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**How the virtue of compassion requires us to be vegan**

Bachelor Thesis

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## Introduction

In recent years, animal ethics has received a lot of attention, vegetarianism, and veganism in particular. However, in the philosophical debate, veganism has not been explicitly covered that much. In literature, vegetarianism has been the main focus instead of veganism. This is one of the reasons, why I chose to cover it in my thesis.

Most of the philosophical discussion on vegetarianism and veganism has been made by the two main approaches to animal ethics: the utilitarian and the deontological approach. My focus is on the virtue ethics approach to animal ethics. It is not that popular in animal ethics as the other approaches, but it has been receiving more and more attention. I focus on the virtue of compassion. The animal ethics issue I have chosen for my thesis is the animal agriculture industry for hindering animal flourishing. I show how on the basis of the virtue of compassion, we should not support such industry by buying animal products and animal by-products.

Although there are many topics in animal ethics of which I could have chosen to write my thesis about in relation to compassion, I am focusing on animal agriculture, because the topic of eating animals and animal by-products is something that affects us every day. For almost every mealtime, most of us have to buy food and make the choice to support the animal agriculture industry by buying its products or buy other, plant based, products instead. Having said that, few people pay attention to it. I focus in my thesis on the eating aspect of veganism and not on other aspects of it because people buy food a lot more often than other products, such as leather products.

In the first chapter, I will explain what virtue ethics is and introduce the three main concepts that are relevant in virtue ethics: *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), *arête* (excellence or virtue) and *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom). Then I will move into the topic of animal ethics and introduce the virtue ethics approach to animal ethics.

The second chapter's focus is on compassion. I will introduce Aristotle's concept of compassion as an emotion, which I expanded a little, and explain the three main beliefs that are necessary to feel compassion. Namely one has to believe that the other is going through a severe hardship or is in a vulnerable position, the gravity of which they are undeserving of that hardship or position and that one or one's close one has the potential to end up in a similar position. Then I will also explain the difference between compassion as an emotion and compassion as a virtue. Namely whilst emotions are involuntary, compassion as a virtue means practicing deliberate compassionate actions towards the right target at the right time and place

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for the right amount of time. After that I will go into compassion's criticism, which is also relevant for the virtue of compassion. I also explain why I do not agree with the said criticism. Namely, compassion has been regarded as 1) irrational, 2) connected to anger and revenge and 3) partial and narrow. The third chapter connects compassion with animal ethics. First, I will explain what ethical veganism is. Then I will talk about being compassionate towards animals. I will elaborate on how the three beliefs that are necessary to feel compassion relate to how we feel compassion towards animals. After that, I will explain why we should be compassionate towards non-human animals. Eudaimonia is humans' and non-human animals' common end. In order for us to fully appreciate our own end – *eudaimonia* – we have to also care about other's end, which is also *eudaimonia*. This requires us to care about and be compassionate towards other people and animals. Then I will elaborate on how the animal agriculture industry hinders animal flourishing. First, animals are being killed prematurely, thus they cannot realize their potential to flourish. Secondly, the living conditions that animals have to endure in the animal agriculture industry are poor. They do not have good lives. Once I have covered why we should not hinder the flourishing of other humans and non-human animals and how the animal agriculture industry hinders the flourishing of animals I will present an argument which concludes that we should not support the animal agriculture industry by buying its products, i.e. we should be vegan.

## 1. What is virtue ethics?

The focus of most virtue ethical approaches is still three main concepts from ancient Greek philosophy: *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), *arête* (excellence or virtue) and *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom). First, I will elaborate on the term *eudaimonia*, then on *arête* and after than shortly on *phronesis*.<sup>1</sup>

*Eudaimonia* is a concept that has its roots in ancient Greek moral philosophy. It is translated as “happiness” or “flourishing” and sometimes “well-being”. “Happiness” is not a perfect translation, because of its subjectivity. No bystander can determine someone’s happiness, only x can determine whether or not they are happy. However, others can determine whether someone is healthy or flourishing. Some also believe that “flourishing” is problematic because animals and plants can also flourish, but only rational beings are capable of achieving *eudaimonia*.<sup>2</sup> However, there are also some who do not agree with this and argue that even though animals do not have to have the ability to reason like humans, they can still live a good life (Walker 2007: 180). My thesis is based on the latter approach.

Eudaemonist versions of virtue ethics define virtues accordingly to their relationship to *eudaimonia*. Virtues are traits that benefit their possessor achieve *eudaimonia*, in case they do not have bad luck. So, according to eudaemonists, we should cultivate virtues in order to achieve *eudaimonia*.<sup>3</sup> Most virtue ethics agree that virtue and *eudaimonia* are connected, but the degree of the connection differs. According to Aristotle, external goods are necessary for *eudaimonia*. Virtue is also necessary, but luck too is needed. Whether or not one has external goods such as wealth and friends is up to luck. However, Plato and the Stoics held the belief that virtue is necessary and also sufficient for *eudaimonia* (Annas 1993).

The term “virtue” stems from a Greek word *arête*, which also means “excellence”. Virtue is usually defined as an excellent character trait that is morally good and admirable.<sup>4</sup> The classic definition of virtue by Aristotle elaborates the term in more detail: “Virtue is a purposive disposition, lying in a mean that is relative to us and determined by a rational principle, and by that which the prudent man would use to determine it” (Arist. *EN* II.6, 1107a1-5, trans.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/ethics-virtue/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

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Thomson). What exactly does Aristotle mean by this definition? According to Aristotle, virtue is “purposive” insofar as virtues are not established by accident, rather they are obtained on purpose, for their own sake, with full knowledge of the virtue. Our nature does not simply determine our virtues, nor are virtues contrary to our nature. When we are exposed to the right factors that influence and form us, our nature shapes us to obtain virtues (Athanasoulis 2013: 61). According to Aristotle, putting virtues into action is how one acquires virtues (Arist. *EN* II.2, 1103a-30, trans. Thomson). Obtaining virtues takes a long time. Nevertheless, once virtues as dispositional character traits are gained, they remain stable. We will not be tempted or distracted to act unvirtuously (Athanasoulis 2013: 61).

