mean that there is nothing to distinguish different life-forms from one another in nature. Unquestionably, there are differences, very real and observable differences, between humans and animals, just as there are distinctions that can be made between animals and other animals, between one form of plant life and another. But there are also very real observable and describable differences between human and humans, between men and women, between the elderly and infants, and between “whites” and “blacks.” So, the question becomes: what differences, between human and nonhuman species, matter morally? And why?

Inquiry into species as a social construction is not so much concerned that variation exists or doesn’t exist, but is more concerned with species as a manufactured concept that establishes rigid categories and hierarchal meaning, from which humans construct and base practices of dominion and exploitation of other-than-\textit{Homo sapiens}. We should question the essentialist view of species because humans have used species to fix clear-cut natures and boundaries that provide the dubious “scientific” evidence that humans are simply partaking in the natural order of things when we (unnecessarily) exploit or kill other species.


I do not think it is a stretch to presume that most people believe that species is an objective fact based on scientific understanding of nature. That is, to talk of species is to refer to an unbiased categorization of biological life-forms, a value-free way of classifying groups of organisms to document and arrange the natural state of the world. However, the very notion of scientific fact should at least turn our heads because facts are not—they cannot be—formed independent of social context and circumstances. Like other categories, such as race, gender, and disability (all scientific “facts” at one time), species is not something that exists as an essential biological reality, independent of human culture. Rather, it arises out of human interpretations of difference. Invented by a certain group of humans to exist, species is contingent upon socially shared meanings that differ with time and place.

Philosophers today are more knowledgeable and attuned to the many similarities between human animals and nonhuman animals largely thanks to Charles Darwin’s revolutionary work. The psychological, emotional, and social capacities—the continuities—that Darwin perceived between human and nonhuman life-forms now serve as legitimate bases for moral standing. Fixed natures and rigid divisions between human and animal become, with Darwin, unstable and unconvincing: Humans are animals. Elstein continues:

In the 19th century, Charles Darwin refuted the prevailing Western view that the world was naturally divided into essential categories of plants and animals. Formally, his discovery radically altered our understanding of the workings of nature. It taught us not to see the world as Aristotle did: as divided into essential natural kinds with inherent separations between masters and slaves, men and women, and humans and animals. But, often unconsciously, the pre-Darwinian worldview of essentially existing species continues to drive many of our philosophical and moral attitudes. We have abandoned the Aristotelian tendency to believe that some humans are naturally inferior, because of their essence, to other humans. But we have not yet done this in our beliefs about nonhuman
animals… This bias is not easily dispelled, especially given that it has been ingrained in Western culture since Plato.\textsuperscript{40} If we take some time to look beyond the superficial differences in appearances between two different species, not just between \textit{Homo Sapiens} and other species, but among animal species, too—say, a pig and a dog—we would see that there are some meaningful morally-relevant continuities between the two, and that pigs deserve a better life.\textsuperscript{41} Yet in America, we not only kill over 100 million pigs annually, but we raise them in morally reprehensible systems; while we find the idea of doing so with the dog is cruel and wrong. The reasons for the conspicuous disparity in how we relate with the two species are weak and unfounded.

In what may still be considered a novel statement in certain scientific and philosophical communities that structure their patterns, concepts, and professions around species categorization and hierarchy, Darwin concluded: “I look at the term species as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other, and that it does not essentially differ from the term variety.”\textsuperscript{42} “Arbitrary” is not a word scientists and philosophers tend to welcome as legitimate grounds for their work, let alone for structuring morality. Darwin also wrote: “there is no \textit{fundamental} difference between man and the higher mammals in their mental faculties,”\textsuperscript{43} and any differences are of degree, not kind. In \textit{Descent of Man}, Darwin

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Elstein, “Species as a Social Construction,” 10 (italics original).
\end{itemize}
writes, “We have seen that the senses and intuitions, the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention and curiosity, imitation, reason etc., of which man boasts, may be found in an incipient, or even sometimes in a well-developed condition, in the lower animals.” After Darwin, the traditional world-view that humans and animals are categorically dissimilar, each possessing an essential nature, clearly fixed and delineated, implodes under careful philosophical and biological scrutiny.

The scientific foundation of species is tenuous at best. The ways scientists use the concept depends on societal values and the epistemological standpoint of the particular field; species is not, as widely believed, employed throughout the sciences in a universal, objective fashion. Elstein finds that “there is currently no universally accepted species concept in the scientific community.” Different scientific fields have varying definitions and meanings of species, thus use the concept differently. Furthermore, scientists do not work in a vacuum and are influenced by, and beholden to, a variety of institutional, social, and political forces. “Societal values” influence the “biological categories,” and if science and the general public based notions of species on genetic similarity, then “humans should be considered apes, since we are genetically closer to chimpanzees than chimpanzees are to orangutans. It is only for historical and social reasons that biologists do not consider humans as apes.” As if fixed and absolute, modern humans continue to celebrate the species hierarchy to further anthropocentric agendas. However, species is a problematic construction, one that is relativistic and culturally situated.45

44 As quoted in Singer, Animal Liberation, 206.
I’ve come off as critical of science and even the larger revolution of the Enlightenment, but make no mistake about it, with science and reason guiding his work, Darwin was a quintessential Enlightenment figure: his contributions were integral to this revolution in philosophy, science, and culture. I’m not suggesting that all those who were the products of the Enlightenment were wrong.

The purpose of analyzing species is not only to clarify and expose flawed assumptions, but also to illustrate how species classification contributes to real suffering in the world. Species provides the momentum in configuring human supremacy over animals. Scholars of critical animal studies explore how the socially constructed identities of gender and race intersect with the human/animal construction, illustrating how systems of category, hierarchy, language, and meaning are imposed onto both nonhumans and humans. When human beings craft categorical structures such as species, they simultaneously construct hierarchal value systems. And the meaning we shape from our schematic knowledge of the world influences—put more strongly, determines—how we behave in the world. Species functions as a way to not only order and name others, but to provide discursive meanings of superiority and inferiority, which then serve as a basis for subjugation. Difference and inferiority are institutionalized and internalized. In time, beliefs of “less-than” transpire into dominant practices that privilege and give power to some groups (whites, men, humans,) while silencing and disempowering others (people of color, women, animals). All of this is evident with animals in the taxonomy of species.

The self-anointed ascent to the top of the species hierarchy brings with it ideologies and relationships of hegemony over all species other than *Homo sapiens*. Erika Cudworth denotes how species constitutes the entire conceptual and practical order of human dominion:

> We do not (just) live in societies which discriminate against non-human species. Rather, we live in societies which are organized around a species hierarchy, a hierarchy in which the needs, desires, interests and even whims of human beings shape the kinds of relationships we are likely to have with non-human species.\(^47\)

The whims Cudworth mentions manifest themselves in the animal furs and skins we wear as shoes, belts, purses, jackets, and countless other commodities; to the zoos and circuses we frequent for entertainment; and to the main form of animal exploitation: the breeding, rearing, and killing of animals for food. Now let us move to those who say that species is not a morally-relevant characteristic, arguing in support of respectful and ethical relationships with animals based on moral reasons that transcend the species barrier.

*Moral Interests and Rights: Peter Singer and Tom Regan*

Thorough in scope and methodical in logical argumentation, contemporary moral philosophers have constructed arguments for the extension of the moral community based heavily on Darwinian theory. Applied ethicists, in particular, draw on both empirical and philosophical evidence to support their positions for the moral standing of animals. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, a growing body of literature in moral philosophy increasingly addressed ethical duties to nonhuman species. From opposite theoretical camps, Peter Singer, a utilitarian, and Tom Regan, a deontologist, provide the seminal moral theories concerning the ethical treatment of animals. Although Singer, ever since

the publication of *Animal Liberation* in 1975, is often heralded as the founder of the animal rights movement, his arguments in fact do not advocate granting rights to animals, per se. With his signature marriage of utilitarian philosophizing and the use of empirical data—mainly in the form of graphic details and the mind-boggling facts and figures exposing the horrors of factory farming and animal experimentation—Singer’s work remains paramount for the theoretical underpinnings for an ethic toward animals.

Any serious discussion of Singer’s work needs to be approached in the language of “interests” rather than “rights.” Singer shows his consequentialist colors early in *Animal Liberation* when he quotes Bentham’s popular excerpt about animal suffering and then proceeds to argue, rather persuasively, that human beings, given our choices as moral agents, need to radically rethink and ultimately change our violent and murderous practices involving animals (such as factory farming and animal experimentation) because the consequences produce more harm than good, more pain and suffering than pleasure and happiness. Some (sentient) animals are equal to humans in terms of considering their interests—that is, both human and animal interests are to be given equal deliberation—which are established from the capacity for suffering. We ought to take the interests of animals as seriously as our own when “the interests of every being affected by an action” can be “taken into account and given the same weight as the like interests of any other being.”48 For Singer, the way to judge human actions concerning animals as moral or immoral is a matter of calculating the suffering of all parties. And if I fail to consider the suffering of another sentient being like myself when I am morally required to do so, I am guilty of speciesism—“a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the

interests of members of one’s own species and against those of members of other species.”

We have a moral obligation to apply equal consideration in our actions in which both animal interest and human interest coalesce in order to take nonhuman and human suffering into account equally, and, when in our power to do so, lessen that suffering. Now, this is not to say that sentient animals and sentient humans are to be treated equally; the moral imperative is moral consideration. A pig’s interest for a comfortable, pain-free life is determined by the pig’s capacity. It makes no sense to talk of pigs voting and gaining citizenship status, for example. On the other hand, it does make sense to talk about a pig not being confined in gestation crates, subjected to tail-docking, and forced to live her entire life indoors on hard concrete floors. Sentience establishes a base line of moral consideration and basic treatment is relative to the life-form under consideration.

Like Singer, Regan believes that devoting conceptual energies to animals is not a matter of sympathy or care; it is a matter of justice, supported by a rational theoretical foundation. But unlike Singer, Regan is influenced by Kantian moral theory and assumes a rights view in establishing his ethic for nonhuman species. He contends that neither contractarianism nor calculating utilitarianism are sufficient moral paradigms; the former excludes those beings, human and nonhuman, who lack the mental fitness to form a contract, while the latter treats beings, human and nonhuman, as expendable resources for the greater good. Regan’s animal rights view stems from a deeper theory of moral rights. His passage below lays bare the deeper principle that drives his call for the rights of animals. The rights view is “rationally the most satisfactory moral theory,” he argues, for

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49 Singer, Animal Liberation, 6. For more on Singer’s discussion of speciesism, see “Speciesism Today,” in Animal Liberation, 213-248.
it “illuminates and explains the foundation of our duties to one another—the domain of human morality.” Regan continues:

To say that we have [inherent] value is to say that we are something more than, something different from, mere receptacles. Moreover, to insure that we do not pave the way for such injustices as slavery or sexual discrimination, we must believe that all who have inherent value have it equally, regardless of their sex, race, religion, birthplace, and so on… The genius and the retarded child, the prince and the pauper, the brain surgeon and the fruit vendor, Mother Theresa and the most unscrupulous used car salesman—all have inherent value, all possess it equally, and all have an equal right to be treated with respect, to be treated in ways that do not reduce them to the status of things, as if they exist as resources for others. My value as an individual is independent of my usefulness to you. Yours is not dependent on your usefulness to me. For either of us to treat the other in ways that fail to show respect for the other’s independent value is to act immorally—is to violate the individual’s rights.  

In this excerpt Regan includes no mention of animals, and, as long as he is only referring to humans, I would say that most people would agree with him. But why? Why do we believe in human rights based on inherent value? And why is adding animals to the realm of inherent value so difficult for humans to accept? Let’s examine his next move in which he attributes inherent value to animals.

Expanding Kant’s “kingdom of ends” beyond the condition of rationality, Regan maintains an unwavering deontological rights position that requires human moral agents to respect those animals, who, just as human beings, are “subjects-of-a-life.” These are beings who have an inherent value that “fares well or ill for them,” and that is independent to both the “utility” and “interests” of others. All beings who are subjects-of-a-life—a status not solely reserved for those who hold membership to the species, Homo sapiens—are conscious beings who have a life, as they experience it. Subjects-of-a-life possess the capacity to experience pleasure, enjoyment, and pain; the aptitude to

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express desires, motivations, and interests; and they are able to demonstrate preferences, 
satisfactions, and expectations. Due to these capacities, subjects-of-a-life, Regan argues, 
should never be viewed or treated as means to another end, and always ends-in-
themselves; they are worthy of an “equal right to respectful treatment.” Therefore, if a 
nonhuman being is a subject-of-a-life, given the criteria above, then, in order to be 
intelligible and consistent in our morals, we must ascribe respectful treatment to that 
particular being and act accordingly, i.e., honor his or her rights. Human beings commit 
an unequivocal moral wrong, judges Regan, when we not just take, but harm, a subject-
of-a-life for our own purposes, regardless of the positive consequences for us. Kant 
justified inherent value with human rationality; Regan does so with subject-of-a-life. 51

Regan proposes that humans do not honor the capacity for rationality as a basis 
for moral respect among fellow human beings—or at least to the degree we claim to. We 
are quick to attribute intrinsic value to all humans, regardless of mental faculties and 
intellectual capabilities; we are just as quick to disallow all animals, regardless of mental 
faculties, inherent value. Most of us live our lives assuming that all of humankind 
possesses intrinsic value, including, for example, severely cognitively disabled persons, 
infants, senile or elderly persons, and others incapable of demonstrating rationality, 
autonomy, or higher-level reasoning. We should not tolerate exploitation and abuse of 
these human beings, and rightfully so, Regan affirms. Nor do we believe that there are 
degrees of inherent value (which is to say that I, since I possess the intelligence and self-
awareness to write this chapter contain more worth than the many humans who cannot do 
so), and that this belief in the equality of inherent value is morally correct. He explains:

There are some who resist the idea that animals have inherent value. ‘Only humans have such value,’ they profess. How might this narrow view be defended? Shall we say that only humans have the requisite intelligence, or autonomy, or reason? But there are many, many humans who will fail to meet these standards and yet who are reasonably viewed as having value above and beyond their usefulness to others… Animals, it is true, lack many of the abilities humans possess. They can’t read, do higher mathematics, build a bookcase, or make baba ghanoush. Neither can many human beings, however, and yet we don’t say—and shouldn’t say—that they (these humans) therefore have less inherent value, less of a right to be treated with respect, than do others.52

The point of this passage is to push us to be more consistent and inclusive in our understanding of what constitutes inherent worth and to see that there is a comprehensive moral foundation that should be the basis for ethical consideration—and it is not reason or rationality but meeting the criteria of subject-of-a-life. Since we should treat fellow *Homo sapiens* with equal moral respect, irrespective of whether they possess the characteristics of rationality, then we should also extend that respect beyond our species to the nonhuman species who also have intrinsic worth that is also not predicated upon rationalist characteristics.

Regan attempts to bring to light just how arbitrary, illogical, or speciesist (we have to be one of these) most of us are in our assumptions about what gives a being inherent moral worth. This point leads me to an important aspect of the overall project of animal ethics. One reason why animal ethics holds potential to facilitate human growth is that it exposes what is commonly taken for granted or what goes unexamined in human ethics, thus forcing us to question and scrutinize our underlying assumptions about moral value. How many people, including applied ethicists and philosophers, believe and argue ardently that *all humans*, regardless of race, gender, sex, ability, etc., have inherent

value? And how many of these same people are equally willing to unblinkingly deny inherent value to all animals—even to animals such as bonobos, dolphins, chimpanzees, who hold higher degrees of autonomy and intelligence and who lead richer emotional and social lives than severely cognitively disabled or infant humans—without good reasons for why we, not them, possess this value? It seems humans have “a pass” for intrinsic worth that animals do not, but I don’t see any good reason for why this is so. Paula Cavalieri, author of The Animal Question and co-editor of The Great Ape Project with Singer, has examined the philosophical literature on human intrinsic value and found that “Regan’s notion of inherent value has been the object of charges of obscurity and clumsiness one would hardly find in the case of the Kantian notion of intrinsic value.”

Why would this be? Cavalieri’s answer: “when the attribution of value goes beyond the boundaries of the human species, theories must satisfy a higher standard of evidence than the one usually required in other [human-only] cases.”

I am sympathetic to Regan’s philosophy, but I also recognize the flaws in his theory and that the philosopher demands a lot if he hopes that people will live out his conclusions. First, one must be convinced that deontological rights theory is actually “the rationally most satisfactory moral theory” (he loses anyone who identifies themselves as, say, a contractarian, utilitarian, care theorist, or pragmatist). Secondly, Regan presents a questionable case for the ontological claim of independent inherent value. Mary Anne Warren, who deems inherent value “a highly obscure concept,” “ill-suited to play” such a “crucial role” in moral theory, faults Regan for defining the

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54 Ibid.
concept in “negative terms,” in opposition to utilitarianism, as opposed to building up a more convincing and foundational “positive account.” Warren’s critique leads me to question whether Regan’s arguments prove that intrinsic value exists in the world, and that all subjects-of-a-life possess it and possess it equally. And finally, one must be convinced that many nonhuman animals, such as birds and mammals, are in fact subjects-of-a-life, who are also worthy of respectful treatment. Moreover, all of these points are theoretical and while they may lead readers-of-theory to deem Regan unconvincing in his effort, these points do not address the most challenging aspect of Regan’s view: practical application.

Since the main purpose of applied ethics is to apply moral theory to lived practice, then we must consider the ways in which the everyday lives of humans and animals would change, given Regan’s and Singer’s conclusions. Under Singer’s view, it is still possible, hypothetically, for humans to maintain animal agriculture, albeit with substantial reformation. As long as farm animals’ interests are considered equally, as long as they live comfortable, pleasantly and contently—that is to say, without suffering—on free-range farms, and when brought to slaughter, are killed as painlessly as possible with some form of “humane slaughter,” we may continue to consume them. Singer allows room for meat eating as long as the animals’ interests are equally taken into account and as long as they would not be experiencing any pain or suffering while alive and while going to and during slaughter. Here, the primary conditions of Singer’s utilitarianism — alleviating suffering, because it is morally bad—is met, even as we consume animal flesh.

Undeniably, humans would have to drastically decrease our levels of meat consumption because it would be virtually impossible to sustain current quantities, while at the same time, raise and kill animals in humane and painless conditions on small-scale, free-range farms with relatively no confinement stalls or pins. (Or we would need millions of additional farmers to maintain high levels of meat production and consumption, but to do so ethically, according to Singer). Respect and compassion, as guiding virtues, would have to replace efficiency and profit for the producers of meat, as would convenience and cost for the consumers of meat. This is a tall order. The cost of meat would rise, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but would obviously affect people’s lives. At the same time, we would drastically reduce the amount of suffering in the world. Clearly, Singer’s conclusions, while perhaps more congenial than Regan’s, still involve radical changes in how we would live our lives.

Since Regan’s rights view is “categorically abolitionist,” he espouses “the total dissolution of commercial animal agriculture.” After all, it would be a violation of the underpinning deontological theory to raise and kill human subjects-of-a-life painlessly for food; animal subjects-of-a-life are no different. Regan admits that reforming farming and slaughtering practices will undeniably alleviate some animal suffering, but this alleviation is ultimately unsatisfactory. The pain animals endure on factory farms are the derivatives, the “symptoms and effects of the deeper, systematic wrong that allows these animals to be viewed and treated as lacking independent value, as resources for us—as, indeed, a renewable resource.” Band-aid efforts will not reform human morality. Painless killing still violates the central tenet of respectful treatment: the right of a subject-of-a-life, a moral rights holder, to continue on living her or his life independent of
our satisfaction. Even humane slaughter, after a pleasant life of free-range frolicking and grazing on the most idyllic family farm, constitutes a moral wrong. This is truly a “radical egalitarian case for animal rights.”

Differences aside, Singer and Regan both agree that the vast majority of human beings fail to extend moral respect to animals since most of us are arbitrarily speciesist. We see no fallacy in thinking that human life and interests, even if insignificant, matter more morally than nonhuman life and interests, even if these interests are grave matters of life and death. For both philosophers, a moral line of demarcation based on species membership alone is simply untenable for philosophically determining which life-forms do and do not deserve our moral treatment. Something more fundamental, like sentience or conscious life, should guide our judgments and arguments. Both ethicists rely primarily on rational argumentation, the work of the reasoning mind, to support their justice-based positions. However, other theorists locate the ethical treatment of animals beyond what one critic called the “hyperrationality” of strict utilitarianism or deontology.

Ecofeminism: A Heart-felt Critique

Ecofeminism is the branch of feminist thought concerned with the ways women’s oppression, animal oppression, as well as the domination of nature are intertwined. Carl Adams and Karen Warren, two of the more renowned ecofeminists, argue that each liberation movement must be joined into one to push traditional ethics toward a more

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holistic epistemological standpoint and thus establish a more robust theory.\textsuperscript{58} Erin McKenna elucidates the broad purpose of ecofeminists and highlights the movement’s main critique of the male- and reason-centered worldview:

Systems of thought that arrange things in dichotomies and hierarchically have historically lumped women, nature, and animals on the side that is viewed as not fully rational. They are to be ruled and manipulated by the more active, more valued side of the dichotomy—the side identified with men. Warren and Adams suggest we see fluid connections instead of rigid dichotomies; in so doing, they hope, we will lose our propensity to see land, trees, animals, and women as objects to be dominated and used as we please. Ecofeminists not only challenge our ethics but suggest a different metaphysics, pushing us at the same time to see traditional epistemology differently. They reject the reason/emotion dichotomy and challenge the traditional focus on reason (\textit{AP}, 162).

It is important to point out that ecofeminists do not suggest that men are inherently prone to be more rational or to dominate animals, women, and nature, just as women are not biologically determined to be emotional vegetarians or caring nurturers. The propensities and associations—the lumpings—of dominance and violence toward women and nature is the work of culture and socialization, not given to us by nature. If we learn objectification and violence, so we can unlearn it. It is in the nature of both men and women to learn to become ecofeminists.

Ecological feminism has offered much more than criticism of the rationalistic ethicists who sever mind from body, reason from emotion.\textsuperscript{59} Ecofeminists offer a fruitful and necessary vision that addresses a place for the human sympathetic faculty, which frankly should never be omitted from human morality, particularly when the goal is to


\textsuperscript{59} This critique is not a problematic one for Singer. In the preface to \textit{Animal Liberation}, Singer writes, “the portrayal of those who protest against cruelty to animals as sentimental, emotional ‘animal lovers’ has had the effect of excluding the entire issue of our treatment of nonhumans from serious political and moral discussion” (ii-iii).
convince people to respect animals and treat them ethically. Ecofeminists argue that neither absolute rights theory nor the utilitarian tradition embrace what an ethical theory should entail: one that accounts for the indispensable role of human emotion. While feelings and emotions are liabilities for Singer and Regan, they remain assets for the ecofeminists (as we’ll see, they do for the pragmatists as well).

Josephine Donovan and Adams, for instance, do not deny that reason and logic should play their fair roles in formulating an ethic for animals. But what they do contest is the hyper-rational methods that the utilitarians and neo-Kantians employ—methods that reinforce a reverence for reason, which, as Donovan and Adams rightfully and importantly point out, is what justified animal oppression and mistreatment in the first place. The severance of reason (of the mind) and emotion (of the body) in human morality reinforces the Cartesian binary that is both simplistic and illusory (and we’ll see, the pragmatists concur). What is needed in animals ethics a more comprehensive theory that encompasses the whole human being, allowing for “sympathy, empathy, love—feelings that often characterize human’s responses to animals.”

Ecofeminism is not the only “ism” critical of the conventions in the animals ethics literature, and it certainly isn’t the only concerned with emotion or our lived experiences with animals.

I have revisited utilitarianism, ecofeminism, and deontology, highlighting mainly their strengths addressing the moral status of nonhumans, not for the purpose of holding one over the other, or even to mold from them a singular moral aim. I have done this as a way to build up and move forward with the analysis of the pluralistic ethical approach that I endorse.

Pragmatism is increasingly gaining ground in the environmental and animal ethics literature as an alternative to the theories discussed above. Until recently, however, those who have identified themselves as pragmatists have remained unconcerned with human-animal relationships. The book, *Animal Pragmatism: Rethinking Human-Nonhuman Relationship*, signifies a change, offering an impressive collection of pragmatist contributions to the field of animal ethics. In his contribution to the book, Stephen Fesmire offers possibilities for why pragmatists have not fully embraced the debates of animal ethics. Pragmatists are typically put off from what they see as narrow discussions of rigidity; the utilitarians and neo-Kantians maintain “monistic positions that strike classical pragmatists as flat,” Fesmire argues (*AP*, 43). Whatever the reason for pragmatists remaining silent on the animal question, Fesmire notes that the effect is that pragmatism has been missing out in “one of the most conceptually rich and practically significant fields of contemporary ethics” (*AP*, 43). But as McKenna, co-editor and contributor to *Animal Pragmatism*, suggests, the coin is two-sided: “I believe a pragmatist perspective on our treatment of nonhuman animals must be articulated. It is a voice, hitherto missing, that more deeply challenges our views of our place in the world and so can also more effectively serve to alter current practice” (*AP*, 163). Pragmatism may build the theoretical and experiential muscle strong enough to engage in critical investigations of the various and multifaceted problems as they relate to animals.

Pragmatism is not so much a moral theory but a process of inquiry capable of enlivening our conversations about morality. And it is not simply an amalgamation of

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61 Also see Andrew Light and Eric Katz, eds., *Environmental Pragmatism* (London: Routledge, 1996).
each theory that I outlined above. Unlike utilitarianism or absolute rights theory, a pragmatic view of animal ethics is more adaptable, experiential, and investigative. Rather than first building up foundational principles or laws, pragmatism demands critical reflection and critical inquiry on existing practice and habits; experience moves to center stage. In following Dewey’s critique of traditional ethics (I find his chapter “Moral Reconstruction” in *Reconstruction in Philosophy* particularly insightful), Light and McKenna suggest that:

> in any inquiry we should start with where we are and with how we commonly understand the world; as we push against those intuitions, we should continually check in with the actual experiences we have had and are having on any particular ethical issue. In this way, pragmatism challenges received experience and inherited wisdom and impels people to be critical of their habits. Rather than just providing principles to guide practice, it focuses on developing a critical approach to life in which all people can engage (*AP*, 9).

Above, in discussing utilitarianism and deontology, I separated the discussion between theory and practice, yet in pragmatism this sharp distinction erodes. Moral agents should not seek guidance from strict, universalizable principles and then from those theoretical principles pursue a course of moral reasoning that eventually leads to how to generalize about what the right or wrong actions are to take in future situations. Pragmatism, assert Light and McKenna, “can more readily adapt to changing circumstances and practices because it is not inalterably wedded to principles that are too often divorced from people’s everyday lived experiences” (*AP*, 9). Specific situations “are scrutinized in detail, and intelligent plans of improvement are worked out” because “inquiry [and] discovery take the same place in morals” as they have in the sciences, writes Dewey.  

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62 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1920), 174. This work will be cited in the text as *RIP* for all subsequent references.
Thus, each moral question and issue that arises in our experiences with animals should be approached in a carefully and critically investigative manner.

