Chapter 9
New Omnivorism

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New omnivorism is a dietary ethic that has arisen in response to animal protection (a better term for what is often referred to as animal rights, given that not all proponents of radically improving the treatment of animals employ the notion of rights, e.g., Singer, 1990). Where proponents of animal protection have traditionally invoked animal rights, anti-speciesism, and related concepts to condemn eating animal products, new omnivores invoke these same concepts to *justify* eating animals.

New omnivorist views differ across a range of dimensions, including the particular animal products they defend consuming. Common to all is that they are defenses of omnivorism that appeal to premises that have traditionally been distinctive of animal protection theory. This feature distinguishes them from other defenses of omnivorism, which typically challenge protectionism at a philosophical level.

The Rise of New Omnivorism

Beginning in the 1970s, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and other philosophers argued for major upward re-evaluations of the moral status of animals. Although they disagreed among themselves as to which ethical theory was correct, they converged on the view that eating animals was morally unacceptable. Singer devoted a chapter of *Animal Liberation* to "Becoming a Vegetarian," while Regan in *The Case for Animal Rights* included a section titled "Why Vegetarianism is Obligatory." Eventually, both philosophers endorsed veganism (Singer, 2020; Regan 2004).

In the 1980s and 1990s, protectionist arguments were subject to sustained criticism by philosophers such as R. G. Frey (1980, 1983), Peter Carruthers (1992), and

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P. T. Leahy (1991). While these first-wave critics mounted their challenges in the name of different philosophical theories, such as utilitiarianism (Frey), contractualism (Carruthers), and Wittgensteinianism (Leahy), they shared the view that the philosophy of animal protection was misguided. They generally argued that the common sense of society regarding animals at the time of writing was by and large defensible when it was not already *too* sensitive to the moral claims of animals. Carruthers, for example, saw his project as taking place in the wake of a "recent explosion of interest in animal rights," a philosophical development he regarded as pernicious (Carruthers, 1992, p. xi). "Just as Nero fiddled while Rome burned, many in the West agonise over the fate of seal pups and cormorants while human beings elsewhere starve or are enslaved" (p. xi).

Animal protection's early critics in short typically rejected both its conceptual claims and its action-guiding recommendations. It was common for their works to criticize core protectionist notions, such as the idea that animals can have welfare interests or that species membership is morally irrelevant (anti-speceisism). Similarly, where protectionists challenged factory farming, hunting, and other practices, these practices were, with occasional exceptions, defended by their first-wave critics. Despite the disagreement between the two camps, they shared the view that the case for animal protection and not eating animal products rise and fall together.

Around the turn of the century, first-wave critiques of animal protection began to give way to a different response. This response, which has come to be called *new omnivorism*, sought not to challenge protectionism at the level of first principles but to separate such principles from the conclusion that eating animals is impermissible. Steven Davis (2003) offers a paradigmatic example of such a view.[1] What makes Davis's argument noteworthy is that it takes as its point of departure Regan's own argument for animal rights. Davis's twist is to argue that a diet that contains free-range beef is more consistent with Regan's theory than the purely plant-based diet Regan has long advocated. Davis arrives at this conclusion by pointing out that mice and other field animals are killed during crop cultivation. He posits that more animals are actually killed in the production of a plant-based diet than in the production of a diet that combines plants and free-range beef. In Davis's hands, such empirical claims are combined with a canonical theory of animal protection to entail a dietary ethic that, contrary to what protection theorists have long argued, ranks a meatless diet second-best to one containing meat.

Davis's argument marks the beginning of the new omnivorist era. The difference between this era and the preceding one that was dominated by first-wave critics is not that critiques of animal protection as theory disappeared or that there were no

[1] Davis says that the aspect of Regan's theory that his argument draws on is the Least Harm Principle (LHP). The LHP, however, is a consequentialist principle that Regan mentions only to reject (301-3). Regan is committed to reducing the number of instances in which rights are overridden, but it arises out of his commitment to the Minimize Overriding Principle, which is not consequentialist (305-7). The minimize overriding principle states that when we must choose between overriding the rights of the few vs overriding the rights of the many, all else being equal we should override the rights of the few. I am grateful to Angus Taylor for drawing this issue with Davis's construal of Regan to my attention.

immanent critics of animal protection before Davis. It is rather that responses such as Davis's, which seeks to divorce animal protection premises from veganism or even vegetarianism, began to achieve a new prominence in the animal ethics debate.