Virtues deal with our response to different situations, how we feel and how we act. What is the right action and the right emotional response, depends on the situation and the agent. A virtuous agent also acts virtuously, merely because it is the right thing to do, not because of selfish reasons. Other than the action itself, motivations and the agent’s character matters. A virtuous person is a person who has acquired virtues (Alvaro 2017b: 20).

Virtuous agents rationally make the right decisions and understand its consequences on the basis of *phronesis*, practical or moral wisdom (Hursthouse 2011: 127). One cannot be virtuous without *phronesis*, as it helps us to find the common ground for virtues.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Animal ethics

Although virtue ethics has its roots in ancient philosophy with its founding fathers Plato and Aristotle, in animal ethics, the virtue ethics approach is quite new. Before virtue ethics, the two main approaches to animal ethics were the deontological approach and the utilitarian approach (Hursthouse 1999: 2).<sup>6</sup> Although utilitarianists and deontologists have gained the public’s attention to the topic of animal ethics, so far, they have been unsuccessful at stopping the exploitation of animals. However, the problem is by no means easy to solve, hence why we need other approaches to talk about animal ethics (Alvaro 2017b: 16).

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<sup>5</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/#Bib>

<sup>6</sup> The deontological approach was mainly influenced by Immanuel Kant and popularized by Tom Regan with his most important work *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983). The most outstanding authors for the utilitarian approach are Peter Singer and Jeremy Bentham, most influential work being “*Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*”.

### 1.3 Virtue ethics approach to animal ethics

Applying virtue ethics to animal ethics shifts the conversation on how to treat animals away from rights, duties and the consequences of our actions. Rather it promotes considering our behaviour towards animals in terms of virtues and vices (Hursthouse 2011: 119). Virtue ethics is an agent-based theory. In its focus is the agent. Whilst theorizing, people are rational and do not base decisions on moral feelings. However, in reality, people's relations with others are complicated and people cannot detach themselves from feelings. In virtue ethics context matters. Every situation is unique, there cannot be a set-to stone guideline for what people should do in every possible situation (Alvaro 2017b: 20). In order to show how virtue ethics can be applied to a specific topic in animal ethics – animal agriculture and its countermeasure: veganism – I am going to show it on the basis of one emotion and its corresponding virtue: compassion. In order to show how compassion can be understood as a virtue, I first explain what compassion as an emotion is.

## 2. Compassion

### 2.1 Compassion as an emotion

Aristotle defined compassion<sup>7</sup> as follows: “Let compassion be a sort of distress at an apparent evil, destructing or distressing, which happens to someone who doesn’t deserve it, and which one might expect to happen to oneself or someone close to one and this when it appears near” (Arist. *Rh.* 1385b-8, trans. Freese).

On the whole, Aristotle proposes that there are three beliefs, which are necessary to feel compassion. One has to believe that:

- 1) the hardship that the target person is going through is severe;
- 2) the target person is not (at least not entirely) to blame for his/her situation
- 3) one or one’s close one could also happen to be in a similar hardship

Although compassion is mostly associated with situations where someone is going through a severe hardship, the gravity of which they are undeserving, Whitebrook proposes that compassion also occurs often towards someone who is vulnerable, i.e. exposed and can be wounded or injured and not necessarily suffering greatly. Compassionate people care about others. When someone is in a severe hardship or in a situation where they can be either physically or emotionally attacked, they feel concern. Exploitation happens to the vulnerable. Those who have more power take advantage of those who have less (Whitebrook 2002: 537).

We can extend Aristotle’s definition of compassion. The three main beliefs that are necessary in order to feel compassion are the following:

- 1) the target person is going through a severe hardship or is in a vulnerable position, where they can be wounded or injured.
- 2) the target person is not (at least not entirely) to blame for his/her situation
- 3) one or one’s close one could also happen to be in a similar position

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<sup>7</sup> The word Aristotle used “ἔλεος” (*eleos*) is sometimes translated to pity and sometimes to compassion. Nussbaum uses the term “pity”, but the meaning is the same. For the sake of simplicity, I will only use “compassion” when I am talking about *eleos*.



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Some examples for a severe hardship are the following: death, physical attack or mistreatment, elderliness, illness, shortage of food, physical shortcoming, deformity, immobility, expectations falling short and negative outlook on the future.

Now I am going to elaborate on the three beliefs that are necessary in order to feel compassion. First, I will explain the severity of the hardship, then blame and after that similar possibilities.

### 2.1.1 Severity of the hardship

When we feel compassion, we recognize the severity of the other's situation. Their suffering is not trivial, and it matters to them a great deal. The severity of the situation can be hard to judge. Who is to judge whether someone is suffering or not? The bystander and not the one who is in a hardship is better to be the judge of that. The following two examples make this clear:

- 1) x goes through something trivial but suffers greatly
- 2) x goes experiences something non-trivial but doesn't believe themselves to suffer

In the first case, it can be that the suffering of x is real, but because the thing is trivial, it is not recognized by others. It does not evoke compassion. For example, some man wants to buy an expensive watch that he has dreamed of for two years but cannot afford it and is devastated by it. An expensive watch is a luxury item; thus, it is something trivial, not severe, and not usually a reason for someone to suffer when they can't have it (Nussbaum 1996: 31).

