

## Day 2: Other defenses of meat consumption

*Setting: M and V have met at Native Foods for another delicious vegan meal.*

V: Have you thought more about what we discussed last week, M?

M: Yeah. Let me see if I understand what you're saying.

V: Go ahead.

M: So, factory farming inflicts extreme pain and suffering on 56 billion animals a year, before killing them. Peter Singer thinks animal suffering is equally important as human suffering. If he's right, then factory farming is like an institution that tortures 56 billion people a year. If there's even a 1% chance that he's right, then it's like an institution that tortures 560 million people a year. Or if animal suffering is even 1% as important as human suffering, then again factory farming is like an institution that tortures 560 million people a year.

V: Right. And if there's only a 1% chance that animal suffering is 1% as important as human suffering, then it's "only" comparable to a practice that tortures 5.6 million people a year, which would still be horrific. And since there aren't even any good arguments that animal interests matter drastically less than human interests, it's hard to claim that there's not even a 1% chance that animal interests are even 1% as important as human interests.

M: My argument was that humans are smarter than animals, and that pain matters much less for a less intelligent creature.

V: But you couldn't give any argument for this or any explanation of why it would be true. Which makes it hard to claim certainty that you're right.

M: (*sigh*) Okay. Let's say factory farming is wrong.

V: So you agree that it should be abolished?

M: I guess so. But that doesn't mean that eating meat is wrong.

V: Why not?

M: Well, meat *could* be produced humanely, without all this cruelty.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in principle, there could be a meat industry that was morally okay, in which case it would be okay to eat the meat it produced.

V: But remember what the issue was. When I told you that I think meat-eating is wrong, I explained that I mean that it is wrong in the conditions we normally actually find ourselves in. It doesn't matter if there is some hypothetical possible world in which it would be okay.

M: Oh yeah. But just because factory farming is wrong, doesn't mean that I'm wrong for buying meat.

V: You know that almost all meat is from factory farms, right?

M: Yeah, I know. But it's not *my* fault that they're so cruel and inhumane. It's not like *I'm* inflicting the pain and suffering on the animals directly. It's the workers on the farms. I don't see why I should be blamed for their bad behavior.

V: Because you're paying them for what they're doing.

M: So what?

---

<sup>19</sup> Compare Lomasky's comments on veal and foie gras ("Is It Wrong to Eat Animals?", p. 195).

V: Usually, if it's wrong to do something, then it's also wrong to pay other people to do it. For instance, murder is wrong; so it's also wrong to hire an assassin. If you hire an assassin to kill someone, you can't say that you're not to blame just because you didn't pull the trigger yourself.

M: Yeah, but that's different. In that case, you're specifically *telling* the assassin to commit a murder. I'm not *telling* meat companies to torture animals, and they don't have to do that. They're just deciding to do it that way, on their own initiative.

V: Okay, different example. You have a friend named "Killian," who happens to be a murderer. One day, you offer Killian \$20,000 to get you a new car. Killian *could* carry out this task in a perfectly moral manner. But you know that the way he *will in fact* do it is by murdering some innocent person and stealing their car. You know this because Killian has performed tasks like this for you in the past, he always murders people along the way, and you always pay him for it afterward. You don't specifically tell him to murder anyone; you just know that that's the way he does things. So you tell Killian to get a car, he goes off, kills someone, steals their car, gives it to you, and you pay him \$20,000. End of story. Did you act morally in this story?

M: I don't like that story. I would never act that way.

V: Of course not. But let's understand why not.

M: Well, I don't want to support murder or theft.

V: Glad to hear it. Moreover, it would be wrong to do so, wouldn't it?

M: It seems wrong.

V: Well, that's like buying factory farmed meat. You didn't tell them to commit acts of extreme cruelty, but you know that that is how they do things, and you keep paying them for the product.

M: But in your story, when I ask Killian to get me a car, the murder and theft hasn't yet occurred, and I'm going to cause it to occur. In the case of buying meat, the animal has *already* been tortured and killed.

