
An Alternative to Moral Vegetarianism for Meat-Eaters: Moral Cannibalism

Florian Marion

Université catholique de Louvain
Institut supérieur de philosophie/Centre De Wulf-Mansion
florian.marion@uclouvain.be

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I shall argue for Moral Cannibalism, namely the view that cannibalism is morally mandatory, at least for some meat-eaters animals, given some acceptable assumptions about justice and moral duty. Such an incredible claim will be preceded by a short exposition of the rationale for Moral Vegetarianism and for its adversary position Moral Omnivorism (§1), then I will briefly present Moral Cannibalism (§2), and finally I will discuss two arguments for it, a positive one (§3) and a negative one (§4): on the one hand, justice between animal species might imply that it is morally better for some carnivorous species to eat the members of their own species rather than members of other species; on the other hand, the moral wrongness of cannibalism lacks a satisfactory ground.

1. Moral Vegetarianism and the Omnivorist Assumption that meat-consumption is a biological necessity

MORAL VEGETARIANISM ARGUES FOR THE THESIS that the consumption of meat is not morally permissible, and so, indirectly, from the following premisses: 1. the consumption of meat requires the production of meat, and 2. the production of meat is morally wrong. If 1 and 2 hold, then the consumption of meat is morally wrong. Premiss 2 is usually defended, first, on consequentialist ground (the industrial production of meats by means of intensive and battery farming causes both massive *ecological* effects that negatively affect all living beings, humans included –

deforestation, water-waste, high-levels of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions for instance¹ –, and a huge amount of *suffering* for the *sentient* living beings that are destined to become meat²), and, second, on deontologist ground (to use a Kantian dialect, the animals we eat are exploited merely as *means* and *tools*, but they deserve to be also treated as *ends-in-themselves* and doing so prevents their murdering).³

Direct arguments for the moral ban of meat-consumption are mostly religious in spirit. The basic idea shared by these direct arguments is that it is morally wrong not only to kill a sentient being for free but also to consume flesh from another living being even if its death was natural and painless, either in virtue of the intrinsic Value of Life, or in virtue of some religious beliefs (the belief that there is a cycle of reincarnations for instance), or else. The claim that the Value of Life precludes meat-consumption is politically problematic, insofar as it is the so-called importance of the Value of Life that grounds the rationale for the anti-abortion campaigns (whose participants are ironically often also supporters of the death penalty). In addition, from a strong Atheistic point of view, what grounds the alleged moral value of a mere accidental chemical event such as life? (of course, the same can be said for the mere accidental electric event that neuronally constitutes pain or pleasure, but it can be noted that old-school Benthamian utilitarianism lies in the maximization of pleasure, not life, in such a way that pleasure forms a primitive moral value while life is at best a derivative one).

The act of killing is often considered as morally wrong in itself (either because that violates the rights to life of the living being, or because that deprives the living being of a life worth living, or because that is incompatible with the fact that a living being is an end-in-itself), at least in normal conditions (killing is taken to be permissible in some extreme situations, when the survival of the individual is at stake for instance). Taken universally, that means that killing both Human and non-Human animals is morally wrong, unless it is true that there is an ontological abyss that sharply separates Humans from non-Humans, a fundamental difference between them.

Usually, the opponents of Moral Vegetarianism (that is: the partisans of Moral Omnivorism) postulate such a natural and ontological gap between Human beings and non-Human animals, that is they are Human Chauvinists (for a typical and systematic criticism of Moral Anthropocentrism, see [Routley 1973] and [Routley & Routley 1980]). They think that some human peculiarities are not shared by the rest of animal beings, and that such a difference morally allow us to eat them (but, we can object, why does *being different to X* involve *being authorized to eat X*?). They disagree on the list however: Human beings have a high degree of consciousness and reflexivity, they are the only sentient beings to be moral agents, they have some intellectual faculty that other animals do not possess (inferential reasoning, sentimental empathy, moral sympathy, capacity to form long-term goals, technical ability, or else), etc. (see [Kant, AK 4:428, 5:61-62, 162, 6:26-28, 7:127, 196, 11:52, 17:472, 20:270, 25:476, 28:276, etc.] for such an Anthropocentric stance). All these criteria

¹ On the systematic environmental degradation caused by industrial farming, see FAO 2006.

² Peter Singer's famous motto, see [Singer 1975].

