

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Carnivorous Companions and the Vegetarian's Dilemma

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with a problem that arises within ethical frameworks that imply that it is wrong for humans to consume meat or other animal products when vegan alternatives are available. The specific problem relates to the ethical difficulties associated with beginning a relationship with a companion animal that may require at least some animal-based foods in order to survive. I follow some psychologists in referring to the ethical problems associated with such companionship as the Vegetarian's Dilemma. After approaching this dilemma from the perspective the animal rights approach and welfarist consequentialism, I argue that some important insights can be gained by viewing this dilemma through a virtue ethical lens. In particular, I point out the ethical significance of the fact that the very same virtues that might lead one to adopt a vegan lifestyle may also support adoption of a carnivorous companion.

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PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

In my own experience, a surprising number of ethical vegans or vegetarians have carnivorous animal companions. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear people report that their first shifts towards veganism were initially inspired by their personal relationship with a nonhuman such as a dog or a cat. Some animal rights theorists, such as Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, report similar experiences: “for some people the route to [ethical veganism] is an intellectual process, but for many others, it comes (if at all) through relationships with individual animals” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 23-24).

In this paper, I am concerned with a common perceived inconsistency (or, as some may put it, a hypocrisy) in a large subsection of the ethical vegan and vegetarian community. The charge of hypocrisy comes from the observation that in order to maintain a companionship relationship with carnivorous companions, one must acquire animal-based foods for the companions in question. This means that many ethical vegetarians and vegans find themselves endorsing the following two commitments, which, when combined, seem to generate a kind of inconsistency: 1) It is wrong to kill animals for food, and 2) It is permissible to continue to participate in the killing of animals for food in order to support a nonhuman companion. The tension between these two statements has been referred to as *the Vegetarian’s Dilemma* (Rothberger 2014).

In order to fully explore this dilemma, I will begin with two assumptions: First, I will assume (without argument) that there are good reasons to believe that some form of ethical veganism (the view that it is prima facie wrong for humans in developed countries to consume animal products, wear animal products, or otherwise support industries that rely on animal products) is correct. I take this for granted because it is only under this

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

assumption that the problems associated with carnivorous companionship can be raised. In other words, the problem I am concerned with only arises within ethical frameworks that imply some version of the claim that it is generally wrong to consume animal products.

Second, I will assume that the health of at least some common carnivorous companions is contingent upon access to animal-derived foods that, practically speaking, must be acquired by farming and slaughtering sentient animals. It should be noted that I am not here attempting to establish this empirical claim. It may well be that this assumption will be proven false, as I have heard many anecdotal accounts of cats (for example) that live healthy lives on a vegan or mostly-vegan diet. Nonetheless, it is worth considering what, ethically speaking, would follow from its truth, as its truth is not out of the question. I have personally heard many anecdotal reports from veterinarians and others who claim that there are serious risks for vegan cats. Additionally, there are several frequently cited studies that raise concerns about the nutritional adequacy of commercially available vegan cat foods (Gray, Sellon, and Freeman 2005; Kanakubo, Fascetti, and Larsen 2015).¹ Finally, social scientists who have researched vegetarians with carnivorous companions have found that the belief that a vegan diet can be harmful to cats is very widespread, even among strict ethical vegans (Rothberger 2014). Because this belief is widespread and has some empirical support, it is philosophically interesting to inquire into what would follow from its truth.

Once again, I am not here attempting to fully defend either of these assumptions, as doing so would take me well beyond

¹ See Gray et al. 2005 and Kanakubo et al. 2015 for a discussion of the problems with vegan cat food alternatives.

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

the scope of this paper. Rather, I am granting them in order to investigate what would follow from their truth.

The first point that must be observed about the Vegetarian's Dilemma is that the two most common defenses of ethical veganism (welfarist consequentialism and the animal rights approach) seem to categorically deny that it is justifiable to kill farmed animals in order to feed a companion animal.

For example, the well-known proponent of animal rights Tom Regan explicitly says that "when we must choose between overriding the rights of many who are innocent or the rights of few who are innocent...then we ought to choose to override the rights of the few in preference to overriding the rights of the many" (Regan 1983, 305). This 'miniride' principle clearly implies that we should override the rights of a single cat rather than the many animals that must be killed to sustain it over the course of its life.