V: True. If you like, we can change the example. Say Killian has a business. He murders people and steals their cars, then sells them. That's where all of his cars come from. You go to Killian to buy a car. You buy a car that has already been stolen, and whose owner is already dead. Does this make it okay to buy cars from Killian?

M: I guess not. But I still think that's different from buying meat.

V: How is it different?

M: Well, Killian is a single person with a small business. So when you buy a car from Killian, that might cause him to go out and kill another person and steal their car, to replenish his stock of cars.

V: Right. And when people buy meat, that might cause the meat companies to raise and slaughter more animals to replenish their stock.

M: But the meat industry is so large that I don't think it would. They're not going to respond to such a small change as a single person giving up meat.

V: Would they respond if a million people gave up meat?

M: Of course. *Then* they'd obviously reduce their production.

V: What if a thousand people gave up meat? Would the industry reduce their production then?

M: Probably.

V: What would you guess is the minimum number of people that would cause the meat industry to reduce its production, if they gave up meat?

M: I don't know.

V: Just take a guess for the sake of argument. It doesn't matter if your guess is wrong.

M: (*shrugs*) Fine. Maybe if a hundred people gave up meat, then the industry would reduce its production. But I can't make a hundred people do that.

V: Alright. Now, if they reduced their production in response to 100 people giving up meat, then they'd reduce it by about the amount that 100 people eat, right?

M: I guess so.

V: But you know, you and I are not the only ones who are thinking about ethical vegetarianism. Other people in our society periodically give up meat in response to ethical reasons. On our current hypothesis, every time 100 people give up meat, the industry reduces its production by the amount eaten by 100 people.

M: Okay.

V: Well, that means that you might trigger a reduction in production like that. If 99 other people have given up eating meat since the last time they reassessed their production, then you'll be the hundredth. Then you'll push them over the 100-person threshold, causing them to reduce production by the amount that 100 people eat.

M: Yeah, but that seems really unlikely.

V: It is: it's only 1% likely. But if it happens, it'll reduce production by 100 times the amount that a single person eats. So it's worth it.<sup>20</sup>

M: Okay, but this reasoning was just based on a guess that I made. I just *guessed* that it takes 100 people to cause the meat industry to respond.

V: True. But similar reasoning would apply no matter what guess you'd made. If you had guessed "86" instead of "100," then I would have said: there's a 1/86 probability that you'll cause the industry to respond, in which case they'll reduce production by the amount that 86 people eat. It's still worth it to give up meat.

M: I see. But you're still assuming that there was *some* correct answer, some specific number of vegetarians who would induce the meat industry to reduce production.

V: And that's not true?

M: I don't think so.

V: You mean that the industry won't reduce production no matter how many people give up meat?

M: No, I don't mean that. I mean that there might be no *particular number* at which it would happen.

V: If a million people gave up meat, one after another, the meat industry would reduce production at some point, right?

M: Presumably.

---

<sup>20</sup> Here, V follows the arguments of Gaverick Matheny ("Expected Utility, Contributory Causation, and Vegetarianism," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19 [2002]: 293-7), Norcross ("Puppies, Pigs, and People," pp. 232-3) and Rachels ("Vegetarianism," p. 886).

V: Well, whenever it happened, it would be after some particular number of people. There's no way of reducing production just in general, without doing it at any particular time.

M: Yeah. But maybe each time someone gives up meat, there's just a *chance* that they'll reduce production, but it's not determined in advance exactly when it will happen.

V: Maybe, but this still doesn't undermine my argument. As long as there's that chance that they'll reduce production, you have a reason to give up buying meat, since you could trigger a large reduction.

M: But maybe if a bunch of people give up meat, instead of reducing production, the meat industry will just lower prices so they can still sell all the meat they produce, to the remaining meat eaters.

