

Being a non-vegetarian? A Moral Deliberation Arguing for Their Justified Positions on Advocating for Animal Welfare

Yue Peng *

Department of Philosophy, University of Washington, Seattle, WA, United States of America

* Corresponding Author Email: yuep3@uw.edu

Abstract. This paper addresses the ethical dilemma non-vegetarians face when advocating for animal welfare, as their stance is often viewed as contradictory due to their consumption of animal products. By utilizing the Ecofeminist framework, the paper argues that non-vegetarians can justify their right to advocate for animal welfare by emphasizing the need for a fully contextualized analysis of their choices. Drawing on Emmertman's and Gaard's ecofeminist perspectives, the paper explores the external challenges non-vegetarians face, such as social and cultural obstacles, and asserts that a single action (eating animal flesh) should not invalidate their contributions to animal welfare. It continues by proposing a "division of labor" approach, suggesting that non-vegetarians can engage in meaningful activism in other areas, such as opposing animal testing and supporting humane farming practices. Ultimately, the paper illustrates how fostering empathy, love, and care among non-vegetarians and vegetarians can lead to a more inclusive and effective animal welfare movement.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Animal welfare, Non-vegetarianism, Ethical dilemma, Moral consideration, Contextualized ethics.

1. Introduction

Non-human animals are suffering from human exploitation with both physical and mental harm. It is yet important to acknowledge that for a long time, a broad segment of society, including philosophers, ethicists, environmentalists, vegetarians, and others, has actively worked towards the betterment of non-human animals. This commitment arises from the shared recognition that animals possess the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, as well as an understanding of the domination, aggression, and deprivation inflicted upon them by humans. However, within the advocacy community for animal welfare, there exists a group that appears somewhat incongruous—the non-vegetarian community—which will be the main target in the rest of my paper.

Non-vegetarians' advocacy for the welfare of non-human animals is often seen as somehow shaky, unreliable, and potentially morally questionable. The consumption of animal flesh in the daily diet of non-vegetarians is thought to both directly and indirectly contribute to animal abuse and animal harm. Such detrimental effects of the non-vegetarian diet, according to their opponents, contradict the goal of championing animal rights, thus significantly undermining the rationality and credibility of non-vegetarians' claims on supporting animal welfare. People may think that someone who eats animal flesh while claiming to be working for the welfare of animals is a hypocrite, and therefore intuitively dismiss non-vegetarians' genuine position in the animal cases from the outset. Consequently, non-vegetarians often find themselves entangled in an ethical dilemma when advocating for animal issues. To give an example of myself, as non-vegetarian, I once engaged in a conversation with a friend about boycotting ivory sales and protecting wild elephants. My friend then questioned the coherence of my advocacy, highlighting that my daily consumption of animal meat actually undermines the impact of my appeals for animal welfare. My friend's comments do confirm the existence of widely held skepticism about non-vegetarians' position on animal issues that I have argued above. Hence, serious consideration and scrutiny of questions about the legitimacy of non-vegetarians' positions on behalf of animal welfare are thus necessary.

Having stated the current moral dilemma that non-vegetarians are facing, in the following paper, I will argue that it is feasible for non-vegetarians to justify their rights and position to advocate for

animal welfare, by appealing to the ecofeminism framework. Ecofeminism framework is an ethical framework that examines the relationship between environmental concerns and the subordination of women. It takes an approach to recognize how patriarchal systems contribute to the exploitation and degradation of both women and nature, by the “analysis of the structure and functioning of oppression itself” (Gaard 2002, 127). In this paper, ecofeminism is used as a moral guide to arguing for justifying non-vegetarian’s position for animal welfare through drawing on the following the viewpoint of: advocating a comprehensive contextualization of moral issues and avoiding highly abstract points of view in moral analysis, the “inclusivity” in the thinking mode advocated by eco-feminism, as well as the ethical claims of love and care that derive from its core.

