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Religious Dietary Practices and Secular Food Ethics; or, How to Hope that Your Food Choices Make a Difference Even When You Reasonably Believe That They Don't

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Abstract and Keywords

Religious dietary practices foster a sense of communal identity, certainly, but traditionally they are also regarded as pleasing to God (or the gods, or the ancestors) and spiritually beneficial. In other words, for many religious people, the effects of fasting go well beyond what is immediately observed or empirically measurable, and that is a large part of what motivates participation in the practice. The goal of this chapter is to develop that religious way of thinking into a response to a motivational problem that arises from our awareness of the insensitivity of contemporary food supply chains. If someone can have faith, or at least tenacious hope, that the significance of her food choices goes well beyond what is immediately observed or empirically measurable, then she may be less demoralized by the apparent inefficacy of those choices. The chapter concludes by considering a way in which this broadly religious way of thinking might be available to secular people as well.

Keywords: religion, fasting, motivation, causal inefficacy, difference-making

Where hope is, is in fact religion.

—Ernst Bloch

Religion and Food Norms

There are, by some measures, approximately six billion religious people on earth, and every one of them eats.¹ For the vast majority, the way they live—and how they eat—is guided in some way by sacred texts, traditions, rituals, or other religious authorities.

Specific guidelines diverge widely across traditions, of course. Nevertheless, there is some commonality at the meta-ethical level: in many religious contexts, the will of (p. 288) a supernatural or Supreme Being is taken to be

sufficient to make an action morally required. In some traditions, it is also necessary: all and only the actions God commands are required, and all and only the actions God proscribes are forbidden. The command or proscription is what makes an action required or forbidden.² Moral philosophers call this general framework “theological voluntarism” or “divine command theory.”³ Here is a very early argument for it by the Chinese philosopher Mozi (ca. 470–391 B.C.E.):

Then what could be the Law for the world? Imagining the parents as the Law, is that good? There are few virtuous (*Ren*) among so many parents. If we regard the parents as the Law, it is not a good law. A bad law cannot be the Law. Imagining the teachers as the Law, is that good? There are few virtuous among so many teachers.

Then what could be the Law? It would be better to [follow the Sage-kings and] regard Heaven as the Law. . . . If we regard Heaven as the Law, then what we do must be according to Heaven. Do what Heaven wills; don’t do what Heaven does not will.

(Mozi [Wang] 1984, 23–24; qtd. in Li 2004, 237–238.)

Mozi is focused on right and wrong here, but there are also religious ways of thinking about good and bad. To take just a couple: “divine desire” theorists hold that the good is what the gods (God) desire or prefer. “Participation” or “resemblance” theorists say that the good is what resembles transcendent Goodness in some salient way.⁴ Here is Mozi again:

Then, what does Heaven will or not will? It must be that Heaven wills people to love each other and profit each other; that Heaven does not will people to hate each other (p. 289) or hurt each other. How do we know that? Because he/she [Heaven] loves us all and profits us all. And still how do we know his/her universal love and universal profit? Because he/she possesses us all and feeds us all.

(*ibid.* 24; qtd. in Li 2004, 238.)⁵

Here Mozi suggests that because Heaven loves and feeds us all, it is good to love and profit others. The focus is more on cultivating divine love and becoming like Heaven than on following commands. But Mozi clearly regards this theory of the good as compatible with a divine command theory of the right: Heaven wills that we do as Heaven itself does (i.e., love and feed others), and that is what makes doing it Law. Someone who rejects the idea that divine command is what makes an action right might still accept some other religious theory of the good, and then say that what is morally required is to promote the good so understood.

But what does all this have to do with food?

Eating-related behavior is, by biological necessity, a central part of human life. It is also a major focus of both industry and culture. Institutions that successfully regulate how large numbers of people collect, prepare, consume, dispose, and teach their children about food will have immense significance; and religions have not hesitated in this regard. There are *kashrut* and *halal* laws, ceremonial food practices, maxims regarding the sharing of food with strangers and neighbors, religious vegetarianisms, guidelines about liturgical eating and fasting, rules about offering food to the dead or to idols, teachings about the symbolic character of certain foods, principles regarding the handling of consecrated food, and so on.⁶

Some religious authorities (texts, creeds, rituals, and individual leaders) explicitly invoke divine commands to motivate food regulations:

Adonai said to Moshe and Aharon, “Tell the people of Isra’el, ‘These are the living creatures which you may eat among all the land animals: any that has a separate hoof which is completely divided and chews the cud—these animals you may eat.’ ” (Leviticus 11:1–3)⁷

Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah, and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars.

(Qur’an 5:3)⁸

Other authorities focus less on commands and more on how eating in a certain way—or the properly prepared food itself—pleases God, or divinizes the eater, or keeps faith with (p. 290) the ancestors, or benefits *qi*, or resembles transcendent Goodness, and that *this* is what gives it value. The second chapter of the Daoist text *Taishang Lingbao Wufixu* (ca. 400 CE) comprises seventy recipes that, if followed meticulously, promise divinization and immortality. A recipe for Solomon’s Seal, for instance, says that

If you ingest and eat this herb, you can live as long as Heaven and Earth. The multitude of gods will convene together and Taiyi will be expecting and will welcome you. You will ascend and be promoted to Officer of Heaven. You will be able to travel to Kunlun and witness the beginning and end of Heaven and Earth The stalk and leaves are close to pure. Their juice can be made into a broth to liberate your inner parts and benefit your *qi* . . . and you will become a spirit immortal. Among dietary practices, only this one will make you prosperous.

(recipe 27a; qtd. in Arthur 2013, 129)

Other ways in which religious authorities underwrite food principles is by claiming that they improve the health of the individual or strengthen the bonds of the in-community:

The food must be *kosher*. Literal food must not mix meat and milk, nor be of an animal type forbidden by Torah; sexuality must not be adulterous, money must not be acquired by theft, etc. In a more general sense, *kosher* also means healthy. The Torah forbids us from doing anything that damages our bodies. This includes eating amounts or types of foods that are literally *kosher* but nevertheless unhealthy. (Schneider 1996, 22)

You [the chosen people] are not to eat any animal that dies naturally; although you may let a stranger staying with you eat it, or sell it to a foreigner; because you are a holy people for Adonai your God.

(Deuteronomy 14:21)

Yet another way to motivate food regulations appeals to the tradition’s broader vision of the cosmos and humanity’s place within it. In reference to eating animals, in particular, Lisa Kemmerer quotes two scholars of indigenous religion:

For indigenous [Native American] peoples, nature is often viewed as a “temple, and within this sanctuary [people ought to show] great respect to every form, function, and power. . . . Reverence for nature and for life is *central* to their religion” (J. Brown, 37). . . . The West African term *Nyam* refers to “an enduring power and energy” that is within all life forms, such that “all forms of life are deemed to possess certain rights, which cannot be violated” (Riley, 479).