This shift is evident in how Davis's appeal to field-animal mortalities has subsequently inspired many other authors to present protectionist arguments for consuming a wide range of animal products beyond free-range beef. Such proposals include free-range meat made from sheep, goats, and kangaroos, roadkill, insects, or any animal product that one has not paid for, such as a ham sandwich someone left in your refrigerator or a cheeseburger that a restaurant has thrown out (so-called freegan meat) (Schedler 2005; Archer 2011; Bruckner 2016; Fischer 2016; Milburn 2024; Milburn and Fischer 2021). These arguments for omnivorism draw on many different moral principles. A philosophical feature they share however is that in order to refute them, a critic cannot simply rehearse Regan's argument for animal rights, as Regan's central philosophical claims are easily accommodated (explicitly so in the case of Davis, while more than one subsequent proponent of his argument from field mortalities does so implicitly).[2]

Although Davis has been an especially influential voice for new omnivorism, other versions of new omnivorism cite Singer's (1990) theory of animal liberation. In particular, many critics draw attention to Singer's utilitarianism, which posits that all else equal, a world is better to the degree that it contains more utility. Singer for many years endorsed preference utilitarianism, which equates utility with the satisfaction of preferences, but recently has endorsed hedonistic utilitarianism, which equates utility with happiness (Singer, 2016). Either way, a world with more animals leading pleasant lives is morally better than one without. It has become common for critics (e.g. Hare, 1999; Schedler, 2005) to invoke this aspect of utilitiarianism, found in both its preference and hedonistic versions, to argue that consuming animals who are raised humanely is not wrong, as doing so increases overall utility. When Singer's argument is construed this way it does not entail vegetarianism, let alone veganism. Although it rules out factory farming, which renders animals miserable, the consumption of animals who have lived decent lives and are slaughtered painlessly would be morally acceptable.

The argument is a version of the so-called Logic of the Larder, which gives moral weight to the existence of animals leading pleasant lives. Although there exist non-utilitarian versions of the Larder argument (e.g., McMahan, 2017), it is frequently grounded in some form of utilitarianism. Authors who reconstruct Singer in light of the Logic of the Larder often point to Temple Grandin's system of humane slaughter as the real-world result of putting Singer's philosophy into practice (Francione, 2008: 55; Callicott, 2016: 48). Grandin is famous for designing slaughterhouses that minimize the animals' stress and pain (Lamey, 2019b). Where Singer himself has defended Grandin's system as a non-ideal compromise and an achievable improvement on traditional slaughter (Singer, 2000: 172–6), these critics argue that a system

[2] One possible vegan response to Davis might be to consume only plants that are not harvested industrially, for example, plants one grows in one's backyard, thereby avoiding field deaths. Few of us, however, avoid buying commercially harvested food entirely, and this solution is unlike to scale up to a society-wide response.

of humane slaughter such as Grandin's is in fact the ideal outcome of Singer's theory, as it does not involve the painful methods involved in traditional slaughter (Grandin, 2010).

In addition to the field-animal-mortality argument and the Logic of the Larder, new omnivorism finds a third source of support in the work of so-called "plant neorobiologists" (Brenner et al., 2007; Gagliano et at., 2014). This controversial group of botanists holds that the signaling and related capabilities of plants are more sophisticated than has traditionally been recognized. Philosophers sympathetic to plant neurobiology have gone so far as to argue that plants are actually sentient (Hall, 2011; Marder, 2013). Michael Marder, for example, argues that plants can explore and pursue resources in changing environments, assess environmental dangers or stressors, and update the information they possess about their surroundings. Such abilities, he suggests make it "possible to infer plant sentience" (2012, p. 1368). In this way, Marder and other proponents of plant sentience employ a concept crucial to protection theory, which has long been concerned with elucidating the moral standing of sentient beings. The fact that animals are sentient and plants are not is a bedrock feature of the protectionist case for granting moral standing to animals and withholding it from plants. The plant neurobiology view however "casts doubts upon the utility of the traditional rigid division made between plants and animals" (Pelizzon & Gagliano, 2015, p. 5). The empirical claims of plant neurobiology are now cited as grounds not to draw dietary or other distinctions between animals and plants (Hall, 2011). Plant-based diets will rather be drained of any moral superiority over omnivorous ones, again in a manner that does not dispute the protectionist case for the moral standing of animals.