When addressing this very issue, Donaldson and Kymlicka ask the following: "...what if it turns out some cats simply cannot be adequately nourished without animal protein in their diet? How could we fulfill our duty to feed our cats without violating the rights of other animals not to be killed?" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 150). As is obvious from this quotation, they believe that the animal rights position implies that killing animals, and thus violating their rights, in order to feed a carnivorous companion is not an ethically acceptable option. While they stop short of explicitly recommending the abolition of carnivorous companions, they close this discussion with the following ominous questions: "Does this level of restriction undermine the possibility of cats being flourishing members of mixed society? Does it mean that we would be justified in

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

bringing about their extinction?" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 152). They do not explicitly answer these questions, but the mere fact that they are stated in this format suggests that, on an animal rights perspective, abolition of carnivorous companionship may be morally required.

Consider also welfarist consequentialism. This is the family of views that establish an obligation to refrain from animal products because of the moral significance of the suffering, happiness, or preferences of nonhuman animals (McPherson 2014, Norcross 2004, Singer 1995). According to most forms of welfarist consequentialism, causing suffering or acting against the preferences of nonhuman animals is wrong unless there are strong reasons that override their preferences or suffering. On such a consequentialist framework, the life of one animal (the carnivorous companion) is clearly outweighed by the lives of the numerous animals that would have to be killed in order to sustain it.

Does this mean that all defenders of ethical veganism must categorically reject carnivorous companionship? In what follows, I will show that a virtue-based approach to this question yields very different results. While the existence of this third position does not undermine the ethical insights of the rights-based or welfarist positions, it does point to some plausible considerations that are ignored by the other two perspectives mentioned above. I now turn to an introduction of some of the most prominent virtue-based accounts of animal ethics.

Virtue Approaches to Animal Ethics

Rosalind Hursthouse argues that our deliberations about animal ethics ought to focus on the following question: which of our practices regarding animals express virtuous dispositions,

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

and which express vicious dispositions? This approach is most clearly explained in the following application of it to the suffering that occurs as a result of animal agriculture:

Can I, in all honesty, deny the ongoing existence of this suffering? No, I can't. I know perfectly well that although there have been some improvements in the regulation of factory farming, what is going on is still terrible. Can I think it is anything but callous to shrug this off and say it doesn't matter? No, I can't. Can I deny that the practices are cruel? No, I can't. Then what am I doing being party to them? It won't do for me to say that I am not actually engaging in the cruelty myself. There is a large gap between not being cruel and being truly compassionate, and the virtue of compassion is what I am supposed to be acquiring and exercising. (Hursthouse 2006, 142)

The most important feature of Hursthouse's framework is that it answers ethical questions about a particular practice by asking what virtues or vices are likely to be expressed by an individual who engages in said practice. By doing so, we can determine whether or not the practice in question is one that "the virtuous, as such, go in for (or ideally, would go in for)" (Hursthouse 2006, 141). For the duration of this paper, I will use the construction "X expresses the virtue Y" as a way of communicating that the individual who has the virtue Y would likely choose the action X.

Other philosophers have recognized that a virtue ethical approach to animal ethics can often help us answer difficult ethical questions. Garrett Merriam, for example, uses this method as a means of more carefully walking the "moral tightrope"

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

associated with the ethics of using animals in biomedical experimentation (Merriam 2012, 126). He prefers a virtue ethical approach in this context because it, “more so than any other ethical theory, is capable of recognizing the moral vagueness and ambiguity raised by this issue” (ibid). In a spirit similar to Merriam’s, I will apply the insights of virtue ethics to the case of carnivorous companionship in the hopes of teasing out some ethical nuances that are ignored by other perspectives.

The first step towards using a virtue ethical framework to approach the issue of carnivorous companionship is to determine which virtues and vices are most relevant. What dispositions of character are likely to be expressed by someone who chooses to, or chooses not to, keep a carnivorous companion, and which of those should play a substantial role in our ethical theorizing about carnivorous companionship?

Despite the fact that some spheres of human behavior and interaction (such as those associated with the virtues of tactfulness, discretion, and humor), do not have analogues in most relationships between humans and animals, a number of spheres of human experience, as well as their associated virtues and vices, do.

The first set of relevant virtues are strongly suggested by Hursthouse’s comments (quoted above): sympathy and compassion. These are behavioral dispositions that any truly virtuous person would express to an appropriate degree in their interactions with both humans and animals. Similarly, it seems unproblematic to claim that the vices associated with these spheres of human behavior (such as callousness or indifference) would never be expressed in the actions of the virtuous

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

individual, irrespective of whether their actions are directed at a human or a nonhuman animal.