(Kemmerer 2011, 22)⁹

Viewing all of living nature as having moral standing in this way does not prevent indigenous peoples from eating some forms of life. However, as Kemmerer goes on to point out, it does affect how they do it.¹⁰ (p. 291)

I do not have the skill or space to consider the highly textured and situated ways in which specific religious traditions conceive of food regulations. Instead, while fully acknowledging the risk involved in philosophical abstraction like this, I will focus on what I will call a *broadly religious approach* to fasting and other forms of dietary regulation.¹¹ Central to this approach are two complementary ideas:

1. The beneficial effects of intentional dietary regulation (fasting and other forms of abstinence) can extend well beyond its *likely* observable results, and
2. Focusing on this possibility can help maintain one’s resolve to follow the regulation.

I do not claim that this approach is shared by every religious eater, or that it is adequate to every tradition. But it is clear that for many people of faith, fasting is not *primarily* about its likely observable outcomes: saving food, cleansing the alimentary tract, pushing the body into starvation mode, hallucinating, and so on. For some, it is about forging an identity, or earning points with peers, or showing solidarity with the poor, or improving resistance to temptation. But for others—especially more traditional believers—fasting seems to be primarily about unobservable aspects of the act: pleasing God, petitioning, earning spiritual or karmic rewards, acquiring special insight, manifesting *ahimsa*, working toward *shalom*, and so on. Such people may regard the observable aspects of the act (what they do and do not do with their bodies) and the likely observable results (hunger, weight loss) as means to these other ends, or as foreseeable side-effects, but they are not the main point of the practice.

My goal here is to bring this broadly religious approach to food regulations to bear (implausibly, perhaps) on a very contemporary problem in food ethics. The problem arises from the fact that the size and complexity of our industrial food system—the insensitivity of many of its supply chains—makes it extremely unlikely that an individual consumer’s choices will have any positive or negative effect on that system. In particular, it will not improve (or worsen) the welfare of any worker or animal in that system, and it will not lead to fewer (or more) rights violations.

Mark Bryant Budolfson (2016) and others have pointed out that this result is particularly troublesome for *act consequentialists* who think that we morally ought to refrain from consuming products of objectionable aspects of the industrial food system. That is because act consequentialism (which I will just call “consequentialism” here) says that, in order for an act to be immoral, it must have overall consequences that are worse than those of some other readily available act. So if a choice to consume food that is wrongfully produced does not lead to any additional negatives and does lead to the goods of pleasure and nourishment, then consuming such food cannot be morally wrong. It might even be morally required! For those who still think that it is wrong, at least sometimes, this will function as an objection to consequentialism. Budolfson calls it the *inefficacy* objection. (p. 292)

Elliot Michaelson (2016b) joins Budolfson (unpublished) in arguing that the inefficacy objection applies to some forms of deontology, too. For example, it applies to a view on which *only* acts that lead to new rights violations can count as morally wrong. Other non-consequentialisms (divine command theory, virtue theory, some versions of Kantianism), however, are clearly able to avoid this form of the objection. An action might still be divinely ordained, virtuous, or categorically rational regardless of its outcomes.

But—and this is my main point here—even if abstaining from purchasing the products of a morally objectionable system is the right thing to do regardless of outcomes, an average person’s commitment to doing so will be threatened by awareness of inefficacy. In other words, for all but the most stoical among us, the fact that our individual choices to abstain from the products of a bad system are almost certainly inefficacious poses a psychological threat to our ongoing moral commitment.

Here is another way to put this point. The original inefficacy objection is conceptual: it starts with the idea that a given action is wrong, and then shows that some ethical theories (consequentialism, in particular) imply the opposite in circumstances where individual choices have no negative effects. The inefficacy problem that I want to consider here, by contrast, is moral-psychological: it, too, starts with a commitment to the idea that a given action is wrong, and then shows that we will often be too psychologically demoralized to resist performing it in circumstances where our individual choices appear to be inefficacious.

After further describing this kind of inefficacy problem in the next section, I go on in the third section to consider ways in which the broadly religious approach just sketched helps many religious people handle it. Even if they cannot see or measure the outcomes, these practitioners take themselves to have religious grounds for faith (or at least motivation-sustaining hope) that some good will result from their dietary practices. As we have already seen, in many cases these grounds invoke what I will call a *supersensible mechanism*¹²: God, the gods, Heaven, karmic principles, reincarnation patterns, and so on. I then turn to an examination of the structure of a Kantian “moral argument”—the sort that Kant himself uses to argue for God’s existence—in order to see whether an analogue of that argument can take us from an obligation to abstain from certain products to a commitment to the existence of some such mechanism. In the final section, I conclude that it cannot—not without lapsing into bad faith. Still, I do think there is a version of the broadly religious approach that can play a role in a naturalistic, secular responses to the psychological inefficacy problem.

Inefficacy and Double Demoralization

Many of the industrial systems in which we are inevitably entwined (food, coffee, leather, water, energy, furniture, fabrics, and so on) have supply chains that seem to (p. 293) be full of slack and buffers, designed to absorb a certain amount of waste in order to achieve economy of scale and, as a result, deeply insensitive to slight changes in demand. If the industrial food system is in fact this way,¹³ then an individual’s occasional choice to consume (or not) its products is very unlikely to change conditions for the workers or animals involved in the system, or the environment and wildlife affected by it. This is particularly true of choices made in private, where no one else is there to witness or be influenced.

Let’s grant that some of the massive supply chains in the real-world food system are “lumpy” rather than linear: supply responds to demand in large lots or “lumps” rather than in one-by-one orders. Now consider, for example, a regional fast-food company that has a policy of ordering 100,000 chickens a month from its suppliers in order to

meet an average demand just shy of 2 million chicken sandwiches (I am guessing, without any expert justification, that a chicken sandwich contains around 1/20th of the edible parts of a chicken). If the demand in a given month is between 1,900,000 and 2 million sandwiches, then the company will not change its usual order. The managers are prepared to throw out that much meat over the course of a week as long as they think that the average demand will continue to be around 2 million sandwiches-worth. But they also have a policy according to which, if the number of sandwich orders in a given month goes below 1,900,000, that will trigger a “lump” reduction in their order for at least the following week. They will order 95,000 chickens instead of 100,000 from the supplier.

So now suppose that someone who is morally opposed to the industrial chicken system comes up to the counter and is trying to decide what to order. It looks as though, if the number of *other* chicken sandwich orders during that period is anywhere between 1,899,999 and 2 million—as it *almost* always is—then her order will not make a difference to the number of actual chickens processed. And if the number is below 1,899,999 but above 1,799,999, then her order also will not make a difference. And so on. It is *only* if she happens to be at the restaurant during a week in which the number of other sandwich orders happens to be *precisely* 1,899,999 (or 1,799,999, or 1,699,999, etc.) that her order will have any effect at all. But if she is at such a pivot point, and if she orders something other than a chicken sandwich, then her action will trigger the lump reduction and lead to 5,000 fewer chickens being ordered from the industrial animal agriculture system.¹⁴

The consequentialist might try to respond here by saying that even if this does describe the real-world situation, we cannot possibly know when we are at a pivot point, and so the thing to do is to equate the *expected effect* of an individual choice with the *average effect* of all the choices between thresholds. If the “lump” order is 5,000 chickens, (p. 294) and it is only triggered every 100,000 sandwich purchases, then the *average effect* of each purchase is $1/100,000 \times 5,000 = 1/20$. In other words, the expected effect of an individual purchase is exactly what one might predict: 1/20th of a chicken.¹⁵ It is then an empirical question whether the thought of occasionally saving 1/20th of a chicken would suffice to maintain the psychological resolve of someone who thinks that industrial chicken production is wrong.

