12

EATING MEAT AS A MORALLY PERMISSIBLE MORAL MISTAKE

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A Puzzle about Accommodation

Many people who are vegetarians for moral reasons nevertheless accommodate the buying and eating of meat in many ways. They go to certain restaurants in deference to their friends' meat-eating preferences; they split restaurant checks, subsidizing the purchase of meat; and they allow money they share with their spouses to be spent on meat. This behavior is puzzling. If someone is a moral vegetarian—that is, a vegetarian for moral reasons—then it seems that the person must believe that buying and eating meat is morally wrong. But if someone believes that a practice is morally wrong, it seems she should also believe that accommodating and supporting that practice is morally wrong: Many moral vegetarians seem not to believe this. In this chapter, I will offer a solution to this puzzle: I will offer a possible explanation of why people who are vegetarians for moral reasons nevertheless do accommodate the buying and eating of meat. I will offer an explanation of this accommodation behavior on which it is reasonable and it makes sense. I will argue that moral vegetarians may see the buying and eating of meat as a *morally permissible moral mistake*. They may see the practice as one that one should not engage in, for moral reasons, but that is not morally wrong. Thus, they may see their accommodation of the practice as accommodation of behavior that is not morally wrong, while it is still the case that they are *moral* vegetarians who see themselves as *required* to be vegetarians.[1]

I will begin my discussion with an examination of the ethics of buying and eating meat. In order to know what moral positions might lie behind the accommodation practices of moral vegetarians, we must directly examine the morality of the buying and eating of meat. Later, I will explain the notion of a morally permissible moral mistake in more detail.

The Morality of the Farming of Meat

Is it morally wrong to buy or eat meat? One natural thought is that it is morally wrong to buy meat because one is *contributing to* a process that is morally wrong—namely, the farming of meat. Some people think that factory farming of meat is morally wrong because it causes great animal suffering. I will assume that that is so. Nevertheless, some people think that so-called "humane farming" is not morally wrong, because it does not cause great animal suffering. So-called "humane farming" involves raising animals in good conditions and then painlessly killing them in the prime of their lives. (Let's suppose that there is some actual farming like this.) If "humane farming" is morally permissible, then it would seem that buying and eating meat from humane farms would also be morally permissible. So it would not be true that buying or eating meat is morally wrong in all cases.

While "humane farming" is morally better than factory farming, I will argue that "humane farming" is nonetheless morally wrong. In particular, if we believe that factory farming is morally wrong *because we have strong reasons not to cause animal suffering*, then we should believe that "humane farming" is morally wrong as well.

If factory farming is morally wrong because we have strong reasons not to cause animal suffering, then that is so because:

> Animals have moral status.
> Factory farming significantly harms animals.
> Any action that significantly harms something with moral status is thereby pro tanto morally wrong.
> There is no sufficient justification available to justify factory farming in the face of its pro tanto moral wrongness.

In my view, these four claims provide the correct explanation of why factory farming is morally wrong. However, they also imply that "humane farming" is morally wrong, because the following is also true:

> Painlessly killing an animal in the prime of its life significantly harms the animal.

"Humane farming" painlessly kills animals in the prime of their lives, significantly harming them. This makes the practice pro tanto morally wrong. No sufficient justification is available to justify the practice, so the practice is all things considered morally wrong. That is my argument.

If someone wanted to deny that "humane farming" is morally wrong while acknowledging that factory farming is morally wrong, she would probably challenge my claim that painlessly killing an animal in the prime of its life significantly harms the animal. I will mention two ways this claim might be challenged, and briefly state my responses to these objections.

First, someone might claim that killing an animal is not *harming* the animal but is rather *depriving* the animal of a *benefit*; and that it is not pro tanto morally wrong to deprive a being of a benefit. I agree that there is a moral asymmetry between harming and depriving of benefit. However, we can see in the case of persons that killing is harming even though what makes killing bad for someone is that the person is deprived of future life. Furthermore, while some deprivations of benefit are not also harmings, when a person deprives another being of a benefit by actively injuring her, this is always a case of harming.

Second, someone might claim that animals' futures have no value to those animals in their present states, because animals lack the right psychological connections to their futures. Note that we are considering this objection from someone who grants my claim that it is pro tanto morally wrong to cause animals to suffer. The problem for this objection arises from considering cases in which an animal has a medical condition which does not bother it now but will cause it to die prematurely several years from now, depriving it of five years of life. It is clearly morally permissible to cause the animal to suffer now in a surgery that will significantly extend its life. The explanation of the permissibility of the surgery is that although an animal currently has an interest in not suffering now, it also currently has an interest in living a longer rather than a shorter life; some current suffering can be morally justified by the extension of the animal's life. This shows that animals do have an interest in surviving, and so that they are harmed by their deaths.