This first category of virtues and vices (sympathy/compassion as well as callousness/indifference) are likely to be the most important when considering questions regarding carnivorous companionship. This is because we can plausibly understand the choice to maintain a carnivorous companion as being both in line with these virtues (as it involves concern and care for another being), but also as problematically callous (as it may also involve a lack of compassion for the animals upon which the carnivorous companion will feed). Since these behavioral dispositions play such an important role in the context of virtue ethical defences of veganism, they will play a similarly central role in the following analysis.

A second virtue that may be relevant is that of being just. I follow Martha Nussbaum in understanding the sphere of human experience pertaining to the “distribution of limited resources” as relating to the virtue of justice (Nussbaum 1988, 37). Since the assumptions I laid out in earlier sections of this paper characterize carnivorous companionship as necessarily involving meeting the needs of one individual (the carnivorous companion) by imposing a burden on another (by killing it and transforming its body into food for the companion), decisions about carnivorous companionship inherently involve making judgments about the benefits and burdens that may result from the distribution of resources. In other words, there are many ways that actions related to carnivorous companions can express the character traits of justice or injustice.

Third, it is worth mentioning that courage and cowardice are also relevant to a virtue ethical account of carnivo-

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

rous companionship. There are a number of ways that someone could exhibit the vice of cowardice when trying to decide how to deal with a carnivorous animal. Simply allowing someone else to deal with the animal without exhibiting appropriate concern for the future well-being of the carnivore involves an unwillingness to take on responsibility and a reticence to face a potentially difficult ethical decision. Alternatively, taking on this responsibility for oneself may involve facing uncomfortable ethical questions, negotiating a number of dilemmas, and engaging in a number of practices which may have questionable ethical implications. As Donaldson and Kymlicka put it,

...any individual contemplating having a companion cat is signing on for a great deal of responsibility in terms of doing the work to ensure their cat flourishes under the necessary restrictions (e.g., efforts to find palatable and nutritionally appropriate foods for them, and to create opportunities for them to enjoy the outdoors while not endangering others)” (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, 153).

In short, there are a number of ways that choices made with respect to a carnivorous companion can exhibit the virtue of courage or the vice of cowardice.

While many other virtues, vices, and character traits might be relevant to the question of carnivorous companions, these three can provide enough of a framework for us to start to understand and assess the alternatives that are open to an individual who is considering adopting such a companion.

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

The Case of the Lycanthropic Human

Now that we have the philosophical resources of a virtue-based approach to animal ethics at our disposal, we can begin to determine which virtues and vices would be expressed by an individual who chooses to enter into the kind of relationship that is typical of carnivorous companionship.

I begin by introducing a fictional case that makes the structure of carnivorous companionship relationships clear, but that makes reference only to the members of a single species. In this example, the caregiver, the companion, and the animals used for food will all be human. My reason for using this example rather than the more realistic example of adopting a cat stems from my concern that it may be easy to draw on biased intuitions against the moral status of nonhuman animals in order to justify carnivorous companionship. My example is designed to neutralize those biased intuitions. The challenge to carnivorous companionship involves pointing out that such companionship requires killing a number of beings with full moral status in order to sustain another being with equal moral status, and this feature is best exemplified by considering a case that is structurally similar to carnivorous companionship, but involves individuals who are uncontroversially of the same moral status.

Without further introduction, the case I wish to discuss is as follows:

A human has contracted a disease (lycanthropy) which makes him irrational, incapable of speech, violent, unpredictable, and easily distracted. He also seems to have an insatiable desire for the taste of human flesh. Furthermore, after running several tests, you have decisive scientific evidence that his continued health

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

depends on his regular consumption of human flesh (other animal flesh does not contain all the compounds necessary to maintain the lycanthropes' health). If the authorities learned of his existence and you did not intervene, he would be imprisoned and subsequently either euthanized or allowed to slowly die of malnutrition. The unpredictable violence of this human suggests that if you simply released him, he would regularly feed on weaker humans and, due to his seeming willingness to entertain himself with violence, would likely kill far more humans than is necessary to sustain him. Despite these features, the lycanthropic human is capable of developing close relationships with some humans and experiences the full range of human desires, pleasures, and emotions. He is, to some extent, capable of understanding his predicament and demonstrates awareness of, and concern about, his future.