In the second case, x is living in a rural village in India and has a shortage of food, due to which she is malnourished. In addition to that, she is uneducated. This kind of life is all she knows, and she does not know that life could or should be better than that. She does not think she is suffering, but others, who have better living conditions, would most likely consider her to be in an unfortunate situation (ibid 32). We can still feel compassion towards people, who themselves not think that they are suffering. Sometimes it is exactly the case that the fact that someone does not comprehend the unfortunate situation they are in, is why they prompt bystander's compassion (ibid 33).

### 2.1.2 Blame

When someone has done something bad and it results in their suffering or them being in a vulnerable position, we usually are not very compassionate towards them. Instead, we criticize them. In case the suffering is graver than the act of which it resulted, we can feel bad for them. Moreover, we can experience and practice compassion. They were not entirely blameless, but they did not deserve the suffering of this magnitude as well. The Greek word that Aristotle used was *anaxious*, which means undeserving. We can only feel compassion towards someone, when we think they did not deserve the misfortune they are experiencing. This results in a specific worldview, according to which we cannot control the situations where we will end up. We might only be virtuous, but we can still end up experiencing bad luck.

### 2.1.3 Similar possibilities

According to Aristotle, people only feel compassion towards x who is suffering, when they think that they or their loved one could also suffer in a similar fashion (Arist. *Rh.* II.2, 1385b-8, trans. Freese). Nussbaum mentions Rousseau, who shares this point of view. Rousseau talks about it in *Emile*, he says that kings never feel compassion towards people of lower caste. Kings do not consider such people to be people at all. They cannot relate to them, they do not expect themselves to ever experience the misfortune that such people experience. In a similar way, rich people often cannot relate to poor people, as they are not afraid to lose their wealth (Rousseau 1976: 224). This should not be the case. Nothing is certain. The rich may very well lose their wealth and become poor. This should not mean that they should worry about it constantly. It only means that they should not dismiss poor people, as they are all people, and everybody could run into bad luck and suffer. We should understand this, as this helps us be more compassionate human beings. Indeed, if we cannot relate to another person at all, we cannot feel bad for them (ibid 34).

Even though we are aware that we could very well end up in a similar misfortune as the one we are pitying, we are still aware that we are not in that situation at the moment. We are separated from the sufferer. Compassion and fear are connected, but they are also different emotions. We may feel concerned about the fact that we could suffer as well, but this is not compassion. Compassion is when we feel bad for the other being. We are concerned about the suffering of the other, not the potential suffering of ourselves (ibid 35).

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In addition to that, even though we recognize that the sufferer and ourselves bear similarities, in order to understand other's suffering, we must also recognize the differences between us. For example, the sufferer might be an orphan, whilst both of my parents are still alive, so some situations (we must consider each case on its own) might affect the person who is also an orphan more severely than they would affect me (ibid 35).

## 2.2 Compassion as a virtue

Compassion can also be regarded as a virtue. Emotions we feel involuntarily, but with virtues, we make deliberate choices to act in a virtuous way (Arist. *NE* II.6, 1106a). If we just experience compassion, it is only an emotion and not the virtue. Virtues regard both emotions and actions. As mentioned in Aristotle's definition of virtue, virtues are dispositions to feelings and actions (Arist. *EN* II.6, 1107a1-5, trans. Thomson). We can become virtuous, because of our dispositions, but we have to practice being virtuous. Through constant training we can obtain the virtue of compassion. (Alvaro 2017a: 774). Our moods change, but as I have already mentioned, acquired virtues are stable (Athanasoulis 2013: 61).

We should act and feel at the right time for the right amount of time for right reasons towards the right people. (Arist. *NE* II.6, 1106b). We should be compassionate in our emotions and actions appropriately. Acting compassionately means not causing harm to others and/or alleviating other's suffering.

As I have already explained in the first chapter, for all virtues, balance is the key. It depends on the context, how much or how little compassion is appropriate to embody. Lack of compassion is unvirtuous, but at the same time, we do not have to suffer too much to ensure that others are well. It is possible to be overly compassionate, which is not virtuous at all. Such are the following actions: feeding strangers instead of one's own children or letting fleas take over one's home (Alvaro 2017b: 22).

## 2.3 Criticism of compassion

Compassion as an emotion has also been criticized. Martha Nussbaum has differentiated the following three<sup>8</sup> common points of criticism against compassion: that compassion is irrational and not beneficial for reasoning, that it is connected to the feeling of anger and revenge and its partiality and narrowness (Nussbaum 1996: 29). Such criticism is relevant for the discussion on compassion as a virtue.

### 2.3.1 Compassion is irrational?

By some modern moral theories, especially liberal and individualist moral theories, compassion is considered to be an “irrational force in human affairs”. They claim that compassion does not help us think about social policy and in fact, it hinders us. Nussbaum argues that closer examination of compassion helps us see that such claims are false.

In different fields such as in politics and in the law, emotion and reason are considered opposites. Emotions are seen as “irrational” and not beneficial to reasoning (Nussbaum 1996: 29). The popular belief is, that if we want to be rational, we should eliminate all feelings. Emotions have no room for in a liberal theory.

Those who see compassion as irrational can mean by it two different things. First, compassion can be thought of as a “noncognitive force” which is separate from thinking or reasoning. Secondly and more commonly, people might think that compassion is prompted by thoughts that are bad or false in some normative sense (Nussbaum 1996: 30). Emotions can definitely prompt irrationalities. The agent might not even be aware of them. Emotions can make us think that something is rational, even when it is not (Goldie 2011: 312). However, we can also make mistakes whilst reasoning. It does not follow that we should not reason if fallacies sometimes occur. We can examine our feelings and rationally decide whether compassion is needed in specific cases and how we should express it.