In this section, I have argued that if factory farming is wrong (as I assume it is), then so-called "humane farming" is wrong too.[2]

The Morality of Buying and Eating Meat—Difference-Making

I have argued that all farming of animals for meat is morally wrong, even so-called "humane farming". What are the implications for the morality of buying and eating meat?

One naïve thought is the following. Supply is sensitive to demand. Suppose I buy a chicken at the supermarket today. That is an increase in demand for chicken (as compared to my refraining from buying the chicken today), so it leads to an increase in supply: one more chicken is slaughtered as a result of my purchase. This thought is naïve for several reasons. First, food production is not sensitive to very small differences in demand; second, that there will be some waste is expected and built into the process. It is very unlikely that whether I buy a chicken today will have any effect at all on how many chickens are killed, because it is very unlikely that whether I buy a chicken today will have any effect on how many chickens my supermarket orders. My supermarket is used to small fluctuations in the demand for chicken, and is used to having some waste. If my not buying a chicken today were to result in an extra chicken that went unsold, my supermarket would probably not order fewer chickens. So it is not very likely

to be true that how many chickens are slaughtered counterfactually depends on my purchase today of one chicken. My purchase is unlikely to make a difference.

Nevertheless, Shelly Kagan has argued, difference-making considerations may still provide compelling moral reasons against my purchase.[3] For my supermarket is not wholly insensitive to demand. The supermarket would order more chickens if chicken demand greatly increased, and it would order fewer chickens if chicken demand greatly decreased. This means (Kagan argues) that there must be some threshold such that if that many chickens are purchased, my supermarket will order a certain number of chickens, but if fewer chickens had been purchased, my supermarket would order fewer chickens. Suppose that if such a threshold is just missed, my supermarket would order N fewer chickens. Kagan claims that I should take my chance that my chicken purchase is one purchase among a group of purchases that exactly meet that threshold as not very likely, but as $1/N$. Assuming that chicken production is perfectly sensitive to demand from supermarkets, it turns out that the expected animal cost of my purchase of one chicken is $(1/N) \times (N \text{ chickens}) = \text{one chicken}$. Although it is very unlikely that any animal deaths depend on whether I buy a chicken today, there is a small chance that many animal deaths do depend on whether I buy a chicken today: there is a small chance that my purchase makes a big difference.

Kagan's argument is seductive, but a serious worry has been raised by Mark Bryant Budolfson. Budolfson emphasizes two things: there is a great deal of waste in the production of meat, and there are many stages of the process from production to consumer. Waste occurs at each stage. This makes it incredibly unlikely that one's chicken purchase today has any effect at all on actual meat production. Not only is it incredibly unlikely, but there is also no reason to think that if one's purchase did have an effect, it would be a big effect. So difference-making considerations give us only very weak reasons to refrain from meat purchases. The expected animal cost of my purchase of a chicken today is $1/M \times (P \text{ chickens})$, where M is very high and P is low. (Budolfson's point does not depend on the phenomenon of *waste* in particular, but rather on the more general facts that the supply chain is long and that there is *noise* in the information transfers along the way. The information that there has been one fewer meat purchase will not transmit to the other end of the long supply chain, given that there are many steps along the way and the information transfer from step to step is noisy.)[4]

One might react to Budolfson's objection by making a different argument against the moral permissibility of eating meat. One might employ a deontological moral principle that takes *directly causing* the death of a being with moral status to be pro tanto wrong, such that even *taking a chance* at directly causing such a death is pro tanto wrong; and one might hold that simply getting pleasure from eating meat is not the kind of thing that could justify such an action. According to this new argument, it does not matter that the chance is low, because we are not Utilitarians—this is simply the kind of risk we should not take.

This deontological argument is interesting and I discuss it more elsewhere.[5] But here is a response that could be offered. Ordinary human life often involves

taking very small chances of directly causing deaths of people. For example, driving to the corner store involves taking such a chance. But this does not make driving to the corner store pro tanto wrong; I do not need a particularly morally weighty justification to do so.

Largely on the basis of Budolfson's objection, I am unsure whether Kagan's argument works. (Though I am not sure that it fails.) For the purposes of this chapter, I will assume that Kagan's argument does fail. Suppose there is no difference-making basis for a strong moral reason against buying and eating meat. Are there nevertheless compelling moral reasons against buying and eating meat?[6]

The Morality of Buying and Eating Meat—Beyond Difference-Making

For the rest of my discussion, I will assume that acts of buying and eating meat make no difference to the amount of suffering in the world (and that we should not have a small credence that such an act will make a huge difference). Nevertheless, sometimes actions are morally wrong (or have moral reasons against them) because they involve *jointly causing* a bad outcome. More specifically:

(i) Sometimes it is morally wrong to participate as a joint cause in an act of harming.