A final challenge to the view that animal protection entails not eating meat is represented by in vitro or, as it is increasingly called, cultured meat. Such meat is created by taking a cell from an animal and growing it in a laboratory into edible flesh (Jacobs, 2015). Cultured meat is thus identical to the traditional kind, but for the fact that it is not carved out of the carcass of an animal. Current production methods involve the use of fetal bovine serum, a growth hormone taken from the fetuses of cows that are pregnant at slaughter. In this way, in vitro meat continues to involve harm to animals. Scientists involved in the creation of cultured meat, however, are already working to develop plant-based alternatives (Carrington, 2020). Given the realistic possibility of such a development, the long-term future of in vitro meat raises the possibility of a new form of meat that involves no harm to animals. As such it represents yet another form of meat-eating that is arguably consistent with arguments for animal protection. Insofar as cultured meat holds out the possibility of meat that does not involve harming animals, it does not seem at odds with animal protection.

The preceding four examples do not exhaust every possible challenge to the link between animal protection philosophy and veganism. They rather illustrate what is distinctive of new omnivorism in general, each form of which seeks to defend meat eating in a manner that does not involve challenging core premises of protection theory. The first three challenges noted above, respectively, grant that we should minimize rights violations as they concern animals, maximize animal utility, and

respect the moral significance of sentience. Any of these three commitments in turn might be invoked to classify the consumption of cultured meat as morally akin to eating plants (a classification that does not require endorsing the controversial empirical claims of plant neurobiology (Alpi et al., 2007)). In addition, most arguments for animal protection, whether rooted in rights theory, utilitarianism, or other normative frameworks, have long endorsed anti-speciesism, which is the view that species membership as such is not morally significant. Given the centrality of anti-speciesism to animal protection, it bears noting none of the four of the challenges noted above presuppose speciesism. In this way, they again are consistent with one of the central philosophical claims of animal protection theory. And again, they raise the possibility that rejecting speciesism does not entail rejecting meat-eating, any more than embracing animal rights does.

Some forms of new omnivorism, such as Davis's early formulation, defend eating one particular type of meat. Others, such as those that invoke the Logic of the Larder, justify eating any animal product that derives from an animal that was well cared for while it lived. Arguments for new omnivorism also diverge in whether they characterize consuming a given animal product as merely permissible or actually obligatory on protectionist grounds. Arguments that appear to field-animal mortalities, for example, often suggest that we are obliged to eat one or more animal products, as doing so reduces the overall number of harms to animals when collateral deaths due to crop cultivation are taken into account. Defenses of eating cultured meat, on the other hand, can be characterized as either permissible or obligatory, depending on whether they also invoke field-animal mortalities (to date most defenses have characterized such consumption as merely permissible). The Logic of the Larder can be formulated so as to render meat-eating either permissible or obligatory, depending on the underlying theory of population ethics the argument draws on, which is a notoriously complex domain of moral theory (see below). Arguments from plant neurobiology are similarly compatible with permissible or obligatory renderings, which hinge on theoretical details beyond the appeal to plant neurobiology as such.

A final way that new omnivorist arguments differ among themselves concerns the two broad purposes to which they have generally been put. Sometimes new omnivorist proposals are earnestly put forward as new dietary ethics. In other instances, critics are not articulating their own dietary code but merely seeking to show that an argument for veganism does not go through. Davis (2003), for example, believed that a mostly plant-based diet that also included some free-range beef was the most ethical (as he once told me in an interview). Bruckner by contrast, in a discussion of the ethics of eating roadkill, writes, 'my thesis is not that we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill. My thesis is that the usual arguments for vegetarianism imply that we are obligated to collect and consume roadkill" (Bruckner, 2016, p. 43). Davis agreed with the animal protection framework his account drew on while Bruckner does not. Philosophically speaking, however, this difference is immaterial, as both arguments dispute veganism's status as the dietary outcome of animal protection. New omnivorism is perhaps best understood as a classification of arguments, rather than advocates, as they raise questions intellectually honest vegans cannot help but take seriously.