Moreover, a pragmatic ethic is pluralist and draws on a wide range of moral data—rational arguments, feelings, intuitions, and individual and collective experiences, all the while taking account for any likely consequences that may arise in our actions and while keeping in view many moral goods. Pragmatism is not limited by any one of these moral inputs and challenges us to strive to incorporate all of them. Dewey professed that “our moral failures” stem from “some weakness of disposition, some absence of sympathy, some one-sided bias that makes us perform the judgment of the concrete case carelessly or perversely” (*RIP*, 164). Because we are not the disembodied beings that Descartes thought us to be, because our moral failures derive from multiple, complex, and interrelated loci rooted someplace within both our rational and emotive selves, we should promote and fine-tune our mental and empathetic “distinctively moral traits,” which, as Dewey called them, are “the virtues of moral excellencies” (*RIP*, 164). These traits and virtues come alive in pluralistic ethical inquiry, including “wide sympathy, keen sensitiveness, persistence in the face of the disagreeable, [and] balance of interests enabling us to undertake the work of analysis and decision intelligently” (*RIP*, 164). The consequence of applying these sophisticated moral traits to a moral dilemma is complication of that dilemma and of morality itself; but doesn’t complexity and nuance in human moral choices seem intuitively right?

In a pragmatic version of animal ethics, theory becomes operational and we examine and reexamine our everyday lives and the problems we face that fundamentally involve our use and dependence on other species. One connecting theme throughout the
chapters of *Animal Pragmatism* is the argument that a pragmatic approach to ethics amounts to more of an experiential process than a theory. What is meant by “process”? Think of our health, as a case in point. Healthy living is an ongoing way of life, continued living through an arrangement of experiences that continues to foster even more health. In fact, we never reach “health,” as a fixed end. If I claim, “I am healthy,” and then stop doing whatever it was that I did to become healthy, then I will quickly become unhealthy again: “the needed improvement of health—a continual process—is the end and good” (*RIP*, 177). As I’ll discuss in the next chapter, when Dewey used the term “end” or “good,” he is not referring to a fixed endpoint that does not change but rather an aim or end-in-view that can alter, adjust, and continue to be improved upon. An end for Dewey is an active process of transforming the existent situation. Health, like any process, should continue, change, and adapt within the “directions of change in the quality of experience” (*RIP*, 177). For the animal pragmatist, moral principles may play a part, but it is open-mindedness, rationality, sympathy, social relationships, critical inquiry—combined together—that constitute a process through which we intelligently engage, judge, and direct our experiences involving animals. We grow by going through a pluralistic process of inquiry, as opposed to deciding what to do based upon a theory that is divorced from our lived experiences and particular moral contexts and dilemmas, and we can never fully be finished with this inquiry.

To be more concrete about what pragmatism has to offer to animal ethics in general and eating animals specifically, let us look more closely at the features of pragmatic pluralism. The main distinction between conventional ethical theories and pragmatist value pluralism is that the former work from fixed moral principles and search
for strict universalizable rules or duties that can be extended to a whole range of moral situations. Value pluralism, however, is more fluid, experiential, open-ended, with deliberation and inquiry applied to a particular moral situation. In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Dewey proposes that ethical theory has:

> been singularly hypnotized by the notion that its business is to discover some final end or good or some ultimate and supreme law… Morals is not a catalog of acts nor a set of rules to be applied like drugstore prescriptions or cook-book recipes (*RIP*, 161, 169-70).

Many deontologists and consequentialists are impressively consistent because their theories are streamlined toward one clear moral ideal that is pre-specified before deliberation or encounter. The pragmatic pluralist, however, risks more ambiguity and inconsistency—because of the focus on the contextual and the particular—but also attempts to cultivate “habits of swimming against a psychological current that propels us toward easy answers and quick solutions to complex problems.” (Fesmire, *AP*, 47). As Fesmire describes, with this experiential, contextual, and pluralistic approach to ethics, the very function of ethics is altered:

> On the view that there are plural primary factors in situations, the role of moral philosophy shifts. It functions not to provide a bedrock but to clarify, interpret, evaluate, and redirect our natural and social interactions. Some may find these pluralistic conclusions, or their implications, unsatisfying. But the principal aim of ethics is the amelioration of perplexing situations, even at the cost of the ease, peace, and rest we fell when we sort out an internally consistent theory (*AP*, 47; italics original).

There is a certain messiness, which is not necessarily unwanted, in pragmatic pluralism that muddies the conceptual waters.

> For the pragmatists, each moral situation holds unique conditions, goods, variables, participants, and outcomes so that “the present” is never made “subservient to a rigid yet abstract future” (*HNC*, 262). While edifying, before-hand-theories that remain
abstract and apart from particular moral dilemmas cannot tell us which goods will be discovered in advance. “No past decision,” writes Dewey, “nor old principle can ever be wholly relied upon to justify a course of action” (*RIP*, 174-75). There is a novelty that we must embrace in every moral situation; indeed this is a tall order because now befallen onto us is more responsibility to commit to the in-the-now investigation and not rely solely or primarily on a universal principle we’ve already established, for doing so would compromise the present. Dewey is sympathetic to utilitarians for their efforts in bringing morality out of the clouds of abstraction and “down to earth, to everyday experience,” but he also critiqued utilitarians for retaining “the notion that the good is future, and hence outside the meaning of present activity” (*HNC*, 267). For Dewey, the abstract, universalizable, and ideal good is problematic for deliberating on present courses of action and dealing with the particular and present conditions of lived moral experience, from which the good(s) ought to be discovered.

Thus, every moral situation is unique and holds the potential for “conflicting desires and alternative apparent goods,” and we should not reduce the potentiality of situations, or the potentiality of human inquiry, by sinking our reflection and action to adhere to one theoretical framework or toward one pre-specified end (*RIP*, 163). Dewey writes that traditional ethics, with its “worship of reason discouraged reason, because it hindered the operation of scrupulous and unremitting inquiry” (*RIP*, 165). By keeping our experience and investigative forces at the fore and in the present, a Deweyan conception of ethics works from the premise that the moral good “cannot intelligently be injected into the situation from without” (*RIP*, 169). Once we face situational analysis and inquiry, once we are knee-deep in the contesting goods, can we intelligently and
realistically detect and work toward the good(s). Building up abstract theories is important, but we cannot afford to spend all our energies philosophizing that all-encompassing, keystone moral theory before we act; acting in the world, even imperfectly, can alleviate problems and lead to real goods: “Moral goods and ends exist only when something has to be done” (RIP, 169).

One might object that the pragmatic pluralist succumbs to moral relativism. But in acknowledging that moral situations necessitate that we consider multiple, varying, and oftentimes conflicting goods—rather than one immutable ideal good or truth—is not to be relativistic or to reject ethical theory altogether. Acknowledging competing goods only means that we reject singularity and foundationalism so that ethical judgment and action do not “become rigid, dogmatic, instead of free and flexible” (RIP, 169). Pragmatic pluralism does not propose that there are no moral judgments to make or aims to be pursued. Again, Dewey’s reconstruction of ethics honors a shifting from the singular to the plural. Moral judgment and goods still exist; they are part and parcel of pragmatic ethics: “What is needed is to find the right course of action, the right good,” writes Dewey (RIP, 164). Pragmatists do believe in what is morally right and wrong, good and bad, but it is a good(s) that is situated and particular. Additionally, what can be said about unearthing the moral goods of a situation can be said about moral evils: “In deliberation and before choice, no evil presents itself as evil. Until it is rejected, it is a competing good. After rejection, it figures not as a lesser good, but as the bad of that situation” (HNC, 257).

In sum, in order to discover what is good and evil, what is right and wrong, we have to make good use of human intelligence in the form of active inquiry and sustained
deliberation with respect to the *particular moral situation we experience*, which is not the same thing as attempting to universalize a principle, regardless of the moral dilemma under scrutiny. Where traditional ethicists see consistent theory based upon reason alone, independent of circumstance or situation, pragmatists see a stifling of human intelligence and critical inquiry, a loss of the nuance and complexion required to appreciate the variability of each moral dilemma.

**Conclusion**

I hope that this chapter has offered the moral and theoretical basis to set up the moral ends I will now shift to the center of my analysis—mainly, the alleviation of animal suffering and the cultivation of human growth. Moreover, these two aims, I believe, are importantly related, and there are a number of traits that augment each. For example, in the following chapter I argue that thinking critically and deliberately about our daily habits is a facet of growth. In the moral situation of eating animals, far too many of us are at the mercy of social convention; we are stuck in unthinking ruts and habits, which reinforce both animal suffering and those qualities adverse to human growth. By addressing the need for human growth, we in turn address these habits that endorse immense suffering and that are fundamental to everyday human experience.

I believe the conversation on growth is lacking in our relationships with animals, especially in our thoughtless dispositions regarding our destructive practices of meat eating. We are largely unaware or indifferent to the suffering of animals, which means that we need to bring more to the conversation about developing the intellectual faculties to combat lackadaisical attitudes and dispositions. Peter Singer has given a very convincing argument for vegetarianism, an argument that is undergirded by his utilitarian
framework of reducing pain and suffering in the world. However, indicative of other animal ethicists, Singer has very little to say about education, human growth, or about developing the faculties that would promote growth. While Singer admits that habits of the mind are to be examined and changed to give animals equal moral consideration, he does not explicitly name human growth as a moral end to accompany his larger goal of promoting pleasure and reducing pain. As such, a number of philosophically interesting questions are glossed over through his theoretical argument for the moral consideration of nonhumans. I have a lot more to say about this in the upcoming pages.

Growth, coupled with the moral aim of reducing suffering, strengthens this project without rendering it unconvincing. Value pluralism involves discovering more than just one good or working from more than just one theory. I recognize that intellectual growth, in itself, does not directly reduce suffering, but it certainly works toward that aim and demands that we become much better at deliberation and ethical reflection concerning how our daily habits reinforce unjust systems of industrial production that do inflict suffering. In that way, human growth is congruent with the aim of reducing animal suffering. There is no guarantee that an increase in ethical knowledge will translate into ethical conduct; but it is clear that the more we think about how we contribute to suffering, the better position we are in to reduce our contribution to it. In what follows, I offer consuming animals as a way to facilitate human moral growth. I intend to stay true to the pragmatic focus on action—in our case, daily conduct that adds force to the suffering of billions of sentient animals.
Chapter 3

Animal Ethics and Human Growth: 
On the Habit of Consuming Animals

\[E\]ducation means the enterprise of supplying the conditions which insure growth. 
–John Dewey\(^63\)

Introduction

As we have seen, the ethical dimension of consuming animals has become a legitimate, rich subject for moral philosophers, but scholars of educational philosophy have remained silent on the subject.\(^64\) The primary purpose of this chapter is to disrupt this silence by pronouncing the educative relationship between the act of eating animals, educational theory, and human growth. To this aim, I will carefully analyze John Dewey’s conception of growth and explore the role of habits—specifically, the habit of

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\(^63\) John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916), 51. This work will be cited in the text as DE for all subsequent references.

\(^64\) The particular act of meat eating remains absent from the literature in philosophy of education, as does the larger question of animal ethics. Using the keywords “animals,” “nonhumans,” “animal rights,” “vegetarianism,” and “meat eating,” a recent online search of the leading journals of philosophy of education produced no results for articles directly related to these terms. Furthermore, no articles were found using a search for “animals” in the journal, *Ethics and Education*; and only one pertinent article was found in the *Journal of Moral Education*. I also surveyed Randall Curren, ed., *A Companion to the Philosophy of Education* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); Tony Johnson and Ronald Reed, eds., *Philosophical Documents in Education, 3rd* ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2008); and Nel Noddings, ed., *Philosophy of Education, 3rd* ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2012). Unsurprisingly, no attention is devoted to human-animal relationships or consuming animals in any of these sources. There are other areas of education, such as cultural studies, environmental education, and critical pedagogy that address human-animal relationships, though to a limited extent. With that said, as we saw in Chapter 1 with Martin and Noddings, a few scholars in philosophy of education do pay attention to animal related questions
meat eating—in nurturing growth. I rely primarily on Dewey in discussing the underlying importance of habits because he is especially effectual in demonstrating that habit does not have to be, as Ralph Waldo Emerson deemed, “soul-destroying slavery,” but can be a vibrant and powerful means to form the growing self. I then look to the work of Julie Andrzejewski, who, in her thought-provoking insights as a teacher of animal ethics courses, provides a pedagogical narrative through which we can ground the abstract theoretical arguments for human growth. These tasks, I hope, will frame my central argument: for human moral growth, we should consider the habit of consuming animals.

**Why Animals—and Why Meat?**

A central supposition underlying this chapter (indeed this entire dissertation) is that educators should be concerned with human growth. As educators, we strive to become better at critiquing, reshaping, and refining our ideas and practices. Hence we must continually challenge ourselves and break the rigid mindsets of how we approach our work—this is how educators grow. That is why this chapter was motivated by and shaped around Dewey’s conception of growth—the “constant expansion of horizons and consequent formation of new purposes and new responses” (DE, 175). To educate for human moral growth, then, means that we need to be sympathetic to what Dewey called in *Democracy and Education* the “intellectual hospitality” for “an active disposition to welcome points of view hitherto alien” (DE, 175). Just as (but not because) ethicists have welcomed new questions concerning the moral relevancy of nonhuman animals,

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philosophers of education should extend their thinking to welcome novel perspectives and fresh possibilities that provoke the human “capacity to grow” (DE, 175). If we expand our theoretical and pedagogical horizons to eating animals—a point of view hitherto alien for many of us in educational philosophy—therein lies opportunities to actualize this capacity.

As we saw in the last chapter, the philosophical tradition gives us good reason to take the moral status of animals seriously, but the arguments of animal ethics did not show us how to prioritize our thinking with respect to the problems of the continued suffering of fellow human beings. A critic, then, might respond that there are other ways to cultivate human growth, suggesting that the moral status of animals is trivial when there are more important human problems to worry about. Shouldn’t humans come first? The conceptualization of the question, I argue, is a step toward limiting, rather than broadening, our moral and educational horizons.

Nevertheless, this is an objection voiced against bringing nonhumans into the realm of ethical or social justice theorizing in education. Now, it is beyond the scope of this work to sufficiently refute this objection; for devoting too much attention to it amounts to a reductive theoretical move. For the sake of this chapter, it is enough to say that asking who should come first—either humans or animals—is to propose a false dilemma; we should have to choose one over the other. Human growth does not bow to either-or thinking. Discussion of the moral standing of animals is a part of the larger project of growth. As human moral consciousness expands, all ethical problems receive renewed urgency. “[W]hen people buttonhole me,” admits Carol Adams, “and insist that we have to help suffering humans first, I am not thrown off by such assertive narrowing
of the field of compassionate activism…we have to stop fragmenting activism; we cannot polarize human and animal suffering since they are interrelated” (SPM, 16). One key aim of this dissertation is to show that questions and issues raised concerning nonhuman injustice not only can be, but should be, explored simultaneously, side by side, with human injustice. Oppression exists in dynamic, multi-faceted ways, crossing and intersecting between and among species.

Before I move on, I want to refer to contemporary philosophers—self-proclaimed pragmatists, Andrew Light and Erin McKenna—who offer a response, though indirectly, to the aforementioned objection. In doing so, they also demonstrate why I believe philosophers of education must exhibit the courage to contemplate ethical questions concerning nonhumans, in general, and eating animals, in particular:

Our lives are lived with other animals. It is implausible that anyone would deny this fact. But even given the long history of philosophical reflection on human identity, relationships, and morality, it is only recently that a critical mass of attention has focused on our possible ethical obligations to other animals. Yet this recent attention, which is producing shock waves in the public realm, is substantial; indeed, it may represent the largest expansion of the domain of moral consideration in the West since the era of debates over slavery and women’s suffrage. Its potential, if fully realized, could fundamentally change the terms of our day-to-day lives, as well as our social, political, and economic structures (AP, 1).

In other words, (1) the potential impact of philosophizing about our obligations to nonhuman animals holds grave significance in our public and private lives, and (2) the problems associated with the moral standing of animals are not just problems for nonhumans; they are problems for humans as well. Thus, while I believe animals deserve our moral respect, regardless of how it may benefit human lives (a non-anthropocentric motivation), I also believe that one good reason to bring the discussion of the moral worth of nonhumans in educational theory is the opportunity to facilitate human growth
(an anthropocentric motivation). My challenge throughout this dissertation is to make these aims, which I believe can be reconciled, clear and convincing.

Consuming animals signifies a particular issue of the larger question of animal ethics, which I believe is a unique moral and educational endeavor for the way it affects our lived experiences. Mylan Engel and Kathie Jenni, two seasoned teachers of university courses on animal rights agree with me and write that animal ethics:

> poses a direct moral challenge to everyday conduct that students have long taken for granted and to practices accepted as normal by their families, friends, authorities, and society at large…. After all, the current lifestyle of most students—including their diet, clothing, and personal care products—involves the use of animals…. As a result, the potential for self-interested bias and defensiveness is greater here than in perhaps any other area of practical ethics.\(^\text{66}\)

Since the items and products that are the result of animal exploitation and killing are so ubiquitous in our culture, animal ethics requires a unique form of critical self-examination. Expanding ethical-educational reflection to consuming animals in educational philosophy is not only a reasonable and new direction; it is a crucial direction as well.

I am reminded of Dewey’s phrase: “Whenever philosophy has been taken seriously, it has always been assumed that it signified achieving a wisdom which would influence the conduct of life” (\textit{DE}, 324). Specific to this study, one might wonder how exactly the topic of animal ethics would, to use Light and McKenna’s words, “change the terms of our day-to-day lives,” or, to use Dewey’s, “influence the conduct of life.” What do the theoretical questions of animal ethics and educational philosophy have to do with our daily lives? I would answer with this: In addition to functioning as a generous

philosophical subject, meat eating is the primary way that most of us in industrial consumerist societies encounter animals—even if they are dead and dismembered by the time we eat them—and it is also the human habit that is the leading cause of their suffering and death. We consume commodities every day that are the products and by-products of animal exploitation and bloodshed, and so do children in and outside schools. And yet the simple fact that it takes animal lives to provide what we routinely ingest is taken for granted; for children, this fact is not just taken for granted, but purposefully obscured, in and outside of schools. How would students feel and what would students think if they were given the opportunity to learn the truth about their daily habits: that much of our food, clothes, shoes, drink, even what our pets eat, are the products of unprecedented levels of systematic—and systemic—abuse and violence toward animals (as we’ll see in more detail in Chapter 5)? I believe that a philosophical approach can ward off the overly-zealous noise too often affixed to these disturbing and emotionally-charged issues, providing a better way to understand and discuss them in and outside of schools. Moreover, meat eating, as a lived ethical practice, demonstrates how philosophy can impact our lived experiences, engendering more purposeful and conscious habits in our lives. Nurturing human wisdom as well as human living is what I wish to do.

The philosophical profundity of human growth is revealed in the habit of consuming animals. The repetitiveness of this habit—daily, over and over again, for years and years—has not only desensitized us to the animal suffering implicated in the habit but also to its philosophical meaning and transformative potentiality. Every chapter of this dissertation explores some aspect of meat eating and the educative significance therein. What interests me is the socially-complex ways we have learned the habit of
meat eating and the ways we have come to legitimize it. I argue that, for most people, especially those of us living in highly-commercial cultures, meat eating is learned through the inertia of unexamined and unreflective habituation, rather than intentional, conscious thought and action. The former constitutes, to use Dewey’s terms, “routine” and “unthinking” habits, which are inimical to human growth, while the latter constitutes active and thinking habits, which energize human growth (DE, 49). Routine and unthinking habits lack human will, are mind-numbing, and largely go unquestioned, due to the lethargy in us that has been built up and reinforced through a variety of social conditions and customs.

While he didn’t articulate a cogent philosophy of food, Dewey held firm that education should transform the habits of mind and body. Dewey thought that habits are functions of society, functions that are the residue of social convention, manifesting in individual and collective behavior. In his lengthy treatment of Dewey’s life and thought, John Dewey and American Democracy, Robert Westbrook, writes, “The customs of any society were its prevailing habits, and Dewey argues strenuously that individual minds were the product of custom and not vice versa.”67 Our individual attitudes concerning nonhumans, and of eating them, are products of the influences around us, the social customs and norms of a culture in which the unreflective, dormant habit of meat eating rules the day. It is important to mention here, and this will soon be discussed in much more detail, that when I refer to “habit,” I am referring to both habit of thought as well as habit of behavior. Miniscule is the attention we devote to thinking carefully and well about the deeply-entrenched habit of meat eating or of the lives of the animals who are

killed to make the meat possible. The lessons of social custom teach us to eat meat, but at the same time, not think about it, which results in uncritical and mechanistic habits. If education is concerned with thinking clearly and critically; if educators are concerned with transforming unthinking habits into thinking ones; and if the customs and “prevailing habits” supply the demand for the methodical killing of over 10 billion animals annually in the United States alone, then these habits, these unconscious derivatives of social conditions, should, at the very least, become the objects of inquiry in education.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I am not willing to argue for vegetarianism as a moral end for all humans, but with that said, I do strongly encourage those of us who have the means to opt-out of eating the products of industrial farming and killing. To be clear, my argument in this chapter is that we ought to rethink, not take for granted, the unthinking habits that reinforce the unethical treatment of animals in order to facilitate growth and conscious action in our lives. My approach is value pluralistic and human growth is just one possible moral aim wedded to this subject, though I think it is a very important one. Human growth always involves some sort of change in lived experience, such as giving up animal flesh, yet it is up to us, as individual persons and communities, to decide how to live-out the particularities of growth. But given that present state of immense suffering inherent in meat production, the obvious alternative to reduce suffering is to reduce or eliminate meat consumption.

Animal Ethics for Human Growth

The educational endeavor is an intrinsically moral one, between learner and educator, between pupil and exemplar. It doesn’t take long for the novice teacher to
come to agree with Nel Noddings when she writes: “Everything we do, then, as teachers, has moral overtones.”\textsuperscript{68} Accordingly, as moral exemplars vital to the intellectual and ethical character of students, educators should continually be looking for dynamic new ways to refine their moral perception. It is my contention that questioning some of the most historic human assumptions and practices concerning sentient nonhumans, such as killing animals for food, should qualify as such a way. I hope to provide new insights, connections, and opportunities that will animate human growth—what Dewey called the only moral ‘end.’ I find that broadening the scope of human morality fosters an enriched disposition for inquiring into the habits we commonly take for granted. The complexity of the habit of meat eating reminds us that our conscious thoughts (should) inform our everyday acts, that our lives are intimately connected with other human and nonhuman beings, and that the interaction between growth and animal ethics is both provocative and instructive for new directions in educational philosophy.

\textit{John Dewey & Growth}

The concept of growth plays a central role in Dewey’s philosophy. Difficult to define succinctly, it is more helpful to discuss growth as possessing qualities and characteristics, demanding preconditions and requisites. Even so, one thing is for sure: Growth is not an absolute destination, established as a final step. For Dewey, growth is education and thus life; it is to be pursued as a purpose of education but it is not an end, absolute. When growth is ‘reached,’ it then continues. Growth is a way of being that involves “the constant expansions of horizons.” In \textit{Reconstruction in Philosophy}, Dewey summarizes:

\textsuperscript{68} Noddings, \textit{Caring}, 179.
The end is no longer a terminus or limit to be reached. It is the active process of transforming the existent situation. Not perfection as a final goal, but the ever-enduring process of perfecting, maturing, refining is the aim of living. Honesty, industry, temperance, justice, like health, wealth and learning, are not goods to be possessed as they would be if they expressed fixed ends to be attained. They are directions of change in quality of experience. Growth itself is the only moral ‘end’ (

Elsewhere, perhaps befuddling his *Reconstruction in Philosophy* readers, Dewey suggests, “the significance of growth is merely transitory; it is *not* an end in itself but simply a *means* of making explicit what is already implicit” (*DE*, 68; italics added).

Dewey postures growth as an “end” to acknowledge the limited, binary language we have set up in education, i.e., methods and means on one side, and objectives and aims on the other. He’s urging us to think it terms of simultaneous pursuits, of process and direction, but not finite goals that never change once attained. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey entitled his chapter on growth, “Education *as* Growth,” not Education *for* Growth. We reach growth and then we don’t stop growing, hence education *as* growth. Growth is not an end as we commonly use the words “end” or “goal”; growth entails much more than a single destination. The means/ends distinction is a false binary.

In his critique of Froebel’s ideas on development, Dewey expressed that he “failed to see that growing is growth, developing is development, and consequently placed the emphasis upon the completed product. Thus he set up a goal which meant the arrest of growth” (*DE*, 58). One could aim for growth, but if she has set growth up a fixed and final ending point, then, in doing so, she will be thwarting growth. Growth leads to more change and adaption, new possibilities and questions. Before I propose how to engender growth, let us take a more in-depth look at just how multi-layered Dewey sees the concept.
Philosophers of education should be like children—immature and dependent. This is not a demeaning or sneering claim. All of us adults should aim to be more childlike, but we should do so in the Deweyan sense of the word. To be like a child is not necessary negative; in fact, intellectual childlikeness is brimming with positivity and hold potential for growth. That is what children do: they grow. “[F]or certain moral and intellectual purposes adults must become as little children… With respect to sympathetic curiosity, unbiased responsiveness, and openness of mind, we may say that adults should be growing in childlikeness” (DE, 42, 50). As Dewey sees it, there is a childlike immaturity that energizes growth.

This immaturity he sees as the “primary condition for growth” (DE, 41). Immaturity is not something to be overcome in order to reach a state of maturity, as an unchanging end. No, immaturity holds a positive meaning. Immaturity involves “capacity” and “potentiality;” in our immaturity, we possess “the ability to develop,” a “positive force or ability,—the power to grow.” (DE, 42; italics original). Holding vigorous potentiality, immaturity is teemed with “plasticity,” or the “ability to learn from experience” (DE, 44). In youthful childhood, we are not just malleable to negative influences but we are also bendable; like a piece of elastic, we stretch out and open our minds to new ways of thinking, to new avenues of exploration, to new experiences and purposes. The dexterity of the immature self means that we do hold the power to change for the better, the power to think and act differently, and the “power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions” (DE, 44; italics original).
Another layer to growth is dependence, which “denotes a power rather than a weakness; it involves interdependence” (DE, 44). It helps to think of dependency—popularly viewed as an uncomplimentary trait—as being positively associated with other human beings in reciprocal social circumstances that augment growth. Raymond Boisvert explains:

Using the terms ‘connection’ and ‘dependence’ in a non-pejorative sense sounds strange to our ears because we still live in the shadow of modernity… Interconnection and interdependence are irrecusable facts of human experience. Their limiting dimensions are balanced off by the opportunities for genuine growth which they also provide.  

For example, as I write this dissertation, I think of how dependent I am on my committee and advisor for their insights, critiques, and suggestions for improvement. I can only grow if I am associated and interdependent on experienced others who can see what I cannot, who will illuminate my strengths as well as my weaknesses. My progress would be severely impeded if I was not linked to other scholars and teachers. I cannot drift alone, as an individual, and sever the associations that bind and compel me. To be too independent and self-reliant, for Dewey, is to be socially detached, out of sync with communal life and thus more likely to become indifferent to social and democratic projects and purposes. Again, my growth would suffer, and so would this work, if I was entirely left alone to research and write as I please. (I could not grow if this truly was an “independent study”). To grow, I must not “exaggerate the independence of adult life from intimacy of contacts and communication with others” (RIP, 185-86). It is not enough for me to be juxtaposed next to others. We have to be interconnected.