To be specific, I will begin by using Emmerman's application of the ecofeminist framework as a reference to argue against arbitrarily dismissing non-vegetarians' fundamental stance or right to advocate for animal welfare based solely on a single act (in this case, non-vegetarians eating animal flesh), because there are complex external difficulties that exist for them (Emmerman 2019, 87). I will also refer to Gaard's opposition to the “Truncated Narrative” here (Gaard 2002, 133). Furthermore, by embracing ecofeminism's inclusive thinking on animal ethics, I will offer a division of labor approach to argue that non-vegetarians' position on animal issues can be justified from the point of view of affirming their contribution to animal welfare *elsewhere*. Finally, I will conclude my argument by arguing that in justifying non-vegetarians' positions on speaking for the welfare of animals we are gradually creating a foundation of empathy and respect firstly between vegetarian and non-vegetarian that can extend further to all beings, including animals.

2. Organization of the Text

2.1. Section Headings

2.1.1. Fully Contextualize the Obstacles Faced by Non-Vegetarians— In Order to Understanding their Genuine Position on Advocating for Animal Welfare

Before I formally begin my argument, I need to first clearly define the non-vegetarianism community that I am defending in this paper. It is important to emphasize that this argument is built upon the shared understanding that animals possess inherent rights and deserve moral consideration; and it is launched with the common goal of trying to solve the ethical problems of animals and contribute to the well-being of animals. That is being said, this paper is a defense of those non-vegetarians who share this shared understanding and common goals, rather than those who do not consider animal welfare a moral concern in the first place. Therefore, for instance, individuals who advocate for animal protection solely as a means to enhance their public image would not fall within the category of non-vegetarians I am defending. Actually, such clarification also foreshadows the primary focal point of my forthcoming argument—that non-vegetarians can employ the ethical framework of ecofeminism to demonstrate that they, alongside other animal activists, share a similar cognitive orientation toward animal ethics amidst the intricacies of the situation. In the following paragraphs, I will expound on the concept of fully contextualized narrative and elucidate how ecofeminism plays a pivotal role in comprehending the genuine position of non-vegetarians.

In the article “*What's Love Got to do With It? An Ecofeminist Approach to Inter-Animal and Intra-Cultural Conflicts of Interest*”, Karen Emmerman highlights the tension between animals' moral consider ability and the moral value tied to certain so-called “nonbasic” human interests (Emmerman 2019, 78). By adopting ecofeminism, Emmerman argues that we cannot arbitrarily generalize these so-called non-basic human interests as *Not overriding* the essential interest of animals, because in fact some of our non-basic interests have a higher moral purpose or value attached to them, especially in a cultural context—that is being said, we should advocate for a nuanced understanding of human interests by giving them a *fully contextualized account* (Emmerman 2019, 79). By using the example of the “Bowl of Chicken Soup”, she points out that refusing her grandma’s chicken soup can alter the nature of the relationship with her grandmother and may even lead to resentment and fractured

relationships within the family. Therefore, Emmerman proposes an ecofeminist approach regarding the inter-animal conflicts of interest that aims to consider the full complexity of human interests while recognizing strong obligations to animals (Emmerman 2019, 80).

Emmerman's points aptly reveals the importance of using fully contextualized accounts to analyze moral situations as advocated by ecofeminism - it enables us to receive more nuanced yet critical information for moral judgment that would otherwise be ignored and dismissed (Emmerman 2019, 80). As a result, this approach helps us to form a more accurate picture in our moral analysis. In my view, this approach of fully contextualized narrative should also be used to determine whether non-vegetarianism has goals, attitudes, and positions toward animals that are consistent with those of other animal protection groups. Ecofeminism as a highly contextualized and "dynamic moral direction" ethical framework, advocates that we should no longer analyze moral issues in a highly simplified way (Gaard 2002, 134). Thus, I am arguing that we should refrain from making arbitrary assumptions that non-vegetarians cannot genuinely advocate for animal welfare due to a single action of their consumption of animal flesh. Instead, we ought to examine the position of these non-vegetarians within the complexities of their social and interpersonal relationships. As Gaard points out, "Our moral conduct cannot be understood apart from the context (or moral soil) in which it grows" (Gaard 2002, 133).