Suppose twelve-year-old Jimmy sees some bullies harassing little Timmy on the playground. Jimmy can see the lay of the land: he can't save Timmy, but he can make it less likely that he himself will ever be bullied by joining in on the bullying; Timmy is so upset that he isn't really watching who's talking and it won't make any difference to Timmy whether Jimmy chimes in too. Here Jimmy's bullying won't make things worse for Timmy, and would make things better for Jimmy. But it would be morally wrong for Jimmy to participate in the bullying of Timmy.

Here is another way that one might face a moral requirement, though one's action will not make a difference:

(ii) Sometimes it is morally wrong to fail to participate as a joint cause in a morally good act or outcome.

Suppose there is a great injustice in one's town or country, and many brave people are protesting, risking injury and imprisonment to stand against the state. It may be wrong to stand idly by and not participate in the protest, even though there are costs to oneself and one more person at the protest will not make any difference.

It is hard to say when it is morally wrong to participate as a joint cause in an act of harming. It is hard to say when it is morally wrong to fail to participate

as a joint cause in a morally good act or outcome. But the following two claims do seem to be true:

> If acting in a particular way would be participating as a joint cause in an act of harming, then there is a moral reason against acting in that way.
> If acting in a particular way would be participating as a joint cause in a morally good act or outcome, then there is a moral reason to act in that way.[7]

These claims have implications for the morality of buying and eating meat. When one buys meat, one's action is one of many actions that together cause the production of meat. While there are hard questions (discussed earlier) about whether individual meat purchases ever make a difference to whether meat production occurs, it is clear that the sum total of meat purchases makes a difference to whether meat production occurs: if meat purchases ceased, meat production would cease as well.

Let me now offer some thoughts about vegetarianism. When a person refuses to eat meat, she is participating in a social movement, whether she intends to be doing so or not. There is now—and there has been for quite some time—a social movement of people who refuse to eat meat out of concern for animal welfare. This movement raises awareness of several things: that much animal production involves animal cruelty, that meat production involves animal killing, that it is possible to eat healthily without consuming meat, that some people refuse to eat meat for these reasons, and that there is consumer demand for vegetarian options. This movement has had a huge effect in the United States. Vegetarian options are now more widely available. So-called "humanely farmed" meat is advertised. Efforts to improve the experiences of farmed animals are being made.

The vegetarian movement is doing a lot of moral good. It is addressing an urgent moral problem—our treatment of the animals we raise for food. There is thereby a moral reason to be a vegetarian and to participate in this movement. Some people participate more actively than others, by arguing and urging people to be vegetarian, or simply by saying "I'm a vegetarian for moral reasons." But even those who do not offer their reasons for being vegetarian are participating in the movement.

So we have isolated two moral reasons to be vegetarian: that by buying and eating meat, one is participating as a joint cause in practices that cause animal suffering and/or animal death, and that by buying and eating meat, one is failing to participate in the vegetarian movement, which is doing a lot of moral good.

There is a third reason against buying and eating meat, which arises from consideration of the following:

> (iii) Sometimes it is morally wrong to *benefit* from another being's suffering, though one's behavior will not affect whether any future suffering occurs.

For example, suppose that Sam discovers that his favorite movie, which is a coming-of-age story about some fourteen-year-olds, was made in circumstances in which the children were kidnapped and forced to work in the movie, though they were scared and miserable. It would be morally wrong for Sam to continue to enjoy the movie, even though the story itself is unchanged by facts about the circumstances of its creation. Allowing oneself to benefit in a case like this has expressive significance; it may seem to express approval or acceptance of the harming of the people in question. Allowing oneself to benefit seems to involve taking up a problematic moral relationship with the people who suffered. While it is not always morally wrong to benefit from another being's suffering, the fact that one's action would involve benefiting from another being's suffering does seem to provide a reason against the action.[8]

Some people may think that these three reasons make it *morally wrong* to buy and eat meat; they think that being vegetarian is one of the instances that makes true either (i), (ii), or (iii)—or more than one of these claims.

But that may not be right. Perhaps the situation is as follows: there are these three morally weighty reasons not to buy or eat meat. These reasons are compelling. Indeed, all things considered, one should not buy or eat meat, for these moral reasons. But buying or eating meat is not morally wrong. On this view, buying or eating meat is a *morally permissible moral mistake*.