I agree with Nussbaum, that compassion should be critically examined as an emotion and only then we can talk about the usefulness or irrationality of it. Compassion implicates thought or belief and is rational in the, commonly used, descriptive sense (Nussbaum 1996: 30). Notwithstanding, when compassion is not based upon true, definite beliefs, it is irrational. Compassion also stems from early moral development. That is why it is usually considered to

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<sup>8</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum also talked about a fourth point of criticism, but that is not relevant for my paper.

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be antithetic to intellectual reasoning. However, compassion can still involve a thought process and be appropriate and valuable (ibid 31).

For Nussbaum, “compassion is a certain sort of reasoning”. It is concern about the comfort of others. The individual and community both need it in order to function together. Compassion is the basic social emotion. In the philosophical tradition, it is of great importance when connecting the individual with the community. Compassion helps others be interested in our personal business. As it is essential in our society, we should develop a greater understanding this moral emotion in order to help promote it. We do not have to eliminate compassion in order to be rational (ibid 28).

### 2.3.2 Compassion’s connectedness to anger and revenge

The other part of the criticism claims that compassion is connected to anger and revenge. According to Aristotle, anger is a “desire accompanied by pain for an imagined retribution on account of an imagined slighting inflicted by people who have no legitimate reason to slight oneself or one’s own” (Arist. *Rh.* II.2 1378a31–3).

Accepting compassion entails a certain kind of worldview, according to which external goods are necessary for human flourishing. This means that our life is not up to us. Even if we do everything right and are virtuous, we could end up suffering due to someone else’s actions. Stoics argue that this leads to fear, anxiety, anger, and revenge. When someone else is dealt cards that lead them to suffer, we feel compassion towards them. However, if we end up in an unfortunate position where others feel compassion towards us, we feel angry that we are in such position. When someone hinders our flourishing, we might get angry at them and in some cases, also want to seek revenge (Nussbaum 1996: 43). Similarly, if we see that others suffer through no fault of their own, we can feel angry. Nussbaum proposes that if compassion and revenge are in fact connected and if society should control the tendency to anger, then it might make sense not to promote compassion in its citizens (Nussbaum 1996: 44).

However, there are also reasons to promote compassion even if it is connected to anger and revenge. In addition to that, the fact that there is a lot of suffering, that has not been deserved, is not up to a debate. It does not matter if one accepts compassion or not. Anger, if it is prompted by moral concerns, does not have to be a negative emotion. In fact, virtuous people should be angry in some situations. Being angry at the right people and things and expressing it the right

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way for the right amount of time is virtuous (Arist. *EN* IV.5, 1125b-30, trans. Irwin). I am not talking about being angry at trivial things, such as that there is no chocolate pudding left in the cafeteria. Anger that is prompted by moral concern is the right kind of anger that I am talking about. Mostly, it is a concern for others, but it can also be virtuous to be angry if something really unfair and cruel happens to you. For example, if someone is sexually assaulted, and they are angry at their assaulter, anger helps to manifest their self-respect. If they were not angry, they might not take the crime that serious. In addition to that, if someone else would doubt that this crime took place, anger would help the victim to be sure in themselves and not let others convince them that maybe it was consensual, and no crime took place (Bommarito 2017: 8). People who do not feel anger, are not likely to be able to defend themselves or their close ones. If someone would insult them or someone close to them, they would be fine with it (Arist. *EN* IV.5, 1125b-5, trans. Irwin).

Furthermore, anger can be a motivational force. Say that someone is being bullied. I get angry that they are being badly treated, and this motivates me to speak up for them and support them so that the bully stops and/or the person who was being bullied does not feel that bad anymore, because they are not alone (Bommarito 2017: 15). In short, anger can be virtuous. If it is the case that compassion and anger are connected and compassion prompts anger, it does not follow that we should reject compassion.

In addition to that, revenge means that we want to harm others, but by exercising compassion, we will not want to harm others. Instead, we are concerned for other's well-being. If others are harmed, we are as well, because we will feel bad for them (Nussbaum 1996: 49-50).

### 2.3.3 Compassion's partiality and narrowness

Compassion has long been criticized for its partiality and narrowness. The Stoics meant by compassion's partiality and narrowness the following: because of compassion, we only see the world in a specific way. It makes us connected only to events that have altered our lives, that we see or can imagine taking place. It follows that we care more about some lives than others. Adam Smith agreed with this and added that compassion motivates us to care about some events, but not other events, which are of same or even greater gravity. The outcome would be inconsistent; thus, compassion is not a very good social motive (Nussbaum 1996: 43).

Jesse Prinz has argued against empathy for its partiality. His definition of empathy is similar to the definition of compassion that I have chosen for my thesis, so his arguments could be expanded against compassion as well. According to him, empathy is bearing the same

emotional state that we believe someone else has (Prinz 2011a: 215). When we feel empathy towards someone who is in a hardship through no fault of their own and we believe we or our close ones could also happen to be in a similar hardship, we feel concern for them. This extends into compassion. Both empathy and compassion are usually regarded as positive emotions.

However, Prinz does not agree with this. One of the reasons is the “similarity bias”. Namely, we usually relate more to the people who bear similarities with us. For example, there have been studies that have shown that Caucasians showed more empathy towards Caucasians who were in pain, in comparison to Chinese, South Asian or African participants (Prinz 2011b: 227). This study can also be used to illustrate the partiality of compassion. If compassion is partial, it could lead to unequal treatment.