³ For a summary and a discussion of the 'from production to consumption' argument in favour of Moral Vegetarianism, see [Doggett 2018].

are deceptive, either because some Human beings fail to meet them (for instance, the mentally deficient Human beings), or because some non-Human beings satisfy them (at least at some degree – but if it is, then the difference is not in kind but only in degree –, from some monkeys to bees, including some birds as crows and cetaceans as dolphins and whales; notably, each of the three Kantian criteria – use of technology, civilizational sophistication, obedience to extra-individual and social behavioral rules – from [Kant, AK 7:322-325] are met by many gregarious species). More generally, evidences from their behavior and their brain-functioning unambiguously indicate that a lot, if not all, non-Human animals have both self-awareness, rich mental lives and individual personalities (see [Tye 2017] for instance, I borrow the definition of *personality* that overflows beyond character and temperament⁴ from [Locke, *EHU*, II.27 §9, §26], substantially refined and morally colored in [Kant, AK 3:268-269, 4:228-230, 6:223, 25:11, 28:296]). If moral duty is firstly directed to *persons* [Kant, AK 5:86-88, 6:434-435] and therefore to ends-in-themselves⁵ (see [Kant, AK 5:87] on the bridge between *being a person* and *being an end-in-itself*), then non-Human animals are moral subjects and we have moral duties to them. And if we agree that killing another person is wrong, then it is morally wrong to kill a non-Human animal. Insofar as eating X usually implies to have killed X before, it is morally wrong to eat a non-Human animal. (Of course, if we disagree that killing another person to eat it is morally wrong, then it is morally permissible to kill both Human and non-Human animals, see [Descola 2005: 45-46, 483-495] for a description of animistic peoples who believe that other animals are really persons and that we have the right to kill and eat them, on condition that the eaters perform some ritual and respectful practices, acknowledgements or food-compensations for instance.)

But some anti-Vegetarians argue differently. They say that the consumption of animal proteins is a biological necessity for Human beings on the ground that Vegetarians and Vegans allegedly suffer protein-deficiency, vitamin B12-deficiency, omega-3 deficiency, iron-deficiency, and other health issues (but omnivores also suffer some health-issues due to the fact that they eat meat, some kinds of meat are linked to various cancer and cardiovascular malfunctions for instance)⁶. Furthermore, they think that the ingestion of non-animal substitutes or chemical synthetisation of animal proteins (nowadays, flesh grown from animal stem cells) involve some ecological negative effects that render the consumption of natural meat preferable to the consumption of synthetic meat. Indeed, they agree that industrial livestock farming involves huge ecologically negative consequences (i.e., a systematic environmental degradation), but they believe that its replacement by an industrial chemical production of synthetic meat would not be ecologically better, *even it would be worse*. They

⁴ Cf. [Kant, AK 7:285-295]

⁵ From a biocentric perspective, [Rolston III 1994] argues that animals (amongst other beings, from plants to ecosystems) are Kantianlike end-in-themselves insofar as they are able to *value* their own existences, viz. insofar as they attribute some objective *intrinsic* values to themselves. For a survey of intrinsic value theories in environmental ethics (including Rolston's one) and a criticism of the Kantian ratiocentrism, see [Callicott 1995].

⁶ It seems that amongst animal species, they are a few real carnivorous ones for which meat consumption is a real biological need. Cats are amongst them. See [Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011:149-153] for a discussion of the challenge imposed by domesticated carnivorous animals to a partisan of Moral Vegetarianism.

also agree that the production of synthetic meat avoids both animal suffering and treating animals as mere tools rather than ends-in-themselves. But they claim that some industrial animal farming does not entail animal suffering or not so much either because the livestock is not plainly sentient (their favourite example is insect farming: because insects are usually – but certainly wrongly – taken to be non-sentient beings, insect farming would involve no animal pain), or because some sorts of farming (outdoor and of small scale for instance), though they shorten the life of the livestock, preserve some level of well-being and welfare (there would be an implicit *contract* or a *bargain* between the livestock and the farmer, the former accepts that his life be shortened in exchange for the protection and healthcare furnished by the latter (see [Budiansky 1992] and [Callicott 2016:56-57])), so that it would be better for the animals to live on these farms than in the wild. They sometimes also claim that if some domestic animals (cows, pigs, etc.) are not reared and farmed, these species would disappear (because they are unable to live in the wild), so using these species as means (as flesh-donors) is in fact a necessary condition for having the opportunity to treat them as end-in-themselves; it is a rather curious justification, insofar as *rearing* and *breeding* involve neither *killing* nor *eating*, nor even *exploiting*. In no way, rearing livestock is synonymous to food-farming (see the example of the endangered species, they are preserved, but not eaten). In sum, they argue from a consequentialist point of view that the consumption of natural meat remains better than the consumption of synthetic meat.