This response fails because the standing policy combined with the empirical trend means that many purchases (or abstentions) have *no* effect at rather than the average effect. Remember that they typically receive between 1.9 and 2 million orders every week, and they *throw out* the extra. So there is effectively a *buffer* in the system that keeps them from ever falling short of demand, but that also means that the decision to purchase or abstain cannot, over time, have anything close to the average effect as calculated above. Note, too, that the “buffer” represented by the policy of the fast-food chain is hardly the end of the story. For in real-world situations, there is often, as Budolfson points out, a *series* of “buffers” like this—a series of points along the supply chain where waste is tolerated or absorbed. The restaurant’s suppliers, for instance, will presumably also have some sort of threshold policy vis-à-vis the farmers who raise the chickens, and be prepared to absorb some decrease in demand before reducing their order. Similarly, the farmer gets the chicks from an incubator facility, which itself will have a threshold policy that is tolerant of a certain amount of waste. Moreover, in a market as big as the chicken market (around 45 billion animals per year worldwide), the suppliers are almost certain to have other customers who will be able to pick up slack in a given period, and so may not tell the farmer to produce 5,000 fewer chickens after all, even if the threshold is occasionally crossed. Likewise at the level of farmer and incubator. And so on: it is buffers all the way down.¹⁶

In such a situation, there is, as Budolfson (2016, 208) puts it, a “vanishingly small” chance that when an individual arrives at the restaurant counter, she is at a threshold or “pivot point” in that supply chain that will make her choice

efficacious. If you add in other kinds of supply chain “noise,” then the chance becomes “infinitesimal.”¹⁷ The (p. 295) expected effect would be difficult to calculate, but it is *nowhere near* as high as 1/20th of a chicken.

In light of all this, Rabbi Yanklowitz’s (2015, 27) claim in *The Jewish Vegan* that “it is not hard to buy a leather-free belt to spare animals from unnecessary suffering” seems well-intentioned but off the mark. Same with the younger Peter Singer’s assertion that

becoming a vegetarian is not merely a symbolic gesture. Nor is it an attempt to isolate oneself from the ugly realities of the world, to keep oneself pure and so without responsibility for the cruelty and carnage all around. Becoming a vegetarian is a highly practical and effective step one can take toward ending both the killing of non-human animals and the infliction of suffering upon them. (1975, 168–169)

In Chignell (2016), I used the term “opportunistic” to characterize acts in which

- (a) a person *benefits* by
- (b) *consuming* products of activity *on the part of others* that
- (c) the person *takes to be morally wrong*, and where
- (d) generating those products is a *constitutive aim* of the activity in question.¹⁸

Intuitions about cases in which someone receives a gift, wins a prize, or finds something edible in a dumpster reveal that most of us think opportunistic eating is permitted in some circumstances. “Freegans,” for instance, have no problem consuming food that results from others’ purchases, even though they would never produce or purchase those items on their own.¹⁹ Likewise, some Theravada monks regard it as permissible to eat meat that others give to them, but not to kill the animals themselves.²⁰ Cases of *opportunistic purchasing* are more complicated: most of us share Yanklowitz’s and Singer’s conviction that we have a moral reason not to purchase the products of wrongful activity on the part of others. However, it is surprisingly difficult to find a sound argument for that conclusion, especially in the context of massive, insensitive supply systems (see Boey 2016; Harman 2016; McPherson 2016; Chignell 2016).

It would be worth thinking more about which ethical theories can rule out opportunistic purchasing or rebut the conceptual version of the inefficacy objection. However, I do not propose to go further into those debates here.²¹ Instead, I want to examine the (p. 296) psychological version of the problem and see whether the “broadly religious approach” to dietary regulations offers an effective response to it.

I co-teach a class (also a Massive Open Online Course) on “The Ethics of Eating.”²² The goal of the class is to expose students to some important facts about the food system and then help them reflect philosophically on the ethical and political ramifications of various consumption patterns. The first thing that the students come to appreciate is that the industrial part of the food system is enormously impressive: relatively few people, using a whole lot of technology, are able to feed billions. Industrialization has also led to dramatic increases in yield, efficiency, and safety. Writing in an industry journal, food scientist John Floros points out that since 1950

the average yield of corn nearly quadrupled (from 39 to 153 bushels per acre), the productivity for meat production increased by a notable 88%, and the output of eggs and poultry increased by a remarkable 411%. Combined, all these improvements resulted in an astonishing 145% increase in overall productivity.

(Floros 2009)

All the same, there are notorious problems, abuses, wastes, and unaccounted externalities throughout the industrial system, as Floros goes on to point out. When confronted with these problems, many of our students seem energized: they agree that aspects of that system are morally objectionable, they want to “make a difference” via their food choices, and they vow to change their habits. However, when confronted with the size, complexity, lumpiness, and opacity of the system—and the resulting challenges facing those who want to bring about change—many of our students become demoralized.

To see why, consider one of the main components of the food system: animal agriculture. That part of the industry processes more than 9 billion land animals per year in the United States and as many as 60 billion land animals worldwide (many billions more if you include all the seafood and bycatch).²³ It also produces more greenhouse gases than the entire transportation sector according to a 2006 UN report.²⁴ Someone who thinks that aspects of that system—the treatment of some of the animals, the conditions of some of the workers, the rampant overuse of antibiotics, the loss of CO₂ absorbing forests and jungles to raise grain for livestock—are morally objectionable might reasonably want to change the system. But when confronted with these daunting numbers, and the lumpiness of some of the supply chains, she might also reasonably think that her individual food choices—even over an entire lifetime—will not make a significant difference. This is one kind of *demoralization*:

(D1) General despair or dejection in the face of the very long odds of making a significant positive difference to the system in question.

(p. 297)

Often this will lead to another and more serious kind of *de-moralization*:

(D2) Loss of psychological resolve required to do what the agent *still* takes herself to have moral reason to do.

When completely demoralized in this way, the agent will presumably revert to purchasing whatever is most convenient, tasty, and affordable—despite her moral qualms. The conjunction of (D1) and (D2) is what I will mean by “double demoralization” in what follows.²⁵

How Religion (Broadly Speaking) Helps

In a recent survey article on “Religion and Food,” Tyler Doggett and Matthew Halteman argue that “surface” level religious principles about what or how to eat (e.g., do not eat pork, do not eat beef) are typically grounded in “deeper” principles (do not pollute yourself, practice *ahimsa*) and metaphysical doctrines (a cow is a motherly deity). These deeper principles and doctrines, in turn, are often drawn from what Doggett and Halteman call a “cosmic vision”: an “intersubjective, communal, evolving way of both understanding and being in the world” Cosmic visions reflect origin myths and oral histories as well as more abstract philosophical and theological reflections; they are often inscribed in folklore, rituals, and authoritative texts. In addition to providing understanding and ethical guidance, these visions can also serve as the basis for political decisions regarding communal identity and policy (2016, 283). In many religious cultures, following the surface principles can be a way of adhering to the deeper principles, demonstrating commitment to the doctrines, and expressing allegiance to the community and the cosmic vision (see also Kaplan 2017 on “food narratives”).