The partiality argument against compassion says that, because it is pretty much impossible to be compassionate towards everyone in the world who deserves it, it is not reliable. However, this is always the case when some emotion will be appealed to the public in hopes to motivate it. Usually, in order for us to care about and attend to the good of others, we need to relate to others and understand them. However, could that happen without appealing to compassion? Nussbaum proposes “an economic-utilitarian account of rational choice in term of self-interest” (Nussbaum 1996: 48). Economics tries to explain human behaviour without referring to compassion (ibid 49). However, compassion is often a major factor in why we do the things we do. For example, it is impossible to explain sacrificing our time, money, well-being if we could not refer to compassion. Sure, there can be other motivations, but concern for others is an important factor as well. Even if compassion is not a perfect tool for motivating people, it does motivate people and we cannot ignore that (ibid 49). Instead, we should use and promote it, so that it could be a better tool for motivation. The problem is not with compassion, the problem is that we are not compassionate enough.

According to scientific research, it is possible to cultivate compassion with training (Younis 2015: 8). The ability to put yourself in other’s situation and feeling concern for them should be taught at every school. The humanities and arts can be useful for cultivating imaginative abilities, which in turn are necessary for politics and other fields (Nussbaum 1996: 51). In the curriculum, it should be of great importance that compassion is extended to different classes, races, nationalities and sexual orientations. Relating to different people can be reached through two subjects, history and literature. In history, students learn facts about the world, the political, social and economic history. In literature, they cultivate imaginative abilities and empathy (ibid 50).

### 3.Compassion and animal ethics

Animal ethics is a broad branch of philosophy. I am focusing on one specific topic: animal agriculture, which hinders the flourishing of animals. The countermeasure for it is ethical veganism. On the basis of the virtue of compassion, we should not support such industry. Compassion tells us that we should be ethical vegans. That means that we should be vegans, based on ethical considerations.

#### 3.1 What is ethical veganism?

The Vegan Society defines veganism as following: “Veganism is a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose.”<sup>9</sup> “As far as is possible and practicable” means for example that vegans can and should still take necessary medication even if it has been tested on animals. It means that people should not starve if they are unable to buy food that does not have any animal (by)products in them.

Animal by-products are defined differently in the U.S and in Europe. In the U.S, the scope of animal by-products (ABPs) is much wider than in Europe. It includes eggs and dairy as well as skin.<sup>10</sup> However, in Europe, animal by-products are parts of the animal that humans do not eat, such as skin and animal feed.<sup>11</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I am going to consider animal by-products by the U.S standards, because this makes it easier to differentiate between vegetarianism and veganism. Animal products are products that are made directly out of animals, such as chicken breast, animal by-products are products that have been made by animals, such as milk and eggs. Vegetarians typically eat eggs and dairy, i.e. animal by-products, whilst vegans do not.

Ethical veganism is a “moral attitude” that people attain by choosing not to participate in the exploitation of animals. Typically, people become vegan after some ethical considerations, that may or may not be clear-cut (McPherson 2018: 1). Vegans do not eat animal products and avoid all products that have animal or animal by-products in them, such as fur and certain cosmetics. A vegan diet consists of plants such as fruits, berries, vegetables, whole grains,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/animal-by-product-categories-site-approval-hygiene-and-disposal#abp-categories-explained>

<sup>11</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/animal-by-products\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/animal-by-products_en)



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seeds, nuts, mushrooms, and legumes. Humans do not need animal products and animal by-products in order to survive and flourish.<sup>12</sup> Alvaro calls it “absolute veganism” when people also refuse to use products that have been tested on animals (Alvaro 2017b: 16). In this paper, I focus on the eating aspect of veganism because it plays a more important role than other products in our everyday lives. We buy food a lot more often than we do leather or makeup products.

There are also different versions of veganism. A stricter version of veganism is called the broad absolutist version of veganism, according to which using animal products or animal by-products is always wrong. There are some concerns with this version. First of all, it is absolutist. It denies the possibility that there are some cases in which using animal products or animal by-products is morally permissible (McPherson 2018: 2). That would mean that even if a piece of bread that has a little bit of milk in and would otherwise be thrown away, it would be wrong to eat it. McPherson also brings out that the extent of such claim is problematic. The arguments for veganism, are often based on the fact that most animals are sentient and are able to suffer. However, not all animals are sentient. Some, for example, sponges, lack a nervous system. Therefore, it would make more sense to not consider animals who are not sentient if we talk about ethical veganism (ibid 2).

There are also less strict versions of ethical veganism. McPherson calls one of them Modest Ethical Veganism, according to which it is ethically wrong in most cases to use animal or animal by-products. However, it allows room for some exceptions (ibid 3). I think this is how most vegans define veganism, as even the definition of the Vegan Society leaves quite a bit of room for interpretation. Modest Ethical Veganism does not face the two challenges that the absolutist version does.

### 3.2 Compassion for animals

The topic of compassion and being compassionate towards animals is not controversial at all. Most people believe that they are compassionate and love animals. However, the animals that they usually consider, are mostly pets and not farm animals. Most people are not compassionate towards farm animals. If one is compassionate towards some animals, but not all animals, one is not compassionate towards animals. I have already explained what compassion is, but how

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<sup>12</sup> [https://www.vrg.org/nutrition/2009\\_ADA\\_position\\_paper.pdf](https://www.vrg.org/nutrition/2009_ADA_position_paper.pdf)

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do we expend compassion from humans to non-human animals? How do the three beliefs that are necessary to feel compassion that I talked about earlier relate to our compassion towards animals?

First of all, the killing aspect of animals is pretty severe. It hinders them from experiencing a good life. I will elaborate on this point in a little while. In addition to that, the animals that are confined in the animal agriculture industry are certainly in a vulnerable position.