Of course, the scientific literature on these topics is far to be persuasive (notably because synthetic flesh technology is still at its beginning). But, for quodlibetic reason, I will admit that their objection is sound: from a biological point of view, Human beings need to eat flesh food, and the synthetic meat is not a viable option. My point is: the biological necessity of meat-consumption for Human beings is compatible with many positions beyond or beside Standard Moral Omnivorism, especially an alternative to Moral Vegetarianism according to which it is morally wrong to eat individuals belonging to non-Human species.

2. Moral Cannibalism: Definition

Moral Cannibalism is the view according to which the act of cannibalism is morally permissible, even morally mandatory, at least in some well-defined contexts. An act of cannibalism occurs when an animal being belonging to the species *X* eats – partially or entirely – another member of the same species *X*, i.e., an act of cannibalism is the eating of flesh of a member of one's own species. It is not an unnatural and rare practice, rabbits for instance often eat their offspring (see [Schutt 2017] for an overview of cannibalistic practices in the natural world). The mainstream view in ethics is that the act of cannibalism is always morally wrong.

Moral Cannibalism is socially expected to be a position that does not have a lot of advocates. The rather tiny literature on the subject of cannibalism is mostly focused on the taxonomy of admissible and inadmissible types of cannibalism ([Routley 1982] is the masterpiece on this subject), that is on the more or less extreme situations in which cannibalism could be morally permissible (life-and-death situations,

siege, famine, survival, eating amputated parts, parts donated with consent, eating beings whose killing was for some reason morally right, etc.). There are also some vexed cases that I do not want to discuss, especially the case in which a Human explicitly and repetitively gives his *consent* to be killed and *fully* eaten by another Human (the most now-famous example is the German cannibal Armin Meiwes and the cannibalized Bernd Brandes in 2001, on this case see [Wisnewski 2007]; but remember the story of Ugolino and his sons in [Dante, *Inferno*, canto 32]). As I shall argue, Moral Cannibalism is not primarily a question that is relevant to the ethics of inter-human relations or to Human waste recycling⁷, but rather a question of Interspecies Justice.

Nobody had seriously argued for the permissibility of cannibalism apart from the life-and-death situations (except some thoughts from [Wisnewski 2023:92-115]), notably nobody had argued for cannibalism in situations of food-abundance like it is still the case in contemporary wealthy societies ([Wisnewski 2004:269] only states that he sees no morally relevant difference between survival cannibalism and cannibalism *simpliciter*, [Routley 1982:41 n.6] notes in passing that some institutionalisation of cannibalism can enhance supply of protein and so protect people of food shortage). So, try it!

3. A Positive Defence of Moral Cannibalism: the Argument from Interspecies Justice

In itself the rejection of Moral Anthropocentrism leaves opens many options, especially the vegetarian, omnivorist and cannibalistic ones (indeed, other assumptions need to be made in order to remove omnivorism). The issue that confronts Moral Vegetarianism, Moral Omnivorism and Moral Cannibalism deals with Interspecies Justice (for a now classic discussion of animal rights and animal citizenship, see [Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011]).

From a Rawlsian point of view and according to the contractarian procedural justice [Rawls 1999]⁸, there could be an original position in which the participants are not Human individuals but either all individuals from all species or species themselves (we can restrict, if you want, in saying that not all earthling animal species should be represented, but only those that have enough richness of mental life, but I

⁷ As once Calvin asks in class in Bill Waterson's masterly comic strip: "I'd like to debate whether cannibalism ought to be grounds for leniency in murders, since it's less wasteful" [Waterson, *Calvin & Hobbes*, June 3 1993].