The term new omnivorism originates in Lamey (2019a), which is generally critical of new omnivorist proposals. Although Fischer (2019) does not employ the label, it is otherwise a book-length defence of new omnivorism. In their recent anthology *New Omnivorism and Strict Veganism: Critical Perspectives,* Abbate and Bobier (2024) bring together arguments for and against different versions of new omnivorism. New omnivorism is also employed as a category by Milburn and Bobier (2022), who emphasize its novelty as an approach to food and animal ethics. One reason for the increasing popularity of the term may be that its usage does not suggest endorsement or rejection of any of the diets in question. For this reason, it is now used by both proponents of traditional veganism such as Abbate, and defenders of meat eating, such as Abbate's co-editor of the 2024 volume, Bobier. In this way, new omnivorism differs from "carnism" and other recent labels for philosophies of food that presuppose controversial ethical claims regarding diet (Joy, 2020).

The rise of new omnivorism as a dietary categorization has been accompanied by a debate over how widely it should be defined. Milburn and Bobier (2022) argued for a narrow understanding of the term, one that would not include all four of the challenges to traditional veganism outlined above. On their account, dietary proposals only count as new omnivorist when they are animated by a commitment to minimizing harm to animals in food production. One their view, Davis's (2003) proposal, and the many others that draw on field-animal fatalities count as new omnivorism. The Logic of the Larder, on the other hand, does not. Although Lamey (2019a) characterized the Larder argument as new omnivorist, Milburn and Bobier (2022) noted that his discussion of the argument engages with a version put forward by Leslie Stephen (1896) in the nineteenth century, which in Milburn and Bobier's (2022) summary, contended that "(future, hypothetical) pigs hav[e] an interest in the continued consumption of bacon, for without it, they would not come into being" (p. 3). On their account, the fact that the central claim of the Larder argument had already been made in the nineteenth century disqualifies it from being classified as a new form of omnivorism.

Similarly, Milburn and Bobier reject plant neurobiology as posing a challenge to traditional veganism on the grounds that it "does not obviously relate to food. For example, Michael Marder's work on 'plant neurobiology' (see Marder, 2013) could be deployed as a challenge to animal ethicists, but Marder is not obviously concerned with the ethics of eating" (p. 3). When it comes to cultivated meat, finally, Miburn and Bobier allow that a new omnivore case consuming it "over plant-based protein sources is not hard to envision—but will depend upon empirical information currently lacking." (p. 7). Of the four challenges canvassed above then, only the first is accepted as unambiguously new omnivorist according to Milburn and Bobier, although the fourth may eventually qualify as well, depending on further empirical inquiry.

Milburn and Bobier do not indicate what empirical questions may prevent cultured meat from posing a challenge to veganism's traditional status as a purely plant-based diet. This makes their agnosticism regarding the status of such meat difficult to evaluate. Their grounds for disputing that plant neurobiology poses a challenge to traditional veganism concern the intentions of one researcher, Marder.

Other commentators, however, take plant neurobiology to "hit hard at the foundations of veganism" (Aloi, 2011; p. 93). This is unsurprising, given that veganism's traditional justification for consuming plants is that, unlike farmed animals, they are not sentient. The case for characterizing plant neurobiology as posing a new omnivorist challenge to traditional veganism, therefore, is supported by the existence of views such as Aloi's (2011) and Hall's (2011) (a view that, in my experience, defenders of meat eating often express in conversation). Even if it were not already predictable that plant neurobiology would be invoked by veganism's critics this way, vegans themselves would still face the question of what to say in response to a school of thought that seems to deny animals a higher moral standing than plants.