Secondly, it is pretty clear that the animals have not done anything wrong in order for us to kill them for food. Animals are sentient beings and want to live. There are cases where farm animals such as cows attack farm workers, but we should keep in mind that they are being kept in confinement and usually not in good conditions. I will elaborate shortly what the cows have to endure in the animal agriculture industry.

We could interpret the third aspect in the following way: humans usually want to live. They do not want to be killed for any reason. I am not going to explore the topic of suicide, which is not the norm, or the cases where people are willing to die to save someone else. On the whole, humans want to live. Animals also want to live. It is different because humans typically have plans for their future. However, the will to live still remains. The magnitude of it is not that important here.

Furthermore, we could also interpret this in another way. Humans usually care for their pets or at least someone else's pets. We would not want our pet's or anyone else's pet's life to be ended unless there was a good enough reason for it. For example, when the said pet has a difficult untreatable health condition, it will die soon and all it is able to do until then is to suffer. Then euthanasia would usually be acceptable. In addition to that, we would not want our or someone else's pet to be exploited. We would want them to flourish.

### 3.3 Why should we be compassionate towards non-human animals?

As I have shown, being compassionate towards humans and being compassionate towards non-human animals is not that different. But why should we be compassionate towards animals? At first the answer might seem as simple as that treating animals well is virtuous. If we want to flourish, we should act virtuously. That includes acting virtuously towards animals. So, treating animals well is necessary for human flourishing. But the question, why is treating animals well virtuous, remains (Walker 2007: 174). First, we have to look at why we should care about other people's flourishing. Then we can see whether the same reasons also apply to animals (ibid

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178). We care about other people because when we acquire virtues, that is what we learn to do. Also, it is in our nature to feel concern for others (ibid 179). However, we naturally feel concern mostly for our close ones. Why should we also feel concern for other people?

Flourishing is our end. In order to properly appreciate flourishing, we have to appreciate it fully, for the good that it is, not only because it is our own proper end. We have to appreciate for also being the proper end of others. If we only care and attend to our and few others flourishing, we do not appreciate it fully. We have to also care and attend to the good of others. The reason why humans care about the flourishing of other humans is not that they are alike but because they have a common interest in flourishing. We care about other's end, because our end, eudaimonia, is alike. By caring about each other's end, we also care about each other. Flourishing as a shared end is a good for humans and for every individual as well. After all, only some individuals can consistently embody flourishing (ibid 180).

However, if we should care about the lives of other humans, how does it follow that we should care about the lives of animals? Humans and non-human animals have different ways of flourishing (Walker 2007: 180). Aristotle's wanted to find the characteristic human function, that would be essential to flourishing if exceptionally achieved (ibid 181). He thought that living, as in growth and nutrition, cannot be it, because plants and animals have that in common with us (Arist. *NE* I.7, 1098a, trans. Irwin) For him, the characteristic human function has to be reason, as reasoning is unique to humans (Arist. *NE* I.7, 1098a-15). However, as Rebecca Walker argues, a characteristic function does not have to be unique. There is no reason, why we could not share functions with other animals and plants and still fulfilled those functions exceptionally (Walker 2007: 181).

Human flourishing has to at least depend on external goods in addition to the acquiring and maintaining of virtues. Animal flourishing depends on external goods as well. For human and animal good lives clean water, physical health, positive psychological states, adequate sleep and nutrition, movement, sunshine (or darkness), and relevant social relations are of great importance (ibid 185). Animals may sense that they are experiencing positive things, but they, unlike humans, do not recognize when they are truly flourishing (ibid 186). If we fail to care about animal flourishing, we fail to appreciate the kind of good that flourishing is (ibid 180).

It is worth noting that it is also important to figure out what it means for animals to flourish and how we should attend to it. In some cases, such as wild animals, we should perhaps leave

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them alone so that they can flourish (ibid 177). What exactly is a good life for animals differs from species to species and the sheer volume of exploring that topic goes well beyond the volume of my thesis, but there are some things that are clearly in conflict with a good life. For example, a good life is hindered when life is prematurely ended. I will elaborate on this shortly.

### 3.4 How animal agriculture hinders animal flourishing

Most animals that are being killed in the animal agriculture industry are very young. When we kill someone prematurely, we take away their chance of flourishing. Usually, the industry focuses on the weight of the animal. The faster the animal reaches the desired weight, the less money has to be spent on resources, such as feed and water, that animals need for living.<sup>13</sup> The younger the animals are being killed, the better it is for the industry.

The natural lifespan of chickens is typically 3-5 years. Chickens that are raised in the animal agriculture business for commercial egg production are slaughtered at about 1 year and 5 months. Broiler chickens are raised for meat live 6 to 7 weeks and then are killed.

With cattle, the lifespan depends extremely on their living conditions. If the conditions are good, they will live up to 25 years. If they are not that good and the animals cannot produce enough milk, they will be slaughtered earlier than that. Usually, dairy cows are slaughtered at the age of 4 or 5. Fattening bulls will reach the desired weight at 1 year and 6-8 months, after which they are slaughtered.

Pigs live usually about 8 to 10 years. Hogs or fattening pigs are slaughtered at 6 or 7 months, female pigs at about 3 years (Grabowski 2014: 182).