In fact, some non-vegetarians are indeed facing multiple difficulties in the aspects of social logistics and cultural relationships that will prevent them from adopting a vegetarian diet or may make it extremely difficult to adopt it. To be specific, limited availability and accessibility in certain regions can make vegetarian options be scarce or difficult to find, especially in remote areas or when dining out. Even in less extreme places, vegetarian diet options are likely to be completely unconsidered by social logistics: For example, growing up in a city in northern China, I never saw a school cafeteria with a separate window for vegetarian meals, and I hardly saw a supermarket with bento for vegan customers or nutritional products to balance vegetarian diets. All of this can make it challenging for non-vegetarians to switch to a vegetarian diet. Besides, there are cultural obstacles that tied to symbolic and religious significance, which make non-vegetarian difficult to adopt a vegetarian diet. For example, In certain cultures and religions, specific animal products hold symbolic or religious significance. It is worth noting that these obstacles from the outside world often inevitably lead to internal conflicts in non-vegetarians, which makes non-vegetarians even fall into a situation of self-doubt.

Now I have explained the obstacles and difficulties that non-vegetarians often face, both from outside and even from themselves, in promoting the welfare of animals. Given my understanding of ecofeminism's Fully contextualizing view, I argue that I strongly disagree that one should arbitrarily deny non-vegetarians the fundamental position or right to speak out for the well-being of animals simply by the result of a single act (in this case, non-vegetarians eating animal flesh). Because through ecofeminism's comprehensive narrative approach, we will discover the complex external difficulties that non-vegetarians are facing, and even the internal conflicts and contradictions of their own wills.

At this point, one may argue that the above argument has overlooked the inherent and valid concerns regarding the contradictions between non-vegetarian practices and advocating for animal welfare. Ecofeminism does value a comprehensive understanding of ethical issues, but it also emphasizes the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and exploitation, including the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature (which could be reduced to the discussion of non-human animals here in this paper) ---It recognizes that oppressive systems are interconnected and mutually reinforce each other. Hence, one may argue that the presumed objection raised in the above argument against non-vegetarians speaking out for animal welfare is actually *not* about arbitrarily denying them the right to advocate for animal well-being—Instead, it raises concerns about the inherent contradiction in their actions. Just as Deane W. Curtin argued that “what we will count as food is a choice that reflects who we are morally (Curtin 1992, 124). Non-vegetarians, by consuming animal flesh, directly contribute to the exploitation and harm of animals. Such contradiction raises questions about the sincerity and effectiveness of their advocacy for animal welfare. It is not a matter

of one single act, but rather an acknowledgment of the ongoing choices and actions that perpetuate animal exploitation.

However, it is important to clarify that the argument presented did NOT ignore the inherent contradiction that arises between actions taken to protect animal welfare and the consumption of animal flesh, as the objection suggested. On the contrary, such contradiction is explicitly acknowledged and recognized. Even more, I chose to highlight the sense of ambivalence and internal conflict experienced by non-vegetarians themselves because it can actually shed light on the sincere stand of them for the voice of animals. The acknowledgment of this internal conflict reflects a genuine desire shared by non-vegetarians and other animal advocates to promote animal welfare. It is important to notice that my argument chose to underscore the fact that their aspirations are hindered by external complexities and challenges, which deserve consideration and understanding. Besides, the objection states that non-vegetarians directly contribute to the exploitation and harm of animals through their consumption of animal flesh. While this is true, my original argument does not dispute this fact. Instead, it seeks to explore the complexities and challenges faced by non-vegetarians in reconciling their actions with their advocacy for animal welfare.

2.1.2. The Division of Labor Approach

Now having arguing that non-vegetarians' fundamental position speak out for the well-being of animals cannot be arbitrarily denied because of the single action, I turn my focus to arguing that they can indeed make a substantial contribution to the cause of animal welfare. Human actions to promote animal welfare can be reasonably "divided.". That is to say, non-vegetarians can also contribute to animal ethical issues in *other* areas, such as animal testing or animal confinement. To be more specific, they can defend animals by condemning the use of their bodies in hunting, trapping, headdress ornamentation, furs, and scientific research (Gaard 2002, 119). The point that I am making here is that non-vegetarians have the capacity to make significant contributions to animal protection in various areas where they can actively engage. For example, my roommate's mother is a non-vegetarian but also a clothing distributor. My roommate told me that her mother has been resisting the sale of clothing and accessories made from animal fur. Even in the most sensitive area of animal food in this paper, non-vegetarians can confidently weigh in — for example, they can advocate for a more humane and ecological approach to farming, and oppose cruel animal food production lines. Therefore, be showing that non-vegetarians can also make a tangible and positive impact on animal welfare in *other* areas, I argued that non-vegetarians can justify their rights and position in advocating for animal welfare.