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The interdependency of human lives highlights the social significance of habits, specifically, and of education and growth, generally. For Dewey, education is a social process and a way of life, not because humans *ought* to be social, but because we *are* social beings who live interconnected lives. To be human is to be reproduced and located in environments and landscapes that involve collective living, cooperation, and adaptation. We dwell in those environments in which we are inextricably situated to interact with other persons. Too much *independence*—or put differently, not being *inter*dependent—“may lead to aloofness and indifference,” making an individual “insensitive in his relations to others” (*DE*, 44). Too much independence can have a quarantine effect, transpiring into comatose isolation. Detachment from social experiences brings about a degree of social insensitivity, which amounts to an illusion for Dewey, a false sense of self-reliance in an increasingly complex world of social relationship and necessities. The role of education, as a social way of life, is to engender the habits that will nurture growth, growth of not just the individual person, but beyond—growth of the community and for democratic life.

*Meat eating as Habit and Catalyst for Growth*

The central way that the animal question has the potential to facilitate growth is that it works to alleviate what Dewey called “the most important problem of moral education,” that is, the “relationship of knowledge and conduct” (*DE*, 360). In reconciling what we know with what we do, this relationship necessitates from us deep reflection on our habits. Singer also appreciates the challenge of this relationship between knowledge and action: “Many people are willing to admit that the case for vegetarianism is strong. Too often, thought, there is a gap between intellectual conviction
and the action needed to break a lifetime of habit.” When consciously and critically pursued, the animal question reveals those habits once settled and comfortable as now the exposed and questionable. Rethinking human customs involving other animals challenges our most routine, even slavish, behaviors—from what we eat, to the clothes we wear, to what we do for leisure and entertainment. The consumption habits that we tend to view as normal and unproblematic in our daily lives means that someplace, somewhere a sentient animal is making (or, to be more accurate, being forced to make) the ultimate sacrifice—her or his life—for what are at times some of our most petty and vain interests (think of veal meat or fur coats). Exhibiting the “intellectual hospitality,” as Dewey wrote, to reflect on and question these habits deeply challenges and disrupts our daily lives. This deliberate moment of disruption makes the animal question and meat eating, specifically, such educative and transformative ventures, for in this inquiry lies the opportunity for human growth.

As with dependency and immaturity, Dewey insisted that the term “habit” should not be thought of in terms of “its customary use” (HNC, 39). He ardently disagreed with the psychologists of his day who equated, and thus limited, the word habit with “repetition;” nor did he want us to think of habits as individualistic. Admitting that most people do conflate individualistic repetition with habit, he challenges us to think of habit in much broader terms, encompassing a range of human thought and activity irrefutably influenced by social custom. Habits address the profounder ways of being, not necessarily denoting behavior in the form of specific impulses, repetitive or slight acts, which are all qualities of habit but do not contain or are sufficient to express habit as a

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70 Singer, Animal Liberation, 177.
whole. Habits are never totally or truly inactive, in the sense that activity is evident through observing one’s behavior. Habits are, when outwardly inactive, budding with potentiality; they can be resting yet holding the potential for emergence in the form of action. Dewey articulates this point as he defines habit as:

that kind of human activity which is influenced by prior activity and in that sense acquired; which contains within itself a certain ordering or systematization of minor elements of action; which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for over manifestation; and which is operative in some subdued subordinate form even when not obviously dominating activity (HNC, 39).

For Dewey habits can be judged in moral terms and, as such, we can judge the direction of growth, for growth is not always heading in a positive direction. He makes clear the distinction between two kinds of habits. What makes “a habit bad is enslavement to old ruts” (HNC, 63). Bad habits are routine and unexamined, the impulses of social custom and transmission that reinforce stagnation, “with loss of freshness, openmindedness, and originality” (DE, 48). These are the docile habits that should be transformed into inventive and vibrant modes of being, or intelligent habits. As opposed to a lackluster life of “unthinking habits” that “possess us instead of our possessing them,” intelligent habits summon a more intentional way of life; they bourgeon into deliberate action, purposeful and healthy forms of activity that have a reciprocal relationship with our conscious thoughts. (DE, 49). As Dewey explains:

Our conscious thoughts, observations, wishes, aversions are important, because they represent inchoate, nascent activities. They fulfill their destiny in issuing, later on, into specific and perceptible acts. And these inchoate, budding organic readjustments are important because they are our sole escape form the dominion of routine habits and blind impulses. They are activities having a new meaning in process of development (DE, 348; italics original).

Meat eating, as an act in of itself, is not necessarily a bad habit. One could eat meat but not be partaking in a bad habit. It is more the case that eating animals
constitutes a bad habit, not inherently as an act, but instead by the way the habit has
developed over time; development that is more the product of unreflective custom and
social influences than our own deliberation and will. In *Human Nature and Conduct*,
Dewey’s treatise on social psychology, he compellingly argues that bad habits are the
ones that have been formed—more precisely, imposed—from outside ourselves; they
develop not from our own consciousness or choosing, but are stamped onto us
perfunctorily, “without [our] set intention” (*HNC*, 26). As I recall, I never intended to
become a meat eater, yet I became one anyway. Formation of the habit certainly wasn’t
deliberate on my part. “We feed our conceit by recalling that the habit was not
deliberately formed, we never intended to become idlers or gamblers or roués” (*HNC*,
26). This becoming was not a conscious process; it was unexamined social custom,
inadvertent impulses, presumed from those around me and raising me. And now I know
that former self is not truly me. And I cannot help but think Dewey is right when he asks:
“How can anything be deeply ourselves which developed accidentally, without set
intention?” (*HNC*, 26)

Meat eating is happenstance for most of us, a “motor skill without accompanying
thought,” which “marks a deliberate closing in of surroundings of growth” (*DE*, 49).
And yet we do not grow simply by turning to vegetarianism, without thinking about why
or what for, but rather in actualizing knowledge that changes our assumptions and states
of mind toward the habit we have acquired in our lives. “Knowledge as an act is bringing
some of our dispositions to consciousness…” (*DE*, 344). Routine and mechanistic
behavior “furnishes the background of growth,” while the active habits containing
thought and intent “constitute growing” (*DE*, 52). Dormant habituation holds the
potentiality for growth; the active human powers of conscious habits actualize the potential.

If we wish to grow, we cannot ignore or dismiss conduct, especially routine conduct in the form of consuming animals, which is deeply ingrained habituation. Informed and intentional thought and action is the makeup of human growth. Once we acquire new and more knowledge, we can then begin to think more critically about the various human practices of animal use, and our subsequent habits that involve animals and the use of their flesh, skin, and other body parts. Whether aligning new knowledge with conduct leads to abstinence from animal flesh is unclear, yet one thing is clear: we begin to see things from a new vantage point and we now are in the position to choose new paths, to bring forth fresh, alternative habits. We are to bring habits to purposeful awareness, commit them to critical inquiry, and ultimately alter any habits that are “so severed from reason that they are opposed to the conclusions of conscious deliberation” (DE, 49). If unreflective, blind routine “marks an arrest of growth,” then conscious, deliberate human action marks an ascent of growth (DE, 53).

Meat eating may also be a bad habit, adverse to growth, not just due to how we’ve learned it but also because of the dispositions and attitudes—our habits of thought—that we bring to the table, literally, when we eat. Recall that habits involve not just activity but the dispositions we bring forward prior to and during action. An inquiry into the habits of thought that give force to the habit of action is necessary to become more conscientious about the nature of the habit and the range of thinking behind the habit. After all, “habits of the mind” are what give “significance” to the “habits of the eye and hand” (DE, 48). From which dispositions do we conduct ourselves when we eat animals?
Are they passive, rote, and dull? Or are they lively and intentional? What is the extent of our reflectivity and plasticity, from which we are to judge this habit and thus our directions of growth?

Habits are not bad only because they involve routine but because they may ultimately lead to “thoughtless action,” “carelessness” and “absentmindedness,” traits and dispositions detrimental to growth, to new forms of thinking and living (HNC, 63, 163-64). Yet there is something transformational going on here. These “traits of a bad habit are precisely the things which are most instructive about all habits and about ourselves;” about how we can change and what alternatives we may seek in our lives (HNC, 26). Erin McKenna explains:

When habits fail to be productive and satisfactory, then those immersed in the method of critical intelligence apply critical thought and experimentation to alter or replace them… Those who refuse to examine habits are fixed and rigid. Dewey speaks of the ossification of the brain. Our culture seems ossified with regard to our habit of consuming animals and animal by-products. Today plenty of alternatives are available that require less reliance on animals. We need to start exploring these possibilities (AP, 172).

If we fail to engage in conscious thinking about human-animal interdependence to see that there are in fact alternatives to many of our current thinking and practices about eating animals, then our unexamined customs, our fixed and routine habits will continue, unchallenged and unchanged.

Given what has been said about habits, some may prima facia agree that eating animals constitutes a habit, yet the astute Deweyan scholar might contest the view that meat eating is actually a habit—perhaps it falls under the realm of a particular act of repetition, but not habit. Are we merely responding, by means of the performance of meat eating, to some more important habit? And is this other, more important habit more
deserving of our concentration? I argue that meat eating does belong in the richer, broader category of a Deweyan habit and therefore should not be relegated to the realm of inert impulse (though the latter is how many people convey, in action, the habit of meat eating).

Meat eating constitutes habit because the action is both a social function and a way of being. “The essence of habit is an acquired predisposition to ways or modes of response, not to particular acts except as, under special conditions, these express a way of behaving” (*HNC*, 40-41; italics original). I will not belabor this point here; as I discussed earlier, eating food represents a profound ontological relationship with the self and world. Eating, not just meat eating, constitutes engagement and integration of dead life into our living bodies. As we ingest the other, the other becomes self, and we break down the self/other dichotomy through food. As we consume, we become.

Meat eating has been inculcated through conditioning and consumptive arrangements, both of which are fundamentally social—that is, relationships and patterns outside the individual self. Meat eating is a habit that is the product of social inheritance of family, friends, and colleagues, but also of social manipulation by food corporations and the dairy and meat industries. All this amounts to powerful social conditioning. As Singer discusses in the preface to *Animal Liberation*, “behind the mere momentary desire to eat meat on a particular occasion lie many years of habitual meat-eating which have conditioned our attitudes to animals.”71 In Chapter 4, I discuss in some detail the pervasive and ubiquitous social influences around meat eating, so for now I want to focus on the act as a non-individualistic habit.

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Eating animals, even during just one meal, is not the expression of an individual, isolated act; it is a habit, and like all habits, is a shared socially, with linkages reaching far beyond the dining table. The individual act of eating is an illusion; I am never alone when I eat, even if another body is not present while I eat. As I eat steak, I am implicated in many social relationships that implicate me in an intricate web of interconnections— with the flora and fauna, with economies and governments. “Conduct is always shared,” writes Dewey, and “habits involve the supporting of environing conditions.” (HNC, 19).

One environing condition that is supported through the meat-eating habit is starvation of the poor of the Southern Hemisphere. Many writers on the topic of animal agriculture make good use of this point to shore up their arguments for vegetarianism. The basic idea here is that feeding and watering billions of farm animals for human consumption is extremely inefficient and wasteful. John Robbins, heir of Baskin & Robbins Ice Cream Company, walked away from the riches of the family business to speak and write about the meat and dairy industries’ detrimental impact on human health and the Earth. Robbins writes: “There are today millions of human beings in less-developed countries who are going hungry while their land, labor, and resources are being used to feed livestock so wealthy people can eat meat.” Jim Motavalli discusses how “food grown for animals could be feeding people. Raising livestock consumes 90 percent of the soy crop in the U.S, 80 percent of its corn and 70 percent of its grain. David Pimentel, professor of entomology at Cornell, points out that ‘if all the grain currently fed to livestock in the U.S. was consumed directly by people, the number who

could be fed is nearly 800 million.” Lester Brown of the Overseas Development Council makes the same point with different numbers: “if Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only 10 percent for one year, it would free at least 12 million tons of grain for human consumption—or enough to feed 60 million people.”

The Executive Director of the Institute for Food and Development Policy and advocate for sustainable food systems, Dr. Walden Bello, describes the sociality of eating beef. Bello’s remarks make Dewey’s statement, “our individual habits are links in forming the endless chain of humanity,” strikingly germane to the social realities of meat consumption (HNC, 23). Bellow observes:

Every time you eat a hamburger you are having a relationship with thousands of people you never met. Not just people at the supermarket or fast-food restaurant but possibly World Bank officials in Washington, D.C., and peasants from Central and South America. And many of these people are hungry. The fact is that there is enough food in the world for everyone. But tragically, much of the world’s food and land resources are tied up in producing beef and other livestock—food for the well-off—while millions of children and adults suffer from malnutrition and starvation… In Central America, staple crop production has been replaced by cattle ranching, which now occupies two-thirds of the arable land. The World Bank encouraged this switch-over with an eye toward expanding U.S. fast food and frozen-dinner markets. The resulting expansion of cattle ranching has deprived peasants of access to land they depend on for growing food. And because of ranching’s limited ability to create jobs (cattle ranching creates 13 times fewer jobs per acre than coffee production), rural hunger has soared…. What does all this have to do with our hamburgers? The American fast-food diet and the meat-eating habits of the wealthy around the world support a world food system that diverts food resources from the hungry.

Consumerism does not appeal to these unsettling facts but to our most selfish, crass interests and whims. We have been acculturated and are very good at individualizing food habits, so much so that we lose touch, our connectedness, with not only the land and

74 As cited in Singer, Animal Liberation, 166.
75 As cited in Robbins, The Food Revolution, 289-290. (italics added)
animals but we forget about the flesh-and-blood humans who labor and die so we can eat. We then cease inquiry and are left with habit “apart from knowledge,” which, Dewey argues, “does not make allowance for change of condition, for novelty” (*DE*, 340). Dewey, who links individual habits with culture, helps us transform indifference into thoughtful action.

Growth requires newness—new powers, opportunities, interactions, and questions. Boisvert writes that Deweyan growth is “the continual flowering and actualizing of possibilities… the actual enhancement of an individual’s life. It signifies the development of new powers of action.” Meat eating, as the weary and old habit we’ve come to learn to live by, sinks us “to the level of the routine mechanic” who has “become rigid, dogmatic, instead of free and flexible” (*RIP*, 168-69). Clearly, our philosophical zeal needs to infuse our habits of thought and diet.

*A Case of Animal Ethics and Growth*

Julie Andrzejewski is co-developer and co-director and of the “Social Responsibility” master’s degree program, an interdisciplinary effort of the College of Education and Departments of Sociology, Women’s Studies, and Anthropology at St. Cloud State University. Andrzejewski refers to the central role that mindful action plays in her courses. In her article, “Teaching Animal Rights at the University: Philosophy and Practice,” she makes two points very clear: (1) that course participants are encouraged to examine their “everyday lives” and consider the extent to which their actions are “congruent” with “stated values,” and (2) that “taking personal actions that reflect and reinforce a person’s values engenders feelings of empowerment and hope” and “are one

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of the most powerful forms of learning.” Applying critical inquiry to human habits is necessary for Deweyan growth, but it is especially illuminating when studying animal ethics and meat eating.

Critical inquiry pertaining to the lives of animals makes a person more mindful and sensitive to the implications of his or her daily habits. In the class that Andrzejewski offers as a case in point, many students were responsive and displayed more sympathetic, compassionate, and justice-oriented behavior. The possibility expressed as “the sense of operativeness, [and] actuality” in Dewey’s conception of habit becomes more than potential; it becomes operational and actualized (HNC, 40). In learning the particulars and consequences of a perennial ethical problem concerning the moral standing of animals—industrialized confinement systems of raising animals for food—students felt motivated, some even obligated, to alter their habits by refraining from eating meat, or at least reducing consumption. Applying critical inquiry to the habit of eating factory-farmed animals reveals an enormity of disturbing and problematic issues for students. Whether from environmental concerns, health motivations, concerns for animal welfare, or perhaps learning that factory farming actually perpetuates global starvation, one outcome for Andrzejewski’s class was constant: “all students worked on changing their eating habits.”

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77 Julie Andrzejewski, “Teaching Animal Rights at the University: Philosophy and Practice,” 8. I obtained this article from TeachKind (http://www.teachkind.org/), a nonprofit organization that distributes free materials on humane education.

78 As we’ll see in Chapter 5, global animal agriculture, according to the United Nations, is the largest contributor to global warming.

The result is that food habits become intentionally altered—and for the better. Deciding what to eat (and what not to eat) becomes a rather nuanced and reflective choice—one informed and dependent on a number of ethical, ecological, and social factors. Whether from a new conception of self or from an overwhelming feeling of benevolence to others (human and nonhuman), or a combination of both, many students simply could no longer think and live in the same undisturbed way after engaging such a morally-charged issue. The point here, one that any self-proclaimed pragmatist would commend, is that when people examine their moral reasoning and principles, their sympathies and their life experiences, to address real-world problems, the result is not only better conceptualization of the problems but also the potential for a life-change for the better. If cultivating new thoughtful and compassionate ways of living does not constitute human moral growth, then I have to conclude that few things do.

And yet genuine growth is never easy or without loss and struggle. Giving up meat for ethical reasons can be empowering and liberating, yet it comes at a cost. For many who take up the animal question, there are unintended and unwanted effects in reconciling this new knowledge with daily life. Changing food behavior may appear altogether desirable, perhaps even easy, but this is far from the case. Changing our lives spawns complexity, uncertainty, and resistance from within ourselves and from others. Transforming some of our most deep-rooted food customs is no exception. Robbins appreciates the difficulty in altering food habits: “When it comes to food choices, habit is
stupendously powerful…. And if our habits are continually reinforced by the society around us, they can become even more powerful and alluring.”\textsuperscript{80}

Raised in familial backgrounds and amid social life where meat eating is deeply-rooted and omnipresent, vegetarians do not correspond to the social majority or the conventional norms of mainstream consumer culture. Sadly, we live in a culture where it is not just normal but encouraged to eat dead animals, and at the same time, we interrogate those in the minority who refrain from doing so and put them on the defensive regarding their conduct. Even as a creative, powerful energy swells within the growing self—energy radiating from the knowledge that one is no longer at the social pressure or whims of unthinking ruts—there nevertheless remains complication.

In the case of Andrzejewski’s class, individuals who altered their habits struggled with their choices. Students often felt marginalized, longing for positive affirmation and support from others. Support is crucial in such profound moments of change—change that is often trivialized by others, because the new dietary habits, unlike the old unthinking ones, take on deep personal meaning; and, all the more, choosing not to eat meat automatically puts one’s ethics, values, and beliefs out in the open for others to see, since many, many meals are shared in social situations. As Andrzejewski writes, “only the students’ own words can express what happened in their lives”:

One of the hardest things I’ve learned is that the people that I love the most aren’t willing to see my views or take my self-discoveries seriously. They put up a fight against their daughter and friend in order to defend meat. This is the time when I need support and when I don’t have them to turn to, I know that I have to find strength within myself.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Robbins, \textit{The Food Revolution}, 13.

\textsuperscript{81} Andrzejewski, “Teaching Animal Rights,” 8.
This reflection is indicative of a larger struggle inherent to human growth. Those who extend ethical concern for animals and renounce culturally-dominant habits face alienation and hostility from others in their everyday lives.82 The cynical and defensive reactions from meat eaters are ill-timed, since, in moments of considerable change, humans often long for understanding through meaningful interaction. Growth demands communication and association. In transforming not only how we think but also how behave in the world—meaning we change who we are—we need more from others: not pity, but sympathetic interaction and communication, which reside in the interdependence and intimate associations that Dewey posited as vital for human growth. Consider the following comment from one of Andrzejewski’s students:

[M]y life has changed dramatically. I have been challenged in ways I could never have imagined and have met many of those challenges. I have been encouraged to ACT to make a difference. The greatest and most significant aspect has been practicing a calm, non-intrusive, non-judgmental way in which to interact and educate others.83

This student did not fall into despair or apathy. Instead, the disturbing challenge of inquiring into the confinement, exploitation, and slaughter of animals provoked conscious thought followed by deliberate action—the distinctive qualities of growth. That personal growth involved further meaningful interaction for this student is of no surprise:

“Sympathetic communication facilitates growth.”84

82 The alienation and hostility individuals often experience from abstaining from animal flesh is commonly observed in the vegetarian and vegan community. See, for example, Barbara McDonald, “‘Once You Know Something, You Can’t Not Know it’: An Empirical Look at Becoming Vegan,” Society & Animals 8, no. 1 (2000): 1-23. The participants in this study, who McDonald refers to as “marginalized individuals,” felt that the “lack of support from family and friends caused hurtful feelings” (12 and 17).

83 Ibid.

Recall that growth is not a final destination, free of uncertainties or unforeseen struggles. “It is not uncommon,” Andrzejewski writes, “for former students to let me know that they continued to make changes after the class ended,” but at the same time, “others have confided that the class made them aware of compassionate solutions but they continue to struggle with their own decisions.” Uncertainty will persist and resurface for the growing self, particularly if those who do not eat animals live in a culture of ubiquitous animal consumption. “The conscious deliberating and desiring which precede over action,” writes Dewey, “are, then, the methodic personal readjustment implied in activity in uncertain situations” (DE, 348). Conscious and critical thought should remain a central practice of the growing individual, even when she is doubtful or put off by those who insist on relating to her in an unsympathetic or antagonistic manner.

Tom Regan sees the struggle of the growing self this way:

All of us engaged in the struggle for animal rights have a tendency to forget who we once were. Most of us once ate meat, for example, or unblinkingly dissected nonhuman animals in the lab…. Some of us hunted or fished and enjoyed that, too. The plain fact is, it is not just society that needs changing. The struggle for animal rights is also a struggle with self. What we are trying to do is transform the moral zombie society would like us to be into the morally advanced being we are capable of becoming.

Whether change in behavior occurs or not is important. But what is more important is that our assumptions and habits reinforcing systems of unnecessary brutality are subject to conscious deliberation—to a good amount of blinking—in order to awake the unthinking zombie.

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Conclusion

While philosophers of education fail to see the opportunity for growth I have presented, bioethicist and distinguished professor of philosophy and animal science, Bernard Rollin, sees educators as the vanguards in the extension of the moral community. Rollin is one of the preeminent figures in the animal welfare movement and is considered the founder of veterinary ethics. He has been integral in instituting real change in animal industries through drafting both state and federal animal welfare legislation as well as working closely with scientists, farmers, veterinarians, and animal advocacy groups. In his book, *Animal Rights and Human Morality*, he suggests that:

> If it turns out that reason requires that other animals are as much within the scope of moral concern as are humans, we must view our entire history as well as all aspects of our daily lives from a new perspective…. The comfortable sense of right and wrong, which securely governs our everyday existence, is no longer tenable, and we can no longer eat, sleep, and work in the same untroubled way.  

Much to the ecofeminists’ dismay, Rollin is championing reason, but he does so with an eye toward changing secure and comfortable habits for the sake of animal morality. We cannot forget who we were and how we got to be such vicarious and loyal exploiters of animal bodies; when we forget the social customs and their influence upon our individual minds and habits, we lose the opportunity to see things from a new perspective. For Rollin, the animal question has very real consequences. One of his veterinary students ponders the effects of extending the moral community:

> If I take your teaching seriously…*no part of my life is untouched*, and all parts are severely shaken. For if I ascribe moral status to animals, I must worry about the food I eat, the clothes I wear, the cosmetics I use, the drugs I take, the pets I keep,

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the horses I ride, the dogs I castrate and euthanize, and the research I do. The price of morality is too high – I’d rather ignore the issue.  

This student’s forthrightness should be commended, but at the same time, this reflection is a clear example of how bringing nonhumans to the fore about what constitutes moral life runs the risk of fundamentally transforming our daily lives. After all, it is so much easier to just “ignore the issue.”

I have critiqued educational philosophy for not keeping pace with moral philosophy, but perhaps I am mistaken in assuming that educators are even savvy to the extent of the ethical-educational questions explored here. What may be the case is not deliberately rejecting the animal question, but rather a failure in recognizing that there is even a moral question to ask. “[T]he use of animals for our purposes,” writes Rollin, “without consideration of their interests is so pervasive and our dependence upon it so great, it becomes invisible to us, in much the same way that exploitation of women and minorities was invisible for too long.” Continuing to keep nonhuman animals absent or on the periphery of conscious thinking reinforces this invisibility, and with it, the mindless behavior that comes at the expense of intelligent, deliberate human action.

Reaching a point of thoughtfulness and reflection where it is possible to hold the predilection to consciously choose to eat animals is one thing; not reaching that point due to a lack of intellectual or moral conviction is quite another.

The animal question not only challenges human thinking; it challenges human living. It only challenges our lives, though, if we are willing to put forth the effort, which I know is not easy when it comes to the disagreeable task of looking into the eyes of

89 Ibid.
suffering and dying farm animals. “It is the nature of a readjusting of habit to involve an effort which is disagreeable,” wrote Dewey (DE, 352). Over the years, I have talked with many people who feel, to use their own words, “guilty” or “bad” about eating animals in light of so much pain and suffering animals undergo in factory farms across America. Yet they do not change their habits. They do not change because, as Robbins writes, it does “not take effort or creativity to do the same thing over and over again. There is ease and relaxation in doing what we have always done.”

90 We do not change because we know that the effort it would take to stop eating animals is disagreeable. Is this a good enough reason to not challenge ourselves? Stagnant habituation and societal custom have not entirely dulled our consciousness and sensibilities. Through habit we become dreary, yet through habit we can be awakened. It will take, as Dewey called it, “persistence in the face of the disagreeable” (RIP, 164).

If nothing else, I hope to have demonstrated that the opportunities for human moral growth are vast when we exhibit the courage to extend serious thought to the moral status of nonhuman animals. It is clear that what was once invisible and insensible to human morality is now unveiled. I believe the philosophy of education should account for this—not simply because moral philosophy has done so but because there are a plethora of educative insights and connections at the crossroads of animal ethics and consuming animals. We can deal with these ethical questions and issues on our own terms and for our own purposes. In sum, having the intellectual courage to expand the moral community will enrich human experience, invigorate philosophical and educational

dialogue, cultivate imaginative and sympathetic faculties, and promote conscious thinking and deliberate action in our everyday lives.

While I conceptualized the relationship between consuming animals and education as chiefly a matter of individual habit and growth in this chapter, I will now examine the topic from the standpoint of culture. As Dewey has demonstrated, the individual cannot be isolated and separated from culture—like the means/ends binary, the individual/society binary is also a false one—and now it is important to link individual meat eating habits with cultural teachings concerning the same practice.
Chapter 4

The Cultural Hegemony of Meat as Cultural Miseducation

Introduction

Most of us are blind to the cultural forces that promote the consumption of animals. By blind I am referring to our inability to perceive the truth with respect to a fundamental part of everyday life. Not only do we know little to nothing of the lives—which is to say, the deprivation, torment, and death—of the animals we eat daily, but we also do not know of the full range of social influences and mechanisms—the cultural forces—of a zealous consumer culture that persuade us to routinely eat animals. I submit that this collective blindness is a result of miseducation, at the cultural level. The incessant and insidious advertising and marketing prowess of the meat and dairy industries, buttressed by the influential food practices of relatives, friends, and colleagues, amounts to what I call the cultural hegemony of meat. In this chapter, I argue that it is important to understand the cultural hegemony of meat—as a problem of cultural miseducation—so that we are better situated to rethink the cultural forces that shape the consenting attitudes underlying our most fundamental act of consumption.