⁸ The theory of procedural justice from [Rawls 1999] can be seen as a substantial refinement of the idea behind Kant's third formulation of the Categorical Imperative [AK 4:433-440, 5:82], the original position being alike to the realm of ends, see [Rawls 1999:221-227, 233]. Hence, my argument can be translated in the usual deontologist Kantian dialect (for instance, the decision-making process under the veil or ignorance guarantees that the chosen principles cannot be *heteronomous* [Rawls 1999:222]).

see no reason to do so)⁹. Under the veil of ignorance, each participant does not know to which species it belongs: in a way, this is just a harmless extension of the Rawlsian claim that under the veil of ignorance and in order to do not put aside the interests of disabled and disadvantaged Humans, the participants know neither what are their social position *nor what natural attributes or gifts they have* [Rawls 1999:172, 175] (see [Rowlands 2009:118-175] for a defence and a discussion of such an extension of Rawls's contractarian theory that allows Interspecies Justice). The fact that the participants do not know what are their species means that they ignore what natural and psychological faculties they are expected to possess in virtue of their species membership, especially they do not know if they are *sentient* beings able to feel pain and pleasure or *rational* beings able to voluntarily respect the outcomes of the decision-making process occurring in the original position. Then, the species that inhabit Earth (that is: a world with relative scarcity of natural resources and competing claims) must agree on some Interspecies Principles of Justice (IPJ henceforth) that preserve their respective well-founded interests, and they need to do so regardless of which species the participants will belong to once the veil of ignorance is lifted.

Firstly, the principles need to meet some 'Leibnizian' meta-principles which are absent from the original Rawlsian theory, one of them is the following:

- *Diversity Maximization*. The chosen IPJ must guarantee the co-living of the maximum of different species.

(Since the outcome of the decision-making process under the veil of ignorance needs not to be an absolutely egalitarian one (as evolutionary processes and natural selection show, it could not be so, that is, the co-living of *all* species does not seem to be a viable option), it is possible that *Diversity Maximization* entails that the participants chose to exterminate the most harmful species. In that case, and given the current state of affairs, the procedural Interspecies Justice seems to be a straightforward argument for Cat-Genocide and Human-Genocide which are positions already defensible by a basic calculus in a Non-Anthropocentric Utilitarianist framework.)

Intuitively, the chosen IPJ will be similar to those advocated in [Rawls 1999], namely ([Rawls 1999:266], I adapt Rawls's original principles):

- **IPJ1**. Each member of whatever species is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all members of all species.

⁹ [Rawls 1999:441-449] argues that the *sufficient* condition ([Rawls 1999:442-443] states that it does not need to be a *necessary* one) for taking part in the original position is the mere *capacity for moral personality*, and not the realization of it. [Rawls 1999:442] requires two conditions for having a capacity for moral personality: first, the capacity of having a conception of its own good (according to [Rolston III 1994], all animals are able to *value* their own life, so they meet the first criterion), and the capacity of having a sense of justice (experience indicates that at least some gregarious animals possess some sense of fairness, especially in cases of food-distribution and access to reproductive market). Thus, *contra* the Human Chauvinism of [Rawls 1999:448-449], I see no irrefutable reason why Human children should take part in the original position [Rawls 1999:445-446] while (at least some) non-Human animals should not.

- **IPJ2.** Inequalities between species are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged species, consistent with the just savings principle.
- *Priority Rule.* The IPJ are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore the basic liberties can be restricted only for the sake of liberty. There are two cases:
 1. a less extensive liberty must strengthen the total system of liberties shared by all species;
 2. a less than equal liberty must be acceptable to those species with the lesser liberty.

Of course, these adaptations leave open the meaning of ‘basic liberty’ for an animal being whatever the species it belongs, but *to have a life worth living* is probably a good candidate and *to pursue the activity of living* or *to satisfy the biological needs of the species I belong to* a good minimal criterion. If so, the weakest reading of IPJ1 conflates with the claim that every species from the Best World satisfying *Diversity Maximization* have an equal right to the fulfilment of its biological needs. Minimally understood, IPJ2 says that the easiness of the biological satisfaction can vary between species if and only if the least advantaged species (the weakest, i.e., those that have the shortest life, a great difficulty to reproduce, those that have more predators or of which the life depends upon some fragile and versatile environmental conditions) can still live and survive in long-term.

To guarantee IPJ1 and IPJ2, it seems that the participants in the original situation should agree on *Minimal Interference* that aims to minimize ecological degradation and animal suffering (and also to allow co-welfare).