V: Well, you've brought up a real point from economics, but you've oversimplified it. In standard economic theory, when demand for a product declines, the producers lower the price *and* reduce production. So if many people give up eating meat, then they'll lower the price *and* reduce production.

M: Okay. So with the lower price, *other* meat eaters will increase *their* meat eating. Which will reduce the impact of my sacrifice. Before I go to all the trouble of converting to a vegetarian diet, I want to know how much impact it's going to have on meat production.

V: It happens that agricultural economists have looked into this. They've done empirical studies of the market for meat in the U.S. They find that, on average, if you reduce your meat purchases by one pound, producers will decrease their production by 0.68 pounds (for beef), 0.76 pounds (for chicken), or 0.74 pounds (for pork).<sup>21</sup>

M: Wait, you're saying the industry responds to *every* one-pound change in demand? You mean a single pound per year?

V: No, they don't respond every time. I'm saying that's the *average* effect. And because it's an average, it doesn't matter if you're talking about a pound per day, a pound per year, or whatever.

M: Okay. But your argument was assuming that meat production is *falling* because of people becoming vegetarian. I've heard that overall meat consumption *increases* in most years. Not to cast any aspersions on your persuasiveness, but new meat-eaters are entering the market faster than people are giving up meat.<sup>22</sup>

V: True. But all the above arguments also apply in reverse.

M: What do you mean "in reverse"?

V: I mean, just as a decline in demand causes a *drop* in production, an *increase* in demand causes a *rise* in production. So, according to the economists I was referring to, if you buy one more pound of meat, that'll cause the industry, on average, to *increase* their production by 0.68 pounds (for beef), 0.76 pounds (for chicken), or 0.74 pounds (for pork). If meat production is on the rise, then by giving up meat, you reduce the rate at which it rises. If it's on the decline, then you increase the rate of decline.

M: Wait a minute. If the meat industry reduces its production, then farm animals won't be better off; there will just be fewer of them. It's better to have a low-quality life than not to live at all. So we're doing future generations of animals a favor by eating animals today!<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> F. Bailey Norwood and Jayson L. Lusk, *Compassion, by the Pound: The Economics of Farm Animal Welfare* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), p. 223. The comparable figures are 0.56 for milk, 0.69 for veal, and 0.91 for eggs.

<sup>22</sup> See Carrie R. Daniel, Amanda J. Cross, Corinna Koebnick, and Rashmi Sinha, "Trends in Meat Consumption in the United States," *Public Health Nutrition* 14 (2011): 575-83.

<sup>23</sup> Here, M follows the reasoning of Lomasky ("Is It Wrong to Eat Animals?", pp. 190-91) and John Zeis ("A Rawlsian Pro-Life Argument Against Vegetarianism," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 53 [2013]: 63-71, at pp. 69-70).

V: Would you accept this argument if it were applied to people? What if a particular race of people were bred solely to serve as slaves? Then you could say that those particular people would not have existed if not for the practice of slavery. Would this make slavery okay?

M: Of course not. But maybe that's because humans have more rights than animals do. Once a person exists, you have to respect their rights, no matter what the reason was for bringing them into existence. But you don't have to respect animals' rights.

V: And why don't animals have rights?

M: I don't know; I haven't figured out the basis for rights yet.

V: Well, it doesn't matter, because life on a factory farm is much worse than no life at all. It would be much better not to create billions of utterly miserable lives.

M: Really? Why do you think it's worse than no life at all?

V: I could start describing the conditions on factory farms again, but I think you need to see it. Go look up some videos on factory farming, then I think you'll agree with me.<sup>24</sup>

M: Okay. But this all assumes *utilitarianism*, doesn't it? I mean, you're assuming that the morally right action is just a matter of what produces the most expected pleasure, or the least expected pain, where you weight each good or bad possible consequence by the probability that it will occur.

V: No, I'm not assuming utilitarianism. I thought *you* were assuming utilitarianism.

M: Me? How so?

V: *You* were making the argument that it's okay to patronize an immoral industry, provided that doing so doesn't cause them to increase their immoral actions. That's something a utilitarian might say. That's not *my* view.