What exactly is “cultural miseducation?” What does miseducation entail? And how does culture become miseducative? In her book, Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution, Jane Roland Martin attempts to answer these questions by,
first, framing her discussion of culture in “the broadest sense of the term,” including “the institutions and practices, rites and rituals, beliefs and skills, attitudes and values, worldviews and localized modes of thinking and acting of all members of society over the whole range of contexts” (CM, 12). Cultural miseducation occurs when the socialization of future generations goes wrong; that is, when generations pass on “cultural liabilities” and fail to pass on “cultural assets,” as Martin terms them, so that “a heavy burden is placed on the next generation” (CM, 5). Of course, it is open for discussion and debate regarding what exactly constitutes an asset or liability and what makes for a “heavy burden” on a generation, but that is why education, dialogue, thinking, and even writing dissertations are important—to further understand culture and everything that comprises it, the good with the bad. Martin chooses to focus her analysis primarily on the liabilities of violence, hatred, sexism, and racism, proposing “cultural book-keeping” as a way to determine which aspects of culture are to be prevented from being passed down as liabilities and which aspects are to be passed down as assets from one generation to the next (CM, 87). While I will not prescribe an itemized list, we could still think of some assets—respect, compassion, honesty, and critical thinking come to mind as examples—to be preferred over the liabilities that are transmitted through the cultural hegemony of meat.

Just as she defines culture in the broadest sense of the term, Martin similarly defines education as such. The transmission of “cultural stock,” which encompasses both liabilities and assets, happens through many means, not only through schools and universities, but also through the broader ways we learn to make and not make sense of the world—what Martin calls the “multiplicity of educational agency” (CM, 37). It is
important for Martin that we do not succumb to the false equation of schooling = education since the school, as a modern institution, has historically never been, and presently is not, the only agent of education in society.91 “When school is considered to be ‘the’ agent of education,” Martin warns us, “and is granted a monopoly over the whole of educational agency, it is only natural to see it as the one true or legitimate transmitter of the heritage” (CM, 34). This is not to say that taking the cultural standpoint means we have to abandon the school as a vital transmitter of cultural wealth. But we will need to grasp, for the sake of discerning society’s liabilities from its assets and for the sake of culturally transmitting the former and not the latter, a “broad and decentralized conception” of education that illuminates the multi-faceted ways human beings live and learn outside the school (CM, 59).

Three things need to be mentioned before I move on. First, Martin has recently refined, but not substantially changed, her ideas on education in her most recent book, Education Reconfigured (see Chapter I for my summation of her theory of education as encounter). Still, I will mainly adhere to her earlier work in Cultural Miseducation because that is where I believe she offers the best language to frame my analysis of the liabilities relevant to our topic. Secondly, by assuming the ambitious task of analyzing the problem of socialization of meat eating at the culture level, I cannot help but pose more questions and frame more problems than recommend solutions. As Martin writes, “the issues that emerge when a cultural perspective on education is taken are profound, and the questions to which they give rise admit of no easy answers” (CM, 4). While a remedy to completely “fix” all cultural miseducation is not realistic, I do not think we can

91 For a more thorough critique of the modern school, and even the call for the disestablishment of compulsory schooling, see Ivan Illich, Deschooling Society (London: Marion Boyars, 1971).
afford to continue to be indifferent to the liabilities I will be identifying, even if the animal industries and corporate advertising of the cultural hegemony of meat want nothing more than to keep consumers eating in a stupor—dreary, unsuspecting, and accepting of the status quo. Perhaps from engaging these problems and liabilities will emerge some intelligible approaches to discuss and deal with cultural miseducation. And third, it would be naive to assume that culture can be split easily into two halves, good and bad, between assets and liabilities. Discerning liabilities from culture, and then making distinctions between assets and liabilities, is not an effort in totalizing all features of culture. Context is important in our discussion and I am not making claims that divide American society in half. There are many things in culture that cannot be classified as either a detriment or a benefit for future generations, and there are things and ideas that could be labeled both liability and asset. What I’m doing is describing and analyzing those aspects of culture that have to do with consuming animals, and that I see as harmful if they continue to be handed down to future generations.

The Problem of Generations, Cultural Liabilities, and the Cultural Hegemony of Meat

Distinguishing cultural liabilities from assets requires that we look back, historically, for present culture encompasses the remnants of past culture. In her discussion of “the problem of generations,” Martin explains the daunting task that each generation faces in attempting to maximize the assets while minimizing the liabilities. Martin believes the problem of generations is one of education—education “not in some narrow rationalistic sense of the term education, but in the broad inclusive sense that acknowledges both the educative and miseducative potential of the whole range of cultural institutions” (CM, 66). I look around today and see generations miseducated
about animals the way previous generations were miseducated about humans, and this miseducation is not transmitted exclusively through schools (though, as we’ll see, schools are complicit in the liabilities discussed here) but through the multiplicity of educational agency. Alice Walker speaks to the generational transmission of oppressive liabilities, linking human and animal as she so movingly writes:

there are those who never once have even considered animals’ rights: those who have been taught that animals actually want to be used and abused by us…They are the great-grandchildren of those who honestly thought, because someone taught them this: ‘Women can’t think’ and ‘niggers can’t faint.’

Most students are no longer formally taught, via school curriculum, that “women can’t think” and “niggers can’t faint,” yet sexism and racism somehow remain cultural problems, learned and transmitted at home, at work, in public spaces, and in media. As Martin posits, “No one is born a racist or misogynist. These cultural liabilities are passed down by a host of educational agents when children are very young” (CM, 101).

Walker’s quote indicates how women and people of color are bound to notions of animality through cultural transmission, having been historically viewed as not only different, but as less-than-human, irrational creatures. Following the footsteps of our ancestors, we learn ideologies and practices of exploitation through culture. In hyper-consumptive cultures like ours, too many humans learn that animals possess some essential characteristic that makes them things and commodities of the market—just as it was the essential nature of the irrational, dependent woman to need a man’s rationality and strength, and just as it was in the essential nature of a human slave to need to be owned, as piece of property. As I read Martin’s theorization of culture and education, I

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think of the many miseducative agents of culture that continue to fuel the fires of exploitation and domination for both human and animal. There is a “curriculum” at work, whether “manifest or hidden,” that transmits liabilities intersecting human and animal in a culture of omnipresent consumption through the vast openings to learn—often referred to as non-traditional learning—but, to use Martin’s phrase, through a “ubiquity of learning affordances” \((CM, 43)\). In crossing the species divide, we extend Martin’s project and raise even more questions, simultaneously addressing mutual forms of oppression that expose the many liabilities disseminated through the cultural hegemony of meat.

Even though the animals we eat are dead, the cultural liabilities that come with eating them are very well alive. Deconstructing the cultural hegemony of meat helps us “become acutely conscious of the many miseducative agents in our midst,” \((CM, 89)\) as well as the ensuing liabilities that have compiled over generations. These include but are not limited to: the mindless and callous disposition, or bad habits, a conversation from last chapter that I’ll extend here; the physical violence and suffering perpetrated onto animals and humans in industrial factory farms, as we’ll see in this and the next chapter; the misleading and demeaning language employed in consumer culture; and the objectification and consumption of women’s and animals’ bodies. I now move to discuss these liabilities reinforced through culture, which I deem pressing cases of cultural miseducation.

\textit{Liability \#1: The Industrial Meat Eater}

This is an economy, and in fact a culture, of the one-night stand. ‘I had a good time,’ says the industrial lover, ‘but don’t ask me my last name.’ Just so, the industrial eater says to the svelte industrial hog, ‘We’ll be together for breakfast. I don’t want to see you before then, and I won’t care to remember you afterwards.’
I begin the discussion of the first liability with this passage from farmer, essayist, and poet, Wendell Berry, because it speaks to the thoughtless dispositions that are the logical outcomes of when consumers’ bodies—and thus their minds—are so far removed from the food they eat. I acknowledge that one could argue that food is not unique in terms of industrial consumption; we are detached and disconnected from production in many ways. But I would refer the reader to Chapter 1 when I explained why food is a unique form of consumption—food is the most intimate and constitutive of all forms of consumption. Eating incorporates and absorbs the object of consumption directly into the subject, the body of the consumer, and nothing else that we consume, such as our clothes or movies, achieves this literal embodiment.

Most of us living in industrial consumerist societies experience a highly individualized and commodified relationship with food. Very few of us grow our own food, and even fewer of us kill our own animals for food. Invented in labs by genetic engineers and nutritional scientists, much of the food we encounter is an assortment of preservatives, chemicals, processed, refined, and artificial ingredients—manufactured, marketed, and distributed as commodity for multinational consumption. When I enter the supermarket or restaurant, I participate, as a consumer, in a monetary exchange where I buy a product with my money. I am not obliged to think about the farm or about the once living and breathing creature or plant. All I see—and know—is right before me: an isolated good, a “piece of meat,” with no discernable history. I have not grown or killed

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this food that I just bought, nor do I know who did. I do not know how it arrived at the store or became readily-available, packaged in cellophane, for me to purchase. Without the sights, sounds, and sensations of the farm, as a solitary customer, I stand detached. I am now, as Berry terms it, an “industrial eater” who:

does not know that eating is an agricultural act, who no longer knows or imagines the connections between eating and the land… When food, in the minds of eaters, is no longer associated with farming and with the land, then the eaters are suffering a kind of cultural amnesia that is misleading and dangerous…. And the result is a kind of solitude, unprecedented in human experience, in which the eater may think of eating as, first, a purely commercial transaction between him and a supplier. 94

If I am not physically present and engaged in the cultivation and production of the food I am going to eat, then it is inevitable that I will experience a body and mind disconnection that eventually transpires into complacency. In the next chapter, I will discuss one possible way to minimize—for it cannot be wholly eliminated—the psychological and physical division between consumption and production, but for now let us continue to analyze the cultural forces that exploit the disconnection of industrial consumers of meat. What are the cultural entities that profit from keeping industrial eaters in the dark?

In the cultural hegemony of meat, it is not only acceptable, but strongly encouraged, to maintain an unreflective and slavish loyalty to meat eating. Corporate profit is reaped not just through inhumane industrial manufacturing, treating plants and animals as mechanical parts of factory production, but also through the dependency, ignorance, and complacency of consumers. That animals are being violently forced to die is of no concern to either the food producer or the industrial eater, as long as we continue to eat in the social conditions that encourage the dispositional liabilities of

94 Wendell Berry, “The Pleasure of Eating,” in What are People For? Essays (Berkeley, CA: Counter Point, 1990), 146.
thoughtlessness and apathy. To be clear, my intent is not to condemn all those who kill and eat animals for food. In fact, those who actually kill and butcher the animals they eat are present—physically, face-to-face and body-to-body with the animal that will become meat—and undergo a range of rich experience that industrial eaters do not and cannot. My intent is to challenge the miseducative agents of commercial culture that attempt to make cultural liabilities, such as willful ignorance and mindless allegiance, virtues among human beings.

Berry often reminds his readers that eating is always an agricultural act, but the meat corporations and advertisers specifically target and manipulate consumers to think of meat as primarily a product and not a process of rearing and killing. Like most industrial foods, meat is aggressively marketed, pervading nearly every realm of our public and private lives. The advertising and marketing wing of the cultural hegemony of meat aggressively endorses animal consumption while simultaneously thwarting critical reflection and autonomous thought. There is a relationship between advertising and the decline of careful and clear thinking, and this relationship evinces in schools, too. In the documentary, Consuming Kids, a revealing film about the growing trend of commercialism in children’s lives, the executive director of Commercial Alert,95 Gary Ruskin, states: “the purpose of schools, in part, is to promote reason, and the purpose of advertising is to subvert reason to promote the sale of a product.”96 The ploys to suppress conscious thought are deliberate. Advertising for meat products is no exception.

95 See http://www.commercialalert.org/
96 Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood, DVD, directed by Adriana Barbaro and Jeremy Earp (Media Education Foundation, 2008). The full film can be viewed at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uUU7cJfcdM.
The outpouring of meat advertising and marketing is deeply troubling because consumers are relentlessly targeted to eat animal flesh, but at the same time, remain apathetic and ignorant about the deaths of the animals, the living beings, who make the meat possible. One of the most glaring examples of this disconnect is the “food tie-ins” in children’s meals at fast-food restaurants. “Animals are also used widely as an advertising tool,” write Kate Stewart and Matthew Cole, “and the largest group of products that use animals in advertising is food and drink.”97 Think about the paradox of food tie-ins for a moment. Parents purchase “Happy Meals,” for their children. With these meals, often comes toys of animals; and the children cherish, talk to, and play with these synthetic animal toys as if they were alive and had feelings, but at the same time, they unblinkingingly and swiftly devour (for this is fast food) the flesh of the dead animal who was alive and had feelings. Both the child’s thinking and affection are devoted to the plastic artificial toy while the actual dead animal amounts to not even an afterthought. Blind consumption will continue to reign, as it is in the food advertisers’ and stockholders’ interest to inculcate unthinking, docile dispositions in meat consumers by advertising only the final product (the meat) and not the agricultural practices, the confinement, or slaughter (the animal-becoming-meat). The cultural hegemony of meat is aggressive and fervent, yet it exists because consumers are acquiescent and uncritical.

The overt and subliminal pedagogy of consumerism zealously teaches us to eat meat but not spend any effort dwelling on the intimate act of consumption, manufacturing numb and mechanistic consumers. As author of The World Peace Diet, Will Tuttle, explains, “Eating animals is thus an unrecognized foundation of consumerism, the

pseudo-religion of our modern world… Because our greatest desensitization involves eating—our most sacred, essential, and defining act of consuming—we inevitably become desensitized consumers with increasingly voracious appetites.”

Eating animal corpses is normalized as just another part of our day because we are:

- surrounded by media images and messages promoting the eating of flesh…. Meat-based food restaurants are ubiquitous in our cultural landscape, and they spend billions of dollars annually in advertising and promoting their products.
- McDonald’s…spends about $800 million annually advertising its products …
- Food is the largest U.S. industry, and it is dominated by meat, dairy, and egg products. As potential consumers, we are all being constantly bombarded with subtle and not-so-subtle messages to buy their products. The meat, dairy, and egg industries’ greatest sales promoters are, of course, our parents, families, neighbors, and teachers as we are growing up, and our colleagues, families, and friends as we get older.

Attempting to decipher and deconstruct the ubiquitous endorsement of eating animals is important, I think, because too often critical views of meat eating are immediately discarded for the reason that people feel they are being told what to eat. This popular reaction is ironic, of course, considering that all of us are being told what to eat, but it is not coming from the vegetarian minority; the directive comes from the cultural hegemony of meat, which is historic, dynamic, and multidimensional. From the time we were infants, we have been trained—at home, in schools, in places of work and leisure, through the multiplicity of educational agency—to eat nonhumans. And now as adults we find ourselves compliant of being told what to do—eat animals and their by-products almost, if not, every day—by two very powerful forms of conditioning: those we love as well as the most powerful, wealthy entities in our culture. As Ari Solomon

99 Ibid., 57.
elucidates:

‘Beef, it's what for dinner.’ ‘Pork, the other white meat.’ ‘Milk, it does a body good.’ Sound familiar? These are the slogans of multi-million dollar ad campaigns paid for by multi-billion dollar corporations hard at work getting American consumers to eat more of the animal-based foods they produce and profit from… You can't turn on the TV without seeing endless slow motion shots of lemon being squeezed on fish and shrimp (Red Lobster), steaks on the grill (Outback Steakhouse). Or how about McDonald's not only telling you what to eat, but also telling your children…. The truth is that most people are just fine being told what to eat, as long as it validates what they're already doing. What they're really complaining about, when confronted with unpleasant truths, is: Don't make me think about what I'm eating.  

Aristotle famously said that it is the trait of an educated person to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. I’m not suggesting that anyone accept vegetarianism. Rather, I am arguing for intellectual growth that requires a shift in consciousness; I am calling for the reversing of thoughtlessness to reflectivity; for the cultivation of imaginative persons who entertain thoughts about the external imposition of meat eating; and for persons who are better situated to critique, understand, and resist the forces of industry and advertising that thrive off the slavish conformity of consumers. The liabilities associated with the cultural hegemony of meat and industrial consumption are not only found in some distant place from the hands of food corporations, but also in the everyday discourse and norms steeped in animal consumption. Lets look at the role of language in addressing the question posed by Stewart and Cole: “So how is it that including a figure of a loved animal character alongside a dead piece of animal is not only tolerated but enjoyed by children?”  

Liability #2: Language and the ‘Absent Referent’

The significance of language should not be underestimated in the construction, rationalization, and transmission of consumptive practices and cultural liabilities. Language is much more than a practical tool for communication; it infiltrates and forms our conscious and unconscious, habits and behaviors. Martin discusses how a variety of educative agents are in the business of transmitting “hate language and, with it, the attitudes it expresses” (CM, 102). Similarly, cultural critic Neil Postman explains the command of discourse and how “language is pure ideology”:

It divides the world into subjects and objects… In English grammar, for example, there are always subjects who act, and verbs which are their actions, and objects which are acted upon. It is a rather aggressive grammar… We are obliged to know the world as made up of things pushing against, and often attacking, one another. 102

Discourse is a powerful device in distancing and diminishing the lives of others—“you animal,” “women can’t think,” and “niggers can’t faint”—reinforcing hierarchy and objectification of others. Humans employ all sorts of metaphors and linguistic devises to exert and legitimize power over animals. Arran Stibbe finds that, “Animals are represented in language not only as different but also as inferior, the two conditions necessary for oppression.” 103 Through critical discourse analysis, Stibbe examines how animals are socially constructed as edible commodities by the discourse of animal industry as well as the “consenting majority of the human population.” 104 How humans talk about nonhumans is telling in the process of objectification, especially when humans

104 Ibid., 147.
continually use language that frames and fortifies the attitude that meat is naturally ready for consumption, as if animals do not have to be killed and torn apart so we can eat them.

Recall that the absent referent, Adams’s concept discussed in Chapter 1, displaces and dissociates meat from the animal body, both symbolically through language and literally through butchering. The absent referent eases or completely curbs the consumer’s consciousness about the act of eating animals so she is less likely to think of the act for what it is but instead of merely eating just another product. It is a cultural liability to eliminate the human act of killing-animals-for-food through language.

“Animals are rendered being-less,” Adams tells us, “not only by technology but by innocuous phrases such as ‘food-producing unit,’ ‘protein harvester,’ ‘converting machine,’ ‘crops,’ and ‘biomachines’” (SPM, 58). Though it has been normalized as everyday vernacular, when humans routinely speak of “meat” and not more accurate, terms such as, “dead, scorched animals” or “animal flesh,” we are disguising the truth that animals were once alive, living and breathing, and then eventually killed, cut into pieces, and turned into edible parts by humans for human consumption. Animal lives are “ontologized as carriers of meat,” Adams contends, and “something we do to animals has become instead something that is a part of animals’ nature, and we lose consideration of our role entirely.”

From the perspective of the consumer, here’s how Adams sees the linguist process that removes humans as the agents of animal violence: “‘Someone kills animals so that I can eat their corpses as meat,’ becomes ‘animals are killed to be eaten as

meat,’ then ‘animals are meat,’ and finally, ‘meat animals,’ thus ‘meat.’” By calling dead animals something they are not, we add force to a dominant ideology that puts a comfortable distance between oppressor and oppressed, between victimizer and victim, all the while misrepresenting the world.

As discussed with the problem of generations, discourse has served as a way to unite women and animals as inferior objects, but it is also the case that the language that is deemed acceptable in the cultural hegemony of meat encourages us to think and act very differently, not only between human and animal, but also between animals of the very same or similar species. In her illuminating article, “A Linguistic Analysis of Discourse on the Killing of Nonhuman Animals,” Jill Jepson, makes the point that our customary language regarding animals contributes, at some level, to larger contradictions in human behavior and thought:

One who affectionately strokes an animal at a petting zoo might eat the flesh of an animal of the same species the same day. A public outraged over the killing of a pair of swans at a lake in New York…has no reaction at all to the daily slaughter of millions of chickens and turkeys. Clearly, the human ability to juggle such contradictory reactions requires skilled mental sleight-of-hand.107

Make no mistake: it is cultural miseducation in the form of the cultural hegemony of meat, with its powerful forces of ubiquitous language and advertising, that not only make such contradictions possible but also structure them as normalcy, wherein children “learn to conceptually distance the animals they eat from those with whom they have an emotional bond or for who they feel ethically responsible.”108

106 Ibid., 250.
All the more, these contradictions go unnoticed and unexamined by far too many people, people who make up the (mis)educative agents of culture that pass down the liabilities.

No formal curriculum or educational program is necessary to begin to turn this cultural liability into an asset. Challenging this liability begins with speaking truthfully, or at least less deceptively, by using literal discourse, which is irrevocably connected to more thoughtful consciousness toward eating animals, and to the act of consumption broadly speaking. Part of addressing this liability involves invoking more authentic, descriptive language that accurately depicts the truth behind meat production and tells the nonfiction story that exposes the fiction. For instance, as children tenderly stroke the pig at the petting zoo, we ought to be clear, an hour later at lunch when she is eating a hot dog, that she is in fact consuming the dead, cooked innards and flesh of the same species of animal who the child just showed affection for at the petting zoo. Or, when children ask the question that relatively all of them ask—“where does meat come from?”—we ought not to lie. If we change the subject to avoid an uncomfortable or awkward moment, or if we answer with, “meat comes from the store,” we are complicit in transmitting the illusory symbolism and deception that sustains the cultural hegemony of meat. Yet if we are open to the emotional responses that an authentic, difficult answer will elicit—that meat is the dismembered muscle remains of no-longer-living animals, the animals so many children seem to have a natural affinity for before socialization almost entirely dulls this mysterious empathy—we are transmitting to youth the asset of truth. Adams explains:

In examining the reactions of children to the literal truth about meat eating, we can see how our language is a distancing devise from these literal facts. Children,
fresh observers of the dominant culture, raise issues about meat eating using a literal viewpoint. One part of the socialization process to the dominant culture is the encouragement of children to view the death of animals for food as acceptable; to do so they must think symbolically rather than literally (SPM, 86).

As discussed earlier, the reason I employ a graphic literary approach using phrases such as “murdered, dismembered remains of animals,” is not to be vulgar but to bring attention to the literal killing of the animal, which we inevitably lose awareness of when we remove animal bodies from the act of consumption by fragmenting our language with misleading terms such as “pork chop” or “steak.”

But in moving beyond this liability for a moment, as I will show in the next chapter, we need more than just words. Talking honestly about eating animals is important but does not offer the whole truth behind the act of consuming animals: We must also acknowledge and uncover the story of production—the descriptive account of animals-becoming-meat. In the meantime, let us see how language does some of its most ugly work in the cultural hegemony of meat by fusing “women’s and animals’ inferior status in patriarch culture” (SPM, 81).

Liability #3: Objectification and Consumption of Women’s and Animals’ Bodies

In an episode of the sitcom Cheers, owner of the bar, Sam Malone, enters waitress, Diane Chambers, into the forty-fifth annual Miss Boston’s Barmaid Contest without her knowledge or consent. Waitresses are entered into the contest, usually by male bar owners, to determine Boston’s “finest” bar waitress. Diane, an intelligent woman and self-proclaimed humanist, is disgusted at the thought of being part of what she deems a sexist, de-humanizing custom. Sam entered her, as Diane says, “much as one would enter a heifer into a county fair.” She goes on to call Boston’s Barmaid a “degrading female contest” that perpetuates “the attitude that women are mere objects, to
be judged and ranked in respect to how well they serve men.” When Sam tells her to calm down and have a little fun, Diane replies, “Do you think being scrutinized, poked, and prodded like a side of beef is fun?” But in order to take advantage of the public forum to “make a statement denouncing” the contest, Diane ultimately abides. She ends up winning; but before Diane is able to give her speech of condemnation, she is awarded a trip to Bermuda, which distracts her from her plan. At the end of the episode, Diane laments, “I sold out womankind for a trip to Bermuda.”

This episode of Cheers is instructive for the final liability I will discuss in this chapter. When Diane identifies the contest as “female de-humanization,” she is linking women’s degradation with the subordinate, objectified status of animals. Her intent, in analogizing women to food animals—more precisely, to lifeless, cut-up cows, as “sides of beef”—is to challenge misogynistic attitudes and objectifying practices toward women, but not to challenge our attitudes about the violence and objectification of nonhuman beings. I am impressed with Diane but in analyzing cultural miseducation we ought to take the critique in a broader direction. In this section, I will discuss the intersection of women-animal objectification, violence, and consumption that is reinforced through miseducation in consumer culture. As we move forward with the sexist and grotesque particulars of the cultural hegemony of meat, I ask the reader to take Martin’s advice: “Be forewarned that looking at education from this [cultural] vantage point for the first time can be an unsettling experience” (CM, 2).

As I have been critiquing liabilities at the points of advertising, consumption, and beyond, it is also important to critique the liabilities at the point of agricultural

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production, before the animal has been processed and packaged as commodity. I will provide a more detailed account of industrial meat production in the next chapter, along with justification about why doing so is instructive for educational philosophy, but for now it is important to sketch a few practices depicting the misery and suffering committed onto female farm animals as a way to link the cultural liabilities between human women and nonhuman animals.

The material conditions and practices of animal industries function in the intersectionality of animals and women as exploitable, consumable objects. Because of the nature of their bodies, female farm animals, mostly egg-laying hens and milk-producing cows, are dominated on a massive scale. As a unit of production, the female farm animal body—and more specifically, her reproductive system—is used by industry in as many ways as possible to yield maximum commodities. In short, “females are more profitable.”

“In better understanding the production of dairy and meat, we strive to take the first step to actualize and unify what Martin calls the “three Cs” of “care, concern, and connection” (CM, 96). Tuttle would agree with Martin’s assessment of the cultural liability of disconnecting. He claims we are both victims and perpetrators of “a severely reduced cultural intelligence that has lost its ability to make basic connections.” Tuttle continues, there is “bizarre and outrageous cruelty” lurking “behind every milk mustache. It is considered business as usual, and no

110 Cudworth, “‘Most Farmers Prefer Blondes,’” 40.
111 Ibid., 38.
one has questioned it because the animals involved have been reduced to mere
objects.”

Dairy cows are raped—the industry prefers the term “artificial insemination”—
confined and forced to reproduce at unnaturally rapid rates in order to live a life of
highly-stressful and unnatural permanent lactation. And when a mother cow does give
birth, her calf is stolen; then, still lactating, her milk is stolen by humans, for other
humans. To turn a mother into an object is to segregate her by severing all meaningful
relations, to quarantine her as a unit for production. Like human mammals, a cow
cultivates a close bond with her young soon after birth, but when foremost conceived as
potential veal, hamburger, butter, or milk, the mother and child are no longer seen as
interrelated, as mother and child, but as resources to streamline production.

These industrial disconnecting procedures are endemic; as such, we must ask if
they, in some way, shape us, the industrial consumers. Tuttle thinks so:

Dominating others requires us to disconnect from them, and from aspects
of ourselves as well. In exploiting dairy cows and hens, we dominate them
not just for their flesh...we specifically exploit their uteruses and
mammary glands. This inhumane desecration of the most intimate and
life-giving functions of the feminine principle, that of giving birth to new
life and of tenderly nourishing that life, harms us perhaps as deeply as it
does the cows, though our wounds may be less obvious...[W]e become as
a culture harder and more separate, competitive, aggressive, and self-
centered. Ironically, we become commodities ourselves, controlled and
enslaved by a system of our own making, yet we don’t realize it because
we’ve been taught to disconnect.