Because there are these connections to more fundamental aspects of their practice, religious people can then coherently view the surface regulations as both unlikely to make a significant observable difference (apart from making them feel hungry or miss certain foods) and as morally and spiritually significant. For example, fasting may be a way of performing other supersensible actions: loving or worshipping God, honoring ancestors, propitiating divine anger, becoming like God, expelling the Three Worms, annihilating the ego, seeking divine favor, doing penance, crucifying the flesh, and so on. It might also count as obeying divine commands, but the broadly religious approach I am exploring here does not entail divine command theory. The point, rather, is that moral psychology (p. 298) can be strengthened by religious adherence: each of these good-making though largely unobservable aspects of a fast can help motivate the keeping of it.²⁶

Some religious people also look for positive results from their fasting and abstinence. Most of these results, too, will be unobservable: spiritual insight, increased faith, the replacement of a coarser *qi* with a more rarefied *qi*, a clean conscience, greater harmony with the whole, good karma, heavenly treasure, immortality, and so on.

Finally, some religious people regard fasting as able indirectly to generate *observable* results in the world, since, for example, a deity who is obeyed, worshipped, and well-pleased may act favorably on their behalf to produce observable, measurable results: sending manna and quail from heaven, healing a sick relative, mending a relationship, parting the Red Sea, furthering a business enterprise, striking down an enemy. Given that God is not, on sophisticated religious pictures anyway, constrained by contracts or buttered-up by rituals, there can be no guarantee that any of these results will obtain. None of them is likely. But a religious outlook at least offers grounds for resolve-sustaining hope.

I characterized the “broadly religious approach” to food regulation as involving the following two ideas:

1. The beneficial effects of intentional dietary regulation (fasting and other forms of abstinence) can extend well beyond its likely observable results, and
2. Focusing on this possibility can help maintain one’s resolve to follow the regulation.

This is doctrinally minimalistic—so much so that later I will sketch a way in which this “broadly religious” approach might be adopted in a secular context. In this section, though, I have been developing a somewhat more concrete and substantive version of that broadly religious approach. It can be summarized as follows:

Traditional Religious Mindset: Following dietary regulations is morally good and spiritually beneficial because of how this practice is grounded in my tradition’s deeper moral principles, metaphysical doctrines, and cosmic vision. Following these regulations may also lead, via supersensible mechanisms, to other good outcomes—both observable and unobservable.

Again, there are typically no guarantees in this context.²⁷ So it would be rash to be optimistic that my individual efforts are going to result in any observable outcomes beyond (p. 299) the obvious ones (improving my ability to resist hunger, for example). A Traditional Religious Mindset, however, clearly does provide the basis for a kind of hope that is both compatible with a lack of optimism and a bulwark against double demoralization. Religious people who fast on behalf of sick relatives are not optimistic, perhaps, but they cling to hope that their fasting will somehow help.

Kantian Religion: Moral Arguments for Theoretical Conclusions

We have seen that a Traditional Religious Mindset offers psychological resources to sustain hope and moral resolve, even in the face of perceived inefficacy. If this is correct, then it might be tempting to think that there is a kind of “moral argument” here from the negative psychological effects of perceived inefficacy to the adoption of such a mindset. Moral arguments are found throughout the nineteenth-century Pragmatist and Idealist traditions, but Immanuel Kant is a key forebear, and his philosophy of religion is explicitly designed to answer the question “What may I hope?” So it is worth looking briefly at a Kantian religious argument that stems from our general psychological need for moral hope. I will then consider an analogous argument based in our need to overcome the psychological ramifications of perceived inefficacy.

Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone (1793) is the treatise in which Kant describes the “rational essence” of religion—the doctrines and practices that can survive examination by the tribunal of universal rationality. The result is called “moral religion,” “rational religion,” or “rational faith” (*Vernunftglaube*) in order to distinguish it from creedal or enthusiastic forms based in special revelation or alleged mystical experience.

Kant articulates the rational essence of the doctrine of providence in the following passage:

Each must, on the contrary, so conduct himself as if everything depended on him. Only on this condition may he hope that a higher wisdom will provide the fulfillment of his well-intentioned effort. ([1793] 1902, 6:101)

The passage displays what we might call a *consequence-dependent moral psychology*. Kant is famously not a consequentialist in ethics generally: “The fulfillment of duty consists in the form of the earnest will, not in the mediating causes of success” ([1790] 1902, 5:451). But he also says that it is rational and (for most of us) psychologically necessary to hope that good consequences will result from the action, even if via a supersensible mechanism (“a higher wisdom”).

Interestingly, Kant’s view of the psychology of sustained ethical action is based in an empirical claim about perceived inefficacy: most human beings are sensible, embodied (p. 300) “creatures of need” as well as rational beings. For us, the best state is not one of mere Epicurean desire-satisfaction nor does it consist (as the Stoics say) simply in being virtuous. Rather, the best state—the “highest good”—is a state of true justice: a state in which virtue is perfectly proportioned to happiness. But happiness, for Kant, is at least partly bodily: it involves the satisfaction of our inclinations, many of which arise from our sensible nature as “creatures of need” ([1788] 1902, 5:61). And so prolonged experience of injustice—of a world-history in which the wicked often prosper and the virtuous are often unhappy—can slowly chip away at our resolve.

This sensitivity on Kant’s part to empirical psychology and embodied desire makes him keenly aware of how hard it is to remain virtuous without some hope that justice will be achieved—i.e., some hope that happiness will come to those who keep to the straight and narrow. Indeed in the *Critique* he says that “all hoping aims at happiness” ([1781/7] 1902, A805/B833). In the *Religion* passage above, he intimates that one of the needs we have, in the context of ethical and political action, is to see our “well-intentioned efforts” fulfilled—at least sometimes. Perhaps the moral law demands that we try to help the disadvantaged by donating our money to various causes. And perhaps this is true regardless of actual outcomes. Still, most of us *also* want our altruism to be effective: it

helps us to retain psychological resolve if we can believe (or at least reasonably hope) that the poor are actually benefiting from our gifts. Even in a Kantian context, a morally good person will reasonably care about the goodness of the *consequences* of her actions, and not just about the goodness of her actions. In *Religion*, Kant depicts this as a rationally respectable appropriation of the ancient doctrine of Providence—a doctrine that has ancestors in the even more ancient and cross-cultural idea that the gods, including the most capricious ones, tend to cooperate with people who do their bidding.

