

Newcastle University e-prints

Date deposited: 5th December 2012

Version of file: Author final

Peer Review Status: Peer reviewed

Citation for item:

Deckers J. [Should Whiteheadians Be Vegetarians? A Critical Analysis of the Thoughts of Hartshorne and Dombrowski](#). *Journal of Animal Ethics* 2011, **1**(2), 195-209.

Further information on publisher website:

<http://www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/jane.html>

Publisher's copyright statement:

The definitive version of this article, published by University of Illinois Press, 2011, is available at:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5406/janimaethics.1.2.0195>

Always use the definitive version when citing.

Use Policy:

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not for profit purposes provided that:

- A full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- A link is made to the metadata record in Newcastle E-prints
- The full text is not changed in any way.

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

**Robinson Library, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Newcastle upon Tyne.
NE1 7RU. Tel. 0191 222 6000**

Should Whiteheadians Be Vegetarians? A Critical Analysis of the Thoughts of Hartshorne and Dombrowski

Jan Deckers, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, NE2 4AX, UK,
Email: jan.deckers@ncl.ac.uk

This is the author's own version of the article published in:

Journal of Animal Ethics, 2011, 1(2), 195-209.

Abstract: A number of philosophers have found inspiration in the writings of Alfred Whitehead to develop their ideas on environmental and animal ethics. I explore the writings of Charles Hartshorne and Daniel Dombrowski to address the question of whether Whiteheadians should be vegetarians. I conclude that there is a morally relevant distinction between plants and animals, based on the Whiteheadian view that animals have higher grades of experience, and that this distinction grounds a moral duty to adopt minimal moral veganism.

Key words: animals, ethics, process thought, vegetarianism, veganism.

Should Whiteheadians Be Vegetarians? A Critical Analysis of the Thoughts of Hartshorne and Dombrowski

Introduction

In a previous work I argued that there is one paragraph in Whitehead's work which supports minimal moral vegetarianism (Deckers, 2010) and defined this as the view that the consumption of animals should be allowed only in situations when either of the following two conditions is satisfied: The first is the condition that no adequate and secure alternative foodstuffs could be made available without producing unacceptably high ecological or social costs. The second is that the animals who are eaten are animals who have not been killed for that purpose (e.g., animals who die naturally, accidentally, or mercifully - i.e., through mercy killing). I also argued that the three Whiteheadian scholars whose writings on the ethics of vegetarianism I considered, namely Charles Birch, John Cobb, and Jay McDaniel, have produced a range of arguments that I found either problematic or question-begging. In this article, I engage with the works of two other distinguished Whiteheadians who have written on the subject of vegetarianism: Charles Hartshorne and Daniel Dombrowski. I develop my own perspective on the question of whether Whiteheadians should be vegetarians by engaging critically with their writings.

Hartshorne

Hartshorne (1979) discussed vegetarianism in an article titled 'The Rights of the Subhuman World'. While he wrote that 'complete vegetarianism need not be and probably is not the most appropriate solution', it is not clear why he made this claim (Hartshorne, 1979, p. 58). But although he dismissed 'complete vegetarianism',

Hartshorne (1979, p. 58) was supportive of diets that are predominantly based on food sources that are not reliant on products derived from animals for ‘economic’ reasons: ‘In many climatic conditions, at least, to consume vegetable matter directly makes far less drain upon the natural ecosystem than to let animals use up most of the energy built up in vegetation, yielding to us only their carcasses for food. For the bulk of the energy will have been dissipated by these animals simply by living for some months or years’.¹

When Hartshorne (1979, p. 58) wrote this paper, now thirty years ago, he added that his fellow citizens might be educated about this economic reality because of ‘present high prices of meat’, yet his hopes clearly have not been fulfilled given that the average consumption of animal bodies by citizens of the United States of America has increased in the last thirty years and has been predicted to remain at very high levels (Interagency Agricultural Projections Committee, 2007). Although Hartshorne (1979, p. 51, 58-59) expressed his belief that the ‘life of each sparrow’ is valuable to God, he clearly found it difficult to value each animal, given that he expressed agreement with the view of ‘those who say that ... it is hypocritical or absurd to shed tears over ill-treatment of subhuman creatures, while ignoring that of many human beings’, unless the ill-treatment concerns an entire species. Although this statement could be read as supportive of the view that tears should be shed over the plight of many human as well as other beings, it rather seems to be the case that Hartshorne (1979, p. 59) thought that shedding tears over the plight of nonhuman animals when the ill-treatment is ‘only of individuals’ is somewhat inappropriate.

Hartshorne’s account raises many questions, including the following:
Why are nonhuman (henceforth, ‘other’) animals referred to as ‘subhuman’, and why

¹ See also Hartshorne, 1983, p. 224.

should it be more problematic to empathize with individuals than with entire species?² For our present purposes, I conclude that it is unclear why Hartshorne appears to give a negative answer to the question of whether we should adopt minimal moral vegetarianism.