Milburn and Bobier are correct that Lamey's original outline of new omnivorism does cite Stephen's (1896) nineteenth century account. Given this, we might wonder about the appropriateness of classifying the logic of the larder as a form of "new" omnivorism. Even if the central idea is not new, however, it bears noting that there has been a marked increase in the frequency with which the argument has appeared since Stephen (1896) wrote. Particularly since Parfit's (1984) influential discussion of population ethics, arguments to the effect that humane animal agriculture has the potential to increase the number of happy animals in existence have been widely made (Hare, 1999: 240; Scruton, 2000: 100; 60; Schedler, 2005: 502–3; Callicott, 2016: 59; cf. Matheny & Chan, 2005; Višak, 2013: 129–33).[3] Stephen's passing reference to the Logic of the Larder was not philosophically influential, and by the time the modern debate over animal protection began in the 1970s, Stephen's (1896) remark, as well as Henry Salt's critical response (1914), had long been forgotten.[4] Interest in it now is largely due to the contemporary debate over animal protection. Thus, even if Stephen did entirely anticipate modern formulations of the Larder argument, the term "new omnivorism" would still have value as a historical label, denoting the current period of much greater contemporary interest in the Logic of the Larder and other defenses of meat eating on ostensibly pro-animal grounds.

Stephen's formulation, however, arguably does not anticipate the strongest versions of the Logic of the Larder. The relevant passage from Stephen states:

> Many of the lower species became subordinate parts of the social organism—that is to say, of the new equilibrium which has been established. There is so far a reciprocal advantage. The sheep that is preserved with a view for mutton gets the advantage, though he is not kept with a view to his own advantage. Of all the arguments for Vegetarianism, none is so weak as the argument from humanity. The pig has a stronger interest than any one in the demand for bacon. If all the world were Jewish, there would be no pigs at all. He has to pay for his privileges by an early death; but he makes a good bargain of it (p. 236).

Stephen here refers to the "advantage" or "privilege" that animals enjoy by being raised for food. Advantage and privilege are comparative concepts: they denote a positive feature that obtains in one state of affairs but not another. The advantage for

[3] To my knowledge, the first writer to mention the logic of the larder during the modern debate over the ethical status of animals was Robert Nozick, albeit in the context of defending a traditional conception of animal rights and vegetarianism rather than new omnivorism (1974, p. 38).

[4] Salt (1914) coined the term "The Logic of the Larder."

the animal appears to be that they exist. It has often been argued in the contemporary debate over the Logic of the Larder that animals (or humans) cannot benefit from coming into existence: for had they not existed, there would be no individual who is denied the advantage in question (Parfit, 1984). The most sophisticated contemporary versions of the Larder argument avoid this problem, by positing that happy or satisfied animals existing is a better state of affairs, but not necessarily better for the animals themselves. It is rather better in the impersonal sense that there is more of something of value, that is, utility. If so, then Stephen is perhaps best categorized as a proto-new omnivorist, whose work foreshadows, without entirely anticipating, the most sophisticated versions of the argument made today.

Evaluating New Omnivorism

New omnivore arguments have given rise to lively debate in the animal ethics literature. Rather than attempt to resolve that debate, it will suffice here to outline the points of controversy that the challenges mentioned above have given rise to.

Davis's (2003) influential argument has attracted criticism of three distinct kinds. The first is empirical. Davis offered a model of how many animals are killed in different forms of agriculture that suggested that twice as many field animals are killed per hectare of crop production than are killed per hectare of free-range pasture. His calculations, however, assume that the two different agricultural practices produce an equal amount of food per hectare. This is disputed by Matheny (2003), who argued that crop production requires one-tenth the hectares as grass-fed cattle do to produce the same amount of protein. Lamey (2007) also argued that Davis misreads the empirical studies that support his estimate of the number of animals killed by plant cultivation. In one study, Davis includes mice who are eaten by owls after harvest removes their crop cover, while in the other Davis inadvertently doubles the number of rats killed in sugarcane cultivation by assuming a one-year rather than two-year growing season. The upshot of both empirical critiques is that plant cultivation kills fewer animals than free-range beef farming.

A separate criticism of Davis's approach raises an ethical objection. It is that Davis draws no distinction between deliberate and accidental killing. While this approach is endorsed by some forms of consequentialism, Davis's argument assumes Regan's non-consequentialist, rights-based framework. In addition, Lamey (2019a) argued that a version of the doctrine of double effect (DDE) extends to animals. According to the most cogent version of the DDE, harmful direct agency, such as deliberately killing a cow in a slaughterhouse, is worse than harmful indirect agency, such as accidentally killing a mouse during harvest. If so, then even if crop cultivation killed the same number of animals as free-range beef production, or even slightly more, it would still not be as wrong as deliberate slaughter. This is a problem for Davis's approach, insofar as it assumes that the only factor that matters is the overall number of animals killed.