The following four choices arguably exhaust the plausible options that are available to someone who has encountered this lycanthropic human:

Option 1: Painlessly kill the lycanthrope or turn it over to someone who will do so.

Option 2: Release the lycanthropic human to fend for itself.

Option 3: Adopt the human and care for it by occasionally selecting, abducting, and killing humans in order to feed it (or retaining a reliable, humane assassin to do so for you).

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

Option 4: Find someone else (either another human or an organization) who will care for the lycanthrope and feed it human flesh.

It is worth mentioning that there is a fifth option that I have chosen to exclude: feeding the lycanthrope human flesh that is harvested from humans that have died from natural causes or accidents. I ignore it because it would not be a viable option for someone considering the adoption of a cat or other carnivore. Even if it were possible to coordinate large-scale efforts to discover, gather, and process the corpses of animals that died naturally into ethically-sourced cat food, such an institution does not currently exist in our society and likely will not exist any time soon. Since there is good reason to think that the Vegetarian's Dilemma cannot be resolved by this fifth option, I will ignore it and focus on the four options that seem to be analogous to the options that are practically available to anyone considering the adoption of a cat. I now turn to a discussion of what welfarism, the animal rights approach, and virtue ethics would say about these four options in the case of the lycanthropic human.

Welfarist theories would choose the option that minimizes suffering and limits the number of people who need to be killed. Option 1, which involves painlessly killing the lycanthrope, would likely best fulfill those criteria.

It is more difficult to see how a rights-based approach might confront this dilemma. While some rights-based theories that are inspired by Kantian philosophy or the distinction between Doing and Allowing (such as Quinn 1989) might recommend option 2, it seems to me that most versions of the animal rights positions, such as those articulated by Donaldson and Kym-

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

licka, would likely conclude that option 1 is the correct choice. This consequence is implied by the selections from Donaldson and Kymlicka's work that were quoted earlier. Furthermore, some aspects of Regan's view also suggest that he would select Option 1. As was mentioned above, Regan endorses the claim that when we are in a situation where someone's rights must be violated, we must choose the action that will violate the rights of the fewest (Regan 1983, 305). It is plausible to think that all four of the options involve violating someone's rights. Option 1 involves violating the lycanthrope's right to life or, if it is simply restrained until it dies of malnutrition, its right to liberty. Option 2 also plausibly involves violating the rights of many people, specifically the many extra people that would be killed by the loose lycanthrope for entertainment (this would especially be true if we accept that you violate someone's rights if you expose them to preventable harm). The remaining options all involve the violation of some other humans' negative rights to not be harmed or, at the very least, their positive rights to be protected from harm. Since options 2-4 plausibly involve violating the rights of many people while Option 1 only requires the rights of a single individual to be violated, Regan would likely recommend this course of action, in agreement with welfarism. That being said, some other authors have argued that Regan has the resources to consistently recommend option 3 in some limited circumstances (Abbate 2016), but this consequence only follows if we make some significant modifications to Regan's view. In sum, it seems plausible to claim that most versions of the animal rights theories would settle on Options 1 or 2.

The main contribution of this paper is the observation that a virtue ethical perspective significantly disagrees with the options that are recommend by welfarism and rights-based theo-

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

ries. It is true that Option 1 may be said to express some important virtues. For example, a truly just individual might choose this option because it prevents anyone from being unjustly forced to take on a burden in order to benefit some third party. But a virtue ethical analysis reveals that an individual who chooses Option 1 also suffers from some very important deficiencies in sympathy and compassion. A compassionate moral agent should not merely look at the suffering of an individual in need and coldly conclude that it must be killed. We may even go as far as to say that the individual who simply turns the lycanthrope over to be killed is problematically callous.

Option 2 is even less defensible from a virtue ethical perspective. This choice likely leads to the greatest number of humans being killed, and these individuals will be killed indiscriminately (as the lycanthrope will likely kill many humans for entertainment as well as food and will not have the capacity to carefully select his victims). This choice therefore expresses a complete lack of concern for justice, as well as a lack of compassion for the large number of victims that could be spared by any of the other remaining options. Additionally, an individual choosing to prioritize her own clean hands over the welfare of others is not demonstrating courage, but rather is expressing a form of cowardice. In short, Option 2 fares the worst from a virtue ethical perspective.