Consequence-dependent moral psychology and an appeal to demoralization is also found in Kant's famous "moral proof" of God's existence. Here is one of his more lyrical presentations of it in the third *Critique*:

A righteous man (like Spinoza) who takes himself to be firmly persuaded that there is no God and . . . also no future life . . . does not demand any advantage for himself from his conformity to the moral law, whether in this world or another; rather, he would simply and unselfishly bring about the good to which that holy law directs all his powers. But his strivings [*Bestreben*] have limits. . . . Deceit, violence, and envy always surround him, even though he is himself honest, peaceable, and benevolent. The other righteous people that he encounters at times will, in spite of all their worthiness to be happy, nevertheless be subject by nature, which pays no respect to that, to all the evils [*Übeln*] of poverty, illnesses, and untimely death, just like all the other animals on earth. It will always remain so until one wide grave engulfs them all together (whether honest or dishonest, here it makes no difference) and hurls them, the very ones who were capable of believing that they were the final purpose [*Endzweck*] of all creation, back into the abyss of the purposeless chaos of matter [*Schlund des zwecklosen Chaos der Materie*] from which they all were drawn. ([1790] 1902, 5:452)

(p. 301)

In the end, when faced with this abyss, the righteous Spinoza has two options: either he will "certainly have to give up his end [of being righteous] as impossible" or "he must accept (*annehmen*) the existence of a moral author of the world (*Welturheber*), i.e. of God, from a practical point of view." The "impossible" here can be read psychologically: he simply cannot keep to the path of virtue without some source of hope that justice will ultimately prevail.²⁸

Here is a stepwise look at one interpretation of this moral argument from despair²⁹:

- (1) We ought to do what is morally right (from an independent argument).
- (2) It would be demoralizing in the first sense (i.e., it would lead to despair) not to be able to hope that there is a moral order by which a just arrangement (i.e., a "moral world") will come about, for then we would have to regard it as certain that the whole history of the universe will not be good on the whole, no matter what we do (empirical premise).
- (3) Such demoralization has an enervating effect on the motivation of finite agents and is thus demoralizing in the second sense: many of us will no longer do actions that we take to be morally good or required (empirical premise).
- (4) Double demoralization of this sort is seriously morally undesirable ((1), conceptual truth).
- (5) Therefore, there is serious moral advantage in being able to hope that there is a moral world order (from (2)–(4)).
- (6) Hope that *p* involves belief or faith that *p* is really possible³⁰ (conceptual truth).

- (7) Therefore, there is serious moral advantage in being able to believe or have faith that a moral order of the universe is really possible (from (5)–(6)). (p. 302)
- (8) The existence of God provides the only adequate account of the real possibility of a moral order of the universe (theoretical premise³¹).
- (9) Therefore, there is serious moral advantage in being able to believe or have faith that God exists (from (7)–(8)).
- (10) There are no good epistemic reasons either for or against the existence of God (result of Kant’s critical examination of natural theology).
- (11) Rational belief requires good epistemic reasons (conceptual truth³²).
- (12) Therefore, belief in God’s existence is irrational (from (10)–(11)).
- (13) Rational faith (*Vernunftglaube*) does not require good epistemic reasons; it can instead be based on good moral or pragmatic reasons (conceptual truth³³).
- (14) Therefore, other things being equal, faith (though not belief) that God exists is morally (though not epistemically) justified (from (9)–(13)).

Kant says that this proof does not count as an exercise in wishful thinking or self-deception as long as we note that the justification is moral rather than epistemic, and that the result is not belief (*Überzeugung*) or even opinion (*Meinung*) but rather mere hope for a moral order (in (5)) combined with faith in the existence of the only being who can and would bring it about (in (14)).

Let us take a look at a couple of the key premises. Premise (8) is obviously a lynchpin. A friend of the argument would have to rule out other accounts of the real possibility of a moral world: dialectical historical processes, political revolutions, a karmic system that ensures that the arc of history ultimately bends toward justice, liberal democracy, and so on. It is not at all obvious that this could be done (cf. Adams 1979).

Premises (10)–(13) are also crucial: the existence-claim has to be one for which the evidence is epistemically ambiguous in order for moral faith to be rational. Large portions of the *Critique of Pure Reason* are dedicated to undermining traditional efforts to prove or even render probable the existence of God on either demonstrative or empirical grounds. Kant also rejects all atheistic arguments, including the empirical argument from evil (Huxford, forthcoming). So, in the famous phrase, knowledge of both theism and atheism is “denied” in order to make room for the kind of moral faith that overcomes demoralization ([1787] 1902, xxx). (p. 303)

In the *Religion* passage quoted at the beginning of this section, Kant is not discussing hope for a “moral world” generally but rather hope for more specific outcomes of specific actions. But this hope, too, requires faith in the existence of a supersensible mechanism: a providential “higher wisdom” that makes the fulfilment of our efforts really possible. Returning to food ethics and inefficacy problems, it seems clear that people who already have a Traditional Religious Mindset can just focus their hopes around the supersensible mechanism to which they are already committed. They can focus, in other words, on the real possibility that this supersensible mechanism arranges things such that some of their choices make a significant positive difference—unobservable and observable. That would presumably help sustain psychological commitment.

But is a version of this argument against double demoralization available in secular, naturalistic contexts as well?

Application: A Moral Argument for Difference-Making?

Given that the industrial food system is deeply insensitive to slight changes in demand, any attempt to inculcate full-blown belief that my individual purchase is going to make a significant positive difference with respect to that system would be a miserable exercise in self-deception. Faith in that proposition also looks more like a Kierkegaardian leap than sweet Kantian reason. Again, Kant joins Pascal, James, and others in the Pragmatist tradition who reject the idea that practical arguments can underwrite a theoretical conclusion whose opposite we have strong epistemic reasons to believe.

With this in mind, let us consider a moral argument that starts, like Kant's own proof, from the conditions on mere hope:

- (1*) I ought to abstain from purchasing the products of a morally objectionable part of the food system (from an independent argument or moral intuition).
- (2*) It would be doubly demoralizing not to be able to hope that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference (with respect to the plight of animals, workers, the environment, etc.) (empirical premise).
- (3*) Such double demoralization is seriously morally undesirable ((1*), conceptual truth).
- (4*) Therefore, there is serious moral advantage in being able to hope that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference (from (2*)–(3*)).
- (5*) Therefore, other things equal, hope that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference is morally justified (from (4*)).

(p. 304) So far, so good: this looks like a simple argument for the practical rationality of hope that I will make a significant positive difference (where “significant” is left vague precisely because the amount of difference-making required to avoid demoralization will differ from person to person).³⁴

But what are the conditions on having hope of this sort? We saw earlier that, for Kant at least, hope involves regarding its object as really (i.e., metaphysically) possible. This “regarding” can presumably involve full-blown belief, but it can also involve mere faith:

- (6*) *S* hopes that *p* only if *S* believes or has faith that *p* is really possible (conceptual truth).
- (7*) Therefore, other things equal, belief or faith that it is really possible that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference is morally justified (from (5*)–(6*)).

Some people may find it psychologically possible to leave things there. They will be able to abstain from consuming industrial strawberries, chicken, avocados, leather (or whatever else they are concerned about) in the stubborn hope that this abstention will somehow make a significant positive difference. Despite the incredibly long odds, they believe or have faith that it is possible, and that is enough to preserve their resolve.

Kant finds such people admirable but rare: for him, as we have seen, virtue is not its own reward, and even someone as righteous as Spinoza is liable to be demoralized in the absence of some sense of how justice might prevail. For the vast majority of us, something more than a gesture at the brute possibility of a good outcome is required for long-term moral-psychological stability.

This is one reason why Kant's moral proof proceeds from a claim about real possibility to a claim about the actual ground or explanation of that possibility: What is it about the actual world that makes the hoped-for outcome really possible? Well, one idea is just:

(8*) The existence of God provides the only adequate account of the real possibility that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference. (Theoretical premise)

If this were acceptable, then the rest of the argument could run like the previous one and conclude with full-blown moral theism. Only such faith, this version of the argument would say, makes it psychologically possible to retain the hope that my abstinence will make a significant positive difference to a morally objectionable system. So that hope and faith, together, allow me to avoid double demoralization, and are *prima facie* morally justified as a result.