Morally Permissible Moral Mistakes

It might seem that it is incoherent to suppose that there are morally permissible moral mistakes (behaviors that one should not engage in, for moral reasons, that are not morally wrong). There could not be any if the following principle were a necessary universal truth:

> * If S should not φ, all things considered, and the reasons against φing that make it the case that S should not φ are moral reasons, then S's φing is *morally wrong*.

This principle may seem plausible, but it is false. To see that it is false, I will offer two kinds of counterexamples, one involving the supererogatory, and one involving the suberogatory.

Some actions are supererogatory: they are above and beyond the moral call of duty. These actions are morally good to do, but not morally required. Each of us has many supererogatory actions available to us every day. Many of these actions are not such that we should perform them, all things considered. Some of them are such that we *should not* perform them, all things considered. For example, when I am rushing to Fenway Park for a rare chance to see my beloved Red Sox in person, that is not the time to stop and write a kind note to an old teacher I remember fondly from years before. That would be a nice thing to do, and it

would mean a lot to her, but it would be a mistake to do that *now*. (I will use "mistake" to refer to any way of behaving that is such that the agent in question *should not* behave that way, all things considered (in light of all her reasons).[9])

Some supererogatory actions that we could perform are *not* such that we *should* perform them, all things considered (in light of all of our reasons); surely most fall into this category. Some supererogatory actions are such that we *should not* perform them, all things considered (in light of all of our reasons); they are mistakes. But some supererogatory actions are such that we *should* perform them, all things considered (in light of all of our reasons). Here is an example:

> I'm about twenty years out of high school. My friend Moggie and I are chatting about our old English teacher Sally Gilbert, and how much she meant to us. She moved away long ago but we know that another teacher, still in town, would know how to reach her. "We should write her a letter, telling her what she meant to us. We should write it right now, before we get distracted by other things and forget. She would appreciate hearing from us," Moggie says. And she is right.

Sending a note of appreciation to our long-ago teacher would be a nice thing to do, but it isn't morally required. Nevertheless, Moggie speaks truly when she says that we *should* do it. In light of all of our reasons, that is the thing we should do right now. What is there to be said in favor of doing it? That it would make Sally happy, and that it would express our gratitude. These are *moral* considerations.

This example isn't special. Often, when one performs a supererogatory action, one doesn't just think "this would be a nice thing to do, so it's available as something I might reasonably do now," but one thinks "I should do this, even though I don't *have to* do it, even though it wouldn't be morally wrong not to"—and often, one is right about that.

Plugging in *failing to perform the supererogatory action in question* (such as writing the note to Sally) for φ, these cases yield counterexamples to principle (*). This failure is a way of behaving that one should not engage in, for moral reasons, but it is not morally wrong to behave that way.

Now let's turn to the suberogatory.[10] It is more controversial whether this category of action exists, but I think it does. Suberogatory actions are actions that are morally bad to do, but not morally wrong to do. Consider your asking someone to repay a debt that is already overdue when you could get by reasonably well without the money but she will have a considerably harder time. Cases like this have sometimes been offered as cases of a "right to do wrong," cases in which one has a moral entitlement to do what is nevertheless morally wrong. I think some cases of calling in a debt like this are indeed morally wrong, particularly when the effect on the person who owes would be very bad. But consider a case in which the effect on her wouldn't be *very bad*. I think we can think of cases

where we would say that one *shouldn't* call the debt in, all things considered, *for moral reasons*, though it would not be morally wrong to do so. In such a case, calling in the debt is a morally permissible moral mistake, and it is a counterexample to principle (*).

I've now argued that there can be morally permissible moral mistakes. Here is a further terminological clarification:

> S's φing is a mistake
> = (def) S should not φ, all things considered
>
> S's φing is a moral mistake
> = (def) S should not φ, all things considered, and the reasons against φing that win out to make it the case that S should not φ are moral reasons
>
> S's φing is a morally permissible moral mistake
> = (def) S should not φ, all things considered, and the reasons against φing that win out to make it the case that S should not φ are moral reasons; and S's φing is not morally wrong[11]

Note that my discussion here does not refer to what one "morally should not do" (whatever that means), nor do I refer to "what one should not do, just considering moral reasons." Rather, I am talking about what one should not do, all things considered; that is, in light of all of one's reasons. Sometimes one should not perform an action, all things considered, and the particular reasons against it that win out against performing it are *moral reasons*; such an option is a *moral mistake*. The judgment *that one should not perform it* takes into account all of one's reasons, including non-moral reasons; we then focus on the reasons against doing it that settle that one should not do it; if these are moral reasons, but the action is not morally wrong, then the action is a *morally permissible moral mistake*.