Dombrowski

Although Hartshorne did not discuss the issue of vegetarianism at great length, the issue is debated extensively by one of his most renowned critics, Daniel Dombrowski (1984), a scholar who also wrote a book titled ‘The Philosophy of Vegetarianism’, in which he provides a detailed account of vegetarianism in the history of (predominantly ancient Greek) philosophy. The debate on vegetarianism is one of the central themes of his book ‘Hartshorne and the Metaphysics of Animal Rights’ (Dombrowski, 1988). Although Dombrowski (1988, p. 84) argues in this book that Hartshorne should have adopted vegetarianism to be true to his own principles, my focus is on the arguments Dombrowski has deployed himself to defend his vegetarian stance.

Dombrowski (2001, p. 31-32) argues that animals with ‘memories’ and a ‘desire to continue living’ should not ‘be killed unnecessarily (gratuitously)’. A crucial part of Dombrowski’s (2008; 2006; 1997) argument is his appeal to what Jan Narveson (1977) has called the argument from marginal cases, which he uses to clarify the point that ‘sneaking up’ on such an animal in order to kill him or her painlessly (if such were possible) would not normally be permissible and justify the

² At the same time, I acknowledge the point made by Linzey (2009, p. 45) that the term ‘nonhuman’ is hardly appropriate to use in reference to other animals either, in that it is rather odd that we refer to other animals by what they are not.

inclusion of such an animal into one's diet.³ Applied to the issue under discussion, this argument can be summarised as follows: The validity of speciesism hinges on the possibility of finding a morally relevant trait that sets all humans apart from members of other species. Since no morally relevant attribute can be found that marks out all humans, any particular attribute that is chosen to exclude other animals will also exclude 'marginal cases' of humans - for example, infants, some people with mental handicaps, or some people suffering from dementia. Since Dombrowski objects to killing these people for food, even if it could occur by 'sneaking up' on them, he argues that we should not kill and eat other animals with similar characteristics either. It is clear that this conclusion is sound for anyone who believes the argument from marginal cases holds water, at least if both logical consistency and the view that 'marginal cases' of humans should not be killed in order to be consumed by other humans are valued at the same time.

³ Incidentally, Dombrowski (2006, p. 232) remarks that the argument from marginal cases has been criticised for using the label 'marginal' to describe certain people. Although the term need not necessarily imply that those who have marginal capacities (for example, to think) compared to most humans are less worthy of respect, it might be appropriate to substitute the name because of the negative connotations associated with it. Dombrowski (2006, p. 232) has suggested replacing the notion by 'the argument from species overlap', while Sztybel (2006, p. 25) has proposed the term 'the argument from mental disability'. Since I believe the capacities of people with mental disabilities need not be thought of as overlapping more with the capacities possessed by animals of some other species than with the capacities possessed by other people, I prefer the latter notion.

The argument from marginal cases, however, is problematic, because it is based on the assumption that an individual's relative moral significance must be determined solely according to whether he or she possesses certain attributes or properties that can be found across different species. One problem with this assumption is that this is similar to comparing apples with pears against a list of selected qualities, for example to decide which have more flavour. Not only can the list of chosen qualities be disputed, but it is also unclear how we could know what it means for different organisms to have certain qualities, especially when these qualities are not qualities for us (as with flavour), but qualities which reside in the organisms themselves - for example, sentience or consciousness. Although many other animals may experience discomfort in ways similar to the ways we do, our capacities to imagine how they might experience discomfort are limited by the fact that we do not have direct access to other minds. Although this need not mean that we should not empathize with them – indeed, the fact that we do not know what discomfort means for other humans need not prevent us from empathizing with them either – we should be careful with the making of interspecific comparisons, since attributes that appear similar to us might differ significantly between animals belonging to different species and fulfill very different functions. Even if we could agree on a list of morally relevant attributes and on a methodology to compare how these are materialized in individuals across different species, it must be asked whether an individual's moral significance relative to the moral significance of another individual should be determined solely by a process of weighing up how many attributes deemed to be morally relevant each possesses. Many people would, in a situation of conflict between helping a human infant or an adult chimpanzee, decide that we must favour the human, in spite of the fact that the chimpanzee might possess

more, or more developed, attributes. I agree, and therefore I am a speciesist, or someone who believes that mere species membership or being born from humans matters morally, which I favour over what could be called ‘attributism’ or ‘property-ism’.⁴

Although I attach some moral significance to species membership, it must be pointed out that the human species cannot be separated neatly from other species of animals. Indeed, it could be said that a ‘species’ is no more than a group of

⁴ Incidentally, in spite of his appeal to the argument from marginal cases, Dombrowski (2006, p. 230) has granted elsewhere that partiality towards humans may be ‘legitimate in morality’, yet he is inconsistent by writing that the ‘ascription of basic rights’ should be ‘impartial’. The same inconsistency is found where he claims that ‘killing a whale is far worse’ than killing an early fetus, while holding at the same time that ‘it perhaps seems reasonable to assign human beings (even nonrational ones) a far higher value than even sentient animals’ (Dombrowski, 1988, p. 68, 74). The view that being ‘born from humans’ is morally relevant raises the question of what the moral status might be of hybrids who include human material, yet who might not need human gestation. An interesting account to show that these hybrids could be accorded human status has been developed by Liao (forthcoming). Liao develops a non-speciesist, property-ist account whereby the possession of the genetic basis for moral agency is considered to be sufficient for a being to be accorded full moral status. Liao argues that the question of whether these hybrids should be granted the same status as other humans would depend on whether or not the relevant genes are sufficiently integrated into the developing organism. For a more elaborate account of Dombrowski’s views on the status of the human fetus, see Dombrowski & Deltete, 2000.