(p. 305)

The problem with this, obviously, is that (8*) is patently false. In Kant's moral proof, there is at least some plausibility to the idea that God's existence is "the only adequate account" of the real possibility of a perfectly just society or a fully moral order. But in the case of a more localized hope—like the hope that my individual actions will make a significant positive difference to the food system—(8*) itself is hopeless. As we saw back in the second section, there are naturalistic ways to account for the possibility that my individual actions make a significant positive difference, even in a massive system with a lumpy supply chain. It is just barely possible, for instance, that I am at one of those thresholds or pivot points. If I am, then my choice to abstain will make a significant positive difference (5,000 chickens saved!).

Given the availability of naturalistic ways of accounting for the real possibility that my abstinence makes a difference, there can be nothing like a theistic proof here, even in a "moral" sense. If someone already has a Traditional Religious Mindset, then perhaps it makes sense for him to fix his hopes on a supersensible mechanism by appealing to a premise like

(8)** The existence of God provides *an* adequate account of the real possibility that my food choices will make a significant difference.

But for someone who does not already share the Traditional Religious Mindset, there is no compelling pressure to appeal to anything like this.

No *compelling* pressure. There might be a little pressure, though, depending on how we think about the odds. I just said that a secular person who is threatened by demoralization can focus in a hopeful way on the possibility of pivotality—she can give that possibility a prominent place in her mind every time she steps up to the restaurant counter. But that is not going to be easy: the chance that she is pivotal is vanishingly small, and it will be hard to keep such a slim hope from sliding into despair. According to the account of hope that I favor, the difference between despair and hope consists in facts about where the subject is disposed to place his focus. I might desire something and regard it as possible, but if I focus on the enormous odds against it, I am in despair. If I instead focus on the chance of its occurring—even just the mere possibility—then I am hoping. Mindful focus of this sort is sometimes under our control: we can sometimes decide to hope rather than to despair.

By way of illustration: Andy and Red are the two main characters in Stephen King's novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption: Hope Springs Eternal* (1982), which is loosely based on a Tolstoy story and was made into a movie by Frank Darabont. Both Andy and Red desperately want to get out of prison: their desire is equally strong. And they both agree that it is possible. But there is a slight but crucial difference in their respective attitudes toward the idea, one that can be illustrated by linguistic emphasis:

Andy: The chances of getting out are only one in a million, but it is POSSIBLE.

Red: Yes, it is possible, but the chances of getting out are ONLY ONE IN A MILLION.

(p. 306) On the view of hope that I am sketching, Andy is hoping, and Red is in despair. Andy's strong desire to escape, together with his steely focus on that outcome under the aspect of its possibility, so to speak, motivate him to look for pathways, even very implausible ones. Red's fixation on the negative odds of the outcome, by contrast, prevents him from joining in: he wants just as badly to escape, but he does not want to "get his hopes up," for fear of disappointment.³⁵

So when the odds are very good, it is not hard to stay hopeful. When they are fair to slim, the focus will have to be more intentional: we will sometimes have to *decide* to hope rather than to despair—that is one sense in which hope or hopefulness can be a virtue (compare Snow, forthcoming). When the odds of the desired outcome are vanishingly small, however, it will be extremely psychological difficult to attend to it under the aspect of its possibility rather than its improbability.³⁶

Another option for someone who is not of a Traditional Religious Mindset is to emphasize the unobservable but still (allegedly) beneficial aspects of her abstinence. She might think that it expresses a kind of integrity or authenticity, or that it allows her symbolically to "stand with the good."³⁷ This will not be of much comfort to the early Peter Singer, who is unhappy with merely symbolic gestures, or to a righteous Spinoza, whose resolve is threatened by the improbability of good observable outcomes. However, it may suffice for some.

There is a fourth option that is by now crying out for mention. Someone who is genuinely threatened by demoralization at the individual level, who finds the chance of pivotality far too slim to sustain her hope, and who is not impressed by merely "symbolic" goods, might be driven to actions that go beyond individual abstention. She might engage politically, encourage others, join a movement, sign petitions, pursue legal efforts to change the morally objectionable parts of the food system, protest, boycott, and so on. These public efforts, and the collective actions to which they contribute, seem at least somewhat more likely than mere individual abstaining to make a significant positive difference. Surely hoping that they do so (p. 307) is a bit easier, and may suffice to sustain resolve—in righteous Spinozas as well as more average agents.³⁸

This last option avoids an objection that can be directed against the previous three—namely, that the hope in those accounts revolves around something that is either mysterious (supersensible mechanisms, symbolic value) or beyond our control (pivotality), or both, and that this is likely to have a stifling effect on political engagement. Someone whose hope for justice is grounded entirely in the supersensible, for instance, may continue to act within the religious community itself but also reasonably disengage from broader politics in the belief that, ultimately, the arc of history is not really his to bend. There are many examples of this in the monastic and Anabaptist traditions, as well as among some contemporary Christians (those who do not bother to recycle because these are the end times, for instance³⁹). Another example is Franz Rosenzweig's Messianic hope for "redemption": on one reading, anyway, the only public actions that contribute to achieving this hope, for Rosenzweig, are *liturgical* and explicitly anti-political. "God, not the ethics and politics of man, is truly the agent of redemption. Man's only agency is love and prayer; politics avails nothing" (cf. Mittleman 2009, 218).

It is worth immediately emphasizing, however, that quietism is not entailed by any of these kinds of hope, including hope that is focused around the supersensible. As we have seen, Kant clearly says that hope in providence must be *posterior* to the duty of "each" to "so conduct himself, as if everything depended on him." Kant's progressive philosophy of history is also explicitly designed to be compatible with cosmopolitan efforts to bring about perpetual peace. Similarly, in the broadly religious vision of the great twentieth-century Marxist

theorist of hope, Ernst Bloch, there is a kind of supersensible entelechy—“the principle of hope”—that animates not just capital but the very stuff of the universe, bringing everything closer to some unforeseeable but utopian “not yet.” Still, Bloch rejects the idea that this leaves no room for political engagement: on the contrary, the ceaseless human effort to find a new collective home (*Heimat*) is one of the ways in which nature progresses (Bloch 1959). It cannot be an accident that a Jewish atheist socialist chose to write an entire book about a sixteenth-century reformation leader (Thomas Müntzer) who thought that true believers should use political means to *help* God usher in an apocalyptic utopia (Bloch 1921). So, to summarize, we have considered four ways of sustaining hope and avoiding double demoralization in the face of perceived inefficacy: (p. 308)

- (a) Someone with a Traditional Religious Mindset can appeal to the morally and spiritually valuable aspects of the act itself in order to sustain resolve, and to the possible workings of a supersensible mechanism to sustain hope that he will make a positive difference. However, such a mindset requires the acceptance of substantive doctrines about supersensible mechanisms and also has the potential to foster public complacency or quietism.
- (b) Someone who does not share that mindset might still inhabit the “broadly religious approach” by focusing in hope on naturalistic mechanisms—the chance of pivotality, say. But that kind of hope is very difficult to sustain, and double demoralization will remain a threat.
- (c) Someone else in this position might seek to stave off demoralization by focusing on unobservable but still symbolically valuable aspects of the action: standing with the good, avoiding moral taint, and so on. However, that requires accepting a somewhat mysterious axiology.
- (d) Finally, someone who finds little comfort in supersensible mechanisms, far-flung hopes, and symbolic gestures might sustain her hope by going activist instead: by doing things, publicly and collectively, that seem more likely to make a significant, positive, observable difference than any individual purchasing choices. However, given the nature of politics, the threat of demoralization will not be wholly vanquished here either.