A third and final critique of Davis straddles the line between empirical and philosophical concerns. It draws attention to the complexity of estimating agriculture's

effects on the life and death of field animals (Fischer & Lamey, 2018). More than one difficult philosophical question needs to be answered in order to generate such an estimate. Consider again the owls who eat mice after their crop cover is removed. Should an estimate of the effect of harvest on animals include the positive outcome for owls and other predators, who are now better able to feed themselves? Answering this question requires getting clear on what the relevant effects of harvest are. Similarly, there is some evidence that the introduction of agriculture in a given region increases the wild animal population. As an examination of the introduction of cereal harvest in central Argentina noted, "some rodent species benefitted from the changes because of increased food availability and decreased predator abundance" (Cavia et al., 2005, p. 95). Should calculations of field-animal mortality weigh such deaths against the increased number of wild animal lives they sustain? These are but two of the questions that need to be answered in order to generate an accurate estimate of the outcome of common agricultural practices. Yet, to date, estimates of field-animal mortalities have not taken heed of them and have instead tended to assume that the only relevant consideration is how many animals are killed by wheat threshers and other farm machinery.

These three critiques of Davis (2003) pose a problem for many, but not all, forms of new omnivorism inspired by his work. Bruckner's (2016) argument that the case for vegetarianism entails an obligation to eat roadkill, for example, is affected little, if at all, as it does not presume that Davis's calculations are correct. Bruckner's more cautious premise rather is that the number of animals killed in crop cultivation is higher than zero. Given that road-killed animals are already dead, consuming their corpses when they are intact and edible will necessarily cause fewer animal deaths overall. Yet while Bruckner's ingenious analysis escapes many of the problems faced by Davis, it has come in for criticisms of its own. Abbate (2019), for example, argued that Bruckner's analysis presupposes a variety of unsupported claims, including that everyone has access to roadkill, that roadkill would go to waste if human beings do not eat it, and that it is impossible to cultivate plant foods without harming animals.[5]

The Logic of the Larder, as noted above, raises complex issues in population ethics. Its commitment to maximizing animal utility has counterintuitive implications. In the case of members of our own species, we do not normally think that potential parents have an obligation to conceive as many happy offspring as they can. The Logic of the Larder seems to call this piece of everyday morality into question. It also seems to result in the so-called repugnant conclusion. This is the conclusion that, as Parfit put it, "for any possible population of at least ten billion people, all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence, if other things are equal, would be better even though its members have lives that are barely worth living" (1984, p. 388). The thought that a world with huge numbers of people living barely acceptable lives would be better than one with a smaller number of happier people is difficult to accept.

[5] See also Lamey (2017) for an argument that Bruckner's proposal gives people an incentive to drive over other travel options, in the hope of coming across some edible roadkill, and so is likely to increase the number of animals hit by cars.

To say that the Logic of the Larder has counter-intuitive implications, however, is not to refute it. The question is whether there is a different theory regarding the ethics of bringing new beings into existence with fewer such implications. Some writers, for example, have attempted to avoid the Larder argument's counterintuitive implications by arguing that when we are evaluating scenarios in which new beings, human or animal, could be created, we need only grant weight to the individuals who already exist.[6] So a couple deliberating over whether to conceive a child, for example, need to give weight only to their own interests, not those of the child they might conceive. As Singer (1993) noted, however, this approach entails that it would be perfectly fine for the parents to deliberately conceive a child whom they know in advance would live a life of agony for two years before dying. This also is hard to accept.

In response to these difficulties, one view recently expressed in the animal ethics literature is that a condition of an action being morally good is that failing to make it would be bad for someone (Lamey, 2019a). On this approach, failing to refrain from conceiving a miserable child or animal would be bad for that child or animal, so deliberately not producing such a being meets the condition. Failing to conceivie a happy child or animal, by contrast, does not meet the condition, as instances of non-conception do not result in the existence of anyone who experiences anything bad. This view, although it has its own counterintuitive implications, may at least allow us to deny that we have an obligation to maximize the number of happy humans or animals in existence, while still recognizing an obligation not to create miserable animals or human beings. But whatever view of the ethics of procreation we wind up affirming, it is likely to be at odds with some aspect of common sense. As Clark Wolf (2004) noted, "There is no normative theory of population choice that does not have seriously counterintuitive implications" (p. 61).