individuals with relatively strong family ties who ultimately share those connections with all forms of life. With this definition, I adopt the view that the general existence of similar attributes between species members is contingent, rather than necessary. The fact that the species concept is a relative and elastic concept, rather than a concept that can be used to establish clear boundaries between groups of animals, implies that other animals are our family members too, even if they are more distant relatives. A speciesist ethic, therefore, is simply an ethic that – all else being equal – gives some consideration to the question of how closely related an organism is to a member of the human species. Contrary to a widely held belief, a speciesist ethic need not be more restrictive than an ‘attributist’ ethic as far as the issue of ascribing rights to other animals is concerned. Indeed, in what remains of this article, I hope it will become clear that an attributist ethic can be more restrictive. To explore this issue, I start from Dombrowski’s (2006, p. 229) statement that killing animals is questionable because ‘animals ... have memories of the past and expectations or hopes or possibilities regarding the future (and) ... as Regan has famously put ... lives of their own’. This statement raises several issues.

First, it must be asked whether Dombrowski believes this statement applies to all animals, as suggested by his indiscriminate usage of the term ‘animals’. The answer might be negative since Dombrowski (2006, p. 229) claims to be ‘influenced positively by Regan’ in this view. Now, Regan has claimed that animals who are ‘subjects-of-a-life’ or who have a ‘unified psychological presence’ possess these capacities. Although in his first publication of ‘The Case for Animal Rights’, Regan (1983, p. 78; 2004, xvi) adopted the view that it is hard to define which animals are subjects of a life, but that ‘mentally normal mammals of a year or more’ are definitely included, in the preface to the 2004 edition of this book, he wrote that

birds are also included and that fish ‘may be’. Although this position would entail that humans have a prima facie duty to abstain from eating many animals for food, it would not necessarily command minimal moral vegetarianism, and therefore, it appears to sit uncomfortably with Dombrowski’s plea for ‘vegetarianism’, the main theme in his ‘Hartshorne and the Metaphysics of Animal Rights’.

Second, I doubt whether mammals, or any other animals for that matter, could reasonably be held to have ‘memories’ and ‘hopes’, at least if these concepts are understood in terms of what Mendl and Paul (2008, p. 363) refer to as, respectively, ‘the vivid conscious awareness that characterises recall of an event in the past’ and an ability to imagine what the future might have in store for them.⁵

Although we must be careful here, given that the human ability to recall the past and to imagine and plan for the future evolved from ancestors who were not human, I believe that the view that other animals are able to entertain ideas about their past or their future must be questioned. Dombrowski (2001, p. 31) mentions the fact that dogs remember negative incidents (for example being ‘struck’), yet the ability to learn from the past need not necessarily be understood in terms of the ability to reflect on or even remember a past event. There is no evidence to suggest that dogs are aware that they evaluate their experiences or that they possess the ability to override their feelings about how they were treated in the past (at least not before they have had the chance to gather positive experiences with those who treated them badly), which would require the ability to reflect on those experiences and to suppress or ‘rationalise’ them, which might be a distinctively human ability. This view is endorsed elsewhere by Dombrowski (1988, p. 59) where he writes – in commenting on Hartshorne’s work –

⁵ On this issue, see for example, Mendl & Paul, 2008 as well as Bermúdez (2003, especially p. 179-181).

that ‘from all we know now ... (other) animals ... are incapable of explicit awareness of awareness, or rather reflexive awareness’. Therefore, if reflexive awareness is required for an animal to possess the capacities to remember and hope, Dombrowski’s category of animals with a prima facie right not to be killed for food would be reduced even further, including human animals only.

Third, since the examples that feature most prominently in his defense of animal rights are those of mammals and birds, it must be asked whether Dombrowski thinks some animals may lack the prima facie right not to be killed for food. Although Dombrowski emphasizes the evolutionary continuity between all species, he wavers in relation to whether the category of animals with a prima facie right to life should include animals as simple as ‘clams’ (Dombrowski, 2006, p. 225). Yet in light of my previous point, it is not clear on what basis Dombrowski makes a distinction between clams and pigs. Although clams and pigs may lack reflexive awareness, both categories of animals might nevertheless be able to act in accordance with what has been learnt from the past and anticipate the future. This ability need not hinge on the existence of an ability to reflect about the past or the future. Anticipation may not even require a capacity for what Mendl and Paul (2008, p. 370) have called a capacity for ‘episodic thinking’ about a future event, or an ability to anticipate future mental states. They add that ‘anticipatory behaviour’ can exist without this capacity in ‘the presence of a learnt cue predicting arrival of a particular reinforcer’ (Mendl & Paul, 2008, p. 370). Such anticipatory behaviour has been shown to exist even in some amoebae, who can adapt their behaviour in anticipation of the imminent arrival of unfavourable conditions when they have learned to expect the arrival of those conditions at particular time intervals (Saigusa et al., 2008).