Disconnecting, as a liability, thwarts the cultural assets of care, concern, and connection,
reducing intrinsically complex phenomena and relationships (cow and calf, for example)

113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., 130-31.
to a world where there are few intricate, interconnected living beings to be revered but mostly potential products to be sold.

The closer we get to female animals on the farm, to the time and place when and where they were not goods on sale but when alive and breathing, we find that the misogyny and volatile practices of patriarchal culture existed prior to consumption. Cudworth visited the Royal Smithfield Show, a popular agricultural event in Britain, and records for readers the intersection of women and animal objectification through describing how animal agriculture and slaughtering—as forms of human domination, or “anthroparchy”—are “constituted through gender relations.”115 Farm animal production and slaughtering, Cudworth finds, is a “heavily masculinized and sexualized employment culture.”116 For example, the vast majority of individuals working in factory farms are men, and the “stickers”—those workers who actually kill the animals by slitting the animals’ throats and sticking the knife in the animals’ chest cavity—are almost always men. Cudworth explains (and her narrative is corroborated by almost every undercover investigation of factory-farm animal cruelty that I have seen) that the way men behave working in industrial farms and slaughterhouses is not only appalling but fraught with sexualized violence—as if they “get off” by both representing all farm animals, regardless of sex, as females and also in purposely targeting, jabbing, spearing, and probing feminine body parts.

Both the literal exploitation of animals and the symbolic objectification of women are enabled in what Adams calls the “cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and

115 Cudworth, “‘Most Farmers Prefer Blondes,’” 33.
116 Ibid., 42.
consumption” (SPM, 58). Particularly troubling, but equally effective in transmitting liabilities and perpetuating the absent referent, is the role of fragmentation, the splitting of whole to part where “the object is severed from its ontological meaning” (SPM, 58).

Fragmentation occurs in the literal butchering of animals, which not only alters the whole creature into parts, but alters how we think of the animal. We fragment animals when we disassemble their bodies, severing their limbs and heads and separating innards and bodies. Subsequently, language mirrors the dismembering of the animal; after literal butchering, we conceptually fragment the whole animal being by speaking of not dead he’s or she’s, but of reduced, objectified its—“breasts,” “legs,” “buttocks,” or “wings” for eating. And while animals are the ones who are literally fragmented and consumed, women are symbolically fragmented and consumed. Metaphorically, women are objectified—in a word, de-humanized—in a similar fashion as animals when women’s thoughts and feelings are dismembered from their bodies, leaving only isolated things and reduced consumable its—“legs,” “breasts,” or a “piece of ass.” As Diane from Cheers protests: “what do you think I am?”¹¹⁷ rather than, “who do you think I am?” This is how women are constructed as animal-like and consumed by men as sexualized objects, or “pieces of meat.”

And genderization—the socialization of “acceptable” gender traits in males and females—for men is implicated in this cycle. Think for a moment about what it means to eat “like a man”—always involves meat of some kind. Adams explains how:

Manhood is constructed in our culture, in part, by access to meat eating and control of other bodies…. We may dine at a restaurant in Chicago and encounter this menu item: “Double D Cup Breast of Turkey. This

¹¹⁷ “No Contest,” Cheers.
sandwich is SO BIG.’ Or, we may dine at the restaurant chain Hooters…. [C]onsuming images such as these provide a way for our culture to talk openly about and joke about the objectification of women without having to acknowledge that this is what they are doing. It is a way that men can bond publicly around misogyny whether they know it or not. It makes the degradation of women appear playful and harmless: ‘just’ a joke. No one has to be accountable because women are not being depicted. Thus everyone can enjoy the degradation of women without being honest about it. ‘We’re just looking at a pig.’ ‘It’s only a sandwich.’ ‘We’re just eating at Hooters’ (SPM, 17; italics original).

To be sure, I am not advocating a sort of biological essentialism or determinism, where men are naturally prone to be dominant and violent toward women and animals or where women are instinctually caring vegetarians. I’m talking about the learning affordances imbedded in consumer culture; or, as I put it in Chapter 2, the propensities and associations of dominance and violence toward women and animals is the work of socialization, not given to us by nature. But it is in the nature of both men and women to unlearn cultural liabilities and turn them into assets.

Through everyday discourse, mass-marketed advertisement, and the norms steeped in the cultural hegemony of meat, objectification and consumption are difficult to perceive, let alone understand or change, because they are so omnipresent. Exploitation can defy common sense: It is hard to see even though it is everywhere, right before our eyes. The whole process, Adams writes, is “invisible to us” because “it corresponds to the view of the dominant culture” and “the end product of the process—the object of consumption—is available everywhere” (SPM, 16). As disconcerting as each of these cultural liabilities might be, they underscore Martin’s overall argument about the importance of considering education from the cultural perspective. In the cultural hegemony of meat, the liabilities are ubiquitous but so are the possibilities for transmitting assets. If cultural is miseducative, so too is it educative.
Conclusion

With all this cultural miseducation on the plate, let us start to think about what can be done, how it is we can address these liabilities and turn them into assets. I think a good place to start is to enact, but also revise, the first phase of Martin’s proposal for a “cultural-wealth curriculum,” which is “consciousness raising.” Speaking to this first phase, Martin writes, “people who know what is going on are in a better position to resist what is being foisted upon them” (CM, 97). I agree but would add that we need a fundamental shift, not only a raising or elevation of consciousness. Adams, too, wants people to raise their consciousnesses, affirming that consciousness raising “argues with the mythologies we are taught to live by until suddenly we are able to see the same thing differently.”118 But seeing the “same thing differently”—in our case, seeing meat not as a what or an it, but a who, a dead animal he or she, raised and killed by humans for human consumption—involves a transformation, not just an enlargement of the same framework of thinking.119 Engel and Jenni understand this shift as a defining feature of studying animal ethics: “assumptions about animals’ moral status relative to humans are as deeply entrenched as any in our culture—so much so, that challenges to those assumptions call for a change in perspective tantamount to a paradigm shift.”120

We need to alter human consciousness, shift paradigms, so more men and women (and everyone in between) think differently, unlike Sam Malone, who, when confronted by Diane Chambers about why he entered her into the Barmaid contest, responded: “I

118 Ibid., 16.
119 I am grateful for Phil Smith who brought this distinction between consciousness raising and consciousness shifting to my attention.
120 Engel and Jenni, The Philosophy of Animal Rights, 49.
But of course deliberate, conscious thought is especially challenging in a culture of superficial things relentlessly being foisted upon consumers. When distraction, efficiency, and convenience become the name of the game, conscious thought, which takes time, is usurped. As such, perhaps a shift in consciousness begins with being still for a moment, to dwell in what is going on. As David Greenwood writes, “If I slow myself down long enough to judge if I can be truly grateful for something, then I am bringing more consciousness toward the act of consuming. Slowness, gratitude, selectivity, and reduction—these are gestures toward a kind of consumer conscientization.”

I have not put the blame, so to speak, on schools for inculcating the liabilities presented in this chapter, but maybe I should. I will now begin to describe how schools clearly play their part in passing down the burdensome and violent facets of the cultural hegemony of meat. Since we’ve looked at education and meat eating from out-of-school contexts and from the standpoint of both the individual and culture, for the remainder of this project I turn the focus to the compulsory school as the nexus miseducative agent for self and society. There is conspicuous continuity between mainstream consumer culture and schools today: the corporate forces thrusting the cultural hegemony of meat are not barred from formal educational institutions but, instead, have been intensifying inside their walls.

121 “No Contest,” Cheers.

Chapter 5

Animals-Becoming-Meat: From Living Animal to Dead Commodity

Introduction

Through formal curricula and policies, as well as through their informal ethos, schools take up a vigorous role in the cultural hegemony of meat. The vast majority of primary and secondary schools in American misrepresent farm animals as inanimate things, mere products and parts of the school day. I emphasize farm animals because companion animals (dogs and cats) are conceptualized much differently for children than the animals they eat. On one hand, schools are places where children—through literature, sharing stories of their pets, other narratives and activities—learn to “love” animals, while on the other hand, every day they gorge on the tortured remains of animal carcasses at lunch. Schools, it seems, are primary places that teach children the “schizoid quality” of our relationships with animals, “in which sentiment and brutality exist side by side.”¹²³ But the brutality behind the school lunch goes largely unseen and unacknowledged—just

as it does in society at large. Schools are exceptionally good at both physically and psychologically distancing students from farm animals by disengaging minds, keeping human bodies removed from farms where animal bodies exist, and by distracting from, rather than bringing attention to, what students eat and the world beyond.

By now it should be clear that meat is an artifice, a deceptive symbol disguising a very long and rich story of living, suffering, and dying. Nothing about the standard cafeteria-style lunch, the structure of schools, or school curriculum leads students to know of this story, or even its prologue; they only know the facade of meat. To address and potentially resist this miseducation, to tell the story of meat, I will argue that schools should be places where children understand animals-becoming-meat—that is, the agricultural and slaughtering practices through which living animals are dominated, confined, maimed, and killed in order to become fragmented, edible pieces of meat. Why should anyone, let alone children, learn of such a dreadful, repugnant story? In my view, the truth behind meat is so profound and gripping that it can change the way we think and act in the world.

But ultimately this effort involves a broader function. In this chapter, I also make

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124 Food safety is also a concern. In 2009, USA Today reported that many fast-food chains have much higher standards for meat inspection and quality than the United States Department of Agriculture, supplier of meat for the National School Lunch Program. Peter Eisler, Blake Morrison, and Anthony DeBarros, “Fast-food Standards for Meat Top Those for School Lunches,” USA Today, December 8, 2009.

125 This is a generalization of the typical American public school, but it is an accurate generalization. There are exceptions of course, and one of the more noteworthy exceptions is The Edible Schoolyard, a joint project of the Chez Panisse Foundation (founded by chef-author Alice Waters) and Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School in Berkeley, California. See http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/.

126 I am borrowing and adapting this term from Erika Cudworth. (See Cudworth, “‘Most Farmers Prefer Blondes.’”) Cudworth specifically uses the term without hyphens as—“animals’ becoming meat”—and she uses an apostrophe to denote the possessive tense. I am hyphenating the three words—“animals-becoming-meat”—to bring attention to the fact that animals are forced through a process in order to become food, whereas Cudworth’s use of the term denotes that animals hold a possessive feature, as if they become meat naturally, without human interference.
a case for extending scholarly inquiry addressing consumerism and commercialism in schools to (re)encompass production and labor. Animals-becoming-meat is a particular form of production and labor—specifically, the work of rearing, dismembering, and killing—that illustrates and exposes the larger problems of distance, ignorance, and alienation in contemporary life. Understanding how a living, bellowing steer turns into succulent steak—from creature to ubiquitous commodity—demonstrates how the foundational role of production is largely concealed and thus taken for granted in consumer society.

These problems of consumerism—distance, alienation, mindlessness, apathy, callous dispositions—are exacerbated in schools due, in part, to the increased commercialization of education. A school is the ideal market for a food business or corporation; every day they are able to specifically target captive, highly-impressionable consumers who have to eat, or at least have to go to the school location where food is served. Food is the primary way that corporations infiltrate schools, and the more fast-food and pre-packaged meals that make their way into schools, the less cooking and preparation of food is required by school personnel, which results in less attentiveness to, and less gratitude for, the complexity of food, the work it involves, how it is grown, or where food comes from. I offer a thicker view of commercialism that gets to the roots of consumption, to production on farms—in our case, the mechanisms that turn living beings into commodified centerpieces of consumable school lunch. The assumption here is that people are more likely to denounce and resist the products of suffering, and thus destabilize the commercialization agenda invading schools, if they are aware of the
enablers and causes of suffering. School lunches can either encumber or foster such
awareness.

School Lunch and a Comprehensive View of School Commercialism

Recent scholars have studied the ways corporations are increasingly infiltrating
schools, mainly through food services and products, advertising, vending machines,
sponsorships, fundraising events, television programs, videos, curricular materials,
computers, and other technologies. Deron Boyles, Harry Brighouse, Henry Giroux,
Trevor Norris, and Carolyn VanderSchee make it clear that the commercialization of
education has many disconcerting effects for public education in a democratic society.

In the place of public values necessary for democracy and active citizenship are the
production of consumers and materialistic conceptions of self, others, and the world.
Even though he does not use the term “cultural liabilities,” like Martin has, it is clear that
Boyles believes unchecked commercialism is problematic and harmful transmission to
youth. School-business partnerships, Boyles finds, undermine civic engagement,
meaningful thinking, substantive inquiry, and ultimately churn out uncritical consumers
rather than engaged citizens. Instead of cultivating the values and skills necessary for the
public good, school commercialism inculcates rampant consumer materialism that

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127 Alex Molnar has been writing on the topic of commercialism and education for years. See Alex Molnar et al., Effectively Embedded: Schools and the Machinery of Modern Marketing – The Thirteenth Annual Report on Schoolhouse Commercializing Trends: 2009-2010 (Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center, 2010).

128 See, for example, Harry Brighouse, “Channel One, the Anti-Commercial Principle, and the Discontinuous Ethos,” Educational Policy 19, no. 3 (2005): 528-549; Deron Boyles, ed. The Corporate Assault on Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation, and the End of Innocence (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Henry Giroux, Stealing Innocence: Corporate Culture’s War on Children (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Trevor Norris, Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics (2011); and VanderSchee, “The Privatization of Food Services in Schools,” in Schools or Markets?, 1-30.
“circumvents process in favor of product” and reduces “searching, being, thinking…to objectified and reductionistic particulars.”

Regardless of the ontological and epistemological effects of school commercialism, as state and local district funding for education decreases, more and more schools depend on businesses and corporations for revenue to cover basic operating costs. It is certainly the case that, for some schools, school-business partnerships cannot be wholly banned. As such, scholars, including Boyles, propose that some version of critical thinking, directed toward school-business partnerships, to be taught in schools as a way to challenge the unhealthy and destructive trend of increased commercialism and consumption in schools.

Boyles offers a potentially transformative suggestion for schools inundated with commercialism by recommending “a form of reverse exploitation” designed to engage students “in critically transitive investigations of the partnerships themselves: as object lessons.” Critically transitive investigations are much needed in our present moment when market logic and consumer materialism saturate more and more institutions. And given that food is a chief way that corporations encroach on schools, and given that there has been a 300% increase in school-business partnerships since 1990, I value Boyles’s criticisms of corporate food programs, particularly Pizza Hut’s “BOOK IT!” and Chick-

131 Ibid., 222.
fil-A’s “Core Essentials” programs. But I want to add a solidifying ingredient to the recipe for criticality. What is needed, in my view, is a more concrete analysis of the objects of consumption—the centerpiece commodities that companies must market and sell to make the food programs possible.

Meat eating in schools is linked to the corporatization and commercialization of education. Because of the physically constitutive nature of internalizing food (as discussed in Chapter 1), as well as the implicit message that is conveyed—that eating animals is unproblematic and even right—when meat is routinely served as the main dish for relatively every meal a child will consume in schools, there is a strong case to make that meat in schools reinforces passive consumers and uncritical citizens. Eating is the most intimate of all consumptive acts, and consumer-pupils in schools habitually ingest the products corporations serve them without much critical thought. Recall from the previous chapter that the food advertisers and marketers of the cultural hegemony of meat thrive off unsuspecting and unquestioning meat consumers, specifically their indifference to animal suffering, which is the consequence of remaining ignorant of animals-becoming-meat. Meat served in schools is part of a broader goal of enlisting life-long allegiances to food corporations that aggressively recruit acquiescent consumers early and often, at all levels of schooling.

To begin the project of understanding animals-becoming-meat, we should recognize the school lunch for what it is and what it has the potential to become. For the most part, lunchtime is viewed as not intrinsically educational but merely an instrumental part of the school day—as means to fill up stomachs so minds can continue on with the

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“real” learning in classrooms. School lunches are a chief way that disconnection from animals occurs, even though this is the time when students physically encounter animals—by eating them. Most children, sitting and eating in cafeterias, just as they are outside of the schools, are not encouraged to think that they are eating animals, for it is the policy of food companies, school districts, and the United States Department of Agriculture that meat is a “commodity,” as opposed to the dead flesh of an animal. Daily, educators and students are complicit in the structures of exploitation and violence through school lunches that thwart intellectual growth as well as endorse animal suffering.

And it is not just what students are eating in schools, but how they eat that fosters thoughtlessness and cruelty. Meat is shipped to schools in boxes, lunch staffers remove the packages, re-heat and serve it up for students—processed slabs of product that do not resemble, in any way, an animal. As one school cafeteria cook says in the food documentary Super Size Me, cooks don’t cook anymore, and the preferred utensil of the “lunch lady” is not the pot, pan, knife, or spatula, but the box-cutter.133 To make things worse, most American children are only allowed twenty to thirty minutes for meals, leaving little to no time for intentional, slow eating or any sort of serious reflection about what it is they are doing. By the time children have passed through all twelve years of elementary, middle, and secondary schooling, they will have thoughtlessly consumed thousands of meals with meat as the centerpiece—ever the more desensitized to the suffering of others, ever the more trained in mindless eating, and ever the more socialized into the dominant culture. Of course, all this is not the fault of innocent children, as the

133 Super Size Me, DVD, directed by Morgan Spurlock (Kathbur Pictures, 2004).
colossal force of the cultural hegemony of meat has pervaded and clouded the minds and actions of their dearest role models and teachers.

Critical object meat lunches, on the other hand, disrupt the mind/body binary reinforced in schools by stimulating deliberate thought through bodily engagement, engendering a more mindful relationship with food and animals. As students consume meat with their mouths, they ruminate over questions of the animal bodies becoming one with their bodies. Seeing only fragmented slabs of beef or chicken fingers, mere signifiers and end-products, and not the killed remains of animal subjects, disconnects us from the human act of killing-for-food and also demonstrates the reductionism of consumer materialism.

But school lunches, as a form of critical pedagogy, ultimately will not suffice in helping students understand animals-becoming-meat; nor are they enough for advancing the moral aims of human growth and the mitigation of animal suffering. We need an education that is more comprehensive and robust, one that pushes our analysis beyond the point of consumption.

Scholars concerned about commercialization trends in education ought to give more credence to the continuity between production and consumption. In *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*, Norris correctly writes of the “productivist bias” of intellectuals (including Karl Marx and Adam Smith) who have, until very recently, focused too narrowly on the role production at the expense of consumption. But a review of the present literature leads me to ask: Is the postmodern turn now overshadowing production and labor? When educationists study commercialism and food consumptions there seems to be a consumerist bias—a main concern for what
happens in schools after production, when commodities are being, or have been, consumed. But consumption begins with production, and there is still a bountiful landscape in the indispensible production and labor practices that make consumption possible.

So, what is so educationally imperative, or at least interesting, about production? Without taking anything away from the consumption-focused writers, I argue that, concerning the production of meat, the turning of animals into edible food substance provides some of the richest educational and philosophical terrain to navigate. Boyles wants “to know more about what is behind the program. We want to understand more than we want to collect answers.” But just how much are we willing to learn and understand behind the school-business partnerships and the fast-food programs operating in schools today? How far should we go? I say we go further than we have been willing—to the production of meat commodities.

Retracing the commodity served as part of school lunch necessitates inquiry into the production processes before meat enters the schools and before it touches children’s mouths, even before meat is meat. With a focus on production—going back to the industrial feeding operation, to the confinement stalls and crates, through the disassembly line at butchering facilities—the taking of animal life to provide meat will no longer be taken for granted, or worse, purposefully obscured. If the intent of reverse exploitation through critical investigations is to question and understand consumerist narratives and commercialization policies, then how can we reasonably deny the elemental dimension of this especially intimate and routine consumptive encounter? Without production, we are

134 Boyles, “Considering the Roles for AESA,” 222.
left with too thin of a story; our understanding of food lacks substance; we fail to appreciate the nuance of consuming animals; and, on a broader level, we lose sight of the deeply relational system of the industrial economy.

I have argued that to take consumption seriously, we must also take production seriously; and to take the production of meat seriously, we must take animal farming and slaughtering seriously—as I wrote in Chapter 1, it would be impossible to consume meat if humans did not somehow make meat consumable.

**Education Down on the Farm**

*All things with which we deal, preach to us. What is a farm but a mute gospel?*

- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*  

In the last chapter, I critiqued the industrial eater as both victim and accomplice in the cultural hegemony of meat. Industrial eaters are ignorant insofar as they believe eating is solely a private, commercial act and as long as they remain unaware that eating is an agricultural act, fraught with far-reaching ethical, ecological, and social ripples. Here, I attempt to provide a way to minimize the reproduction of industrial eaters. Of course, as long as we produce and consume in an industrial, global-scale economy, there will remain some disconnection between producer and consumer. I am not arguing for a total elimination of distance between the two; this would be impossible. I am calling for its reduction. This begins on the farm.

Our analysis of schoolhouse commercialism has not led us astray into the wilderness, but back to a place where I believe careful thinking and mindful eating comes naturally: the farm, where our very sustenance begins, where the production of

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commodities commences. For something to be consumed, something must be produced. For something to be produced, something must be sowed in the soil. Just as schools are not simply places where children learn about stuff, farms are not simply places that grow foodstuff. The farm—its textures, sensations, and hues—is much more than simply an arm of consumer society. It is a gospel.

This chapter was initially inspired by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who warned his fellow nineteenth-century Americans to question the bourgeoning technological and economic “progress” of industrialization. One thing he wanted them to do was contemplate the deceptive and immoral aspects of industrial consumption: “it is only necessary to ask a few questions as to the progress of the articles of commerce from the fields where they grew, to our houses, to become aware that we eat and drink and wear perjury and fraud in a hundred commodities.”136 The best catalyst to get people to ask questions about unjust production—indeed the solution to it—lies in what Emerson called the “doctrine of the Farm.”137 Humans, Emerson thought, should not be mere slaves to consuming but rather should “stand in primary relations with the work of the world.”138 We are implicated in unjust economic systems of production, and the only way to get out of this injustice is to do the work ourselves, or at least consume only those products from which we know their specific origins; those goods that were produced by the hands we are familiar with, hands of the laborers closest to us. For Emerson, the work of the farm is not only essential to remedy injustice but is also to be lived and experienced as educational. It is a doctrine with a twofold purpose: to promote justice

136 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Man the Reformer,” in Essays and Poems, 85.
137 Ibid., 89.
138 Ibid.
and to educate.\textsuperscript{139} Emerson maintained that those who produce “have got the education;” those who consume, “only the commodity.”\textsuperscript{140} If it is educational to labor on farms, then where does that leave children who remain physically removed from farms, inert in schools?

Emerson lived during a time when schooling, as we know it today, was in its infancy. But I think his criticisms and suggestions are as insightful and urgent today as they were then (as we’ll soon see, recent empirical research supports his claims about the educative value of farms). After attending a lecture given by Horace Mann on the democratic aims of common schooling, Emerson wrote the following:

We are shut up in schools and college recitation rooms for ten or fifteen years & come out at last with a bellyful of words & do not know a thing. We cannot use our hands or our legs or our eyes or our arms. We do not know an edible root in the woods. We cannot tell our course by the stars nor the hour of the day by the sun…. The farm, the farm is the right school. The reason of my deep respect for the farmer is that he is a realist and not a dictionary. The farm is a piece of the world, the School house is not. The farm by training the physical rectifies and invigorates the metaphysical & moral nature.\textsuperscript{141}

Emerson is calling for bodily encounters with “a piece of the world” and these encounters on farms invoke philosophical and ethical contemplation. It is important to appreciate that the doctrine of the farm moves us beyond what those in education today often refer to as “hands-on learning,” which can still be carried out inside the confine of schools.

Emerson wants us to think in a more radical way—not only about what education is but also about what the world is—so we see the world as teeming with, yes,

\textsuperscript{139} For an intriguing discussion on this point and on Emerson’s ideas on the educational worth of nature, see Bryan Warnick, “Emerson and the Education of Nature,” \textit{Philosophical Studies in Education} 38 (2007): 95-103.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 88

\textsuperscript{141} As cited in E.D. Hirsch, Jr., \textit{The Schools We Need and Why we Don’t have Them} (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 108. (italics mine)
educational purpose and potential, but also with moral and spiritual meaning. The world is abundant with meaning and soul, and there are boundless moral lessons to be learned in nature, especially on farms; but when students enter a school house they are severed from all this. In rigidly defining what is educational and what is not, what is good and what is not, schools indoctrinate and mold, they institutionalize and confine bodies and souls. Emerson was not convinced, and neither am I, that schooling was effective in getting humans to ask the necessary moral questions about our commodities or unjust labor. It is too cutoff and isolated from the world of work. Students would be better equipped to ask questions if they could get out of the school and get their hands into the soil, if they could see and experience farms, farming, and farmers—the things that make up production. Clearly, it would be impossible and undesirable to take all children out of school houses and put them on farms to do the “work of the world.” But schools should, at the very least, encourage students to acquire an understanding and the know-how of this historically educative human practice. If students cannot do the doctrine of the farm, they at least need to acquire some understanding of it; they need to hear what this “mute gospel” has to teach.

For the sake of argument, assume for a moment that some version of the doctrine of the farm could be carried out by schools. Unjust economic production would still exist, so what would be the point? I argue that the “objective,” to use the jargon of educationists, of the doctrine of the farm is not to completely eradicate injustice but to

142 I am not alone in this claim. The doctrine of the farm is reflected in a few authors working in educational theory today, in particular the writings of David Orr, Chet Bowers, and Madhu Suri Prakash, who all share Emerson’s sentiments and dedicate much of their scholarly and teaching efforts to food, sustainability, and farming. See, for example, David Orr, Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2004); and Madhu Suri Prakash, “Soil, Seeds, Salt: Education Brought Down to Earth,” YES! Magazine, August, 14, 2009.
carefully address it by bringing forth a “stomach-orientation,” as Glen Kuehn terms it. Stomach-orientation is a question-posing, take-nothing-for-granted disposition toward food that helps students rediscover the tale of eating for the sake of understanding the gospel of the farm, and with it, the complexities, realities, and consequences of food production, distribution, and consumption. A stomach-orientation can be a solution to industrial injustice but its most basic function is to heighten propensity for awareness and critical reflection by seeking to understand the origins and connections of our (seemingly) individual food choices. Kuehn expresses how the stomach-oriented thinker:

does not believe there is a separation between the source of the food and how it finally arrived on the plate… [W]e do not assume that it grew in some ‘other’ place that is completely separate from us, from which it traversed unknowable territory and then magically appeared as food to be consumed. The stomach-oriented person sees the question of where the food came from as crucial to understanding the range of experiences surrounding the food from its point of origination to its eventual consumption (AP, 242-43).

While a stomach-orientation certainly is not the remedy to eradicating all unjust production, it certainly is a step in the right direction in working to cultivate human growth and alleviating the human and animal suffering resulting from unethical, inhumane meat production. It is not foolish to believe that schools are places that should engage meat eating as a profound educative experience, one that entails multiple levels of intelligence to unveil the vast dimensions of the ideologies that undergird this prevailing practice of our culture. Schools should become primary sites for stomach-oriented educators and students to explore the range of experiences with eating dead animals as food.