M: What would your view be?

V: *My* view would be that it's wrong to patronize extremely immoral businesses. It doesn't matter if you're *causing* them to do it, or if they've already done it and you're paying them after the fact.

M: If it's not contributing to the amount of immoral behavior, what's wrong with it?

V: Two things: one, you're rewarding wrongful behavior, which is unjust. You're contributing to making it so that immorality pays—

M: But that's always true. A lot of immoral behavior has been paying for a long time.

V: But from a moral point of view, you're responsible for your own role in the system. You're not necessarily obligated to fix the world's injustices, but you are obligated not to become a part of them. Second, whether or not immorality pays, you have a duty not to become party to a crime after the fact. You should not willingly make it the case that great wrongs are done *for you*.

M: I'm not sure it would be true that animals were tormented and killed "for me"; after all, the people on the farms don't know anything about me in particular.

V: It's done for the meat customers. You're a part of that class, so it's done in part for you, as well as all the other meat customers.

M: But if a wrong is going to be committed regardless of what we do, shouldn't we make the most of it by

---

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Mercy for Animals, "What Cody Saw Will Change Your Life" (video), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FhHgYjymNU>, accessed Nov. 29, 2017.

taking whatever advantage can be gained from it?

V: I doubt you would think that in other contexts. Say you live in Nazi Germany. Someone offers you a job helping load Jews into gas chambers for execution. It pays a little more than your current job. If you turn down the job, they'll just get someone else to do it. Would you take the job?

M: No, but . . .

V: The wrong is going to be done anyway; why not take personal advantage of it?

M: That's kind of messed up.

V: That's my point.

M: So you're assuming an *anti*-utilitarian ethics, then.

V: No, I'm saying that meat-eating is wrong either way. On *any* reasonable moral view, it's wrong to inflict severe pain and suffering on others without good reason. So factory farming is wrong. If you're a utilitarian, you should give up meat because doing so reduces the expected number of animals suffering on factory farms. If you're not a utilitarian, you should give up meat because you don't want to be party to serious immorality.

M: Okay, fine. But all this turns on the pain allegedly suffered by farm animals. How can we really be sure that nonhuman animals feel pain?<sup>25</sup>

V: You can't be 100% certain of *anything* about the external world. I mean, I can't be 100% sure that *you* feel pain. Maybe you're just a mindless automaton. Does that mean I should feel free to torture you?

M: No, that won't be okay.

V: Which shows that I don't have to be 100% *certain* that I'm inflicting pain in order for my action to be wrong. If there's even a good chance that you can feel pain, I shouldn't torture you.

M: Okay, then why is there even a *good chance* that animals feel pain?

V: One, they act like they feel pain. They sometimes scream, try to escape, and so on. They do this under the same conditions that would make *you* scream or try to escape, e.g., if someone cut off one of your body parts. Two, animals have the same physiological structures that explain *your* capacity to feel pain – the same sort of pain sensors in the body, connected up to the same brain areas. That's why no animal scientist seriously doubts that farm animals feel pain.

M: Alright, so they feel pain. But animals eat each other all the time. So why shouldn't we eat them?<sup>26</sup>

V: Are you saying that anything done by an animal is morally permissible for you to do?

M: Well, no. If an animal killed a person, that wouldn't show that it was okay to kill people. It's just that the animals *couldn't complain* about being eaten by us, since they eat each other.

---

<sup>25</sup> Rene Descartes famously held that nonhuman animals are mere mindless automata. See his letter to Henry More dated Feb. 5, 1649, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 365-6.

<sup>26</sup> Here, M follows the reasoning of Benjamin Franklin (*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Charles W. Elliot, Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 32). Franklin, however, seems to immediately concede that the argument is a mere rationalization: "[W]hen the fish were opened, I saw smaller fish taken out of their stomachs; then thought I, 'If you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you.' So I din'd upon cod very heartily, and continued to eat with other people, returning only now and then occasionally to a vegetable diet. So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do."