Every morally wrong action is a *mistake*, but some mistakes are not morally wrong. For example, if I have a strong hand in poker, it is a mistake to fold my hand, but it is not morally wrong. Every morally wrong action is a *moral mistake*, but not all moral mistakes are morally wrong, as I have just argued: some moral mistakes are morally permissible. Suberogatory actions (if there are any) are moral mistakes that are morally permissible. And because some supererogatory acts *should* be performed, some failures to act supererogatorily are moral mistakes that are morally permissible. (Other failures to act supererogatorily are not mistakes.)

In the next section, I will offer a solution to the puzzle about accommodation with which we started.

Explaining Accommodation

Why do most vegetarians, even those who are vegetarian for moral reasons, accommodate meat eating in many ways? Perhaps they believe—perhaps only

implicitly—that while everyone *should* be vegetarian (all things considered, in light of all their reasons), it is not morally wrong to buy and eat meat. This hypothesis would explain accommodation behavior. It is generally morally wrong to aid people in doing morally wrong things, but on this view accommodation of the buying and eating of meat is not doing that. On this view, buying and eating meat is a *morally permissible moral mistake*: it is something that one should not do, all things considered, for moral reasons, but it is not morally wrong. The appropriate way of behaving regarding morally permissible moral mistakes is quite different from the appropriate way of behaving regarding morally wrong actions. Consider a situation in which you thought someone *should*, all things considered, perform a particular supererogatory action; if she chose not to do so, it would seem morally unproblematic to support her in seeing that choice through. Even a suberogatory action, when it is within someone's rights, does not call for the same reactions that a morally wrong action does; for example, one might want to signal one's disapproval while nevertheless accommodating the agent's choice. A vegetarian who accommodates walks this line: she reveals and expresses her own view of how we should eat, while accommodating the meat-eating choices of others.

Let's consider two different cases of accommodation of others' behavior to bring out the ways that it may be morally wrong to accommodate morally wrong behavior, while it may not be morally wrong to accommodate morally permissible moral mistakes. Here are two background situations in which we will consider accommodation:

> Loan: Andrea loaned her coworker Betsy $100 a while ago. Right now, Andrea doesn't really need the money, but it would be very burdensome on Betsy to pay her back at this moment (as opposed to one month from now). Although Andrea knows all of this, she decides to ask Betsy to pay her back now.
>
> Sale: Carrie sold a painting for $500 to her coworker Dana recently, with the agreement that Dana would pay her today. Dana misremembered the price and left $600 in Carrie's office. Carrie decides to keep the extra $100 and not correct Dana's memory.

Let's suppose that Betsy's situation is not so dire that it is morally wrong for Andrea to demand repayment, but that all things considered, Andrea should not demand repayment right now: doing so is a morally permissible moral mistake. Suppose that the four characters in these two stories work together, and that you are another coworker at the same company. Suppose further that you are in a position to accommodate or thwart Andrea's and Carrie's actions in various ways.

First, suppose that Andrea asks you to say to Betsy, "Andrea would like you to pay her the money you owe her today." And suppose that Carrie asks you to say to Dana, "Carrie says thank you for paying her for the painting." Is it morally

permissible for you to accommodate their activities in these ways? It is morally permissible for you to pass on Andrea's message. Although she shouldn't demand repayment, she is entitled to do so. But it is not morally permissible for you to pass on Carrie's message. Doing so falsely implicates that Dana did not overpay, and makes you complicit in Carrie's keeping of Dana's extra $100. This comparison illustrates that it may be morally permissible to help someone to commit a morally permissible moral mistake, while it may be morally wrong to help someone to do something morally wrong.

Second, suppose that you and Betsy are standing in the hall outside Andrea's empty office and you see the $100 that Betsy paid sitting on Andrea's desk. (Andrea was handed the money by Betsy earlier in the day.) Betsy says, "It's going to be hard to make ends meet this month now that I've repaid that debt." Next, suppose that you and Dana are standing in the hall outside Carrie's empty office, with the $600 on the desk, and Dana says, "It's going to be hard to make ends meet this month now that I've paid for the painting." Is it morally permissible for you to pick up the $100 from Andrea's desk and urge Betsy to take back her repayment of the debt—in effect, taking Andrea's money without Andrea's permission? No, it is not morally permissible for you to urge Betsy to take the money. Is it morally permissible for you to pick up $100 from Carrie's desk and urge Dana to take it, saying "You overpaid; you only owed $500." Yes, this is morally permissible; indeed, it is arguably morally required. This comparison shows that it may be morally wrong to thwart someone's commission of a morally permissible moral mistake (it is morally wrong to thwart Andrea's being repaid by urging Betsy to take her money back), while it may be morally permissible (even morally required) to thwart someone's doing something morally wrong (Carrie's keeping the extra $100).