The argument we have been considering here provides *prima facie* moral justification for responding in one or more of these ways, and possibly others. Unlike the Kantian argument from despair, it leaves numerous options open, only one of which involves something like traditional religious faith.

Conclusion

Recent discussions of the causal inefficacy objection focus primarily on the conceptual side of the problem—that is, on how inefficacy poses a challenge to traditional consequentialism as well as a few other influential normative frameworks. In this essay, I focused instead on the psychological side of the problem—that is, on how the perception of inefficacy can lead to the kind of demoralization that, in turn, threatens to undermine agency.

Recent discussions of the relationship between religion, fasting, and other dietary regulations focus primarily on the character of the regulations in particular traditions, on their functions in the life of particular communities, and on the sources of their authority or normativity. In this essay, I focused more abstractly on the merits of a “broadly religious approach” to fasting and how it might help us keep our resolve in the face of almost certain inefficacy.

I concluded by showing that versions of the broadly religious approach are available in a secular or naturalistic context, too. By (b) focusing in hope on the extremely unlikely but still possible state of affairs in which one of

their choices occurs at a threshold or “pivot point,” some people may be able to avoid double demoralization. For those (p. 309) who find this too unlikely to offer succor, the arguments we have been considering also offer *prima facie* moral justification for sustaining hope by (d) trying to effect change in more public, collective ways, (c) working up more appreciation for symbolic gestures, or (a) adopting faith in a supersensible mechanism after all.⁴⁰

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Notes:

⁽¹⁾ A 2010 survey by Pew Forum (<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-unaffiliated/>) identified 84% of the world's population as religious and 16% as "religiously unaffiliated."

⁽²⁾ In some traditions, there is a distinction between commands that apply to everyone and commands that apply only to members of the tradition. According to Maimonides, for instance, the seven Noahic laws apply to every human being, whereas the remaining 606 laws of the Torah (including food regulations) apply only to Jews.

⁽³⁾ This is not the only way to think about the relationship between religion and ethics. Plenty of religious people (and religious philosophers: Augustine, Spinoza, and Leibniz, for example) happily grant that some actions are right or wrong independently of God's commands or preferences. A middle way here is "modified divine command" theory according to which a loving God's command is what makes an action morally right, but if God had not commanded us to do that, then it would have been right for other reasons. Put in terms of wrongness: if God's command had not made it wrong, then an action's wrongness would have consisted in something other than being proscribed by a loving God (see Stout 1978; Adams 1979b; Kavka and Rashkover 2004; Zagzebski 2007; Hare 2015).

⁽⁴⁾ One version of this kind of view says that something is good because God prefers it. Another says that God prefers it because it is good—its goodness is independent of God's desiring it. Some religious value theorists who accept the second option will then let the explanation bottom out in a resemblance thesis: something is good, and God prefers it, because it resembles Godself in some salient way. But why is whatever resembles God in some salient way good? That is often where explanation stops. (Leibniz seems to have this sort of picture.) But if you are going to let explanation bottom out somewhere, a nice place to do it is in the essential properties of a necessary being. For a contemporary version of the divine resemblance theory of the good, see Adams 1999. Adams suggests, for instance, that a gourmet meal is good because it resembles God in some salient way (he quotes the Psalmist, only half-jokingly, as evidence: "Taste and see that the Lord is good").

⁽⁵⁾ For a close examination of this passage, see Li 2006. Thanks to Yong Li for discussion here.

⁽⁶⁾ For an overview of the approaches that scholars of religion take toward studying foodways and eating practices in particular traditions, see Norman 2012.

⁽⁷⁾ Complete Jewish Bible, translated David H. Stern (Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1998). All Bible citations are from this version.

⁽⁸⁾ Qur'an (Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning) (Saheeh International, 1997).

⁽⁹⁾ Kemmerer is quoting from Brown 1991 and Riley 2003.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Compare Lévi-Strauss on indigenous cooking regulations: “[N]ot only does cooking mark the transition from nature to culture, but through it and by means of it, the human state can be defined with all its attributes, even those that, like mortality, might seem to be the most unquestionably natural” (1969, 164).

⁽¹¹⁾ In what follows, I use “fasting” and “abstinence” as terms of art that refer not only to actual fasting but also to dietary rituals and regulations generally.

⁽¹²⁾ Many cases, but not all. In some religious views, the relevant mechanism may not be fully supersensible or outside of nature (and, of course, a lot hangs on what we mean by “sensible” and “nature”). I will continue to use this (Kantian) term here for lack of a better one.

⁽¹³⁾ For a discussion of the extent to which the causal inefficacy objection hangs on contingent facts about the actual food supply, see Michaelson 2016a. For an economist’s doubts about how much insensitivity there really is, see Halteman and McMullen, unpublished.

⁽¹⁴⁾ This is essentially a large-scale version of the “Three-in-a-Boat” game (named after a J. K. Jerome short story): If only one of us rows, the boat goes in a circle; if the two of you row, then my rowing will not make a difference. So I should only bother rowing if exactly one of you is going to join me. Luc Bovens (2015) argues that the “tragedy of the commons” is also best modeled as this kind of game rather than a Prisoner’s Dilemma. Thanks to Bovens for conversations about this part of the paper.

⁽¹⁵⁾ See Singer 1980 and Kagan 2011. Despite some similarities, this chicken sandwich scenario poses problems for both rationality and resolve that are somewhat different from real-world voting paradoxes. When voting for president, one might not make a difference to the outcome but still be able to take credit for signaling support, or increasing the “manifest normative mandate” of the winner (see Guerrero 2010). But analogous reasons are not available to someone who abstains from the chicken sandwich in a lumpy supply system, but is not at a pivot point.

⁽¹⁶⁾ For more discussion of all these points, see Kagan 2011, Nefsky 2017, as well as Budolfson 2016 and forthcoming.

⁽¹⁷⁾ I am not entirely sure what Budolfson means by “noise” but perhaps this is an example: apparently cultural trends can make the demand for certain *cuts* of poultry go up (turkey breast at Thanksgiving, chicken wings during years when the local football team does well, etc.). But animals come in wholes, and so if wings are in high demand this year, a decision not to eat a chicken sandwich (which is not made of wings) is even less likely to have any effect on how many chickens are produced and processed, since retailers are demanding as many wings as

possible. Thanks to conversations with Cornell food scientist and poultry expert Joe Regenstein here; see also Parcell and Pierce 2000.

(¹⁸) The term “opportunistic carnivore” is used in zoological circles to describe animals that are typically herbivorous but will at times eat carcasses and other meat that is the byproduct of the activity of normal carnivores. Such opportunists include hyenas and vultures. As far as I know, Almeida and Bernstein (2000) are the first to use the term to refer to certain kinds of humans.