V: You know, humans sometimes kill other humans. Would you accept this reasoning: “humans can’t complain about being killed, since they sometimes kill each other”?

M: Well, maybe the particular people who have committed a murder can’t complain if we kill *them*. We can execute murderers. Of course we can’t just kill any human merely because some other humans have murdered.

V: So by similar logic, animals that have killed other animals may be killed in turn? Like capital punishment for animals?

M: Sure.

V: But the chickens, pigs, and cows on the farms don’t eat each other, and they don’t kill other animals.

M: Well, chickens sometimes eat insects and worms.

V: Okay, chickens eat other species, so it’s okay to kill chickens. But people also eat other species, so . . . it’s okay to kill people?

M: That’s awful.

V: I’m just following the logic of your argument.

M: Fine. Now let’s follow the logic of your argument. You’re saying it’s wrong to eat animals. Then it must also be wrong for animals to eat other animals, right? Is it wrong for a lion to eat a gazelle?

V: I dunno, what do you think?

M: I say it’s *not* wrong, because it’s natural for animals to eat each other.

V: Do you think lions are moral agents?

M: What do you mean by “moral agents”?

V: Do they have free will? And are they able to regulate their behavior according to moral principles?

M: No to both. Animals just act on instinct.

V: Then nothing is morally right or wrong for a lion.

M: You’re saying morality only applies to things with free will that can regulate their behavior morally?

V: Don’t you agree? You don’t blame a baby for crying on an airplane, or a hurricane for destroying a city, or a lion for killing a gazelle. Because none of them are capable of regulating their behavior morally.

M: But then how can similar actions be wrong for us?

V: We have free will and are able to regulate our behavior according to moral principles.

M: That’s so unfair. Lions get to do whatever they want, but we have to restrain ourselves?

V: That’s the nature of morality.

M: Okay, lions can’t restrain themselves. But do you think we should stop lions from killing gazelles?

V: If you can figure out a feasible way of doing that, without killing all the lions, then we should consider it. In the meanwhile, though, I know a way that we could prevent *ourselves* from slaughtering animals, without us dying. We could just eat vegetables.

M: But if animals can’t have moral obligations, then doesn’t that mean that they can’t have moral rights either? I’ve heard from conservative moralists that rights imply obligations.

V: My case for vegetarianism didn’t rely on any claims about “rights.” Remember that it was all compatible

with utilitarianism. I'm only assuming that you shouldn't inflict enormous pain and suffering for minor reasons.

M: Let me rephrase. If it's impossible for some creature to do wrong, then it's also impossible for anyone to do wrong *to* that creature.

V: Why do you think that?

M: Morality only protects those who can understand morality.<sup>27</sup>

V: Again, why do you think that?

M: It sounded good when I said it.

V: Let me give you a couple of examples. You're saying morality only protects those who can understand morality. Babies can't understand morality. It follows that, on your view, morality doesn't protect babies. So it would be alright to torture babies.

M: That's terrible.

V: Another example. Say you have an adult human who can't understand morality. Like a mentally retarded person. Can we torture them?

M: No.

V: Or a psychopath – again, they can't understand morality. Can we torture them?

M: Well, if they commit crimes, we should put them in jail.

V: Don't change the subject. I'm not asking about jail; I'm asking about torture. And I'm not asking if you can do it because they committed a crime; I'm asking if you can do it simply because *they* can't understand morality.

M: Well, no, that would be wrong.

V: So it's not true that morality only protects those who can understand morality. Morality protects infants, retarded people, and psychopaths from gratuitous infliction of pain and suffering. So why not animals?

M: Maybe morality is the result of a social contract, so it only protects those who are members of our society. The retarded person, baby, and psychopath are all members of our society, despite their limited understanding.

V: So if you meet a person from another society, you can torture and kill them?

M: No, because they *could* join our society.

