

Politico-Moral Apathy and Omnivore's *Akrasia*

Views from the Rationalist Tradition

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Awareness concerning the moral status and treatment of nonhuman animals has risen exponentially in the past few decades. Yet many of those who rationally note the unjustifiability of practices such as industrial animal farming continue to support those practices with their own lifestyles. The paper investigates this perturbing obstacle to the spread of animal politics from the perspective of *akrasia*. *Akrasia* is an old philosophical paradox, within which one knows *x* to be true, and yet willfully acts against *x*—here, attention will be on “omnivore’s *akrasia*,” a state within which one voluntarily consumes products which one deems to have been produced with immoral means. Emphasis will be on depictions of *akrasia* offered by rationalist philosophers—Plato, Spinoza, and Descartes—who all accentuated misled emotions, wants, and desires, together with a lack of self-control and cultivation, as the primary sources of *akrasia*. Moreover, these philosophers brought forward the relevance of external influence and habit, together with cognitive defects, and suggested that *akrasia* can be overcome not only via self-control (Plato), but also through the cultivation of inner emotions and joy (Spinoza) and generosity (Descartes). It will be suggested that many aspects of omnivore’s *akrasia*, ranging from hedonistic impulsivity to political apathy, can be explained via the qualifications offered by the rationalist school. Furthermore, the paper claims that if omnivore’s *akrasia* were to become less commonplace, animal ethics and advocacy would greatly benefit from offering the type of moral arguments that underline the links between reflective cultivation, joy, and generosity.

Keywords:
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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, arguments for animal liberation and veganism have increased momentarily, and penetrated the public consciousness. Most people in Western countries know, at least superficially, about these arguments against animal consumption, and many have seen footage from within animal industries, together with other “points of evidence,” which suggest that the human-nonhuman relation ought to be radically reconsidered. Some of those who have heard the arguments and witnessed the points of evidence remain simply, flatly unpersuaded. Many, however, are persuaded on the level of ideas: they consider compassion toward nonhuman beings to be imperative, they can find no way to refute the logical arguments of animal ethics, and they may even term themselves “animal lovers,” eager to condemn any

person or institution that partakes in violence against other animals. Yet most of those who are so persuaded remain consumers of animal products: they know why they ought to stop their habits of consumption, but they do not follow this knowledge in their mode of living. Awareness of animal liberation remains sectioned into the realm of ideas, and does not manifest in the realm of practice, does not transform into concrete actions.

The question that emerges is astoundingly simple: How can animal advocates evoke political change, if moral arguments and factual considerations fail to persuade, even when their validity is recognized? How can the animal issue manifest itself on the political level in an adequately extensive sense, if rational arguments, and rational proof, fail to arouse practical change? Individuals know, societal instances and institutions know—and yet

change is slow, painstaking, labored. How to proceed when there is an abyss between reason and action?

This paper will investigate the tension between knowledge and action, between knowing x is good and not acting upon that knowledge, by going back to one of the oldest conundrums of Western philosophy: *akrasia*. In a state of *akrasia*, one believes “ x is good” to be true, and yet voluntarily acts contrary to this belief. This paradoxical yet familiar aspect of human cognition will, it is hoped, help to illuminate how and why many condemn violence toward nonhuman animals whilst taking part in that very violence. *Akrasia* can be approached from a variety of perspectives, and here the emphasis is on its most traditional antagonist: rationalism. The paper will explore how key rationalist thinkers—Plato, Spinoza, and Descartes—approached the peculiar ability of humans to act against their best knowledge. It is hoped that these classics, who remained quite detached from moral concern toward more-than-human animals, nonetheless might help to make sense of, and counteract, what is here termed “omnivore’s *akrasia*.”