(¹⁹) Freegans (<http://freegan.info/>) will also eat roadkill or animals that died a natural death. Those would not be cases of opportunism as defined here. (For more discussion of freeganism, see Singer and Mason 2006.)

(²⁰) They also must not “have seen, heard, or suspected that the animal in question was killed specifically for them” (Goodman 2017).

(²¹) See Nefsky, in this volume, for more discussion of these issues.

(²²) <https://www.edx.org/course/ethics-eating-cornellx-phil1440x>.

(²³) <https://www.nass.usda.gov/>;
http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_slaughter_totals.html.

(²⁴) Food and Agriculture Organization 2006.

(²⁵) Internalists and externalists about moral motivation may have slightly different ways of spelling this out, but I am abstracting from that debate for present purposes and focusing on psychological motivation or willpower. For two very different reflections on the psychology of demoralization, see Jamieson 2014 and Foa Dienstag 2006.

(²⁶) Here and in the next two paragraphs, I briefly list some claims about how religious traditions conceive of food regulations, most of which I am not expert enough to describe or defend at any length. What limited acquaintance I do have is informed by encounters with individual practitioners as well as with Douglas 1974; Walker Bynum 1988; Halteman 2008; Narayanan 2010; Sandford 2011; Zamore 2011; Arthur 2013; Zeller et al. 2014; Freidenreich 2015; and Yanklowitz 2015.

(²⁷) It may be that in a few traditions, extraordinary observable results are indeed regarded as likely. We noted above that the recipes in the second chapter of the Daoist *Wufuxu*, for instance, promise an increase in health and even reversed aging and immortality for those who follow its regimens. See Arthur 2013, ch. 4.

(²⁸) It was common in eighteenth-century Germany to regard pantheism as tantamount to atheism, since it rejects the existence of the classical deity. During the *Pantheismusstreit* in which Lessing was reported by Mendelssohn to have been a Spinozist, it became important to disavow Spinoza for a time. Another way to read Spinoza, however, is the way Novalis did: as “that God-intoxicated man.” For more on all this, see Israel 2002. “Accept” here is “*annehmen*,” the verb Kant often associates with the noun “*Glaube*.” Camus (1955 [1942]) famously rejects this: he considers the same predicament and says that we must both accept the demands of the moral law and embrace the absurdity of a world in which justice never prevails: “One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

(²⁹) Note that I am not trying to work closely with the texts or satisfy my fellow Kant scholars here, though I do think that this captures one strand of Kant’s thinking about the moral proof. Robert M. Adams (1979a) develops this more empirical-psychological way of reconstructing Kant’s proof. The present reconstruction is inspired by

Adams, but differs from his in many key respects. See also Zagzebski 2007. In the first *Critique*, Kant presents a very different version of the moral proof according to which hope for happiness seems to be part of the *incentive* for acting rightly. In the second *Critique* we find the more canonical articulation of the proof according to which we ought to will be the highest good, and this involves, as a sort of presupposition, adopting moral faith in the existence of God and the afterlife. See Wood 1970. Very little attention has been devoted to the moral-psychological argument from despair in the third *Critique* and *Religion*. For an important exception, see Fugate 2014.

(³⁰) For a lengthy discussion of this premise in a Kantian context, see Chignell 2013.

(³¹) There is a famous objection here: Kant moves from a commitment to the possibility of the highest good to faith in the actuality of God's existence. But why could not faith that God is possible be sufficient? Understanding Kant's answer would involve going deeper into his theory of modality. I will set the objection aside here, but see Chignell 2009; Chignell and Stang 2015; and Stang 2016.

(³²) Non-evidentialists will deny that this is a conceptual truth. But Kant is a conceptual evidentialist about what we would call "belief"—the kind of holding-for-true (*Fürwahrhalten*) that can count, if true and justified, as knowledge (*Wissen*) (Kant calls it "conviction" (*Überzeugung*), as do many contemporary German epistemologists). See Wood 1991 and Chignell 2007a.

(³³) Rational faith, for Kant, is a voluntary state of holding-for-true (*Fürwahrhalten*) that, for non-epistemic reasons, a subject uses to guide deliberation, action, and assertion in certain contexts. See Chignell 2007b.

(³⁴) It is also an empirical question precisely what a given agent will need to hope for in order to avoid demoralization. Some people may simply need to hope that one of their actions (who knows which) across a certain stretch of time will make a non-trivial difference. Others will need to hope that many of their actions make a significant difference in order to keep pressing on.

(³⁵) In the story, the difference between Andy and Red is more complex than this, of course. Andy is white and Red is black; presumably race determines a lot with respect to hope and despair in incarcerated America. Moreover, in the story Andy is not guilty and Red is. Still, citing the cartoon version of the story is now a common way of illustrating the point that mere desire plus belief in possibility are not sufficient for hope. See Meirav 2009 and Martin 2012. Interestingly, the Tolstoy story that inspired this one is called "God Sees the Truth, But Waits."

(³⁶) Hope of this sort may naturally dispose us to many other things, including Luc Bovens's mental imaging, C. R. Snyder's pathways thinking, Philip Pettit's acting as-if, and Victoria McGeer's orienting of our agential energies to the future. But in my view those important connections are ultimately contingent: hope *simpliciter* involves the conative component, the doxastic component, and the disposition to focus on the positive odds of an outcome occurring. (Note: Both Pettit and McGeer suggest that there is a rudimentary kind of hope that involves only belief and desire. But this does not seem to distinguish it from despair. My view of hope *simpliciter* falls between what Pettit calls "superficial hope" and "substantial hope.") See Bovens 1999, Pettit 2004, McGeer 2004, and Snyder 2000.

(³⁷) On "standing with the good," see Adams 1999; and on the related notions of symbolic value and moral taint, see Hill 1979; Appiah 1986; and Cuneo 2016.

(³⁸) This is not a failsafe way to avoid demoralization, of course. More than a few students have gone off with great enthusiasm to try to change the world, only to come back a few years later and say that the challenges were too overwhelming and they are now working on Wall Street. Going activist is also not a failsafe way to make an overall *positive* difference. Someone might try to convince his friends and family not to buy industrial chicken, make sure that co-workers witness his own eating habits, and go door-to-door for PETA on the weekends. And this might influence some people in the way he intends. But for all he knows it might also cause so much irritation and resentment that it pushes even more people *away* from what he is trying to encourage. For an environmental philosopher's largely despairing reflections about activism, see Jamieson 2014.

(³⁹) Popular preacher Mark Driscoll, when asked how he can drive a SUV in an era of climate change, apparently replied: "I know who made the environment and he's coming back and going to burn it all up. So yes, I drive an SUV" (Mehta 2013).

(⁴⁰) For helpful feedback on these ideas, I am grateful to Stewart Brand, Luc Bovens, Matthew Halteman, Nicole Hassoun, Michael Milona, Daniel Telech, Daniel Smyth, Hannah Tierney, and the editors of this volume, as well as to audiences at the Stanford Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, American University of Beirut, Williams College, Princeton University, Humboldt University-Berlin, the 2017 "Philosophy in Assos" conference in Assos, Turkey, the LongNow Foundation's "Interval" salon in San Francisco, and Boston University's Institute for Philosophy and Religion.

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