The two cases we have been discussing differ in important ways. Is that a weakness of the discussion? It is not. Rather, the point is that the features of an action that make the action morally wrong will also tend to make it morally wrong to accommodate the action. And the features of an action that make it morally permissible will also tend to make accommodation of the action morally permissible, even if the agent shouldn't be engaging in the action.

Now let's compare two more cases:

> Eddie regularly buys and eats meat.
> Frankie runs an illegal dogfighting business.

Suppose that you know both Eddie and Frankie, that you socialize with them, and that you are in a position to help them with their projects or to thwart their projects in various ways. Suppose you are a vegetarian for moral reasons. As we've already discussed, there are many ways that vegetarians often accommodate meat eaters. You may allow Eddie's preferences to determine where you eat together; you may split the bill with him, subsidizing his meat purchases; and

you may refrain from knocking his food off his plate or changing his order while he's in the bathroom. Is it morally wrong to behave in these accommodating ways? It is not, we might say, though it would be if animal suffering or animal lives depended on how you act. By contrast, suppose that you could accommodate Frankie's business in various ways, by driving his dogs from one location to another sometimes, by accepting payment on his behalf from some of his bettors, and by refraining from turning him in to the police. Is it morally wrong to engage in these accommodating behaviors? Yes, we might say, both because *he* is making a difference to whether these animals suffer, and because *you* are making a difference to whether these animals suffer. Again, these two cases differ in important ways. It is the facts in virtue of which running the dogfighting is wrong that make it morally wrong to accommodate it. And it is the facts in virtue of which eating meat is not morally wrong that will explain why accommodating it is morally permissible, even if eating meat is something that Eddie should not do, for moral reasons.

Here is my solution to the puzzle of accommodation:

> Those who are vegetarians for moral reasons may be implicitly committed to the following view: that the moral reasons against eating meat make it something one *should not* do, but do not make it morally wrong; that is, that eating meat is a morally permissible moral mistake. It is in general morally permissible to accommodate others' morally permissible moral mistakes, while it is not in general morally permissible to accommodate others' morally wrong actions.

I have furthermore suggested that although meat production—even so-called "humane farming"—is morally wrong, it is *plausible* that eating meat is a morally permissible moral mistake, and that it is morally permissible to accommodate it. So, the implicit belief I am suggesting that vegetarians may have is a plausible moral view.

Note that I am not making the stronger moral claim that it is always morally permissible to accommodate others' morally permissible moral mistakes.

Nor am I making the stronger moral claim that it is always morally wrong to accommodate others' morally wrong actions. There are cases in which agents have a moral "right to do wrong," and in which we may be morally *obligated* to accommodate their wrongful actions. Here are two examples. First, it is morally wrong to have an extramarital affair when one has agreed with one's spouse to have a monogamous marriage. Still, it may be morally wrong for a hotel clerk to refuse a hotel room to two people because he knows that they would be acting morally wrongly in this way. Second, suppose it is morally wrong to read lots of sexist princess stories to a three-year-old girl.[12] Still, it may be morally wrong for a bookstore clerk to refuse to sell ten such books to a parent of a girl. Note that these are special cases, in which the clerks have particular roles, and in which the

clerks have particular powers. By contrast, if the parents told their friends that they want their daughter to receive particular (in fact sexist) princess books for her birthday, the friends would not be morally obligated to comply, and indeed might be morally obligated not to comply.

Objections and Clarification

In this section I will discuss some objections; this will enable me to clarify my arguments and claims.

> Objection: I framed the puzzle as *how could it be morally permissible to accommodate meat eating if one should not eat meat, and this is so for moral reasons?* I have argued that eating meat may be a morally permissible moral mistake and that it is often morally permissible to accommodate others' morally permissible moral mistakes. But the real puzzle is: if eating meat is a mistake (if one should not eat meat), how could *accommodation* not also be a mistake? While I have proposed that it is not *morally wrong* to accommodate meat eating, I have not yet addressed the question of whether it is a morally permissible moral mistake to accommodate meat eating.

As this objection points out, our puzzle is about *making sense of* the behavior of moral vegetarians—offering a story on which moral vegetarians are being rational, and indeed may be making the right choices, both in being vegetarian and in accommodating meat eating. I believe that my story can do this: it can explain not just how accommodation of meat eating may be *morally permissible* but also how it may be *the behavior one should engage in*. I am indeed offering the following claim: often, all things considered, one *should* accommodate others' morally permissible moral mistakes. I think this claim seems quite plausible, once we see that (as I have argued) it is often morally permissible to accommodate others' morally permissible moral mistakes. There are a great many reasons *to accommodate*: it is less psychologically taxing, it does less damage to one's friendships, and it is more respectful, for example. But these reasons are ill-suited to justify doing something that is otherwise *morally wrong*; they are well-suited to justify one choice among many morally permissible choices.[13] Note also that vegetarians accommodate to different degrees; what needs explanation is not the strong claim that all vegetarians should always accommodate meat eating in every way, but rather the weaker claim that sometimes accommodating meat eating is not a mistake.