Arguments for new omnivorism rooted in plant neurobiology have faced both scientific and philosophical criticism. In 2007, mainstream plant scientists at 33 different research institutions released a public letter characterizing plant neurobiology as being based on "superficial analogies and questionable extrapolations" (Alpi et al., 2007, p. 136). One such extrapolation concerns the claim that plant signaling is as complex as the communication enabled by animal neural systems. According to mainstream botanists and neuroscientists, even if the most revisionary accounts of plant signaling prove correct, the communication systems of animals will still be exponentially faster and more sophisticated. In a similar vein, philosophical defenders of plant neurobiology commonly characterize plants as sentient, but define sentience so as not to include all of its central features. In *Plants as Persons*, for example, "the idea of plant intelligence has little to do with consciousness" (Hall, 2011, p. 145). But if plants are not conscious they are not sentient in the sense animal protection theory has long been concerned with, and there is no challenge to veganism after all.

[6] Singer (1993) provides an influential discussion of the prior existence view without endorsing it.

An argument that has been made against eating cultured meat is that doing so furthers the ideology of animal edibility. To be edible is to occupy a political rather than natural category: It is socially approved for such a being to be killed and eaten without risk of social or criminal sanction. Rebekah Sinclair (2016) makes a version of this objection to eating plant-based meats that would also rule out eating cultured meat. According to Sinclair (2016) and other critics, the best response to the harm done to food animals is to reject outright the notion that they can be eaten. Not only do plant-based meats fail to do this, she argues, but they "perpetuate a framework of intelligibility" (p. 239) according to which animals are edible. Even more so than plant-based meats, cultured meat mimics traditional meat, and so by the same logic depends on a preexisting framework that sanctions eating animal bodies.

Call this criticism of cultured meat the edibility objection. In response, defenders of cultivated meat have questioned the notion of intelligibility it rests on (Lamey, 2019a). Sinclair (2016) argued that because in vitro meat is intelligible by reference to traditionally derived meat, it must perpetuate the ideology of traditional omnivorism. This, however, may overlook how a concept can be intelligible by reference to a traditional meaning that it nonetheless escapes. For example, there is a long history of terms that were once insults being embraced as positive labels. Quaker. Tory. Suffragette. Queer. The first time these terms were used in a positive way, they were rendered intelligible by their history as insults. But this avenue of intelligibility did nothing to change the fact that their new usage had a different meaning. This is possible, arguably, because being intelligible by reference to a familiar meaning is not the same as being *defined* by that meaning. In the case of in vitro meat, the meaning that is called into question is the concept of meat itself. It evokes the notion of meat as animal flesh, defenders argue, precisely in order to overcome it.

New omnivorist challenges to traditional veganism now occupy a place of prominence in the ethical literature on animals and food that would have been hard to imagine when the philosophical debate over animal protection began in the 1970s. The rise of new omnivorism has coincided with a noticeable decline in the number of philosophers willing to defend factory farming. Indeed, many new omnivorist proposals would require their own radical reforms to animal agriculture as it currently exists. Davis's (2003) influential proposal, for example, would entail no longer consuming any meat other than free-range beef. Defenders of traditional veganism are obliged to resist this and many other dietary conclusions that new omnivorists make. Yet new omnivorism to date, although it contests animal protection theory's traditional dietary recommendations, cedes the philosophical terrain to animal protection. In this way, its rise to prominence marks an important shift in the animal debate, one that protectionist vegans are likely to regard as an improvement on the debate when it was first joined by more ambitious critics, who sought to challenge protection theory outright. Indeed, if sweeping arguments against animal protection are increasingly giving way to critiques that employ protection theory's own premises, this may well be a sign that such premises are difficult, perhaps even impossible, to refute.[7]

[7] Several paragraphs in this article are adapted from Lamey (2019a).

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