Although Dombrowski (2006, p. 225) might grant that clams are united with pigs by lacking reflexive awareness, he could still ground his view that there is a morally relevant distinction in the fact that clams, ‘lacking a central nervous system’, may not be able to feel pain. This is in line with the position he adopts elsewhere, where he expresses his agreement with Singer’s well-known early position by drawing the ‘prudential’ line ‘somewhere between a shrimp and an oyster’ (Dombrowski, 1988, p. 76-77; Singer, 1975, p. 188). Presumably, this argument would work only if both the view that clams may not be capable of feeling pain and the view that pigs cannot be killed painlessly are correct. With regard to the former assumption, it is true that we, not being clams ourselves, do not know what clams may or may not feel. Yet we do not know what other humans may or may not feel either. This does not mean that we cannot imagine what they might feel. When it comes to trying to imagine what clams might feel, anatomical, physiological, and behavioural evidence could be used. Anatomically, Dombrowski (2006, p. 225) claims that clams do not have a ‘central nervous system’ and that they ‘only have a cluster of ganglia’. Yet the fact that they may lack a brain must not tempt us into thinking that they lack central control, considering that a clam’s nervous system, though spread out over its body, nevertheless exerts unified control over the clam’s body. And the view that they ‘only have a cluster of ganglia’ should not tempt us into thinking that their nervous systems are far less sophisticated compared to organisms that do possess a central nervous system, given that the ganglia are connected with other parts of the nervous system, as well as with other organs and tissues. For example, the common mussel, also known by the name of *Mytilus edulis*, has three pairs of ganglia, the cerebral ganglia, the pedal ganglia, and the visceral ganglia. These are connected with each other and with other body parts by means of commissures, connectives and

nerves. Physiologically, mussels are known to produce substances that are similar to the dopamines that mammals release to produce analgesic effects when they are in pain (Stefano et al., 1981). Although these observations may be sufficient to undermine Dombrowski's suggestion that the nervous systems of these organisms are relatively simple and might prevent the organism from feeling pain, some might claim that the perception of significant anatomical and physiological dissimilarities with human nervous systems might support this suggestion. Differences in interpretation might stem from different views on how much we might be able to learn from considering anatomical and physiological features. In this respect, the cognitive ethologists Marc Bekoff and Paul Sherman (2004, p. 179) have 'urge(d) abandonment of the anthropocentric view that only big-brained creatures' have developed modes of awareness. More generally, we might learn more about an organism's mental capacities by studying the organism's behaviour than by focusing on anatomical and physiological features. If we stick to the example of the common mussel, we know that they respond very quickly to threats in their environment, for example by closing their shells when they identify dangerous chemicals in the water surrounding them. Of course, none of this need imply that mussels feel pain. Their responses to noxious stimuli could be reflexes that occur without the mussels actually experiencing any pain. Yet the same could be said about any other animal. Since mussels have a nervous system, however, it would seem to be wise to err on the side of caution: Just like with so many other animals we believe to be capable of feeling pain, the ability to feel pain may have survival value for common mussels too. If we therefore accept that clams as well as pigs can feel pain, it must be asked whether this would give them a *prima facie* right to life not possessed by organisms incapable of feeling pain. As Dombrowski (2008) has recognised, some might say that a positive answer to this

question is not required, provided that animals can be killed painlessly. If we assume – in spite of much evidence which suggests that the killing of animals cannot be dissociated from practices that involve the infliction of pain on them - that this is possible, we still must ask whether the painless killing of animals for food is more problematic than the killing of plants for food.

Although I have argued so far that Dombrowski's position can be understood as granting a right to life that should not normally be violated to a range of other animals, Dombrowski's (2006, p. 226; 2001, p. 31) claim that what is problematic about the killing of sentient animals is that they 'have lives that can go well or ill *for them*', that they 'have memories' and 'present experiences', and that 'their lives' and 'future value intensities' would be taken away fails to discriminate animals from plants. This is so because – in a Whiteheadian framework - plants (or at least their cells) as well as animals have 'memories' of a rudimentary sort, understood in terms of a capacity to learn from past experiences or an ability to take into account or 'prehend' one's past. Likewise, plants or plant cells may 'have lives that can go well or ill *for them* ... present experiences (and) future value intensities'. In a different text, the same problem recurs, as Dombrowski (1988, p. 142 note 2) identifies 'Regan's ... point that animals are subjects-of-a-life' with the view that 'they value their own lives'. The question then is how the capacity to value one's own life must be understood. If what is understood is something similar to the human capacity to ponder over the question of whether one's life is meaningful or worthwhile, no other animals may possess such a capacity. If, however, this capacity is understood in terms of an unreflected concern for one's own self-preservation, not only animals but also plants (or at least – for most Whiteheadians – plant cells) can be

said to engage in activities that aim to preserve their lives.⁶ Even Whitehead (1978, p. 176) expressed the view that plants ‘exhibit modes of behaviour towards self-preservation’, in spite of his conviction that plants are democracies (Whitehead, 1933, p. 264). A clearer account of the putative distinction between the moral significance of plants and the moral significance of many kinds of animals is provided where Dombrowski (1988, p. 43) adopts the view that we should distinguish between ‘sentiency 1’ and ‘sentiency 2’, where the former is possessed by all organisms who can have experience, whereas the latter applies to all who possess the capacity to feel pain.⁷ Yet if it is only sentiency (or ‘sentiency 2’) that separates some animals from other organisms, what remains to be answered is the question of why the killing of animals, provided that they are insentient while being killed, should be any more problematic than the killing of plants.