V: What if they can't because our society has rules that permanently exclude them? Then we can torture them?

M: No, because they could be members of our society if we were to change our practices.

V: Okay. So a mentally retarded person from another society is protected because our society could adopt that person as a member?

---

<sup>27</sup> This view is taken by Timothy Hsiao ("In Defense of Eating Meat," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 28 [2015]: 277-91), who claims that infants and the mentally disabled possess a "root capacity" for rationality even if they can never exercise it. Cohen ("A Critique of the Alleged Moral Basis for Vegetarianism") argues on similar grounds that animals lack rights, though we still have weighty obligations toward them.

M: I guess so.

V: Then why wouldn't animals also be protected because our society could adopt *them* as members?

M: Animals are never true members of society, not even when we treat them as if they were.

V: Why not?

M: Well, they never really reciprocate – they don't understand the social rules, they don't engage in public deliberation; things like that.

V: Okay. But the same is true of severely retarded people. So we could torture them, right?

M: No. But . . . eating meat is natural! People have done it for all of history. We have teeth adapted for chewing meat, see? (*points to canines*) But eating retarded humans isn't natural.

V: You're a big fan of naturalness, are you?

M: Sure . . . sometimes. Sometimes I like to follow nature.

V: Those hot dogs that you enjoy: do you know how many unnatural ingredients they stick in those things?

M: So maybe I should give up the hot dogs. But other meat products are more natural.

V: What do you mean by "natural"?

M: You know, meat-eating follows our instincts. We evolved to do it. It's what our ancestors have always done.

V: Our ancestors didn't run factory farms.

M: Yeah, but they ate meat, and we need factory farms today in order to provide the amount of meat we want to eat at a reasonable price.

V: Our ancestors also did some other things that I bet you wouldn't approve of. Slavery, wars of conquest, oppression of women, torture . . .

M: Okay, scratch the point about ancestors. But it's still natural because it follows our instincts and we evolved to do it.

V: Do you think that everything that's natural is good?

M: Well, not necessarily *good* per se . . .

V: But at least okay? Is everything that's natural something that's okay?

M: Sure.

V: You know, cancer is natural. So are earthquakes, hurricanes, . . .

M: Okay, those things are bad. But I'm just talking about behavior. *Behaviors* that are natural are okay.

V: I think war is natural too.

M: How could *that* be natural?

V: Well, people have been doing it for all of human history. That's some evidence that it's natural for humans, isn't it? Just as eating meat is natural for us? Primitive tribes make war even more than we do.<sup>28</sup> There seems to be some sort of human instinct to conquer and dominate other people.

---

<sup>28</sup> See Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (New York: Viking, 2011).

M: I don't see how an instinct for war could evolve – wars are so destructive.

V: According to one theory, men in primitive tribes would attack a neighboring tribe to kill the neighboring tribe's men and kidnap and rape its women. In our evolutionary past, the men who succeeded in doing this sort of thing tended to leave behind more offspring than peaceful men who stayed at home. They passed on their genes for aggressive behavior. That's how the instinct for war evolved.<sup>29</sup>

M: I don't know that I want to buy into that. That's a very cynical and nasty theory.

V: Yeah, it's unpleasant. But at least it's a possible explanation of war, right?

M: I guess it's possible.

V: So here's my question: would you say that *if* that theory is correct, then war is good?

M: I'm pretty sure that war is bad.

V: But if the theory I described is correct, then war is *natural*. So then it would have to be good, right?

M: Well, I guess not everything natural is necessarily good. But, it still just seems to me like humans are superior to nonhuman animals.

V: Superior how? Is this the point about intelligence again?

M: That's part of it; we're clearly smarter than other animals. But there's more. You yourself said that humans have free will but animals don't. Humans understand morality and animals don't.

V: Right, so we're superior in respect of understanding morality and controlling our behavior.

M: Those things seem pretty important.