Now, we have arrived at the rather significant challenge of how to implement the doctrine of the farm to develop stomach-oriented students. For some schools, there is
already a policy framework put in place for both the doctrine of the farm and for the
question of understanding animals-becoming-meat: Farm to School (FTS) programs.143

Begun as an innovative project of the Urban and Environmental Policy Institute at
Occidental College, FTS is spreading across the nation. The programs are intended to
connect local farms to schools, provide schools with fresh healthy foods, and help
students make the connections between what they eat and the farms from which the food
is grown. FTS is gaining recognition for its benefits to schools, students, local
communities, and local and regional farmers.144 In providing nutrition education,
encouraging healthy eating, and energizing local economies, the program holds wide-
ranging support from local farmers, teachers, students, administrators, parents, non-profit
organizations, universities, and other community members. In addition to promoting
healthier eating, FTS promotes a broader economic and ecological agenda designed to:

- Support economic development across numerous sectors and promote job
  creation;
- Increase market opportunities for farmers, fishers, ranchers, food
  processors and food manufacturers;
- Decrease the distance between producers and consumers, thus promoting food security while reducing emissions of greenhouse
gases and reliance on oil.145

However, there is one glaring omission of FTS: the programs fail to adequately
address the centerpiece of school food and the Standard American Diet. The reasons for

143 There is a national Farm to School network but the specific programs are carried out by local districts
and schools, though these often take guidance from the national network. The network’s website claims,
“Farm to School is now operational in more than 10,000 schools spanning all 50 states.” See:

144 See, for example, Jessica Bagdonis, Clare Hinrichs, and Kai Schafft, “The Emergence and Framing of
Farm-to-School Initiatives: Civic Engagement, Health, and Local Agriculture,” Agriculture and Human
Programs: Perspectives of School Food Service Professionals,” Journal of Nutrition Education 42, no. 2
(2010): 83-91; and Mark Vallianatos, Robert Gottlieb, and Margaret Ann Haase, “Farm-to-School:
Strategies for Urban Health, Combating Sprawl, and Establishing a Community Food Systems Approach,”

this omission are obvious. Given that one of the main aims of the program is to help children understand where their food comes from, what school administrator would ever dream of allowing her students to take a tour of a slaughterhouse or factory farm? What district superintendent would approve of her student body witnessing the dismembering and killing of animals? And what would parents have to say about this? (See Chapter 6 for this concern).

But there are other ways to experience animals-becoming-meat. FTS is not only about getting students to visit farms; knowledge and information of farms and food are also brought into the schools. It seems this would be the most realistic option for a school brave enough to implement a meat-centered FTS policy. Regardless of the specific pedagogical or policy means of a meat-centered FTS program, one thing now managing the miseducation behind meat consumption in schools should no longer be tolerated, and that is that educators and administrators are turning their backs on the animals who die to provide lunch; or worse, they purposefully conceal or distort the truth when students do express interest. The doctrine of the farm makes no exceptions for uncomfortable or disturbing questions, especially when they are questions that are so fundamental to everyday consumption and life.

An ideal meat FTS program would involve visitations and tours to farms and slaughterhouses so students could witness, firsthand, the procedures that turn animals into meat. (This is a more practical option for college students and my analysis and arguments are applicable to them as well). However, I recognize that this is impractical for the vast majority of K-12 schools. So, in the next chapter I discuss the next best thing: visual representations of animals-becoming-meat. Until then, though, let us keep with the
general purpose of FTS—that children will learn about the origins of food and cultivate knowledge about farms to promote healthful eating and stronger community-school relationships—and extend the scope of the program to encompass all foods, but specifically the main dish of school lunches. What will we find if we apply the same principle of FTS, as currently carried out primarily with vegetable farms, to animal farms?

The initial step of any FTS program dedicated to animal agriculture would be to have students explore the question that relatively all children ask at some point: “Where does meat come from?” The answer, of course, is a farm. The question then becomes: “What kind of farm?”

Stories behind Meat: Humans, Animals, and the Land

Humans convert animals to meat in a variety of ways. As I return to my experiences growing up in rural Ohio, what I learned from my grandparents on their traditional, small-scale family-owned and operated farm has given me good reason to protest intensive agriculture and mechanized, industrial slaughtering. In recollecting my childhood, I see now that Emerson was right: the farm preached to me; it had something meaningful and sacred to teach me. There were countless sermons, stories, and lessons, and each had a profound effect on my life, sense of self, and understanding of the world.

Admittedly, it can be problematic to set up a binary between “family farms” and “factory farms” or “industrial agriculture,” as if the former are inherently righteous and the latter evil. Small farms can be environmentally destructive and cruel to the land, people, and animals, too. Additionally, there is often a grey area where small and middle-sized farms are owned by corporations, even though they may involve sustainable, humane farming on that particular farm. For the sake of this project, my grandparents’ farm, however, illustrates a certain relationship to the land, a relationship that becomes less sacred and more economic as farms have moved from small to large.
I have the privilege to know firsthand what a sustainable, free-range farm is in practice, and to know the joy, health, and love it brings to self, family, and community. My grandparents raised chickens, pigs, and steers on their eighty-acre farm in southwest Ohio. Small holdings were the norm; no more that twenty-two cattle at one time and no more than two dozen chickens and pigs. With this sort of traditional farming, commonly referred to as “family farming,” animals are not confined in stalls or crates but instead contently explore and graze the pastures, fertilizing the land with their excrement. (The farm was free-range and organic before “free-range” and “organic” became commodified for mass market and consumption). Subsistence-based farms like my grandparents’—the practices humans have engaged in for most of our history—are harmonious with the natural environment, never demanding more from the land than it can provide. What was obvious on the farm was the meaningful relationships and the sanctity of humans, nonhumans, and the land. Together, brimming with life, we literally fed off each other.

As I think about the educational significance of consuming animals, I think back to the chickens raised by my grandparents, from their own coupe. The hens would squawk around, peck the ground, dust bathe outside in the fresh air and sun, spreading and stretching their limbs—all the things that a chicken needs and ought to do, all the things a chicken cannot do in the battery cages and confines of industrial feeding operations (see page 143). I remember how my grandparents lived joyfully and pleasantly every day with the hens. One of my fondest memories is collecting their eggs with my grandma and watching the chickens live happy, free, unencumbered lives—until it was time to kill them for food. By my grandmother’s own hands, while the chickens would struggle and fight for their lives, she would stretch the chickens’ necks across the
chopping block and chop off their heads. She would immediately hang them upside-down to drain the blood, then put them in the bucket of scalding hot water to soften the skin for de-feathering. After which, my grandmother would remove the guts and entrails and fry the meat to serve to our family.

To see this ritual unfold, to live with the hen, then to see her struggle in those final moments of life, to see her head chopped off, then to eat her—going from life to death to table—you recognize that all of this is not gross, but a cherished ceremony that induces laughter and tears, joy and sadness, love and fear. This is a story of animals-becoming-meat. It is teeming with meaning, involving commitment, thought, intentionality, care, work, and morbid ritual. It is an intimate narrative of human and nonhuman creatures, how they live and die with each other. But this story of animals-becoming-meat is a forgotten story, one being replaced with the story of corporate conquest and factory production.

Even though there has been a gradual increase of locally-grown food, farmer’s markets, urban gardening, and community supported agriculture, large-scale industrial agriculture is still the prevailing method of food production in industrial societies. With the expansion of global capitalism, the twentieth century was a period of rapid technological-scientific advancement that has streamlined and centralized agriculture, making diverse, traditional farming like my grandparents less feasible across a country that was once a predominantly rural landscape. Gradually replacing the artful human touch of family farming is the corporatization of farming, often referred to as “agribusiness,” a departure from the land that is turning the American family farm into nothing but romanticized illusion.
Industrial agriculture is more mechanized and globalized. It uproots and replaces the local with the global, the small with the large, natural animal-waste fertilizer with chemicals, pesticides, and herbicides; it replaces human labor and small tractors with gigantic machines and equipment. Industrial agriculture replaces the honesty and transparency of the family farm—anyone who wanted to were allowed to see the animals at my grandparents—with distance, secrecy, and disguise. It supplants the free range, grass fed practices of subsistence based farms with CAFOs where thousands—in the case of egg-laying hens, hundreds of thousands and millions—of livestock (i.e., living inventory) are reared in one facility. Deprivation of basic comforts; rearing animals in crowded confinement stalls and pins; veil crates, gestation crates, and battery cages; tail docking and beak clipping; hormones and anti-biotics; broken limbs and dysfunctional organs; a disassembly line that never stops mutilating and killing; and transporting both living animals and dead animals over states and continents—these are the standard practices of industrial meat production. Like my grandparents’ farm, this too is a story about animals-becoming-meat. But it is a very different story, with a different climax, not of intentional and intimate familial ceremony, but of fast food, drive-thrus, and supermarkets.

The fate of industrial agriculture depends on unsuspecting consumers as much as it does the will of the corporate-techno-chemical conglomerates of agribusiness. It is in their greatest interest—profit—to keep us in a pathetic, dependent condition, to keep us thinking that we are better off eating their products, to keep us thinking that industrial agriculture feeds the world. They will never stop telling their story. They will never stop because it is an obscenely lucrative story. They will continue to destroy honor, care,
family, community, individual and ecological health with more factories, petroleum, feedlots, manure lagoons, and chemicals. With the aid of massive government subsidies, agribusiness dominates the food landscape, implementing more and better science, new machines, new drugs, convoluted laws, more food technicians and biotechnologies—while the advertising and marketing segments of the system persuade us that all this is necessary for safer, cheaper food.

As we look closer into the reality of animals-becoming-meat in industrial operations, I think that the descriptions themselves constitute powerful arguments for focusing more intently on the suffering of animals. The way things are in factory farming and industrial slaughterhouses will suffice in presenting a case for the viciousness and wrongness of it all. Timothy Pachirat’s insights in learning about animals-becoming-meat—specifically from working undercover in an industrial slaughterhouse in Nebraska for over five months—are pertinent to my efforts over the next few pages:

You may find the descriptions in the pages ahead both physically and morally repugnant. Recognize, however, that this reaction of disgust, this impulse to thumb through the pages so as to locate, separate, and segregate the sterile, abstract arguments from the flat, ugly, day-in, day-out minutiae of the working of killing, is the same impulse that isolates the slaughterhouses from society as a whole… The detailed accounts that follow are not merely incidental to or illustrative of a more important theoretical argument…. They are the argument.147

The rest of the chapter might be some of the most important pages of the whole dissertation, even as I move my analysis, arguments, and ideas to the backdrop and give priority to the facts and stories of others. I encourage the reader to take heed of Pachirat’s advice and not succumb to that impulse to skim over the disgusting details to get to my

argument. The ugly, uneasy, squeamish particulars of animals-becoming-meat that make us cringe are the argument.

_Human Stickers: Or, Those Who Kill the Animals We Eat_

This chapter is mainly about the lives of farm animals, but I would be remiss if I did not reveal how industrial animal production devalues humans, too, privileging output and efficiency over basic dignity and respect. Understanding animals-becoming-meat involves becoming cognizant of the hidden, yet extensive, human exploitation in what Gail Eisnitz calls “the most dangerous industry in the United States,” the meat-packing industry. In her book _Slaughterhouse_—heralded as modern day’s _The Jungle_—Eisnitz provides a thorough account of the working and living conditions of under-paid, over-worked slaughterhouse workers. The human beings laboring to turn out the meat our appetites crave also are, like the animals they kill, victims of inhumane treatment. The sheer speed that which workers are forced to maim and kill the animals is shocking and reprehensible. “As line speeds have as much as tripled in the last fifteen years,” notes Eisnitz, “cumulative trauma disorders have increased nearly 1,000 percent.” The most heart-wrenching aspect of her investigations is the personal accounts of those who do the slaughtering, the kill-floor workers, and those who actually slit, or “stick,” the animals’ throats, the stickers.

All day long, every day for hours upon hours, it is the sticker’s job to kill animals. As the disassembly line maintains constant motion, stickers are forced to hurriedly and repetitiously maim and kill animals using conspicuously violent implements and

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149 Ibid., 273.
methods. This comes with appalling, lasting psychological ramifications, wherein some stickers actually begin to see humans as killable—some wanting to harm humans just as they do the animals they mutilate and slaughter. The hardening or even total eradication of human empathy and compassion in kill-floor workers is evident, as one seasoned employee explains to Eisnitz:

But when you’re standing there night after night, digging that knife into those hogs, and they’re fighting you, kicking at you, squealing, trying to bite you—doing whatever they can to try and get away from you—after a while you don’t give a shit. You’re just putting in your time. And then it gets to a point where you’re at a daydream stage. Where you can think about everything else and still do your job. You become emotionally dead. And you get just as sadistic as the company itself.150

One sticker confides to Eisnitz:

You get an attitude that if that hog kicks at me, I’m going to get even. You’re already going to kill the hog, but that’s not enough. It has to suffer. When you get a live one you think, Oh good, I’m going to beat this sucker…. Another thing that happens is that you don’t care about people’s pain anymore. I used to be very sensitive about people’s problems—willing to listen…. Like, one day the live hogs were driving me nuts and the kill-floor superintendent was playing his power games, yelling at me about something…. If he’d come down there I would’ve slit his throat. Could’ve taken a human life and not given it one thought or had one regret for it.151

The same sticker goes on to tell Eisnitz a story about how one day a stressed, frantic pig was getting on his nerves so he took his knife and “sliced off the end of the hog’s nose, just like a piece of bologna.” Then after the hog “went crazy” for a while, he shoved a “handful of salt brine and ground it into his nose.” This man shoved the remaining salt “right up the hog’s ass.”152 This isn’t the local neighborhood butcher of American

150 Ibid., 75.
151 Ibid., 92-93.
152 Ibid., 93.
pastime. Poorly-paid, silenced, invisible, marginalized, virtually non-existent, this is the
industrial killer no one wants to know about.

Another veteran kill-floor worker, having worked “at ten different plants,” tells
Eisnitz:

The worst thing, worse than the physical danger, is the emotional toll. If
you work in that stick pit for any period of time, you develop an attitude
that lets you kill things but doesn’t let you care…Pigs down on the kill
group have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later I had
to kill them—beat them to death with a pipe. I can’t care… My attitude
was, it’s only an animal. Kill it. Sometimes I looked at people that way,
too… I remember going into the office and telling the personnel man that I
have no problem pulling the trigger on a person—if you get in my face I’ll
blow you away. Every sticker I know carries a gun, and every one of them
would shoot you. Most stickers I know have been arrested for assault. A
lot of them have problems with alcohol. They have to drink, they have no
other way of dealing with killing live, kicking animals all day long. If you
stop and think about it, you’re killing several thousand beings a day…. Some of [the workers] end up abusing their spouses because they can’t get
rid of the feelings. They leave work with this attitude and they go down to
the bar to forget. Only problem is, even if you try to drink those feelings
away, they’re still there when you sober up.\footnote{153}

Many of these kill-floor workers reveal to Eisnitz, again and again, that their stories are
not the exception; that the animal torture or acts of cruelty they witness or perform
themselves are not isolated instances of abuse; and that the injury, trauma, depression,
anger, alcoholism, domestic violence that many of them live with are not uncommon.

Animals and humans have something in common here: both are nothing but cogs in the
engine of mechanized killing.

As we transition to the animals, I have three brief points to make. First, although
the details described below will themselves present compelling reasons for
vegetarianism, I should reiterate that my purpose is not to argue that all killing of animals

\footnote{153 Ibid., 87-8. (italics original)}
for food is an absolute moral wrong. And though I will make the case in the next chapter for visual representations of animals-becoming-meat, it is necessary (due to the medium of writing a dissertation) to provide a written account of what I mean by farm animal suffering, even though I believe written accounts ultimately do not suffice in conveying the message.

Secondly, the literature on farm animal welfare and factory farming is vast, but I will draw mostly on the illuminating book, *The Ethics of What we Eat: Why our Food Choices Matter*, written by Peter Singer and Jim Mason, two experts on the topics of animal ethics, food production, and farm animal welfare. Out of all the books I’ve read that attempt to retell the story of food, especially of meat, this is one of the most impressive and informative. *The Ethics of What we Eat* is comprehensive and well-researched. Singer and Mason assume the roles of philosophers, researchers, and investigative journalists to retrace the history of three different diets: the Standard American Diet (supermarkets, chain restaurants, fast-food, and high in meat and dairy consumption); the diet of the “conscientious omnivore” (highly-selective meat consumption of only free-range, humanely-killed and processed animals); and the vegan diet (no meat or animal by-products, including dairy, eggs, butter, cheese). Part gritty detail, part ethical analysis, the authors write about the vast ethical and social dimensions of these diets and their impact on human health, animals, farmers, ecosystems, and local communities. Singer and/or Mason spent time talking with the families who followed each diet and made multiple visits to various farms and supermarkets. They even gained employment, albeit for a mere day, artificially inseminating turkeys, which the authors called:
the hardest, fastest, dirtiest, most disgusting, worst-paid work we have ever done. For ten hours we grabbed and wrestled birds, jerking them upside down, facing their pushed-open assholes, dodging their spurting shit, while breathing air filled with dust and feathers stirred up by panicked birds. Through all that, we received a torrent of verbal abuse from the foreman and others on the crew.\textsuperscript{154}

It does not come as a surprise that this was the dirtiest work Singer has performed, for he is an academic, but it is telling for Mason, a “farm boy” from Missouri, to corroborate this statement.

Third, out of the seemingly innumerable instances of suffering in intensive confinement operations and industrial slaughtering, I detail the below methods of chicken, egg, and pork production, not because they are the most horrifying I have come across in my reading or that I have seen, but because they illustrate the most common, everyday torment entailed in the “standard practices” of contemporary livestock operations—and this is what we are blind to, what too many of us unknowingly take part in as uncritical consumers.

\textit{Chickens: Or, Wings and Eggs}

Americans consume more chicken than any other animal—8.7 billion chickens were killed for meat in 2010. But we also consume a lot of eggs and pork. I will devote the next couple pages to the production of chicken, eggs, and pig meat to offer merely a glimpse into how chickens become nuggets and patties, and how pigs become bacon and pork sandwiches. (See the sources cited over the next few pages and the Bibliography for thorough accounts of beef steers, dairy cows, veal calves, turkeys, and fish).

The chickens raised and killed primarily for meat (not eggs) are referred to by the industry as “broilers.” Broilers, unlike egg-laying hens, are not caged but their space is

severely restricted, since thousands and tens of thousands of birds are raised indoors, crowded together under in a single shed.\(^{155}\) This confined environment is relatively new and very unnatural for chickens, who when raised in more open environments will establish social hierarchies and establish their own boundaries and space. But of course, this is impossible with 10,000 or more birds to one barn. One outcome of this intense confinement is the high levels of ammonia (from their feces accumulating on the ground) that:

- gives the birds chronic respiratory diseases, sores on their feet and hocks, and breast blisters. It makes their eyes water, and when it is really bad, many birds go blind. As the birds, bred for extremely rapid growth, get heavier it hurts them to keep standing up, so they spend much of their time sitting on the excrement-filled litter—hence the breast blisters.\(^{156}\)

The birds endure months of this, then they are transported to slaughter in which during they are crammed into cages—often violently—and suffer from broken limbs and wings. Again, the high number of birds raised, transported, and killed makes humane treatment or care during each phase of the whole animals-becoming-meat process very difficult, some say, practically impossible. After the chickens have to ride—sometimes for hours and hours, in the sweltering heat or freezing cold—on trucks in a state of fear, injury, stress, and more confinement, they arrive at the slaughterhouse where they are hung upside down on a mechanized line, a sort of conveyer belt for killing chickens. They are then dipped into an electrified water bath, designed to stun them out of consciousness before they move on through the throat-cutting machine. But the “stunner” bath at many slaughterhouses is not strong enough (because too much voltage would taint the meat),


\(^{156}\) Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What we Eat*, 24.
leaving many birds paralyzed for slaughter but still fully conscious. Singer and Mason point out that the throat-cutting line runs so fast that it, like the stunner bath, misses many birds. Even if they are missed, because it is too inefficient and costly to stop the line, they proceed, still alive and conscious, to the tank of scalding hot water. No one knows the exact figure, but it has been approximated that up to three million chickens a year are scalded alive. These three million suffer and die gruesome deaths from being scalded alive; as one worker explains: they “flop, scream, kick, and their eyeballs pop out of their heads,” and some come out of the tank with “broken bones and disfigured and missing body parts because they’ve struggled so much in the tank.”

There are other chickens who bear a similarly horrendous life. These are the hens that produce eggs, a ubiquitous food ingredient in the diet of most Americans. Singer and Mason detail the typical life of factory-farmed hens:

Most Americans know little about how their eggs are produced. They don’t know that American egg-producers typically keep their hens in bare wire cages, often crammed eight or nine hens to a cage so small that they never have room to stretch even one wing, let alone both. The space allocated per hen, in fact, is even less than broiler chickens get, ranging from 48 to 72 square inches. Even the higher of these figures is less than the size of a standard American sheet of typing paper. In such crowded conditions, stressed hens tend to peck each other—and the sharp beak of a hen can be a lethal weapon when used relentlessly against weaker birds unable to escape. To prevent this, producers routinely sear off the ends of the hens’ sensitive beaks with a hot blade—without an anesthetic… Artificial lighting is used to mimic the longest days of summer, to induce the hens to lay the maximum number of eggs all year round. A year of this leaves the hens debilitated, and they start to lay fewer eggs. Many American producers then cut off their food and starve them for as long as two weeks until they go into molt, which means they lose their feathers and cease to lay eggs. Some die during this period, and the survivors lose about 30 percent of their body weight. They are then fed again, and their

157 Ibid., 26.
158 Ibid., 27.
laying resumes for a few more months before they are killed.\textsuperscript{159}

Pause for a moment. Try to imagine, as best you can, what sort of life this must be for these hens who are deprived of sun, fresh air, movement, dust and dirt—in essence, they are deprived of a chicken’s life. And try to imagine what life was like for hens on my grandparents’ farm. Take a moment to compare the two ways of being.

\textit{Pigs: Or, Bacon and Pork Chops}

Of all the animals who become meat, my heart pains the most for pigs. Pigs are naturally inquisitive, playful, smart, social, and \textit{clean} animals. When left to their own, in less restricted conditions, pigs will wallow in mud to cool down or as a form of hygiene to rid the skin of external parasites. (Note that some humans, too, take mud baths and get mud facials for hygienic benefits). In the wild, boars and pigs will choose specific dung areas to relieve themselves, removed from where they eat and dwell. But they are filthy on farms because they are confined and have no place to excrete their feces but in the same place they live. Plus, in close quarters, they root up and trample what little grass and dirt they may have had and are left with only mud. Moreover, on average, pigs are just as intelligent as dogs, and in some cases, even more so. Their cognition has been studied by scientists and learning psychologists, demonstrating high-level reasoning and problem-solving.\textsuperscript{160} But of course the dogs with formal training, behavior modification, and whose owners enroll them in obedience school will have the edge over pigs who are stuck in confinement with very little stimulation or environing conditions that would promote or develop their natural intelligence. Nevertheless, we can see that more and

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 37-38.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid; and see “The Joy of Pigs,” as part of PBS’s NATURE series at: http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/the-joy-of-pigs/video-full-episode/5416/.
more people are realizing that pigs are not the filthy, stupid, sweaty (they don’t even sweat) animals once thought to be, as some folks are deciding to raise these loyal, affectionate, intelligent problem solvers as pets.

All these facts are taken into account here because they matter morally, with the exception of cleanliness. If we take the time to think about the intelligence (moving beyond sentience), natural instincts, and biological make-up of a pig, we can see just how abhorrent the conditions of rearing are for pigs in industrial feeding factories.

According to Singer and Mason, about ninety percent of the pigs Americans will consume this year are reared indoors in concentrated feeding farms. Factory-famed pigs have to live their entire lives indoors and are subjected to severe confinement, which not only prevents them from behaving as pigs—exploring, foraging, socializing—but results in physical injury, deformation, fear, and severe psychological distress. Take the life of a pregnant sow, for example. Sows are confined to gestation crates—steel stalls about two feet wide and six feet long, which is barely wider and longer than their bodies—wherein they cannot even turn around. Every instinctual behavior is suppressed, as they stand there—alone, for twenty-four hours a day, several months, until they are ready to give birth—in these crates that sit atop a bare concrete floor, with no straw, grass, or dirt for comfort. Many sows develop painful foot injuries from continuously standing on the hard floors. Since producers keep female pigs on a strict breeding and artificial insemination regimen to maximize productivity, females are pregnant for most of their lives and thus regularly subjected to the isolation, fear, and utter boredom of gestation crates. Virtually immobilized, deprived of any stimulation, robbed of the freedom to

161 Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What we Eat*, 46.
exercise, or to even take one step in any direction, these curious and exploratory animals become highly anxious, distressed, and resort to gnawing on the crate for their only physical and mental stimulation. Then after birth, the sow is moved to a farrowing crate where she is, again, confined but this time caged to the floor so her piglets have constant access to their mother’s milk. Producers do this to wean the piglets as fast as possible so the whole process can start again. Our demand for cheap, readily-available bacon and pork make output, efficiency, and speed the driving values of the pork industry.

Like broiler chickens and egg-laying hens, pigs also deserve better treatment and a basic level of moral respect. These animals deserve human moral consideration because they are sentient, conscious, and intelligent beings, and all beings who possess these qualities deserve a life that affords them basic dignity that would allow them the freedom to satisfy and actualize their most natural tendencies and instincts.

I will not fully describe the agony pigs or other animals endure in factory farms or the terror they live through leading up to and during slaughter. While the vast majority of animals make it to the slaughterhouse and are killed by a sticker, some die horrific deaths on their way to slaughter. These animals died for nothing, not even a single pork sandwich, steak, or hotdog was enjoyed. Briefly, here is what Singer has to say about the animals who die in transit, from farm to slaughterhouse:

Animals who die in transit do not die easy deaths. They freeze to death in winter and collapse from thirst and heat exhaustion in summer. The die, lying unattended in stockyards, from injuries sustained in falling off a slippery loading ramp. They suffocate when other animals pile on top of them in overcrowded, badly loaded trucks. They die from thirst or starve when careless stock-men forget to give them food or water. And they die from the sheer stress of the whole terrifying experience. The animal that you may be having for dinner tonight did not die in
any of these ways; but these deaths are and always have been part of the overall process that provides people with their meat.\textsuperscript{162}

There is so much more to this story, much more suffering, exploitation, and violence to be unearthed than what I have offered. Perhaps I have done the reader a service by omitting more accounts of grotesque farm animal cruelty, but I have done a disservice to the animals by not elaborating further on their suffering.