Why should killing animals be any more problematic compared to killing plants?

Whitehead (1930, p. 87) wrote: ‘Value is inherent in actuality itself. To be an actual entity is to have a self-interest. This self-interest is a feeling of self-valuation; it is an emotional tone’. Although this is applied not only to animals, but to all actual entities, it must be asked whether there are any qualitative differences in organisms’ abilities to value either themselves or the fulfillment of their basic needs. On this issue, Clare Palmer (1998, p. 47), a scholar who has written on process thought and environmental

⁶ Incidentally, Dombrowski has conceded in personal communication that plants might not be democracies because there may be ‘some unity of purpose’ in them.

⁷ Dombrowski (2001, p. 30) has also used the concept ‘proto-sentient’ to describe the experiences of plant cells and other actual entities, yet I favour talking about actual entities having ‘experiences’.

ethics, has claimed that ‘one need make no comment on either the experience or preferences of a fish to recognize that, when being landed, a fish is being deprived of one of its basic needs: that of breathing’. The problem with this view is that the same can be said about any organism that has basic needs, including, for example, a plant. Therefore, some distinctions have to be made in different organisms’ capacities to experience themselves and the world around them. On this issue, Bekoff and Sherman (2004) distinguish between self-referencing, self-awareness, and self-consciousness as three different and increasingly more developed ways of self-cognizance. Although self-consciousness or reflective consciousness is reserved for organisms who are able to think about themselves, they argue that self-referencing can occur even among organisms who have no nervous systems, such as plants. This is inspired by the claim that some plants are known to be able to discriminate among others by ‘matching phenotypic characteristics of a target individual against the phenotype of the discriminator’, a process known as self-referent phenotype matching (Bekoff & Sherman, 2004, p. 177). For example, many flowering plants are known to be able to discriminate against their own pollen to avoid self-pollination and to accept pollen from other plants that is neither too similar nor too dissimilar to their own pollen (Hauber & Sherman, 2001, p. 611). Bekoff and Sherman (2004, p. 177) reserve self-awareness, which would consist of an individual’s ability ‘to discriminate between its own body and those of others’, to organisms with nervous systems. Likewise, Helen Steward (2009, p. 225, 227) has claimed that we should impose ‘a dualistic scheme of animal and body, according to which we suppose the animal to be a *possessor* of its body’, on organisms who belong to ‘the animal kingdom’, yet not on a paramecium, claiming that there is no ‘role left for a paramecium-self ... in the control of the paramecium body’. However, in view of what was said previously about the

capacities of plants, it must be questioned on what grounds Bekoff and Sherman claim that plants lack the ability to discriminate between themselves and other things, and on what grounds Steward (2009, p. 227) claims that ‘a paramecium cannot be an agent’ and that its behaviour must therefore be controlled totally ‘by a range of (external) forces’. It must be asked whether these authors might have become victims of what is known as Morgan’s canon, or what Steward refers to as ‘the idea that where lower levels of explanation are available they supplant the higher – that explanations ... at the levels appropriate to neurology, microbiology and perhaps even physics ... can and must replace the agency scheme’, a canon she considers to be an obstacle to considering ‘animate’ animals as agents (Steward, 2009, p. 228). Yet we must ask why (and how) a line should be drawn between ‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’ organisms in the first place and how we should conceive of plants being capable of self-referencing, yet not of self-awareness.

It could be argued that whatever one may think about how to conceive of the ontological difference between plants and animals, the moral difference between plants and animals is just obvious. In this vein, Carol Adams (1994, p. 107) has expressed the view that ‘it may be theoretically asked whether carrots are being exploited, but once we situate ourselves within the lived reality we know as this world, we must surely know or intuit that the eating of a horse, cow, pig, or chicken is different from the eating of a carrot’. I agree with her intuition and have no ambition to leave ‘this world’ just yet. However, although both animals and plants might be animate as well as self-aware, whether there are any ontological grounds for accepting our intuition must still be asked.