- *Minimal Interference.* The biological needs of a species should be met without negatively interfering with other species, or with as little negative interference as possible.

(To guarantee the application of IPJ1 and IPJ2 and in order to reassure the Human Chauvinists who mistakenly believe that Humanity is at the apex of an alleged chain of beings, the participants might also decide that the self-esteemed more sophisticated and powerful species should be the keepers of the Interspecies Justice and police the Interspecies co-living. However, the balance and well-behaving of natural ecosystems in absence of Human beings tend to show that it is not mandatory at all. Moreover, as a matter of fact, Human interfering with the extra-Human natural world is rarely advantageous for non-Human beings.)

What is a negative interference should be broadly understood. A negative interference is not necessarily a direct predatory activity, it could be either a negative impact on the ecosystem or a negative influence on climate conditions that have undesirable consequences for the living of other species. Amongst species behaviors that imply negative interferences, there is the ‘pest propagation’ of some species populations – for instance the introduced ones – that have undesirable ecological effects that affect both the species in question and the others that share their ecosystem by producing starvation, biodiversity collapse, etc. But the fact that the proliferation of some species is ecologically disastrous does not mean that the right answer is to *eat*

them (*contra* [Routley 1982:5]) although *killing* them is desirable (i.e., if it is true that often meat-eating involves killing, but it does not require it, neither does killing involve eating). In fact, the reproductive activity of a species has also to be restrained by *Minimal Interference*, and that is enough to permit mass-killing and mass-sterilizing of some members of a species in certain cases. Of course, there are arguments from waste management that suggest to do not waste the dead corpses (so, we should use the dead bodies of the overpopulating species for food or other activity), but these arguments are far too general: they are rationales for the broader claim that, *if possible*, carnivorous beings should eat already dead animals. But it should be remarked for the point of this paper that such a claim of lexical order [Rawls 1999:37-38] in meat-consumption ('eat the already dead first, then kill your meals') says nothing at all about the species-membership of the dead corpses, and therefore remains neutral between Moral Omnivorism and Moral Cannibalism.

In itself, *Minimal Interference* precludes neither that some interferences between species occur, nor that there remain some *negative* interferences (predatory activities for instance, on 'essential predation', cf. [Routley 1982:32-38]) that ultimately lead to some species extinctions. In fact, *Minimal Interference* only constrains the relations between species, and therefore it is not incompatible with predatory behaviors and the continuation of natural selection and evolutionary processes.

Minimal Interference obviously is a kind of No-Harm Principle that normative ethics routinely deals with, viz. the No-Harm Principle that is usually considered at the core of ethics (in an Anthropocentric framework, it is the following moral <golden> rule: a person's action is morally permissible provided that it does not harm or negatively interfere with other persons). In fact, *Minimal Interference* is very close to the revised No-Harm Principle advocated by [Routley & Routley 1980:174] and can be quasi-formulated in Routleyan spirit as follows:

- *No-Harm IPJ*. A species's action is morally permissible provided that
 1. it does not unwarrantedly harm or negatively interfere with other species, and
 2. it does not damage or ill-treat or devalue anything of <intrinsic or ecological> value.

Clause 1 captures the deep meaning of *Minimal Interference*, while clause 2 makes explicit the broad understanding that must be ascribed to 'negative interference': the living of animals is necessary entangled with the living of other items (from non-animal livings to ecosystems taken as wholes – it is well-known that distinguishing biocentrism from ecocentrism is a difficult scholastic task).

Since some animals (of which Humans belong according to the hypothesis¹⁰) need to eat meat to live, their predatory activities are constrained by *Minimal Inter-*

¹⁰ [Rowlands 2009:162-174], since he does not work under the leading assumption of this paper (for he claims that eating meat or not has no impact on health and human life), supports that the extension of Rawls's original position to non-Human beings (participants in the original position have no knowledge of their species membership) offers a powerful

ference and *No-Harm IPJ*. Amongst them, some wild and liminal animals do not dispose of the facilities that Humans and dogs have (I borrow the tripartition between domesticated, liminal and wild animals from [Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011]). In particular, Humans and domesticated animals can – directly or indirectly – choose from what species the flesh they eat belongs to with a freedom that liminal and wild animals do not have (on this subject, see [Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011:149-152]). To this extent, they are more constrained by *Minimal Interference* than other carnivorous beings (whose predatory activity is taken to be necessary for them in order to pursue *living*). One way to meet *Minimal Interference* is to observe the following sub-principle:

- *No-Interference If Possible*. If possible, and in order to minimize the negative interferences with other species (that is to satisfy *Minimal Interference*), the biological needs of a species should be met without interfering at all with other species.