V: They are. But they don't make it right to inflict extreme pain and suffering for trivial reasons. Remember that the question isn't whether humans are better than animals. The question is whether one can, morally, inflict severe pain and suffering on other creatures to gain minor benefits for oneself. One's superior understanding, free will, intelligence, or rationality doesn't explain why one may do that.

M: I've also heard that God gave humans souls, and He didn't give souls to animals.

V: What's a soul?

M: I'm not sure exactly. It's some immaterial component of a person that goes to heaven after you die.

V: And how do we know that there are any such things?

M: Perhaps because we have conscious experiences. The existence of a soul explains how inanimate matter differs from conscious beings.<sup>30</sup> There's a certain way that it feels to be us, but there's nothing that it feels like to be a hunk of matter.

V: In that case, I think animals have souls too. They have experiences; there's something that it feels like to be a cow.

M: But they can't reason using abstract concepts! Also, they don't go to heaven or hell when they die, according to traditional religions.

V: So their souls are non-rational and mortal.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), pp. 513-17.

<sup>30</sup> See Rene Descartes' famous defense of mind/body dualism in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

M: Right. Only humans have rational, immortal souls.

V: I'm not seeing how this makes it okay to torture and kill animals for trivial reasons. If anything, now it sounds like it's even worse to kill an animal than a human. At least the human gets an afterlife; the animal is just gone forever.

M: But the Bible says that God granted us dominion over the Earth and all its creatures.<sup>31</sup>

V: Did he give us the Earth and its creatures to torment, or to watch over as responsible stewards?

M: Well, "responsible steward" sounds more like the sort of thing God would expect of us.

V: Is there a Bible verse that says torturing animals for minor reasons is okay?

M: No, but I can't find any verse that says it's *not* okay.

V: It also doesn't say that insider trading is wrong.

M: What does that have to do with this?

V: The point being that the Bible isn't an exhaustive list of everything that's right and wrong. We also have to exercise our conscience.

M: Okay, I'm not defending factory farming. The point about the soul was just to explain why we have rights and animals don't – in response to the extreme animal rights advocates.

V: I don't think it even explains that. It's at least possible that we don't really have immortal souls, right?

M: I guess it's possible.

V: Okay. *If* it turns out that we don't have immortal souls, will we then have no rights?

M: No.

V: So it looks like the reason you believe we have rights is not really that we have immortal souls.

M: (*sighs, looks at watch*) Okay. I haven't figured out why you're wrong yet, but I'll try again next week.

V: Agreed. Same time and place?

M: Actually, there's a new Chinese restaurant I'd like to try. It's supposed to have a great Kung Pao Chicken.

V: No.

M: Come on, *you* don't have to eat the chicken. They have vegetarian dishes too.

V: I'm not going there to watch you eat meat.

M: Why not?

V: Have you forgotten the conversation we just had?

M: No, I know you're against eating meat. I just didn't realize you had such a problem with *other* people eating meat. That's so *judgy*.

V: You must not have understood my position. I haven't just been reporting personal preferences; I'm not saying "I personally prefer not to eat meat." I'm saying it's morally wrong. That's what all the arguments

---

<sup>31</sup> *Genesis* 1:26 (King James Version): "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

have been about. That means it's just as wrong for you to do it.

M: I understand that that's your opinion. But what gives you the right to judge *me*?

V: Are you judging me for judging you?

M: Uh oh, that feels like one of those self-referential paradoxes. If it's wrong to judge people, then it's wrong to judge that it's wrong to judge people . . .

V: Look, it doesn't require any special rights to make a moral evaluation. If you see someone do something, and you have enough evidence that it was wrong, then you can and should draw the conclusion that they acted wrongly. You don't need to be some special authority figure with special rights or anything. If you saw me beat up a child, you would rightly conclude that I was behaving badly. You wouldn't refuse to draw any conclusions, just to avoid being "judgy."

M: Okay fine, I'll meet you here again so I won't offend your delicate sensibilities. But I still want you to know that I'm feeling pretty judged here.