If the living conditions are poor, one could argue that it is better for the life to be ended prematurely. In animal agriculture, the welfare of animals is not the industry's main focus. The conditions that the livestock lives in are usually poor. However, animals still have the capability to flourish. They could live a good life if their living conditions were not poor. In most cases, livestock cannot realize that potential. Some livestock does have good living conditions. For example, grass-fed cattle, cows, and bulls do spend the majority of their lives outside, where they have plenty of space to run around in the sunshine and they are not forcibly separated from their calves. This argument excludes such cases because it is clear that ending a life prematurely, when the life is pretty good, is wrong and does hinder their possibility to flourish.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2010/Optimum\\_slaughter\\_weights\\_May2010.pdf](https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2010/Optimum_slaughter_weights_May2010.pdf)

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But even if most livestock cannot realize their potential to flourish, they still have this potential and killing them is wrong on the basis of that.

Another way the animal agriculture industry hinders animal flourishing is that animals typically have to live in very poor conditions. The industry's aim is to make the most profits, so the welfare of the animal's is not the industry's main interest. The welfare of billions of animals is often neglected (Walters 2012: 19).<sup>14</sup>

Animals are forced to live in crowded farms amongst their own waste (Rachels 2011: 878). Most of them never see sunlight before they are being taken to the slaughterhouse by trucks, which can take days. During their way to the slaughterhouse, the animals will not have any water, food, nor can they rest. This causes animals extreme stress. They also experience stress before going to the slaughterhouse. Cows are separated from their calves, in order for humans to take as much milk as possible from cows. The reason cows produce milk in the first place is to feed their calves. Moreover, they experience a lot of stress when they are separated from their calves. After separation, it takes days for cows to stop moping and bellowing (ibid 879). This is also the case with other mammals such as pigs (ibid 878).

There are also "humane slaughterhouses", but in reality, they are not that humane. There is still cruelty that takes place there. For example, since male chicks cannot lay eggs and grow slower than female chicks, almost all male chicks will be killed right after hatching. The typical killing method is grinding them alive.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes they are also thrown alive into trash cans (Rachels 2011: 880).

### 3.5 How the virtue of compassion requires us to be vegan

As I have explained earlier, when we have acquired the virtue of compassion, we should feel concern for other humans and non-human animals.

P1: We should not hinder the flourishing of other humans and non-human animals.

P2: Animal agriculture hinders animal flourishing.

P3: Supporting something that hinders animal flourishing counts as hindering animal flourishing.

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<sup>14</sup> Stuart Rachels gives in „Vegetarianism” a more thorough short overview on how the pigs, cows, chickens, turkeys and marine creatures are being treated in the animal agriculture industry.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/confinement\\_farm/facts/guide\\_egg\\_labels.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/confinement_farm/facts/guide_egg_labels.html)

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P4: Buying the products of animal agriculture counts as supporting animal agriculture.

C: We should not buy the products of animal agriculture, i.e. we should be vegan.

Premise 1 I explained in chapter 3.3. and premise 2 in chapter 3.4. We should not hinder the flourishing of other humans and non-human animals, because we have a common end – flourishing. We have the same end, which is why we should also care about each other. Only then can we truly appreciate flourishing. It also requires us to have obtained the virtue of compassion. We cannot have acquired the virtue of compassion and knowingly support an industry that hinders animal flourishing.

How do we hinder animal flourishing when we support the animal agriculture industry? Industries work in a supply-and-demand- fashion. As long as there are people who are willing to buy x products, the industries will sell x products. The bigger the demand, the bigger the supply. If more and more people buy fewer animal products, fewer animals flourishing will be hindered. Buyers influence the market. For example, in comparison to 2007, in 2014 300 million fewer animals were killed for food.<sup>16</sup>

Although it is possible to get animal products and animal by-products through other means than buying them and eat them, it is not relevant enough. Most adults have to buy most of their own food or get someone to buy it for them. This argument applies to adults, who can make their own choices, as teenagers and children typically eat what their parents or guardians provide for them.

My argument also favours Modest Veganism, which I have introduced earlier. It does not say that everyone has to be vegan. Some do not have this option. However, most of us do. If we have to option to be vegan, we should be vegan.

Once we have realized that we cannot be virtuous and support animal agriculture because it hinders the flourishing of animals we still might want to question whether it required us to go vegan. Is there perhaps another option to not support supporting an industry that hinders animal flourishing by buying animal products and animal by-products besides going vegan? Would

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.collective-evolution.com/2017/11/27/half-a-billion-fewer-animals-were-killed-since-2007-because-people-are-eating-less-meat/>  
[http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats\\_slaughter\\_totals.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/resources/research/stats_slaughter_totals.html)

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buying animal products and by-products from animals who have good living conditions and humanely raised animals, who live in good conditions be okay? Typically, even animals who have good living conditions, are usually still killed prematurely. Buying humanely raised meat and animal by-product's production still hinders animal's flourishing. If one has animals of their own, such as backyard chicken, one could care for them and eat their eggs, but chickens and other animals need more care than cats or dogs. Most people do not have the time, resources and interest to raise animals. Raising backyard chickens with care would be an exception to my argument, but for most people, my argument does apply.

## Conclusion

In my thesis, I applied virtue ethics to animal ethics. In order to show how virtue ethics can be applied to a specific topic in animal ethics – animal agriculture and its countermeasure: veganism - I focused on the virtue of compassion.

Virtue (*arête*) is a morally good and admirable character trait. We have to train ourselves to obtain virtues. Flourishing (eudaimonia) is for both humans and non-human animals our end. In order to flourish, both virtue and external goods are necessary.

In order to show how compassion can be understood as a virtue, I explained what compassion as an emotion is. Namely, there are three beliefs that are necessary to feel compassion. Compassion occurs when we believe that the other is going through a grave hardship or is in a vulnerable position, the magnitude of which they have not deserved and that one or one's close one could possibly end up in a similar hardship.