2.1.3. The Relationship of Love and Care to be Transmitted to Animals

One of the central arguments of ecofeminism is the recognition of the profound significance of the moral agent's relationship with others. As Warren contends, our identity as humans is shaped by the historical, social, and relational contexts we inhabit, including our interactions with nonhuman nature (Warren 1990, 142). Building upon the previously established notions of non-vegetarians' genuine commitment to animal welfare and their ability to make tangible contributions, I hold that acknowledging the legitimacy of non-vegetarians' advocacy for animal welfare can foster a supportive attitude and the recognition and validation of non-vegetarian contributions serve as expressions of love and care that will eventually benefit animals-issues solving. By extending this inclusive acceptance of love, initially within the human community itself (specifically, non-vegetarians in this paper), we are bringing in more forces that would otherwise have been excluded from the study of animal ethics. Moreover, the caring and loving relationships forged between non-vegetarians and other communities in their advocacy for animal welfare can subsequently extend to human-animal relationships, thereby offering insights to solve animal ethic issues overall. To explain, let us assume that if the next time I advocate against ivory as a non-vegetarian and instead of being questioned by my vegetarian friends about my daily diet, I find that they start to support and believe in my sincere stand for animals, I will definitely become more confident, determined and motivated to take action for the cause of animal protection. More importantly, I will learn this feeling of being

loved, cared for, respected and supported, and this acquisition of rich positive emotions will even be applied in the context of cross-species interactions: for example, they will help me in my next analysis of animal ethics, and I will be more empathetic with animals. On the other hand, other communities, such as my vegetarian friend, will also benefit from supporting non-vegetarians like me, because he will cultivate the ability of fostering inclusive perspectives, love, care, and respect. These positive emotional connections will enhance their ability to address future animal ethical problems.

At this point, One might argue that our energy should be directed towards advocating directly for animals instead of focusing on how non-vegetarians form loving and caring relationships. Animals require direct attention, advocacy, and tailored protections to address their unique needs and rights. While creating a compassionate human society can positively impact animal treatment, animals cannot solely rely on indirect transmission of care. Similarly, the suggestion of generating a caring relationship within human society with the expectation of extending it to human-animal relationships overlooks the urgency and specific actions required to address animal exploitation and oppression. Shifting the focus primarily to human society risks diluting the necessary actions to address animal rights.

However, my argument does not ignore the unique challenges and urgent needs of animals, but rather emphasizes the positive impact of creating a compassionate and equitable relationship to non-vegetarians on the treatment of animals. It recognizes the interconnected issues in both non-vegetarian and animals, and aims to foster empathy and respect for them as connected. The focus on generating a caring and loving relationship within non-vegetarians and other human communities does not disregard the urgency of direct actions to protect animals. Instead, I argue that societal shifts in perspectives and values can actually have potential lead to greater responsibility towards animals and prioritize their rights and well-being.

3. Summary

In this paper, I offered the moral dilemma faced by non-vegetarians in advocating for animal welfare where their positions on animal issues are often dismissed as inherently contradictory. By employing the ethical framework of ecofeminism, I have argued that non-vegetarians can justify their rights and positions in advocating for animal welfare, through fully contextualizing the obstacles they face, recognizing their capacity for contribution in various areas, and promoting love and care in relationships in which both non-vegetarians and other animal advocates can actively work towards the betterment of animal welfare. In conclusion, by recognizing and supporting the justified positions and efforts of non-vegetarians, we can eventually foster a sense of progress and inclusivity, encouraging individuals to embark on a journey towards more compassionate and loving choices.

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