From *Minimal Interference* and *No-Interference If Possible*, it follows for an individual belonging to the species X that the better way to meet a biological need is to look inside the species X in order to obtain satisfaction. The issue is not controversial for reproduction: usually sexual relations between different species are not welcomed and are rarely encouraged (except if you want a mule). Weirdly, it is more controversial when we talk about food. However, procreative and feeding activities are the most basic biological needs. A worry about symmetry is enough to think that perhaps we should eat from what we like for other purposes. On a very small scale, this is already the case: a new-born mammal finds the food it needs from its mother's teats without interfering with animals of other species. Moral Cannibalism follows directly from *No-Interference If Possible*: for a species that needs meat-consumption, eating the members of the same species minimizes or nullifies the negative interferences with other living beings. Moral Cannibalism is the best option that meets *Minimal Interference* for carnivorous but not liminal or wild animals (when, of course, already dead corpses from other species are not available, in accordance with the lexical order claim 'eat the already dead first, then kill your meals'): cats should eat cat flesh, dogs should eat dog flesh, Humans should eat Human flesh.

4. A Negative Defence of Moral Cannibalism: the Arguments from the Moral Un-wrongness of Cannibalism

Since Moral Cannibalism is morally grounded insofar as Interspecies Justice is taken into account (given the positive argument above), what are Human beings we could and should eat? If there were a sharp natural or extra-natural gap between Human animals and non-Human animals, Moral Cannibalism would imply that we could

argument for Moral Vegetarianism. I agree, of course. But, here, I'm working under the (seemingly false) assumption that, from a biological point of view, it is necessary for Humans to be omnivore (and so, vegetarianism would not be a viable option).

eat the few Human beings that fail to satisfy the so-called ‘Humanity-criterion’. For instance, if *fully-being a Human* requires to have some intellectual faculties, we could eat the mentally deficient or incapacitated members of our species [Routley *Unpublished*:§5]. If *fully-being a Human* requires to have some high degree of self-consciousness, we could eat the non-conscious members of our species (either those in comas or the new-borns). Otherwise, since the need of animal-proteins is not a matter of taste but *per hypothesi* a biological necessity, we can just follow the Cynical and Stoic proposal [Sext. Emp. *PH* 3.247-248 and *AM* 11.192-194]¹¹: modify our funeral rites and eat already dead Humans. Indeed, funeral ceremonies are mere social and cultural conventions, furthermore some Human peoples and tribes include or have already included some acts of cannibalism in their funeral rites (this point famously was the main motivation for Montaigne to write about cannibalism).

Moreover, we already use parts of dead Human bodies for transplants and medical purposes (in addition, we also use parts of *living* Human bodies in blood transfusions, kidney and bone marrow transplants), why do not use them for food if such a practice can help other Humans to keep living and help them to meet their biological needs? The process of food ingestion is essentially a kind of internal connection as are blood transfusion and organ transplantation (cf. [Routley 1982:5-7] that, in addition, quotes a Catholic Bishop who explicitly draws the parallel between survival cannibalism and graft): insofar as these processes are *teleologically* equal since they all aim at maintaining a body alive, no internal reason urges us to morally permit some while prohibiting others (*contra* the hylomorphic stance of [Lu 2013:455-457] according to which, since food ingestion involves a *transformation* of the material that is absent from blood transfusion and organ transplantation, food ingestion is not on an equal moral footing with these last processes: while they respect the *forms* – what are oddly taken to be the primitive bearers of moral value (insofar as *forms* are *souls* in the case of living hylomorphic complexes) – of the blood and organs, food ingestion reduces the object to being only its valueless *matter* without any regard for its *form*: therefore, *eating* in itself is always morally worse than *transfusing* or *transplanting*).