I also presented criticisms of compassion. It has been addressed as 1) irrational, 2) connected to anger and revenge and 3) partial and narrow. 1) I argued that although emotions can prompt irrationalities, we can also make mistakes whilst reasoning. We simply need to examine our emotions and take time to decide whether they are necessary for particular occasions.

2) When someone hinders our flourishing, we might feel angry at them. However, anger is not necessarily a bad thing. When anger is prompted by moral concern at the right people at the right time, expressed the right way and for the right amount of time, it is virtuous. Moreover, anger can motivate people to be courageous.

3) If compassion is partial, felt only towards people who are similar to us, it could possibly lead to unequal treatment. However, the problem is not with compassion per se, the problem is that we are not compassionate enough, which is why we should cultivate it.

Compassion as a virtue is more stable than compassion as an emotion. Emotions change and are involuntary, virtues are intentional choices we make over a long period of time.

We feel compassion towards animals on the basis of three beliefs that are necessary to feel compassion. Compassion occurs when we believe that the other is going through a grave hardship or is in a vulnerable position, the magnitude of which they have not deserved and that one or one's close one could possibly end up in a similar hardship. Killing animals prematurely and keeping them in confinement is definitely severe and the animals have not deserved it. We can also imagine that we would not want our or someone else's pet to be in the same position as animals in the animal agriculture industry.



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The reason why we should feel compassion towards non-human animals in the first place lies in eudaimonia - our common end. Although what constitutes a good life is different from species to species, we can say that the good life is hindered when someone is prematurely killed. In order for us to fully appreciate the good that is eudaimonia, we have to care about other human's and non-human animals' flourishing as well. By extension, we also care about and are compassionate towards other humans and non-human animals.

Having obtained the virtue of compassion and realized that the animal agriculture industry hinders animal flourishing and that we should care about it, we cannot support it by buying its products, i.e. we should be vegans. Although there are other means to gain excess to animal products and animal by-products, they are not relevant, as most adults have to buy most their own food and my argument applies to them.

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## Miks peaksime kaastunde voorust järgides olema veganid?

Käesolevas töös rakendasin vooruseetikat loomaetikasse. Voorus, mille näitel rakendamist tegin, oli kaastunne ning konkreetne loomaetika probleem loomatööstus, kuna see takistab loomade õitsengut. Töö eesmärk oli näidata, et kaastunde vooruse järgi ei tohiks me toetada sellist tööstust selle tööstuse produktide ostmisega, st me peaksime olema veganid.

Valisin loomade ja loomsete toodete söömise oma teemaks, kuna see on teema, mis puudutab meid kõiki igapäevaselt, mitu korda päevas. Kuigi on võimalik süüa loomi ja loomseid tooteid ilma seda tööstust toetamata, esineb selliseid juhtumeid harva, seega pole need piisavalt relevantset. Enamus täiskasvanuid peab enamiku oma toidust ise ostma. Mainisin, et veganlus puudutab tegelikult ka teisi tööstusi, näiteks nahatööstust. Nahatoodete tootmiseks on samuti vaja loomi eksploateerida ja tappa ning nahast toodetele on olemas alternatiivid. Samas ostetakse nahatooteid tunduvalt harvemini kui toitu, seega otsustasin keskenduda söömisharjumustele.

Esimeses peatükis selgitasin, mis on vooruseetika. Seejärel liikusin edasi loomaetika juurde ning tutvustasin vooruseetika lähenemist loomaetikale. Viimane nimelt see meie suhtumist loomadesse vooruste ja pahede kaudu.

Teise peatüki teema oli kaastunne. Selgitasin, mis kaastunne kui emotsioon täpselt on, lähtudes Aristotelese definitsioonist, mille järgi on vaja kaastunde jaoks kolme uskumust. Me tunneme kaastunnet kellegi vastu, kui usume, et 1) keegi elab midagi väga rasket läbi või on haavatavas olukorras ning 2) ta ei ole seda väärinud. Lisaks 3) peame me uskuma, et meie või keegi meie lähedastest võib sattuda samasse positsiooni nagu see kelle vastu me kaastunnet tunneme. Seejärel selgitasin, mis on kaastunne kui voorus ja kuidas erineb see kaastunde emotsioonist. Emotsioonide tundmist me nimelt ei saa kontrollida, vooruste jaoks käitume me aga teadlike otsuste järgi.

Pärast seda tutvustasin ma kolme viisi, kuidas kaastunnet on kritiseeritud. Kaastunnet on nimelt peetud 1) irratsionaalseks, 2) viha ja kättemaksuhimuga seostuvaks ning 3) erapoolikuks ja kitsaks.

Kolmas peatükk seob kaastunde loomaetikaga. Kõigepealt selgitan, mis veganlus on. Seejärel selgitasin, kuidas me tunneme loomade vastu kaastunnet eelpool nimetatud kolm uskumuse kaudu, mida on vaja kaastunde tundmiseks. Siis selgitasin, miks me üldse peaksime olema kaastundlikud loomade vastu. Nimelt on meil teiste inimeste ja loomadega ühine lõppeesmärk: *eudaimonia*. Selleks, et seda eesmärki hinnata, peame me hoolima teiste inimeste ja loomade eesmärgist ning olema nende vastu kaastundlikud. Pärast seda selgitasin, kuidas loomatööstus

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takistab loomade õitsengut kahel viisil: 1) loomad tapetakse enneaegselt ning 2) loomadel pole head elamistingimused farmides. Lõpuks esitasin eelnevate peatükkide alusel argumendi, mille järelduseks oli see, et me ei tohiks osta loomatööstuste produkte, st. me peaksime olema veganid, et mitte toetada loomatööstust, mis takistab loomade õitsengut.

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