There are, of course, many ethical concerns that could be raised about the people who choose options 3 or 4. For example, we might plausibly point out that allowing humans to be killed (or killing them oneself) to maintain the life of the lycanthropic human reveals not only a lack of sympathy towards the food-humans, but also a callousness towards human life that must be considered vicious. However, I am not convinced

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

that choosing options 3 or 4 necessarily reveals a lack of sympathy or an objectionable amount of callousness. This is largely because the lycanthrope does not merely desire human flesh, but requires it in order to survive. Once we acknowledge this fact, the following question becomes absolutely crucial to this discussion: if a morally-considerable being requires the death of another morally-considerable being in order to survive, does the first necessarily express callousness when taking the life of the second? Rosalind Hursthouse answers this question in the following way:

What if I needed meat to survive? That would, of course, be a very different situation. No one would think of many Africans, situated as they are, as being short of compassion solely on the grounds that they ate whatever the aid agencies provided. (Hursthouse 2006, 142).

If we agree with Hursthouse that one does not necessarily express a lack of compassion simply by taking what one needs (even the life of another) in order to survive, why wouldn't the same be true of someone who takes the life of another to allow a third human to survive?

This point can be expressed more precisely by considering the following chain of inference. First, we must observe that the ethics of eating animal products is heavily influenced by our actual biological, ecological, and agricultural realities. Many proponents of ethical veganism would accept that it is only because it is possible for humans to thrive on a vegan diet that we have any obligation to abstain from animal products. If our biological, ecological, or agricultural realities were such that a vegan diet and lifestyle was not practically possible, it

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

is plausible to claim that we could eat meat or other animal products without exhibiting callousness or a lack of sympathy. To claim any alternative is to say that any human who does not starve to death or suffer serious malnourishment for the sake of others is callous or unsympathetic. It is not uncommon for people discussing animal ethics to consider this issue by asking what one would do if one were abandoned on an island with insufficient sources of plant protein but plenty of wild pigs. It does not seem that the people who kill pigs in this situation are necessarily being callous or unsympathetic to those animals. This intuition is acknowledged by other prominent proponents of veganism, such as Mylan Engel (Engel 2000, 873).

The second step in this chain of inference is to ask what, if anything, would change if a third party were to engage in the acts of killing on behalf of another person who needed animal products in order to survive and thrive. To modify the 'desert island' example mentioned above, imagine two people stranded on an island with few sources of plant protein but many pigs. One of the individuals was injured in whatever horrible accident led to their being stranded on this particular island. The injured party is also deathly allergic to the one significant source of plant protein that grows on the island (a legume similar to the peanut). The other individual can consume the legumes, and thus has no need of animal protein, but nonetheless catches and kills pigs for the injured person to consume (but does not consume pig flesh herself). Does this third party exhibit a lack of compassion or an objectionable amount of callousness towards the pigs that are killed to sustain her compatriot? It is hard to see how the motivations and dispositions of this individual should be any different from the person who consumes animal products in order to prevent her own starvation. If we have already agreed that imminent starvation or

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

severe malnutrition make it possible to kill an animal for food without exhibiting a lack of compassion, then it should not be relevant whose starvation or malnutrition is imminent.

Finally, we have to apply these conclusions to the case of the lycanthropic human where it is not pigs being killed to sustain a human life, but rather other humans. Does this fact about the case imply that the individual who cares for and feeds the lycanthropic human necessarily exhibits an objectionable degree of callousness, or betrays a problematic lack of sympathy and compassion? I suspect that anyone who believes that humans deserve a higher moral status than animals (such as Cohen 1986 or Warren 1986) would answer this question in the affirmative, but those who accept some version of the claim that animals should be extended moral equality with humans ought to make roughly consistent judgments about the individual who kills a pig so another may live and the individual who kills a human so another may live. At the very least, proponents of animal equality should concede that both individuals are very likely to express the same virtues and vices. In sum, if it is possible to kill a pig to prevent the starvation of another without exhibiting callousness, then it should also be possible to kill a human for the same motives without exhibiting callousness.

I think this chain of reasoning serves as a plausible defense of the claim that someone could choose options 3 or 4 without necessarily exhibiting callousness. Additionally, unlike options 1 or 2, 3 and 4 both involve the expression of a profound sympathy for a living being. When faced with this lycanthropic human in need, an individual who chooses 3 or 4 decides to do everything possible to find a home for it and provide for its biological needs. This kind of sympathy and compassion, which is a virtue that plays a large role in virtue ethical accounts of

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

animal ethics, is not exhibited by the actions described in either Options 1 or 2.