In fact, from an empirical point of view, Humans currently commit soft and small acts of cannibalism without any trouble: Humans eat their own skin from chapped lips, eat dead skin in general, suck their own blood when they are hurt, milk breastfeeding, bite their own nails, swallow sperm from their sexual partners, etc. ([Schutt 2017:78] labels these cases ‘grey zone cannibalism’). The eating of Human biological products is testified in many ways, even in widely (but not universally) socially and culturally accepted ways (for instance, eating or drinking bones, blood and organs for medicinal purposes in China and Europe, see [Schutt 2017:207-218]). Why worry about the moral value of such a common practice? Of course, nobody defends that it is morally permissible to kill one of your neighbours for Thanksgiving, but all things being equal it is also not morally permissible to kill a turkey in your garden for Thanksgiving. Recreative and unnecessary killing and recreative flesh-eating are equally morally problematic for Moral Omnivorism and Moral Cannibalism (cf. [Routley 1982:21-32, esp. 21-22] on the moral wrongness of killing).

¹¹ Cf. Plut. *De Stoic.* 1044f-1045a, DL 7.188 and Phld. *De Stoic.* in *PHerc.* 155 col. 16.

What are the arguments for the moral prohibition of cannibalism or anthropophagy from a non-Vegetarian point of view (since, of course, Moral Vegetarianism, by forbidding all kinds of meat-consumption, naturally implies the inadmissibility of cannibalism – except, perhaps, in extreme and life-and-death situations)? If Human Chauvinism is removed (see [Routley 1982:1-5] for a criticism of Human Chauvinism linked to the question of the admissibility of cannibalism), there is not a lot and surprisingly they are ridiculously bad (see [Wisnewski 2004] and [Shand 2010] for convergent discussions of consequentialist and deontologist unsuccessful arguments against cannibalism). They are mistakenly based

- either on the rationally unjustified belief that *eating* necessarily involves other morally reprehensible activities as *harming*, *hurting* (either *physically* hurting the cannibalized or *psychologically* hurting its close relatives), and *murdering*;
- or on the gratuitous assumption that a society which permits cannibalism necessarily creates more unhappiness than happiness (but would it be so if the taboo of Human-consumption was abolished?);
- or on the wrong qualification of dead corpses as *ends-in-themselves* so that they possess some unassailable *moral dignity*; while a living being can certainly be an end-in-itself whose *living in itself* has unconditioned worth [Kant, AK 4:428], given that *living* seems to be a pre-condition that an entity X must fulfil in order to be an end-in-itself¹², a dead body fails to meet such a pre-condition by definition: a dead body is precisely a non-living one – in addition, the fact that we often respect the last requests of the deceased and keep our promises to them, especially their wishes that concern the use of its dead body (cremation, burial, authorization of donation for medical purposes, donation to science¹³, etc.), does not imply that its dead body *is* an end-in-itself, that only implies that it *was* formerly an end-in-itself (on this point, I disagree with [Wisnewski 2004:269] and [Wisnewski 2023]: the living have no moral duty towards the dead, the belief that it is a moral duty to respect the last requests of a deceased is an unjustified and false creed ([Lu 2013] tries to argue for the thesis that dead bodies possess some *low* intrinsic moral value from the standpoint of virtue ethics and under the Human Chauvinist assumption, but he agrees that the *moral vulnerability* or possible *devaluation* of dead corpses is not sufficient to prohibit an act of anthropophagy if it is morally justified, yet Interspecies Justice precisely provides such a moral reason));¹⁴

¹² The sufficient condition for being an end-in-itself, according to Kant, is *autonomy*, see [AK 5:87].

¹³ On cannibalism and organ donation, see [Wisnewski 2023:92-115].

¹⁴ For a recent study and an in-depth discussion of the alleged moral dignity of the dead and our moral duty towards them, see [Wisnewski 2023]. Albeit I strongly recommend his book, I disagree with Wisnewski's conclusions however, though this paper is not the place to put all my objections. In a nutshell, I don't believe that the body is a *metonym* for the person, and, even if it were, the body of a dead would not *be* a metonym for a person, but *had been* a metonym for a person (here, tenses are morally relevant: the alleged metonymic relationship between a person and its body has no reason to carry over into death). There is a crucial difference between '*x was a metonym for y*' and '*x is a metonym for the past y*' (which is the reading of [Wisnewski 2023:28, 44]: the corpse of the dead *is* a metonym for the formerly living person) for the relationship of metonymy does not hold