> Objection: I argued that it is morally wrong to engage in meat production, whether on factory farms or on so-called "humane farms". Later in the chapter, I argued that it is often morally wrong to *accommodate* morally wrong behavior (as opposed to morally permissible moral mistakes). But

> meat eating accommodates meat production. Wouldn't that make it morally wrong?[14]

There are many different ways that some behavior may be seen to *accommodate* some other behavior. One thing that is striking about the way that vegetarians accommodate meat eating is that they refrain from behavior that could *make a difference* to whether particular instances of meat eating occur. Vegetarians engage in what we might think of as *strong accommodation* (accommodation that makes a difference) as well as *weak accommodation* (accommodation that doesn't make a difference). My view is that there are moral reasons against both strong and weak accommodation of morally wrong behavior. Earlier, I examined the reasons that confront meat eaters. I argued that there is a compelling case to be made that there are no significant *difference-making* reasons against buying and eating meat, which means that if buying and eating meat is properly seen as *accommodation* of meat production, it is only *weak accommodation*. I developed a view on which there are weighty reasons against buying and eating meat—indeed, these reasons settle that one *should not* buy or eat meat—but eating meat is not morally wrong. My view is that either buying and eating meat is not a way of *accommodating* meat production, or if it is a way of accommodating meat production, it is a morally permissible form of accommodation (though still a moral mistake) because it is only weak accommodation.

> Objection: Is the view that eating meat is a morally permissible moral mistake just the view that, in each eating situation, the *morally best choice* is to refrain from eating meat? If so, that's not very significant. We already knew that animal pain mattered *somewhat* and we knew that it was *morally better* to refrain from having any gustatory pleasures derived from animal pain and the support of animal pain. What more is there to the view?

My proposal that eating meat is a morally permissible moral mistake is not the view that the morally *best* way to behave is to refrain from eating meat. In general, it is not true that a choice is a morally permissible moral mistake just in case refraining from that choice is the morally best option. Often there is an option that is the *morally best* option but is *not* an option that an agent *should take*, all things considered. For example, suppose that some dogfighting is going on and you could shorten tonight's episode of dogfighting (but not free the dogs) if you engaged in a physical confrontation. Knowing the players involved, you would probably be beaten up very severely, landing in the hospital for a long time. It may be that it would be the morally best thing to do to step in—you would be making a personal sacrifice to stand up against animal cruelty. But it also may be that, all things considered, you shouldn't do it.

The claim that the morally best thing to do is to refrain from buying or eating meat is weaker than the claim that it is a moral mistake to buy or eat meat.

Something can be the morally best way to behave without its being a mistake to fail to behave that way. The claim that eating meat is a morally permissible moral mistake is not just the claim that it's a morally better to refrain from buying and eating meat; it is the claim that, given all of one's reasons, one *should* refrain from eating meat.

> Objection: The solution you've offered to the puzzle is not the best solution.

This objection enables me to clarify the ambitions of this chapter and the scope of my claims. My goal is to offer *an* explanation of why moral vegetarians accommodate meat eating while making sense of this behavior. I have not discussed alternative explanations, and I will not do so at any length now. My goal is to put my solution on the table. Nevertheless, let me briefly discuss two competing explanations.

> Explanation 1: Moral vegetarians know they shouldn't accommodate but they lack the nerve to disrupt social norms by refusing to accommodate.

This explanation offers *weakness of will* as the diagnosis of accommodation behavior. This explanation does not offer a way to *solve* the puzzle because it merely offers a *psychological* explanation of accommodation behavior; it does not tell a story on which that behavior is reasonable.

> Explanation 2: Moral vegetarians are being pragmatic when they accommodate meat eating. They know they'll have more success in the long run if they don't come on too strong.

This explanation does not explain why it is *morally permissible* to accommodate meat eating. It is not in general morally permissible to help someone do some morally wrong things just because in the long term, this is likely to lead to less of that kind of morally wrong behavior. That there would be *better consequences* of doing so is not in general enough to justify helping someone act morally wrongly. Explanation 2 may be part of the full story of why vegetarians choose to accommodate, but only in combination with the story I have offered of why accommodation may be morally permissible.