My view on this is that animals have more developed senses of self, and therefore stronger capacities for what Whitehead called ‘self-valuation’. This must not

be misunderstood. I do not argue that all animals are conscious of the fact that their lives are important to them.⁸ Although neither plants nor other animals may be capable of reflecting on the value of their lives, animals appear to have greater capacities to exert conscious control over their bodies compared with plants. Or to use the terminology favoured by Charles Birch and John Cobb (1984, p. 145), animals have greater capacities for ‘richness of experience’. These capacities do not disappear when animals are anaesthetised. I believe that my perception that there is a morally relevant distinction between killing an animal and killing a plant stems at least in part from the recognition that animals lose more when their capacities to control themselves are taken away from them by their being killed. Although both animals and plants lose their whole lives by being killed, when the life of an animal is taken, it destroys the life of an individual with a more significant degree of conscious control over his or her own parts. We must ask, however, whether the reason why killing an animal may be more problematic relates only to the belief that animals have greater degrees of conscious control, or also to the belief that they exercise their capacities in ways that aim to preserve their lives. A previous version of this paper included a few remarks that suggested that it was the latter rather than the former belief that did the work. This might have been challenged rightly by an anonymous reviewer, who argued that if the inclination to preserve one’s own life were considered a necessary prerequisite, this would fail to provide a reason that it would be, *prima facie*, morally wrong to kill those who had lost that inclination - for example, those animals who

⁸ This appears to be Dombrowski’s (2001, p. 33) view where he claims that ‘animals (have a) desire to keep on living’. The ‘desire to keep on living’ may be present only among animals who are able to reflect on their own mortality, a capacity that only human animals may possess.

possessed suicidal tendencies. In reply, it could be pointed out that it seems hard to imagine why we should value the lives of animals a great deal if they would be rather indifferent about whether they might lose control over their lives. Rather, the argument could be made that it is precisely because we see them engage in so many activities that contribute toward preserving either their own lives or the lives of significant others that we should attach great moral significance to their lives. Seen in this light, the inclinations of a suicidal animal might be – to use Whitehead’s (1978, p. 102) words – ‘in the province of pathology’. If this is correct, it may be more appropriate for us to question whether we might have contributed to the production of negative feelings within those animals who either feel indifferent or even seek out things that might help them to lose control than to use the existence of these feelings to undermine the view that the morality of killing animals would be related to the belief that animals value life. I hope that this journal will stimulate further discussion on this issue. For now, I would like to conclude that, if we should be more concerned with protecting the interests of those other organisms whose capacities for conscious control (or ‘richness of experience’) are greater than with protecting the interests of other organisms with more limited capacities of awareness, the conclusion follows that, instrumental considerations being equal, the killing of anaesthetised animals for food (when it is not carried out to serve their best interests to save them from a very painful and protracted death) is more problematic than the killing of plants.

In addition, I believe that we should also abstain from eating animal products, such as dairy products, where the eating of such products cannot be dissociated from practices that maintain the exploitation of animals and their being killed (e.g. male chicks and male calves, as well as cows and hens who are no longer productive) when this is not serving their best interests. Although Dombrowski (1988,

p. 47) has approved of diets that include ‘dairy products’, even for those who lack no alternative options, on the basis that they ‘do not necessarily deprive animals of intrinsic value or cause them suffering’, the fact that there is no necessary connection between the eating of dairy products and the infliction of suffering on or deprivation of animals cannot be used to justify the eating of such products in situations where we know or can reasonably expect that, de facto, there is such a connection.⁹ Therefore, I defend the view that people who are able to meet their dietary requirements by eating foodstuffs that are not derived from animals at reasonable social and ecological costs must adopt minimal moral veganism and, consequently, reflect this position in their diets. Minimal moral veganism extends the previously provided definition of minimal moral vegetarianism to the consumption of all animal products.

Hartshorne (1974, p. 205) points at another issue that is relevant in this discussion where he remarks: ‘Other things being equal, one prefers that persons, even animals, should be happy, not only while one can share in their happiness, but afterward as well. Anyone of whom this is not true is insofar a subnormal or irrational human being, and may be a sick one as well’.¹⁰ Although I suspend judgement on the question of what kind of human being someone who does not agree with Hartshorne here might be, I agree with Hartshorne that the desire to make others happy, even if it

⁹ In personal communication, Dombrowski has expressed the view that the choice of whether to eat dairy products (when the use of alternatives would be justifiable) would depend largely on the conditions in which animals are kept on dairy farms. Although this is an important concern, it ignores the question and the reality of what happens to the animals once their productive lives are over.

¹⁰ It is unclear why Hartshorne did not commit to vegetarianism on the basis of this view.

does not affect one's own happiness, seems to be an important aspect of the human experience.¹¹ For those who do not share this view: It can at least be said that since our lives are interwoven with the lives of other animals, by killing animals, we also rob ourselves of opportunities to share in their lives. Whitehead (1985, p. 247) emphasized this point, the fact that rich experiences are born from the internal relations we have with others, and he lamented the fact that many children are acquainted with animals through books and pictures rather than through concrete relationships with them. It is intimately connected with his ideas about beauty, the experience of which, in my view, is thwarted when animals are reduced to instruments.¹² Although not all our interactions with organisms with rich experiences produce rich experiences for us, many do, which may account at least partly for the joys many people experience from keeping companion animals and encountering animals in places where animals roam free, in zoos, and in other places. These experiences are not bolted on to us as additional extras. Each individual is constituted by those experiences, or - in Whitehead's (1930, p. 79) words - 'each unit has in its nature a reference to every other member of the community, so that each unit is a microcosm representing in itself the entire all-inclusive universe'. In spite of many people's desires to eat animal bodies, not many may like to work in slaughterhouses or even to visit them, though they may rejoice in meeting animals in other places. Although many people enjoy visiting the places where the products they enjoy are

¹¹ On the belief that it might be good to suspend judgment, see Deckers, 2007, p. 102-103.