- or on the assumption that *respecting a person* implies *respecting its body* <for-ever> (see [Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011:150-151]) so that moral duties extend beyond its death – but a person is not identical to its body: if this were the case, the atoms that once made up a person in a past far away would still be respected and we should be daily careful in handling atoms in our everyday activities because they might have formerly belonged to a person who was alive in by-gone days; furthermore, as points out by [Wisniewski 2023: 92-96], the relationship between the *respect* due to the deceased person and the ban of cannibalism is contingent, for very often actual cases of cannibalism were cases of *ritual* cannibalism which precisely aims to honour the dead and to express their dignity as formerly living end-in-themselves, hence ritual cannibalism breaks the intensional entailment from *respecting a person* to *not-eating* ($\approx$ *respecting its body*);
- or on the Victorian idea that eating another Human is disgusting (but there are plenty of morally permissible things that are deemed ‘disgusting’ or ‘reluctant’ that Humans do in their privacy, sometimes with great pleasure, see [Routley 1982:3-4]), etc.

In fact, the only good objection against cannibalism does not argue for its moral wrongness at all (if it were the case, that would be a prescriptive fallacy, that is a violation of Hume’s Law [Hume, *THN* III.1 sec. 1 §27], viz. an illegitimate inference of an *ought* from an *is*¹⁵). Historically, the major problem with cannibalism was a health-issue: it empirically appears that cannibalism is linked to the development of prion diseases, especially Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (fatal degenerative brain disorder) for Humans (mad cow disease furnishes another example for non-Human animals). The most famous and documented case is that of the Fore people from Papua New Guinea who practiced the eating of the brains of dead people as a funeral ritual. They are known to have suffered from a local prion disease called ‘Kuru’ (another fatal neurodegenerative disorder) transmitted on the occasion of their funerary cannibalism. The epidemic was contained with the prohibition of cannibalism (on Kuru epidemic, see [Lindenbaum 2013]). In the case of Kuru and in order to explain the fact that the Kuru epidemic takes twenty years to develop and to cause large-scale death, scientists have recently discovered the existence of a ‘prion resistance gene’ which prevents all prion diseases and was prevalent during the epidemic amongst the unaffected Fore people [Asante, Smidak, Grimshaw *et al.* 2015]. Therefore, although the question remains whether Human cannibalism is inevitably or not tied with prion diseases, if Moral Cannibalism is adopted, it is likely that some evolutionary processes will naturally favour the development of a ‘protection gene’ against prion diseases. Given the current medical technology, it is also likely that a synthetisation of such a protective protein will help to avoid the health-issues historically linked with

anymore in the first case but still continue to hold in the second (and if it were, it would be, as Wisniewski acknowledges many times, a mere convention and subject to cultural variance).

¹⁵ Of course, the question whether Hume’s Law universally holds or not is a highly debated topic in ethics. See [Russell 2023] for a recent summary and a logical study of such an allegedly banned inference from descriptive premisses to a normative conclusion.

some forms of cannibalism (on Kuru and the alleged immorality of cannibalism, see also [Wisnewski 2007:18]).

Of course, Moral Cannibalism needs not to involve either violence or a dystopian society similar to that depicted in Richard Fleischer's sci-fi movie *Soylent Green* or that ironically argued for in Swift's *Modest Proposal*. For instance, if synthetic meat becomes efficient and ecologically viable, Moral Cannibalism requires only that the stem cells from which the synthetic flesh grown be extracted from Human beings. If meat-consumption is a biological need for Humans, therefore Moral Cannibalism is, morally speaking and from the standpoint of Interspecies Justice, the better option. Anyway, the lesson is: meat-lovers, eat ourselves or become vegetarians. (From a pragmatic point of view, it should be noted that the overpopulations of ecologically harmful animal species introduced by Humans in alien ecosystems furnish a huge supply protein nowadays, in such a way that it might be thought that Human cannibalism can be avoided in practice: for ecological reason, we are justified to *eat the invasive species first*. Alas, *Homo Sapiens* is the main widespread invasive species on Earth!)

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References and Abbreviations

HUME, DAVID

THN

Treatise of Human Nature

KANT, IMMANUEL

AK

Akademie-Ausgabe (Kant Gesammelte Schriften herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften)

LOCKE, JOHN

EHU

An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

PHILODEME DE GADARA

Phld. *De Stoic.*

De Stoicis

PLUTARQUE

Plut. *De Stoic.*

De Stoicorum repugnantiis

SEXTUS EMPIRICUS

AM

Adversus Mathematicos

PH

Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes

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