Conclusion

Those who are vegetarians for moral reasons often accommodate others' buying and eating meat. This behavior is puzzling if these moral vegetarians are committed to the view that buying and eating meat is *morally wrong*. I have argued that we can make sense of the way that moral vegetarians accommodate if we see them as implicitly committed to the view that buying and eating meat is *morally*

permissible but is a *moral mistake*: One should not buy or eat meat, because of the moral reasons against doing so, but doing so is not morally wrong.

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Notes

1. I will restrict my attention to people who are vegetarians because of their moral concern for *animals*. I will not discuss people who are vegetarians for moral reasons, but whose motivating reasons are restricted to concern for the *environment*.
2. The argument in this section appears at greater length in my "The Moral Significance of Animal Pain and Animal Death" in *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics and Animals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp and R. L. Frey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
3. See Shelly Kagan, "Do I Make a Difference?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 39, no. 2 (2011): 105–141.
4. Mark Bryant Budolfson, "The Inefficacy Objection to Consequentialism and the Problem with the Expected Consequences Response" (forthcoming).
5. In my "Is the Subjective 'Ought' Explanatorily Prior to the Objective 'Ought'? (What We Learn from Errands and Russian Roulette)" (manuscript), I argue that when we consider cases in which agents take small chances of violating deontological constraints, we see that whether the actions are permissible is not just a matter of the degree of risk and the degree of wrongness of violating the deontological constraint in question; rather, there are distinct moral principles that apply to different kinds of risk-taking. I argue that this shows that the subjective "ought" cannot be explained in terms of the objective "ought."
6. A further question is whether a person's adopting a life policy of not buying or eating meat makes a difference to how much meat production occurs. I will assume that it does not, and that the discussion in this section could be expanded to draw that conclusion. For arguments similar to Kagan's, but regarding life policies, see Peter Singer's "Utilitarianism and Vegetarianism," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, no. 4 (1980): 325–337; and Alastair Norcross, "Puppies, Pigs, and People," *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004): 229–245, pp. 232–233.
7. A consequentialist would reject these two claims. Cases such as the two I just mentioned show that consequentialism is false.
8. A special kind of case is one in which someone *chose* to undergo a burden *in order* to benefit you. In such a case, there may be no reason to refuse to accept the benefit on the grounds that it derives from someone's suffering.
9. Note that I am using the word "mistake" to apply to *actions* (or *failures to act*) rather than *thought processes*. When we say that someone has made a mistake, very often we mean that she has reasoned poorly. But we also sometimes refer to actions as mistakes. We say "it was a mistake to call that poker hand" or "don't make the mistake of paying the carpenter before she finishes the job." A person can perform an action

that is a mistake without making any mistake of reasoning, as when someone correctly realizes what she should do but then out of weakness of will fails to do it; one might truly say, "She made a mistake. How did it happen, you ask? She knew what she should do but she was weak-willed."

10. For interesting discussion of the suberogatory (also called "offence"), see Roderick M. Chisholm, "Supererogation and Offence: A Conceptual Scheme for Ethics," *Ratio* 5 (1963): 1–14; David Heyd, *Supererogation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Gregory Mellema, *Beyond the Call of Duty: Supererogation, Obligation, and Offence* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Julia Driver, "The Suberogatory," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 70, no. 3 (1992): 286–295; Hallie Liberto, "Denying the Suberogatory," *Philosophia* 40 (2011): 395–402; and Paul McNamara, "Supererogation, Inside and Out: Toward an Adequate Scheme for Common Sense Morality," in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark Timmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 202–235.
11. I introduce and discuss these concepts in greater detail in my "Morally Permissible Moral Mistakes" (forthcoming in *Ethics*); see also my "Morality Within the Realm of the Morally Permissible" (in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark Timmons [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015]) and my "Gamete Donation as a Laudable Moral Mistake" (manuscript).
12. This issue weighs on me, as a parent of a four-year-old girl who adores princess stories. Happily, not all princess stories are sexist.
13. Seana Shiffrin (in "Egalitarianism, Choice-Sensitivity, and Accommodation," in *Reason and Value: Themes from the Work of Joseph Raz*, ed. Philip Pettit [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004], 270–302) discusses the accommodation practices of vegetarians and offers some explanations of why these practices make sense. Tyler Doggett (in "Letting Others Do Wrong" [manuscript]) argues that Shiffrin's proposed explanations cannot account for why it would be morally permissible to accommodate morally wrong behavior. But her proposed explanations may do a better job at a different task: supplementing my account. Once we see accommodation as one of a number of *morally permissible* options, it is more plausible that the kinds of considerations Shiffrin offers can explain why one should accommodate in some cases.
14. Adrienne M. Martin's chapter in this volume, "Factory Farming and Consumer Complicity," argues that meat eaters of factory farmed meat are *accomplices* to meat production.