¹² The concept of beauty is central to Whitehead's philosophy. The relevance of this idea as a basis for a Whiteheadian environmental ethic has been argued by Gunter, 2004.

made (e.g. bakeries, whisky distilleries), the slaughterhouse might be an exception. It is a place where not only the lives of animals are terminated, but also our abilities to interact with them. Yet it seems odd that one can really value a product and at the same time be indifferent to or even dislike the production process. I suggest, therefore, that those who like eating the bodies of animals that were ‘processed’ in the slaughterhouse must either learn to like visiting the slaughterhouse or question their liking of eating animal bodies from their dislike of visiting (let alone working in) it.

Apart from the animal losing its life and humans losing the opportunity to engage with the animal, the killing of an animal as such can hardly be called a joyful experience. According to Dombrowski (2006, p. 229; 1988, p. 84), ‘morally reflective people (including meat-eaters!) cringe when they imagine cows being cut down in the abattoir’ since ‘premature and ugly modes of dying ought to be avoided’. I suspend judgment on whether someone who might not have such feelings would be ‘morally reflective’, but I think Dombrowski is right to say that it cannot be ignored that many people associate negative feelings with the killing of animals. This does change the fact that there are circumstances where I believe the killing of other animals must be accepted - for example, in situations where no plant foods can be obtained without incurring very high ecological or social costs.

In an article titled ‘A Christian Rationale for Vegetarianism’, Kristin Johnston Largen (2009, p. 151) has claimed that ‘loving someone means not eating him/her’, which raises the question of whether there are any moral arguments for the case that humans might want to go beyond minimal moral veganism and adopt a *prima facie* moral duty to abstain from eating any animal products, irrespective of whether the animals in question had been killed for food. In relation to this, Cora Diamond (2004, p. 99) has claimed that those who base their vegetarian stance

exclusively on the intentional killing of animals for food ‘should be perfectly happy to eat the unfortunate lamb that has just been hit by a car’, and David DeGrazia (2009, p. 148 note 14) has expressed the view that his ‘position does not oppose ... the consumption of a dead animal one finds in the woods’. This issue has not been addressed by either of the process philosophers whose work I have engaged with here. Although I have argued elsewhere that a positive answer to this question may be required, I would like to conclude here that – in many situations – killing animals is more problematic than killing plants and that minimal moral veganism is therefore required from those who adopt a Whiteheadian worldview (or a worldview inspired by Whitehead’s views) that a moral distinction between plants and animals must be made, a view that is shared by many who adopt different worldviews (Deckers, 2009).

Conclusion

In this paper I evaluated the accounts of two distinguished Whiteheadian scholars on the ethics of vegetarianism. I argued that Hartshorne and Dombrowski have focussed rightly on the point that sentient animals deserve moral priority over plants, yet that insufficient attention has been given, first, to the question of whether animals whose capacity to feel pain has been eliminated still deserve such priority and, second, to how this might be argued. Since plants may not have much awareness of what is valuable to them compared to most (if not all) animals, I argued that we should attribute greater moral significance to the lives of animals. I believe that this conclusion holds true for all who accept the view that many animals are capable of having rich experiences, a point that has been emphasized by Whiteheadian philosophers, yet that is supported by many others. A group of organisms I have ignored here are the fungi, who are now widely accepted to be more closely related to

animals than to plants (Baldauf, 2008). Nevertheless, their capacities for awareness seem rather limited, even if future research could yield evidence that might suggest otherwise. If plants and fungi have more limited capacities to like or dislike what happens to them, it seems appropriate to give priority to the interests of animals. Also, it is not difficult for us to imagine that situations that might result in death are, at least in most situations, disliked by animals, whereas it is much harder to imagine the possibility that potentially lethal encounters might be disliked by plants or fungi. Therefore, I have argued that Whiteheadians as well as others who are persuaded by the need to distinguish animals from other organisms should not support activities that involve the killing of animals for food, unless we face situations where no adequate and secure alternative food sources could be obtained without creating significant social or ecological problems. This puts Whiteheadians, as well as many others, under a moral obligation to adopt minimal moral veganism, a position that extends my definition of minimal moral vegetarianism to the consumption of all animal products. A wide range of other studies suggest that the moral imperative to adopt this stance is even greater when the environmental and health effects of vegan diets are compared with those of other diets, a topic that merits urgent further attention in its own right (Eshel & Martin, 2006; McMichael et al., 2007; Lloyd-Williams et al., 2008; Garnett, 2009; Deckers, 2010; Deckers, 2011).

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the helpful comments I received from an anonymous reviewer and from Jay McDaniel and Daniel Dombrowski on an earlier version of this article.