\textit{The Land and Natural Resources}

Why don’t we philosophize more about the soil, air, and water? Like food, they are fundamental to everything we do; yet we take them for granted. For the most part, those who study education tend to keep away from earthy issues, but it would be apt for educational philosophers and scholars to come down to the soil and take a page out of the book of the twentieth-century’s most ardent critic of compulsory schooling, Ivan Illich:

The ecological discourse about planet earth, global hunger, threats to life, urges us to look down at the soil, humbly, as philosophers…. From soil we come, and to the soil we bequeath our excrements and remains. And soil – its cultivation and our bondage to it – is remarkably absent from those things clarified by philosophy in our western tradition…. As philosophers, we search below our feet because our generation has lost its grounding in both soil and virtue.\textsuperscript{163}

Raising animals, as a practice in itself, is not detrimental to the soil. Farmers, such as Joel Salatin of Polyface farms in Virginia (and my grandparents as well), actually enrich the soil and benefit the land by keeping with the carrying capacity of the soil in raising a limited number of grass-fed animals on free-range pastures.\textsuperscript{164} Regardless of these traditional, time-tested practices, which are now, in our industrial age, often deemed

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{162} Singer, \textit{Animal Liberation}, 149-50.
\textsuperscript{163} Ivan Illich, “Declaration on Soil,” 1990, \url{http://www.davidtinapple.com/illich/1990_declaration_soil.PDF}.
\textsuperscript{164} See the Polyface Farm website: \url{http://www.polyfacefarms.com/}.
\end{footnotesize}
“alternative farming methods,” the dominant methods used to feed, rear, and slaughter animals remain highly-intensive, massive-scaled and are of dire ecological consequence.

In a consumer’s index of environmental sustainability, “eco-friendly” typically involves hybrid cars, recycling, choosing paper over plastic, or installing low-flow showerheads and other “green” products and technologies. But more and more people are becoming aware of the mounting environmental problems that industrial animal agriculture presents. Of all our everyday actions, including driving cars, none have the impact on the planet more than our appetites for meat food. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in the most comprehensive study of animal agriculture and its impact on the environment that I am aware of, raising animals for human consumption has devastating consequences on the global climate as well as local and regional ecosystems. Take greenhouse gases, for example. The 2006 U.N. report, which is entitled, *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, found that the global meat industry is the single largest contributor to global warming, accounting for eighteen percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. That percentage surpasses the entire transportation industry at thirteen percent. Let me reiterate that point: raising animals for human consumption produces more greenhouse gases than all of the cars, trucks, and planes combined. This is largely because, in addition to the carbon monoxide used for meat and animal transportation, livestock emit a substantial amount of methane and nitrous oxide—gases that are twenty-three and 296 times more toxic than carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas our automobiles produce. 165 As this report shows, the story does not end with toxic gases.

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Animal agribusiness contributes to massive soil erosion and rainforest deforestation; contributes to air and water pollution; harms biodiversity; accelerates species loss; and produces 60 millions of tons of waste annually, which is 130 times the volume of human waste. In the United States alone, “livestock are responsible for an estimated 55 percent of erosion, 37 percent of the pesticides applied, 50 percent of the volume of antibiotics consumed, and for 32 percent of the nitrogen load and 33 percent of the phosphorus load into freshwater resources.”

Energy and natural resources are other concerns. In 2007, a “record 284 million tons of meat were produced worldwide,” and that amount, according to the U.N., will reach 465 million tons by 2050. Feeding, watering, transporting, and slaughtering this many animals, to get them pre-packaged and ready for purchase as meat in the supermarkets and restaurants, uses an enormous amount of energy, natural resources, and fossil fuels. “Raising livestock consumes 90 percent of the soy crop in the U.S., 80 percent of the corn and 70 percent of its grain.”

Additionally, these feeding crops require astounding amounts water for drinking, growing food, servicing, and irrigation. Instead of using the land, labor, and resources to grow food and supply water directly for ourselves, we are growing an enormous amount of food for animals who we, in turn, eat. This is a tremendously inefficient use of finite resources—wastefulness that meat-eating populations need to question and change, considering that so many humans suffer and die due to starvation and lack of clean water.

In short, animal agriculture has become one of the most urgent dangers to the

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166 Steinfeld, et al., *Livestock’s Long Shadow*, 273
Earth and the finite natural recourses for future generations. If we believe what the ecologists and environmentalists warn us about, Singer is accurate when he writes: “We are, quite literally, gambling with the future of our planet—for the sake of hamburgers.” And still, as an increasing number of consumers are “going green” by reducing meat consumption or seeking out local meat sources, for the majority population, giving up the beloved American pastime of convenient, readily-available meat remains an unpopular solution. Even the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Al Gore, avoids the topic, ignoring any serious discussion of meat production and the environment in his highly-acclaimed, Oscar-winning film, An Inconvenient Truth. But if there is ever an inconvenient truth, it is that a lifetime of meat-eating does more damage to Earth than a lifetime of hummer-driving.

I said at the onset that I would not be prescribing vegetarianism as a moral aim, but the evidence, admittedly, gravitates toward that end, especially for those who are concerned about animal welfare, humane working conditions for humans, and sustainability. It is important to note that vegetarianism is not a perfectly sustainable or cruelty-free diet, for there is no such thing. One still promotes some level of harm no matter what his or her diet, meat or no meat. Again, the point is not total elimination but reduction. But once all the statistics, reports, and arguments are analyzed, it is unquestionable: the less meat one consumes, especially factory farm meat, the less harm is done—to humans, animals, and the Earth.

Proponents and Defenses of Factory Farming

At this point, the fair thing to do is consider some of the common defenses for

\[170^{170}\] Singer, Animal Liberation, 169.
industrial animal agriculture. Proponents of industrial meat production frequently say that industrial agriculture is necessary to feed the world. Blake Hurst writes that “everything I know and I have learned tells me this: we have to farm ‘industrially’ to feed the world.” But here’s the big problem with the “feed the world” defense: The world is not fed; in fact, much of the world is starving, with 1 billion humans going hungry across the globe, according to the United Nations. Furthermore, as discussed, we know that the global meat industry, while providing rich nations with an overabundance of cheap meat, actually perpetuates starvation in poorer, developing nations. As Walden Bellow, among many others, has pointed out, we now have an industrial food system that diverts food from the hungry. Millions of peasants around the world have lost their food independence and security, increasingly growing and exporting crops for consumers in wealthier nations. Corporate agriculture spans the globe and the world’s poor now use their own land and resources to raise crops for livestock instead of growing local, staple foodstuffs for themselves. Additionally, hunger is made worse through industrial meat production because of how inefficient it is to feed and water billions of animals each year, when we could be directly growing food to eat ourselves and directly drinking the water we give to animals ourselves. If industrial agriculture feeds the world, then why are so many of the world’s humans suffering and dying of starvation?

A second common defense of factory farming is that it provides cheap and safe meat. It is true that factory farming has made cheap meat ubiquitous. But the problem is


more complex than the proponents of the system want us to believe. When they say “cheap food,” left out of the calculation are the many hidden environmental, social, and health costs of factory farms—costs passed onto others. Bryan Walsh writes that industrial food production “generates cheap, filling food at the literal expense of healthier produce is also a principal cause of America’s obesity epidemic. At a time when the nation is close to a civil war over health-care reform, obesity adds $147 billion a year to our doctor bills.” There are additional health costs to be paid for an increasingly sedentary society that continues to eat a lot of processed, cheap meat high in fat, sodium, and cholesterol.

There are also environmental costs, a few of which I’ve already detailed above, that we do not think of when we buy “cheap” meat. Here I will be more specific and briefly mention the environmental costs that factory farms transfer onto citizens, local communities, and ecosystems. One citizen offered this statement to the Kentucky Department of Environmental Protection:

My family lives next to chicken houses. We caught 80 mice in two days in our home…The smell is nauseating… My son and I got stomach cramps, diarrhea, nausea, and we had a sore on our mouths that would not go away. We went to the doctor and my son had parasites in his intestines. Where are the children’s rights? Should families have to sacrifice a safe and healthy environment for the economic benefit of others?  

Animal waste from factory farms is a major environmental problem. The large amount of animal manure that a single factory farm produces must be liquefied and stored in manure lagoons, some covering more than 100,000 square feet. These lagoons do not work a lot

174 As quoted in Singer and Mason, The Ethics of What we Eat, 30.
of the times because they cannot contain so much liquefied waste from so many animals. On smaller farms, with dozens or hundreds of animals, waste can be used as fertilizer for the plants. But on large-scale, animal confinement farms, there are no plants to fertilize and the liquefied manure spills over into nearby waterways and rivers, often killing fish and harming ecosystems. Factory farm run-off is common, Jonathan Safran-Foer writes, and “conservative estimates by the EPA indicate that chicken, hog, and cattle excrement has already polluted 35,000 miles of rivers in twenty-two states (for reference, the circumference of the earth is roughly 25,000 miles).”

Proponents of industrial animal farming rarely, if ever, mention the huge sums of government subsidies the industry receives. Big agribusiness and big government maintain a cozy relationship with each other, as we, the public, finances corporate welfare programs. U.S. tax payers shell out billions and billions of dollars to support the production of grain and crops to feed to animals for meat and for the sugary, fatty, highly-processed and fast foods that dominate the American food landscape. What is more, these subsidies work to the demise of small-scale farming where it is more common to raise animals on pastures, free from intense confinement and where animal waste can be put back into the land. As Washington Post writers highlight:

The very policies touted by Congress as a way to save small family farms are instead helping accelerate their demise, economists, analysts and farmers say. That’s because owners of large farms receive the largest share of government

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175 Safran-Foer, Eating Animals, 179.
subsidies. They often use the money to acquire more land, pushing aside small and medium-size farms as well as young farmers starting out.\footnote{Gilbert Gaul, Sarah Cohen, and Dan Morgan, “Federal Subsidies Turn Farms into Big Business,” \textit{Washington Post}, December 21, 2006, par. 6, \url{http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/12/20/AR2006122001591.html}.}

We tend not to focus on these additional costs partly because consumerism keeps us fixated on the one-dimensional interpretation of cost. But the truth is: “once you factor in crop subsidies, ecological damage and what we pay in health-care bills after our fatty, sugary diets makes us sick, conventionally produced food looks a lot pricier.”\footnote{Walsh, “Getting Real,” par. 23.} Factory-farmed meat appears cheap in the supermarket and on the fast-food menu, but when price is measured beyond the individual consumer’s purchase, it is very costly.

Just as factory-farmed meat is not cheap, it also is not safe. There is always a chance for food-borne illness as long as we eat food. But the scale of industrial production increases the chances of contamination, disease, and food poisoning. We know industrial factory farming and slaughter produce cheap meat but with this large, mechanized system of production and distribution, comes greater risk for spreading salmonella poisoning and E. coli.\footnote{See all USDA meat, dairy, and egg recalls from 1994-present at: \url{http://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls/Recall_Case_Archive/index.asp}.} The largest meat recall in U.S. history, which I referenced in Chapter 1, is a good example of how unsafe the present system of massive-scale animal agriculture and slaughter has become. In that case, 143,383,823 pounds of frozen and raw beef was recalled because Hallmark/Westland Meat Packing Co. was processing “downer” cows—cows who are unable to walk and thus flounder around in feces, which increases their susceptibility to bacteria that can lead to food-born diseases.
such as “mad cow” disease. The troubling thing about the largest meat recall in our nation’s history is that we would have never known that Hallmark/Westland was processing downer cows if it wasn’t for undercover investigators of the Humane Society of the United States and the video they released depicting downer cows being cruelly forced to slaughter.\footnote{USDA, Food Safety and Inspection Service, “Recall Release,” February 17, 2008, \url{http://www.fsis.usda.gov/PDF/Recall_005-2008_Release.pdf}.} In the following chapter, we’ll see that these investigations and videos unveil the practices of cruelty and killing, but they also expose just how dangerous it can be to eat factory-farmed meat.

And finally, defenders of factory farming frequently claim that the massive confinement systems are beneficial for the animals. The Animal Agriculture Alliance claims that modern animal “housing protects animals from predators, disease, and bad weather or extreme climate.”\footnote{Animal Agriculture Alliance, “Animal Agriculture: Myths and Facts,” in The Animal Ethics Reader, 192.} But what do they mean by “housing?” This is a defense of animal housing in general, not of massive confinement sheds that hold tens and hundreds of thousands of animals under one roof—animals so tightly cramped and confined that they must be administered anti-biotics to prevent the spread of disease and suffer from all sorts of bodily injuries and death. Factory farming is a type of housing, and advocates for this type of housing have become skilled into blurring the distinctions between different forms of animal housing. For example, on my grandparents’ farm, cows were housed but no more than twenty-two were kept at the same time in a single barn. Indeed, my grandparents controlled their animals’ access to the world outside the
barn, but when housed, the barn was spacious enough and kept them safe from the freezing temperatures during Ohio winters.

Defenders of factory farming will also say that the system, as it currently exists, is good for animal welfare because we cannot let captive farm animals return to a state of nature; it would be dangerous. Farm animals, this line of defense goes, are raised to become food, and, unlike other animals in the wild, they cannot protect themselves from dangerous situations or from predators. Hurst writes that if pigs are “allowed to ‘return to their mire’… they’ll also be crushed and eaten by their mothers. Chickens will provide lunch to any number of predators, and some number of chickens will die as flocks establish their pecking order.”  

The big flaw in Hurst’s argument stems from his deeper belief that industrial agriculture is necessary to feed the world. From this, he believes that we must continue to breed, rear, and kill the same number—or even more—of animals we currently do. This is common among defenders of factory farming who, because they want things to stay the same, maintain the premise that they should keep the same very high levels of production to keep “feeding the world.”

It is more the case that if we were to significantly reduce the number of animals we eat, and also create more farms, then the number bred for confinement would be reduced. Only pigs that are still raised in factory farms—frustrated, isolated, held in unnatural confinement—would crush their young, as Hurst puts it, if they were suddenly allowed to be their natural selves in industrial settings. No mother pig ever crushed her younglings at my grandparents farm and many of today’s pasture-based, free-range pig farmers also speak to how this is not a problem. The problem of factory farms is the sheer

182 Hurst, “The Omnivore’s Delusion,” par. 19.
number of animals raised and the restrictive environments of confinement operations. Hurst is right: we cannot, just suddenly, tear down industrial walls and expect animals to roam free, in their natural states. But careful critics of factory farming are not suggesting that we, tomorrow, simply allow billions of farm animals to return back to nature. A change to more humane, sustainable, and yes, natural, food production and consumption practices will take time and is much more complicated.

I have not revisited all the defenses for industrial animal agriculture but these are the main ones and, I think, they comprise insufficient arguments for the continuation and active support of factory farming. I also want to say that we can reduce our involvement and support of systematic animal suffering if we begin to eat less meat, stop eating animals altogether, or raise food animals ourselves. Either one is a direct form of action that helps generate change for the better. It’s not a choice of either vegetarianism or eating factory farmed animals; and, as we move into new ways of thinking about consuming animals, we shouldn’t remain beholden to the simplistic characterizations and categorizations of each other’s dietary habits as a way to cut us off from imagining new ways of being. I’m a vegetarian but I truly enjoy sitting down with people who eat meat and learn about why the eat meat—but I also like for them to learn about why I do not. “I don’t care whether you call yourself a vegetarian, a vegan, or an asparagus,” writes John Robbins, “I care whether you live in accord with your values.... I care whether your food choices are consistent with your love.”183 What the industrial agriculturalists fear the most—what I want the most—are food habits motivated by compassion, understanding, and love, not convenience, status-quo thinking, and dollar menus. But these sorts of

183 Robbins, The Food Revolution, 5-6.
intelligent food habits require a shift in thinking and acting in the world; they require that we change our priorities.

First and foremost, a more humane food system would require that we think of eating as not a commercial act but an educational act, one that requires more personal, ecological, ethical, and communal responsibility. We’ll have to give up certain pleasures, such as cheap chicken fingers and supermarket bologna. But the pleasures we’ll gain will be tremendously rewarding, better for our intellectual life, better for our health, better for the environment, and undoubtedly better for the animals. At the same time, we’ll need many more farmers to reclaim the education, autonomy, and health that come with growing one’s own food. I’m not suggesting we all grow all of our food, but we will all have to make some sort of serious effort to take more responsibility when it comes to growing and preparing our food. Farming will have to become a serious employment and career option for youth. As one small-scale, pasture cattle farmer tells Walsh: “We’re hurting for job creation, and industrial food production has pushed people off the farm. We need to make farming real employment, because if you do it right, it’s enjoyable work.”184 And those who cannot or really do not want to farm, along with the urban and suburban dwellers, should find some way to grow and prepare some of their food themselves, with the help of neighbors and communities. For those of us who work and live distant from the land, to cultivate a more intimate and intentional relationship with food and eating, urban and community gardening and farmers markets will have to be promoted and financed through public funds. But unlike agribusiness billion-dollar

184 Walsh, “Getting Real,” par. 23.
subsidies, this support would be distributed in a way that would help us grow ethical, healthy, sustainable food.

Since this is a theoretical project, not a practical guide for sustainable food development, these are just the basic ideas of the few first steps. But as I have discussed earlier, these ideas are becoming less strange in conversations about education, food, and schools.

**Conclusion**

Despite their miseducative roles as enablers in the cultural hegemony of meat, I believe that schools hold emancipatory potential. If they actively work to not thin and commodify our relationships with food and the natural world, schools can structure lunch as a time and space for candid, intentional appreciation that this is when, where, and how students taste bodily flesh. We need alternative approaches to mindless, quick- and convenient-eating in schools—and this is beginning with Farm to School programs—that question and counter the thoughtlessness and violence perpetuated in and outside of educational institutions. Re-visioning and re-imagining our interconnectedness with fellow humans, nonhumans, and the land should be a fundamental feature of a school lunch that rejects the docile and passive consumption of mainstream culture. Understanding animals-becoming-meat is not the answer to all the quandaries described in this dissertation, or to the liabilities described in the last. But it is an instructive and realistic alternative for schools to encourage mindful meat consumption, and perhaps, provides the impetus necessary for personal transformation that would lead students to take some form of action to address rampant animal suffering implicated in their daily habits.
Emerson believed that the consumers in industrial society were just as accountable for the injustices as the producers. In his article, “Emerson and the Education of Nature,” Bryan Warnick writes, “Emerson recognized that in any economic system there is no relevant moral distinction between those who produce unjustly and those who enjoy the unjust production.”

It is certainly the case that the more meat products our ravenous appetites demand, the more we enable the systematic cruelty of factory farm production—and I have only scratched the surface of the horror that lurks behind the walls of industrial confinement and killing. But if it is true that there “is no relevant moral distinction” between those who confine and slaughter animals and those who enjoy the products of this system, then we must face a very disturbing conclusion: If we eat bacon, then we are the moral equivalent of the sticker I quoted who ruthlessly slit the nose off an innocent, conscious pig, shoved salt into the open flesh wound, then proceeded to shove more salt up the pig’s anus. I do think our habits support a cruel, inhumane, and violent system of animal death; and we, in turn, are cruel and violent—but to a lesser extent than the sticker. I believe there is a distinction to be made between the industrial eater—remote and uninformed—and the factory farm workers shown in numerous undercover videos who cram led pipes up animals’ anuses, or those who mercilessly bash in the head of a baby veal calf for absolutely no reason. There is a moral difference to be made between those who perform these unthinkable acts and those who eat the products that keep intact an unthinkable system wherein these acts exist.

So, even if the moral distinction between production and consumption is a little muddier than what Emerson wants us to believe, he is certainly right about one thing: no

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matter how much factories of animal death are hidden from us, removed beyond our immediate vision, we are participants. “You have just dined,” he reminds us, “and however scrupulously the slaughter-house is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.”\textsuperscript{186} To lessen the distance and understand the extent to which we are complicit requires an education that extends beyond the convention of books, words, and lectures. It is time for us to look, with our eyes, into the eyes of the suffering and dying animals we eat.

\textsuperscript{186} Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Fate,” in \textit{Essays and Poems}, 369.
Chapter 6

A Disturbing Conclusion: Seeing the Unseen, Education the Taboo

We are not ostriches, and cannot believe that if we refuse to look at what we do not wish to see, it will not exist. This is especially the case when what we do not wish to see is what we wish to eat."

—Leo Tolstoy

Introduction

Paul McCartney once said that everyone would become vegetarian if slaughterhouses were made of glass walls. If this were to happen, everyone would not give up meat but the general point—that we would be so shocked and repulsed at the sight of animals being butchered that we would denounce eating them—holds much force in our industrial age of veiled and secretive slaughtering practices. Given the great extent that corporate agriculture goes to conceal the brutality behind its walls, and since consumerism gives us the luxury to not think about how our daily habits contribute to the agony and death of animals, I believe we must be unsettled with disturbing visuals of animals-becoming-meat. The purpose of this concluding chapter is to argue that education should unveil, through visual imagery, the exploitive practices that remain deliberately hidden from public view—even if it is culturally taboo to do so. We ought to make a concerted effort to tolerate the intolerable: To see, for ourselves, how whole

187 Leo Tolstoy, “The Immorality of Carnivorism,” in Ethical Vegetarianism, 104.
animal bodies become pieces of meat.

The Role of the Visual in Consumer Culture

Before I move on with my argument for a project based on disturbing images of animals-becoming-meat, I want to discuss education’s role in a visual culture. Americans live in a culture of omnipresent consumption and we live in a culture of omnipresent imagery—the two are importantly related. As Henry Giroux writes: “Children are growing up in a world shaped by a visual culture under the control of a handful of megacorporations that influence much of what young people learn.”188 A large part of what young people learn—indeed, all of us—is to consume, to do so often, and to even form our sense of self around the what, where, and how of consuming. Our desire to consume is largely driven by sight and the proliferation of images. In contemporary society, we are not just citizens and consumers; in the words of Gustavo Fischman, we are “citizens-consumers-viewers.”189 Visuals are essential in ties between production and consumption. Corporations make sure that we see products and services—and see them as consumable—in advertisements through movies, television, magazines, billboards, and on the Internet. Consumer capitalist economies are based on constant growth and expansion, and visual cultural orders and streamlines the mass-consumption of mass-produced goods. As Fischman writes:

The growing interest in scholarly inquiry into visual experiences and studies of seeing and the seen follow an unmistakable social and cultural reality: that images have become an omnipresent and overpowering means of circulating signs, symbols, and information. Many of the everyday iconic events, such as watching movies, window shopping, and television consumption, have become core

188 Henry Giroux, “Turning America into a Toy Store,” in Critical Pedagogies of Consumption, 255.
cultural experiences of urban modernity in the second half of the 20th century and are intrinsically linked to the continuous expansion of capitalism. Images are fundamental in the effort of corporations and marketers to disseminate their products and messages far and wide.

This being the case, over the past couple decades scholars have argued that educational researchers and practitioners should begin to take visual culture more seriously, shifting inquiry more and more to the visual as a way to complement conventional written texts and ways of knowing. More specifically, some art educators implement visual pedagogies as means to increase student engagement with visual artifacts in order to address larger social issues and questions about the role of education in a democratic society. Critiquing norms of popular culture through visual pedagogy involves sustained analysis with images, resources, and messages. David Darts and Kevin Tavin argue that a “defining feature” of visual pedagogy is the focus on “critical citizenship” that challenges “corporate ideologies of consumption.”

As visuality becomes more integral to pedagogical activities of deconstruction and inquiry, the main point is not to dilute visual learning to “what works” via PowerPoint presentations in classrooms. The purpose of visual pedagogy, as conceptualized here, is for students to expose, critique, and better understand the broader meanings of visual culture (its

190 Ibid.
resources, artifacts, and messages), capitalist consumption, and the relationship between the two.

I will argue that, through visuality, we can challenge and even work to thwart the meat industry’s intentions of keeping us in the dark as ignorant, distant, and passive consumers. Typically, visual pedagogy turns critical attention to images ubiquitous in media and public spaces—the “corporate public pedagogy”—to allow students the space to see how these visuals, as Darts and Tavin put it, “exert their force on personal and social experiences in everyday life.”

I agree with those who want to implement this version visual pedagogy, but my aim is to call attention to what is deliberately kept out of public spaces—the visuals of a “corporate private pedagogy” that do exist in the world but exist as secret realities, purposefully concealed from plain view. This chapter does not attempt to deconstruct the common images of meat advertisements or marketing campaigns of popular culture. I call for something I see as more philosophically and emotionally gripping: To see the unpopular, unseen images of animals-becoming-meat. Visual pedagogy of this intense variety will help us concretely see that we are not mere solitary consumers but interrelated “citizens-consumers-viewers” whose consumption habits determine the lives and deaths of others—my focus will remain on animal others.

**Education and Visual Representations of Animals-Becoming-Meat**

What would Tolstoy, the self-proclaimed moral vegetarian, say today? We bury our heads in the sand, foolishly wishing that the animal brutality we do not wish to see does not exist. We see meat everywhere—restaurant menus, our dinner tables, school lunches, supermarkets, billboards, television commercials, in movies—but we do not see

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193 Ibid. (italics added).
the *animals* who become meat or the processes that turns them into edible products. As Tuttle points out:

The social consequences of harming animals for food are all positive. Ordering a steak earns us approving nods, and our friends rave over the barbecued ribs at the office picnic. The actual confinement, raping, mutilating, and killing are kept carefully hidden as shameful secrets that would make us profoundly uncomfortable if we had to witness them, or worse, perform them ourselves.\(^{194}\)

Since what we see and buy is obscured in neatly wrapped plastic and cellophane, we should make visible the sentient life-forms who make meat possible.

There is a reason why factory farms and slaughterhouses escape public view. There is a reason why they are purposefully kept out of sight and are not places just anyone can visit. If made visible, what goes on inside of them would surely move many persons—customers in the eyes of industry—to demand welfare standards, reduce meat consumption, or eliminate it completely. Even those working in the academic field of animal sciences, which serves as a virtual pipeline to contemporary animal agriculture, recognizes the importance of maintaining veiled meat production. Peter Cheeke, author of the animal science textbook, *Contemporary Issues in Animal Agriculture*, writes: “For modern animal agriculture, the less the consumer knows about what’s happening before the meat hits the plate, the better.”\(^{195}\) Wes Jamison, agriculture professor at Dordt College in Iowa, comments: “You’re not going to see a beef-packing plant be transparent. They can’t. It’s so shocking to the average person.”\(^{196}\) Cheeke and Jamison’s claims were recently corroborated.

It is not uncommon for a restaurant, fast-food chain, or supermarket to remove

\(^{194}\) Tuttle, *The World Peace Diet*, 63-4
\(^{195}\) As cited in Singer and Mason, *The Ethics of What we Eat*, 11.
\(^{196}\) Ibid., 12.
meat and animal products from their establishments once it is revealed to the public that they have been selling the products of animal cruelty and abuse. In November, 2011, for example, the animal activist group, Mercy for Animals, “released disturbing video” depicting animal abuse at several industrial egg farms owned by Sparboe Farms, one of the largest egg producers in the country. The video shows, among other sadistic acts, hens violently crammed into crowded battery cages, decomposed carcasses in the same overcrowded cages with living hens, workers burning the beaks of baby chicks, and one worker shoving a live chicken into a co-workers pocket for fun. Soon after the release of the video, McDonald’s and the retail giant, Target, immediately stopped the sale of all Sparboe Farms eggs. This is just one example of the effectiveness of these undercover videos. Animal rights groups know these disturbing visuals and other graphic accounts of animal suffering work—and so do their adversaries in animal agribusiness.