Furthermore, Option 3 expresses more virtues than Option 4, as it would take considerable courage to take on the task of providing for another creature when doing so will involve participating in actions that are ethically suspect. By taking on this responsibility oneself, rather than passing it off on someone who may not take it as seriously, our protagonist demonstrates not only courage, but also the willingness to take on difficult responsibilities and an unwillingness to risk that another caregiver will care for the lycanthrope in a less ethical way (by, for example, feeding it human meat that was not procured humanely). Thus, it seems that a virtuous individual would be very likely to 'go in for' Option 3 over any of the alternatives.

Ultimately, what should the virtue ethicist say about these four options? None of them are perfect, as choosing any of the available options involves the expression of at least some vices. However, we have found that a person who chooses Option 3 not only expresses a deep, important form of compassion and sympathy for the lycanthropic human, but also expresses a substantial degree of courage by choosing an option that requires taking responsibility and making difficult decisions. After all, it will prove very challenging for a truly compassionate person to care for the lycanthropic human. In order to express a sufficient amount of compassion for the humans that will be used as food, the chooser of Option 3 is essentially taking on the obligation to experiment with a number of food alternatives and thus to try to find a diet that will sustain the lycanthrope with the minimal loss of human life. This may involve paying for regular health care for the lycanthrope, purchasing a variety of expensive alternative foods and supplements, and closely

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

monitoring the health and well-being of the cannibalistic companion. If it is truly determined that this being cannot survive and flourish without food derived from humans, then the person who chooses Option 3 must work hard to acquire the food-humans in the most humane way possible. None of these tasks will be easy, and accepting a responsibility to perform them expresses a considerable amount of courage.

Even though the person selecting Option 3 may be deficient in a sense of justice, it seems very plausible to claim that we can understand why a compassionate, sensitive, caring, and courageous person would decide to begin a companionship relationship with the lycanthropic human. This finding has profound implications for the problem of carnivorous companionship.

From Lycanthropes to Cats

The fictional scenario I just considered at length is closely analogous to adoption of a feline that needs a home. If it is made known to someone that a cat does not have a home nor a human companion to care for it, the four options below exhaust the practically available options:

Option 1: Kill the cat (either directly or by restraining it until it dies of malnutrition).

Option 2: Release the cat and leave it to its own devices (which will certainly involve the death of many birds, reptiles, and rodents).

Option 3: Adopt the cat and work to acquire the most humanely harvested animal products for it.

Option 4: Turn it over to a humane society, a foster home, or another individual who will care for it.

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

Note, once again, that I am ignoring the fifth option of feeding the cat food derived from the corpses of naturally-dying animals, as it is not likely that the current number of cats in the world who need a home could, practically speaking, be sustained on this source of food.

Just like in the case of the lycanthropic human, we can see that a compassionate, sensitive person would not consider Options 1 or 2. We can also see how someone may express a considerable amount of courage by choosing 3, which involves taking on the responsibility to work as hard to possible to care for the cat, monitor its health, and seek the most humane animal products possible (rather than standard factory-farmed cat food), including as much vegan cat food as is practically possible, for it to consume. While such a person would arguably express some kind of a deficiency in terms of the virtue of justice, Option 3 seems to express more virtues and fewer vices than any of the other available options.

The important conclusion to focus on at this point is that a virtue ethical approach would give a very different solution to the Vegetarian's Dilemma than would welfarist and animal rights approaches. Whereas these other approaches deny that it would be ethically acceptable to begin a companionship relationship with a carnivore, the virtue ethical approach shows us that the very same virtuous dispositions that might lead someone to transition towards a vegan lifestyle (specifically sympathy and compassion) could also lead them to commit to caring for a carnivorous animal in need. Thus, from a virtue ethical perspective, veganism and carnivorous companionship are not merely consistent, but are complementary in an important type of way.

PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

Proponents of welfarism or the animal rights perspective will likely dismiss these considerations on the grounds that a focus on compassion and other virtuous dispositions may mislead us or otherwise prevent us from making correct ethical judgments. However, my purpose in this paper is not to refute welfarism or rights-based approaches any more than it is to offer a sustained defense of virtue-based approaches. Rather, my goal has been to shed light on the fact that an often-neglected perspective on animal ethics seems to provide a plausible and unique account of how the Vegetarian's Dilemma could be resolved.

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PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

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PATRICK J. CLIPSHAM

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