References

- Adams, C. (1994). *Neither Man Nor Beast. Feminism and the Defense of Animals*. New York: Continuum.
- Baldauf, S. (2008). An Overview of the Phylogeny and Diversity of Eukaryotes. *Journal of Systematics and Evolution*, 46, 263-273.
- Bekoff, M. & Sherman, P. (2004). Reflections on Animal Selves. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 19, 176-180.
- Bermúdez, J. (2003). *Thinking Without Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Birch, C. & Cobb, J. (1984). *The Liberation of Life. From the Cell to the Community*. Second edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deckers, J. (2007). Are Those Who Subscribe to the View that Embryos Are Persons Irrational and Inconsistent? *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 33, 102-106.
- Deckers, J. (2009). Vegetarianism, Sentimental or Ethical? *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 22, 573-597.
- Deckers, J. (2010). Should the consumption of farmed animal products be restricted, and if so, by how much? *Food Policy*, 35, 497-503.
- Deckers, J. (2011). Could some people be wronged by contracting swine flu? A case discussion on the links between the farm animal sector and human disease. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 37, 354-356.
- DeGrazia, D. (2009). Moral Vegetarianism from a Very Broad Basis. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 6, 143-165.
- Diamond, C. (2004). Eating Meat and Eating People. In C. Sunstein and M. Nussbaum (Eds.), *Animal Rights. Current Debates and New Directions* (pp. 93-107). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dombrowski, D. (1984). *The Philosophy of Vegetarianism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

- Dombrowski, D. (1988). *Hartshorne and the Metaphysics of Animal Rights*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dombrowski, D. (1997). *Babies and Beasts: The Argument from Marginal Cases*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Dombrowski, D., Deltete, R. (2000). *A Brief, Catholic Defense of Abortion*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Dombrowski, D. (2001). The Replaceability Argument. *Process Studies*, 30, 22-35.
- Dombrowski, D. (2006). Is the Argument from Marginal Cases Obtuse?, *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 23, 223-232.
- Dombrowski, D. (2008). Whitehead and Nonhuman Animal Rights. In M. Weber and W. Desmond (Eds.), *Handbook of Whiteheadian Process Thought I* (pp. 225-236). Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag.
- Eshel, G., Martin, P. (2006). Diet, Energy, and Global Warming. *Earth Interactions*, 10, 1-17.
- Garnett, T. (2009). Livestock-related Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Impacts and Options for Policy Makers. *Environmental Science and Policy*, 12, 491-503.
- Gunter, P. (2004). A Whiteheadian Aesthetics of Nature: Beauty and the Forest. *Process Studies*, 33, 314-322.
- Hartshorne, C. (1974). Beyond Enlightened Self-interest: A Metaphysics of Ethics. *Ethics*, 84, 201-216.
- Hartshorne, C. (1979). The Rights of the Subhuman World. *Environmental Ethics*, 1, 49-60.
- Hartshorne, C. (1983). *Insights and Oversights of Great Thinkers. An Evaluation of Western Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Hauber, M. & Sherman, P. (2001). Self-referent Phenotype Matching. Theoretical Evidence and Empirical Evidence. *Trends in Neurosciences*, 24, 609-616.
- Interagency Agricultural Projections Committee (2007). *USDA Agricultural Projections to 2016*. Washington: United States Department of Agriculture.
- Johnston Largen, K. (2009). A Christian Rationale for Vegetarianism. *Dialog. A Journal of Theology*, 48, 147-157.
- Liao, S. (forthcoming). The Basis of Human Moral Status. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*.
- Linzey, A. (2009). *Why Animal Suffering Matters: Philosophy, Theology and Practical Ethics*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lloyd-Williams, F., O'Flaherty, M., Mwatsama, M., Birt, C., Ireland, R., Capewell, S. (2008). Estimating the Cardiovascular Mortality Burden Attributable to the European Common Agricultural Policy on Dietary Saturated Fats. *Bulletin of the World Health Organisation*, 7, 535-41.
- McMichael, A., Powles, J., Butler, C., Uauy R. (2007). Food, Livestock Production, Energy, Climate Change, and Health. *Lancet*, 370, 1253-63.
- Mendl, M. & Paul, E. (2008). Do Animals Live in the Present? Current Evidence and Implications for Welfare. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 113, 357-382.
- Narveson, J. (1977). Animal Rights. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 161-178.
- Palmer, C. (1998). *Environmental Ethics and Process Thinking*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Regan, T. (1983). *The Case for Animal Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Regan, T. (2004). *The Case for Animal Rights*. New edition. Berkeley: University of
- Singer, P. (1975). *Animal Liberation*. New York: New York Review of Books.

- Saigusa, T., Tero, A., Nakagaki, T. & Kuramoto, Y. (2008). Amoebae Anticipate Periodic Events. *Physical Review Letters*, 100, 1-4.
- Stefano, G., Hall, B., Makman, M., Dvorkin, B. (1981). Opioid Inhibition of Dopamine Release from Nervous Tissue of *Mytilus edulis* and *Octopus bimaculatus*. *Science*, 213, 928-930.
- Steward, H. (2009). Animal Agency. *Inquiry*, 52, 217-231.
- Sztybel, D. (2006). The Rights of Animal Persons. *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal*, 4, 1-37.
- Whitehead, A. (1930). *Religion in the Making*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitehead, A. (1985). *Science and the Modern World*. London: Free Association Books.