The meat industry has become savvy to consumer outrage to modern industrial meat production. But instead of reforming production methods, the industry is attempting to build higher and thicker walls, turning to the state to establish even further secrecy. Recent legislative efforts in Iowa, among other states, intend to criminalize the production, distribution, and even possession of unauthorized video, audio, photographic

198 Ibid., par. 2.
199 See, for example, Death on a Factory Farm, DVD, directed by Tom Simon and Sarah Teale (HBO, 2009); 45 Days: The Life and Death of a Broiler Chicken, DVD (Washington, DC: Compassion Over Killing); and Life Behind Bars: The Sad Truth about Factory Farming, DVD (Farm Sanctuary). Footage depicting animals-becoming-meat can be easily accessed via the websites of Mercy for Animals (http://www.mercyforanimals.org/); The Humane Farming Association (http://www.hfa.org/about/index.html); Farm Sanctuary (http://farmsanctuary.org/); and PETA (http://www.peta.org/). Also see “Resources” in Tuttle, World Peace Diet, 309-11.
images, or other documentation of animal agriculture and slaughtering. In March 2011, the Iowa State House of Representatives passed House File 589, which, if enacted as law, will punish by felony those found guilty of “animal facility tampering.” The reason behind HF 589 in Iowa is important for our discussion. Even though the industry’s rationale is to prevent interference or “tampering” with food production, the truth is that animal agribusiness fears humans will opt-out of eating animals and animal by-products if they see what is concealed behind its strongly-fortified walls.

The legislation in Iowa is a clear indication that watching animals-become-meat is transformational. A visual disturbing pedagogy of animals-becoming-meat works to offset the agenda of concealment, distance, and ignorance by demonstrating, in a very palpable way, all that remains hidden and removed from the consumer’s field of vision.

It is one thing to hear or read about animals-becoming-meat; it is quite another to watch the cold, mechanized process unfold with our own eyes. Upton Sinclair learned this firsthand when he provided an insider’s account of the Chicago stockyards in his infamous book, The Jungle. With its gruesomely accurate depictions of the meat-packing industry, the book sparked an immediate outcry from a disgusted and shocked public, ultimately leading to real societal change. Sinclair’s original intent, however, was not to reform the meat industry in the form of the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906 but to undermine industrial capitalism by divulging the inhumane conditions of human laborers. But Sinclair quickly found that human exploitation in the meat industry is built on animal

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exploitation. After witnessing the methodical cruelty of industrial pig slaughtering, Sinclair wrote:

It was all so very businesslike that one watched it fascinated. It was pork-making by machinery; pork-making by applied mathematics. And yet somehow the most matter-of-fact person could not help thinking of the hogs; they were so innocent, they came so very trustingly; and they were so very human in their protests—and so perfectly within their rights! They had done nothing to deserve it; and it was adding insult to injury, as the thing was done here, swinging them up in this cold-blooded, impersonal way, without a pretense of apology, without the homage of a tear. Now and then a visitor wept, to be sure; but this slaughtering machine ran on, visitors or no visitors. It was like some horrible crime committed in a dungeon, all unseen and unheeded, buried out of sight and of memory. One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe.\footnote{Upton Sinclair, \textit{The Jungle} (New York: Signet Classic, 1960), 39-40. (italics mine)}

To see the throat cut open of a kicking, struggling pig, to hear the “hog-squeal of the universe,” is so disturbing that it borders on the traumatic. Still, I am convinced that Sinclair was right: Watching humans slaughter innocent, utterly powerless animals is philosophical. It certainly is educational.

Education ought to interrupt and unnerve the complacent and routine habits we have learned to live by. In his illuminating piece “The Tragic Sense of Education,” Nicholas Burbules suggests that “education that is worth anything” involves an element of uncertainty and loss: “Every gain is a loss; every deeper insight won is a cherished, comfortable, familiar illusion slipping away.”\footnote{Nicholas Burbules, “The Tragic Sense of Education,” \textit{Teachers College Record}, 91 no. 4 (1990): par. 2; accessed at: \url{http://faculty.ed.uiuc.edu/burbules/papers/tragic.html}.} When education provokes us to watch the lives and deaths of the animals we will eat, deep emotional chords are struck and the familiar notions of how we have been living our lives; our comfortable illusions of the idyllic family farm with picket fences, green pastures, and happy animals; and even our
cherished sense of self, all slip away and we find ourselves asking the difficult questions of who we want to be and what sort of world we want to live in. Exposing animal suffering by either visiting intensive confinement farms or slaughterhouses (this is ideal but too unreasonable) or by viewing undercover investigations and other expose documentaries (this is reasonable), is necessary to see what has been concealed for too long. Words are important but they are not disturbing enough. The visual, however, puts a squealing face with the bloody, dead piece of body on my plate.

Before I move on, let me address the question of access to watching animals-becoming-meat. How and where can we see it? It is unreasonable to propose that all consumers of animal flesh should become undercover investigators and seek illegitimate employment at a factory farm or slaughterhouse; however, there are enough visual sources at our disposal to pursue this educational project in a critical, sustained way. But where do we find these sources? The disturbing videos of animals-becoming-meat are almost always a product of animal rights activists who acquire employment at farms and slaughterhouses under false pretences. Are these groups really reliable sources? In a word, yes, I believe they are.

Like Sinclair, a few brave souls today—artists, writers, consumer advocates, animal advocacy groups—provide us with the truth, an insider’s perspective regarding veiled animal cruelty and killing. In addition to Mercy for Animals, there are other groups doing some important educational work (though they are not typically thought of as educational organizations), including the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), the Humane Society of the United States, and the Humane Farming Association. These are the leading animal advocacy groups that, in my view, provide the best visual
imagery depicting inhumane practices of animal farming and killing (they also produce a lot of literature). Yes, some of these groups, especially PETA, have a reputation of drawing primarily on our emotions, choosing the approach of “shock value” to elicit a reaction of disgust, anger, or gushy compassion. And yes, PETA and Mercy for Animals ultimately dream to build a radically new society, an entirely vegan population wherein no animals are raised for human food.

With that said, it is a mistake to dismiss these sources as incredible or unreliable because they have biases and agendas that are not consistent with most Americans. There is no such thing as an organization working for social justice and peace that doesn’t have an agenda or bias. One does not have to agree with the larger goal of animal rights groups to consider, in a serious way, the solid documentation and evidence of cruelty, suffering, and inhumane killing that these groups provide. The videos these “radical” groups produce are followed up with criminal investigations by law enforcement and USDA officials (like in the Westland/Hallmark case). The enforcement and regulatory entities take the evidence animal rights groups send them very seriously—as should we, the consumers of animal products. If we move beyond the immediate, surface reaction that these groups are incredible because they hold radical agendas, and instead focus on the substance and content—the evidence they produce—then we open ourselves up to a whole new level of uncomfortable, critical self-examination.

When we see suffering and death that we would have dismissed having not witnessed it ourselves, we are not merely gaining new information; rather we enrich and sharpen our empathetic and intellectual faculties. “We’re troubled by suffering that we learn of through prose and statistics,” writes Kathie Jenni in her article “The Power of the
Visual,” but “our unease remains vague, sporadic, and practically inert. We respond in dramatically different ways to suffering we see.”\textsuperscript{204} Seeing that animals are enslaved and coerced to provide the fleshy tissue that becomes edible food expands our knowledge about the whispers and fragments of information about farm animal abuse that we may have heard about. “For those who already knew about a problem and perceived its relation to their moral values, the visual provides a different service: transforming abstract ideas into knowledge that is felt and absorbed.”\textsuperscript{205} Replacing the symbolic illusory of “meat,” the visual restores the literal, which in turn, exposes a perspective that we tend to lose sight of through deceptive socialization as we grow up.

A visual pedagogy from the standpoint of animal mortality may provoke sorrow, hurt, disbelief, resistance, sadness, confusion, shock, and even anger. These feelings, these initial states of mind, are not the end of the story. Our primary reactions to seeing misery can transpire into deep reflection and self-questioning. The emotional and mental conditions elicited are not to be dismissed as mere sentimental reactions but are to be attended to as catalysts toward further reason-based inquiry and rational deliberation. This is how we tear down the reason/emotion dichotomy—by reasoning with and about our intuitions and our emotional responses, by synthesizing our hearts and minds. Jenni emphasizes how:

Images of the suffering give substance and emotional power to our beliefs about them. Intellectual knowledge that there is a problem becomes, at least for a while, something more: a detailed grasp of what that fact entails and a deeply disturbing and salient awareness. When we see that ‘inhumane slaughter’ entails the struggles of exhausted pigs to escape


\textsuperscript{205} Ibid., 3 (italics original).
workers who kick them, beat them, and cut them apart while they are conscious, abstract knowledge becomes richly informed and emotionally powerful awareness.  

Looking at what we have been socialized not to look at helps us move beyond apathy and inattention to concentration and responsiveness. Most people do care about how the animals they eat are raised but nevertheless are socialized to remain either unaffected or ignorant of the lives of factory-farmed animals. “When carelessness, laziness, or fear keep us from investigating, our inattention manifests a vice… Images can overcome such shortcomings.” The visual helps combat complacency while bringing intuitive care and empathy to the surface, which is why, after watching animals-become-meat, it is not uncommon for individuals to change how they think and act. After watching footage of the cruelty on a factory farm, one viewer remarked:

I watched the video. It was almost like, it was like they say, the curtain was pulled back. The truth was made known. I felt like I had been born again. It was like there is no turning back now. Now I know the cruelty that exists.

I am not suggesting that this singular pedagogical project will lead everyone to experience a similar transformational experience, or will aaddress every question I’ve posed about consuming animals. There is also the important issue of exposing what would be shocking, grotesque visuals of blood and death to students who have perhaps experienced other forms of gruesome acts of violence and killing in their own lives. For these students, the pedagogical visual project I am calling for may be too traumatic; this is a serious concern because not only

206 Ibid., 3-4
207 Ibid., 6.
208 McDonald, “‘Once You Know Something, You Can’t Not Know it,’” 9.

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would such students be traumatized but they may “shut down,” so to speak, regarding learning related to this or other subjects. Yet I have articulated one means of a visual pedagogy, but for these students perhaps visual pedagogy shifts in means without losing the overall project. The visual can still be maintained, but it requires a teacher’s intimate knowledge of her unique group of students—and what these students have experience in their lives—to move forward as intelligently, compassionately, and creatively as she can. Regardless of precisely how animals-becoming-meat is carried out, the potential for transformation cannot be denied—we feel it when we catch a glimpse of these videos; they are so unsettling and disturbing that we quickly turn away because we feel—deep down—that we will change something about our life, either the way we think, feel, or act.

Some individuals will change immediately, perhaps experimenting with vegetarianism or veganism, while others will not change at all, or, they might in time. Perhaps others will begin to slowly eat less meat; but all who make the invisible visible—and this is the point—begin to think more carefully and act more intentionally with respect to consuming animals. In any case, seeing animals-becoming-meat, through graphic visuals, engenders purposeful awareness to understand a part of the world that is purposefully hidden from view, a part of the world that the cultural hegemony of meat teaches us to take part in, but at the same time, remain ignorant of.

**What will Parents Say? A Case for Autonomy**

I have attempted to articulate an argument for the project of understanding the processes through which the defenseless creatures, who have done nothing to deserve the
injustices and violence committed upon them, turn into edible food. However, it is highly likely that some parents will disagrees with the “stomach-oriented” vision of education that traces meat from plate to its origin, perhaps fearing their children are too young to witness animals being kicked, punched, and beaten. Some parents will say that their children should not see animals’ throats cut open and blood spilling out. I have not addressed this valid and important issue of age-appropriateness. Even though the particulars of teaching practices for younger school-age children have not been my primary concern, practitioners should be creative, caring, and intelligent in presenting a disturbing education to children. Disturbance, though, should not be avoided.

I have too often conflated the suffering involved in the practices of rearing animals for food on industrial farms and in killing animals for food in industrial slaughterhouses; but the two are different in practice and this matters pedagogically. The conditions of intensive confinement farms are a good place to start for younger children. There are some divulging children’s books and other visual resources that present difficult questions of animal suffering in a sensitive manner for younger children.\(^{209}\) Even though PETA’s *Meet Your Meat*, which depicts vividly gruesome images of slaughtering, is more appropriate for teenagers and young adults, it would not be appropriate for, say, eight year-olds. (Though I would still push us to ask why we intuit this). Children will react emotionally; they might feel guilty, disgusted, sad, and uncomfortable upon learning about the lives and deaths of the animals they eat. But these initial emotional reactions are not good enough reasons to abandon further contemplation and understanding. “Although the issues are at once difficult, frightening, and challenging,”

\(^{209}\) See, for example, Deirdre Rochford, *Rights for Animals?* (London: Franklin Watts, 1996); *PETA*kids *Comics*; and www.petakids.com.
maintains Marc Bekoff, “this does not mean they are impossible with which to deal. *Certainly we cannot let the animals suffer because of our inability to come to terms with difficult issues.*”\(^{210}\)

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the issue of graphic content is settled with pedagogically-sensitive, age-appropriate content and methods. This brings me to perhaps the most important aspect of this objection. Some parents will fervently disagree with this project, not because it is, at times, shockingly grotesque but because they disagree on a more fundamental level in that watching animals-becoming-meat challenges the values and beliefs they want to instill in their children. In this sense, the topic of animal suffering is no different than any other controversial topic that some parents find offensive or that violates their value system.

I see it fit to address this objection with the argument that of central concern in education is the facilitation of critical and autonomous thought. It is important to reiterate that nothing I have written, or will write, instills vegetarianism or bars children from eating meat. The education I envision supplies the conditions necessary for critical thinking geared toward the cultural hegemony of meat, which is a form of domination that suppresses the aim of autonomous thought. How can students become autonomous thinkers if they are virtually coerced into a way of living that is dominant in their families and in popular culture? Eamonn Callan, author of *Creating Citizens*, contends that, “the autonomy argument is correct to the extent that it affirms children’s right to an education that liberates them from cultural domination, whether it be in the family or in some larger

cultural unit.” The autonomy argument is strikingly pertinent to our topic, given that the domination of the cultural hegemony of meat leaves children with relatively no place to seek an alternative vision that would lead them to think independently about what is so fervently—and literally—being forced down their throats.

The liberal educational theorist, Harry Brighouse, has developed an important argument for autonomy concerning the ethos of a school. The ethos of a school, in the most general sense, is school culture—the general milieu, character, values, and composition of a school. For our purposes, there are two important things to say about the ethos of a school. First, food, lunch, and cafeterias—the where, when, what, and how children eat every day in schools—are chief components of school culture. Food is cultural, as discussed earlier, and it remains so inside the school walls. Second, we can say that most schools in America maintain a food ethos that closely resembles mainstream American culture. There is obvious continuity between school food and consumer society, continuity that Brighouse argues is antithetical to encouraging autonomy in schools.

In order to facilitate autonomy, Brighouse maintains that schools should “have an ethos that is noticeably discontinuous with that of both the home [of students] and the mainstream culture.” The general milieu of a school should promote “a space that is distinct from, and provides an alternative” to commercial popular culture as well as children’s familial environment. A “discontinuous ethos,” as Brighouse terms it,

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212 Brighouse, “Channel One, the Anti-Commercial Principle, and the Discontinuous Ethos,” 540.
213 Ibid., 542.
involves a strong diversity component that brings together a wide range of experiences, alternatives, and varying outlooks on the world—all for the purpose of providing the educative setting that will help expand a student's horizons, facilitate autonomy, and ultimately enable children to live happy and flourishing lives. A discontinuous ethos is not merely recommended for Brighouse; it is required for autonomy: “The obligation to facilitate a child’s prospective autonomy requires that the school ethos be discontinuous with the mainstream culture.” In his book *On Education*, Brighouse stresses that an autonomy-facilitating education “requires a modicum of discontinuity between the child’s home experience and her school experience, so that the opportunities provided by the home (and the public culture) are supplemented, rather than replicated, in the school.” The basic idea is that schools should be places that provide some healthy distance and alternatives to the rampant consumerism that is insidious outside of schools—in both popular consumer culture and in children’s homes. What does all this have to do with eating animals?

Looking at the food choices in most schools is like looking directly at the meat-centered meals in mainstream culture. Meat dominates, as the “necessary” centerpiece in all three: schools, most American homes, and in consumer culture. In schools, children receive and physically internalize the meat products replicated in their homes and that are nearly universal outside of school. What do students learn from this *continuity* between their home lives, popular culture, and the school lunchroom? Daily, they learn to become loyal meat eaters, unquestioning and docile. They lack food autonomy.

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214 Ibid. (italics added).
Part of understanding animals-becoming-meat involves engendering the capacity to question the fundamental moral assumption that animals ought to become food. Such a question-posing disposition is lacking, I suspect, in most homes and we know that it is not promoted in mainstream culture (its opposite is, as we saw in Chapter 4). To understand animals-becoming-meat is to engage an element of discontinuity, a rupture with a consumptive culture that masks and conceals farm animal brutality, suffering, and death. Schools that do not encourage students to understand animals-becoming-meat are continuous with popular culture and do not meet the condition for discontinuity by “failing to present valuable alternatives to the options presented by the commercial culture.” A discontinuous ethos, however, will give students the surroundings and educational means to actively pursue the difficult and unsettling moral, social, and ecological questions about the meat that is served in their school.

Thus far, I have taken it largely for granted that autonomy should be end of education. However, the autonomy question is hotly-contested in the field of educational philosophy and the debate is relevant to our discussion. Some disagree with the likes of Callan and Brighouse, providing arguments against autonomy as a goal of education. These thinkers still believe in critical thinking, human rights, and that education should involve robust democratic and civic components; they just do not believe autonomy is the best way to promote these things. For example, Lucas Swaine calls the “ideal of personal autonomy...unsound and unworthy of promotion in education.”

216 Brighouse, “Channel One, the Anti-Commercial Principle, and the Discontinuous Ethos,” 541.
moral character education, Swaine argues that the “core conception of autonomy”—the rational assessment of “one’s beliefs, aims, attachments, desires, and interests”—should not be a goal of education, and that it could even be harmful. He sees a fundamental problem with an education that doesn’t afford a solid foundation for moral character, the formation of what is good and right in a person. Autonomy promotes rational evaluation and choice concerning our beliefs, aims, interests. But what is it that we choose to believe in, that we aim to do? For Swaine, the focus on the core concepts of autonomy undermines forming moral character, the more primary purpose of education. What if, because we lack a “strong moral character,” we autonomously choose to act in immoral or harmful ways? Doing bad and harmful things is more likely for the autonomous person than it is for the morally good person. For Swaine, educators ought to focus on the formation of moral character in students and not encourage the core concept of autonomy, as he defines it. Let’s consider a few more criticisms.

For Brighouse, autonomy is important for schools to endorse but it is not, ultimately, an end in itself but a means to the ends of happiness and flourishing. At first glance, these aims seem uncontroversial and generally agreeable. But flaws and questions arise when the ends of an educational theory are highly-subjective. Happiness and flourishing vary so greatly among people. How are we to define, contain, and settle on such wild and large concepts? What if the goals of education, like happiness, are untenable? Then where does that leave autonomy as the educational means to reach the goal?

219 Ibid., 108 (italics original).
220 Ibid., 110.
Critical reflection on a person’s own life, values, beliefs, interests, and projects is a fundamental feature of autonomy; and to reiterate, autonomy is the instrument to the ends of happiness and flourishing for Brighouse. But it is not clear, argues Anders Schinkel, that critically reflecting on “one’s most fundamental values and commitments” contributes to happiness and flourishing; in fact, critical self-reflection “could just as easily lead to uncertainty and depression.”\(^{221}\) This is certainly true. Bryan Warnick also finds the instrumentalist autonomy positing critical self-reflection as a defining characteristic of autonomy philosophically unsatisfying. Warnick explains how conceptions of happiness and flourishing for some religious groups fly in the face of the core components of autonomy. He writes that “what counts as flourishing, for many religious people, is not a self-reported match between individual personality and the direction of one’s life… For some religious parents, flourishing is achieved by submitting to God’s will, not by actualizing personal preference.”\(^{222}\) Autonomy can be in great conflict with historical and cultural tradition that, for some groups, paves the way for happiness and flourishing.

There is another important aspect to the cultural group challenge to autonomy. Communitarian critics denounce autonomy in a more fundamental way than those above; communitarians disagree with the very foundation of liberalism. Communitarians critique liberalism on both descriptive and normative grounds; that is, autonomy liberals misrepresent human experience by positing the individual over the communal and thus


literals do not offer adequate moral visions for human education. To be human is not to be an autonomous chooser and assessor of one’s own beliefs, ends, and values—disconnected from tradition, from cultural and familial ties. Human life is group life. We are limited, but also thrive, in communities and social relationship. Michael Sandel submits that we are “encumbered selves,” whose identities are the results and extensions of communities, traditions, cultures, and families. This relational conception of the human persons is “at odds with the liberal conception of persons as free and independent selves, unbound by prior moral ties, capable of choosing our ends for ourselves.” We are embedded in relationships and communal ties that are deep, lasting, and greatly shape and influence our moral obligations of “solidarity,” and these obligations “are difficult to account for if we understand ourselves as free and independent selves…. Unless we think of ourselves as encumbered selves, already claimed by certain projects and commitments, we cannot make sense of these indispensable aspects of our moral and political experience.”

Some cultures, then, value group tradition and social convention over (or instead of) independent critical thought and autonomous choosing. As follows, some cultures do not endorse a vision of education that would facilitate individual autonomy. (One can see how denouncing meat eating—a central cultural practice for many—would upset and challenge cultural norms and traditions). For these cultures, few things would be more detrimental to their values, traditions, and even group livelihood than an organized, compulsory socialization of youth designed to promote critical self-reflection and

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224 Ibid., 575-76.
The critics of autonomy demonstrate that autonomy as an educational goal—or means to other goals such as flourishing—might constitute tenuous grounds in addressing the parental objection to my project of understanding animals-becoming-meat. But they have not convinced me that autonomy is unnecessary or undesirable for all contexts of learning. I emphasized “might” above because I believe the critics of autonomy are ultimately wrong, at least when we take the context of this particular form of cultural domination into consideration. I made it clear from the start that I would not argue for an all-encompassing moral theory or educational philosophy that could be applied to all learning situations. Autonomy survives the critics I’ve discussed because of how this unique form of cultural domination sustains the largest scale of suffering and killing in the world. So even if autonomy is not defensible as an educational end for everyone in all learning contexts, it is a necessary and defensible aim in the context of the cultural hegemony of meat. How can we justify an education that reinforces such immense suffering, such large-scale killing? Due to this ubiquitous private and public domination of meat eating, a central practice which endorses unprecedented levels of global suffering, autonomy ought to be promoted in schools.

Autonomy is necessary to get students to recognize the degree to which schools and consumer culture condition them to be loyal, unquestioning, and life-long contributors to unjust production, suffering, and killing. The central endeavor is to provide children with an education that attempts to facilitate diversity of thought, critical reflection on their own values and traditions, and engagement with alternative ways of living. Exposing children to an education critical of the cultural hegemony of meat
supports the right of children to understand this private and cultural domination—
domination that is at times specifically designed to instill blind dependence and hinder autonomous thought. So, there is strong reasoning for overriding this parental objection because an education that perpetuates the cultural hegemony of meat—and almost all formal educational institutions perpetuate this hegemony—violates a student’s right to be exposed to different ways of life, to critical self-reflection, and to develop autonomy.

**Conclusion**

I will be the first to admit that seeking and seeing this form of violence will not be easy, and to say we will not like what we see is an understatement. At the closing of Chapter 3, I referenced Dewey and the disagreeable effort it takes to acquire understanding behind the habit of meat eating. In truth, this effort is more than disagreeable; understanding, and especially watching, animals-becoming-meat is downright disturbing. As the idyllic green pastures and free-range animals of the family farm fall further into oblivion, we now have to look into the eyes of suffering and dying livestock (i.e., living inventory) in intensive confinement operations. But it is the potentiality of the disturbing, grotesque, and shocking that transforms indifference into thoughtfulness, that transforms mind and hearts.

I have addressed the particular challenges of a disturbing education but we also have to face the broader challenge of consumerism—an ideology that does not encourage us to watch, witness, or imagine the horrific fates our daily consumption habits transfer onto others, human and nonhuman. On the contrary, complex systems of power, involving huge sums of capital and resources, work diligently to keep us in line by keeping the whole process of animals-becoming-meat deliberately concealed from view,
preventing us from seeing and touching the bloodshed. Since we all cannot walk into the stockyards like Sinclair, we must engage both “the language of visuality” as well as the “actual images” of undercover investigations of animal cruelty and slaughtering that we normally avert our eyes from because they make us cringe. When unveiled, the ugly, squeamish detail of the abuse and killing is the stuff I find the most educational about consuming animals. But what I judge the most transformative is (for many) the unbearable sight of the kill-floor. And what sort of person wants to see that? The educated person does.

In seeing the disgust, we no longer take this fundamental habit for granted. Instead, as animal death moves from the shadows into the light, from the unseen to the seen, intelligent habits come alive. This is the first step in provoking conscientious consumption that, in time, helps us strive to reduce the suffering of animals and promote human growth. By complicating the sign of “meat,” visibility restores the tangible animal, the literal killing, and all the repugnant stuff—the cow’s hide, fat, bits of brain, intestines, tongue, lips, liver, bone, innards, muscle, and cart ledge—that makes up the products we routinely wear as cosmetics and clothes and eat as food. To consume animals with gratitude, slowly and attentively—or perhaps to give up this habit altogether—we must tolerate the intolerable, stomach the dreadful, and have the courage to be disturbed by educational encounters previously brushed aside. The animals we eat deserve more than a passing glance. They deserve our serious gaze. Only then will we

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sense what Sinclair called that precious “hog-personality.”

I think we can—and must—do much better in questioning and resisting power structures that exploit both humans and animals. Collectively, the historical weight of speciesism, the cultural hegemony of meat, industrial agriculture and slaughtering, and the convenience of industrial consumption, all seem to be insurmountable forces. None of the powers behind these forces benefit from our looking at the disturbing deaths of farm animals, and all of them will do everything in their power to prevent us from looking. And worse, we don’t want to look either. But I do not think this is a matter of what we want to do but instead what we are painfully obligated to do. In trying to understand animals-becoming-meat, we suffer ourselves. “This is painful,” says John Robbins; “it can be shattering to see that in our ignorance we have, perhaps for many years, unknowingly eaten the products of such a system. But this pain may serve a healing purpose. It may be the breaking of the shell that encloses our understanding.”

No matter how disturbing, in challenging the cultural forces that promote animal oppression, educators help foster the critical energy, space, and courage necessary for understanding and for change.

To end, I have argued for the power of the visual in understanding animals-becoming-meat but the power of words should not be forgotten. The visual complements written and verbal accounts of human and animal suffering. To see and hear suffering and death, to read about it, and to taste, smell, and feel it—this is the best way to deepen our

227 Robbins, The Food Revolution, 221.
understanding and grow as human persons. I want to end this dissertation with the timely words of philosopher Tom Regan:

There are times, and these are not infrequent, when tears come to my eyes when I see, or read, or hear of the wretched plight of animals in the hands of humans. Their pain, their suffering, their loneliness, their innocence, their death. Anger. Rage. Pity. Sorrow. Disgust. The whole creation groans under the weight of the evil we humans visit upon these mute, powerless creatures. It is our heart, not just our head, that calls for an end, that demands of us that we overcome, for them, the habits and forces behind their systematic oppression. All great movements, it is written, go through three stages: ridicule, discussion, adoption. It is the realization of this third stage—adoption—that demands both our passion and our discipline, our heart and our head. *The fate of animals is in our hands. God grant we are equal to the task.*

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45 Days: The Life and Death of a Broiler Chicken, DVD. Washington, DC: Compassion Over Killing.


*LIFE BEHIND BARS: THE SAD TRUTH ABOUT FACTORY FARMING*, DVD. Farm Sanctuary.