PLATO AND EMOTIONS AS APPEARANCE

Socrates was famous for suggesting that immoral actions are always the result of ignorance, and that knowledge will always, by necessity, lead to good deeds. This notion remains prevalent in Western thought, reflected in the belief that knowledge facilitates societal and political change: that all one needs is the adequate representation of reason and evidence for such change to follow. It is from here that the animal scholar’s or the advocate’s hopefulness stems as well—from the tradition that prioritizes reason as the human motivator. Immoral acts toward nonhuman animals are caused by ignorance, by lack of knowledge and awareness, and as long as knowledge and proof are provided, people will alter their ways of treating those animals. Socrates’ legacy is, thereby, scripted onto the ethos of political campaigning. But are human beings such reasonable creatures?

It was of course Plato, through whom Socrates spoke, who printed the Socratic belief in knowledge onto the contours of the Western psyche. Plato addressed the impossibility of *akrasia* both in *Gorgias* and in *Protagoras*, where he presupposed that an agent would always pursue the better of two alternatives, that pleasure is linked with the good and the true, and that we are therefore destined

to act in ways that promote truth and goodness. Divergences from this path can only be caused by muddled perceptions of what truth and goodness are (Taylor, 1980; Brickhouse & Smith, 2007). Should we hence believe that knowledge and moral arguments suffice for political change, as long as nothing distracts and jumbles our faculties of reason?

In *Protagoras*, Plato puzzles, via Socrates, whether knowledge can be enslaved by passions (emotions). The initial stance is clear: “If someone knows what is good and evil, then he could not be forced by anything to act contrary to what knowledge says; understanding is sufficient to aid a person” (352c4-7). The problem, however, is that *appearances* can mislead one away from knowledge, in which case one no longer follows its direction: “The power of appearance can often make us wander all over the place in confusion, changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices” (356d4-7). Knowledge can free us from these appearances, for “the art of measurement in contrast, would make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth” (356d7-e1). However, knowledge does not always succeed in its task—and in these instances appearances can mask evil as good, thereby inducing us to pursue unworthy causes, to chase and live by *aischron* (moral baseness) instead of *kalon* (moral beauty). Appearances, again, are founded on the manner in which non-rational desires target an object and mask it as rationally desirable—and to add a further element, these desires are fed by various appetites (wants) and passions (emotions). (See also Taylor, 1980; Brickhouse & Smith, 2007.) Accordingly, appetites and passions can stir and evoke in us non-rational desires, which in turn conceal truths from us, and distort our view so that we begin to confuse moral beauty and goodness with moral baseness and evil. It is via this confusion that a person may kill for petty vengeance, for her reason has been clouded by passion, and that same passion has sparked into being rage and a desire for revenge, masked as honor and justice.

Therefore, Plato stays firm: we do follow knowledge, but only when that knowledge is not muddled by various non-rational desires, thereby being pushed under misleading appearances, and only when we stay clear from the wants and emotions that feed those desires. If I want something, and feel pleasure regarding that thing, it may spark a desire in me, which again push-

es me to believe that what I want, and what brings me pleasure, is good—when, in fact, it remains unjustified, crooked, warped.

Could one, then, explain the stubborn consumption of animal products, the refusal to politicize animal issues via actions that depart from the institutionalized utilization of nonhuman animals, as resulting from a similar pattern? Is wider political change a non-actuality, despite all the reasoned arguments and points of evidence in its favor, because wants and emotions, ranging from culinary taste to financial greed, and from contempt toward animals to grandiose self-love of humanity, are stirring in individuals and societies a desire for animal products, and because this desire again is masking meat-eating and fur-wearing as acts morally justified, even as acts of *kalon*? Could we, then, claim that many act against their better judgment, because the power of appearances pushes logical, reasoned arguments for animal liberation to the margins, or even masks them as forms of absurdity or lunacy, while acts stemming from taste, greed, contempt, and self-love are masked as “necessary” and “natural,” as expressions of a cosmic order, and thereby as markers of nothing less than moral beauty? The implication would be that regardless of the pro-animal arguments, the appearance of what it is to use and consume other animals remains positive as long as the wants and emotions that mask it as such remain undetected. Indeed, this scenario would explain the insistence on holding on to acts that one cannot justify, the persistent falling back on ways of using other animals that one cannot morally defend, for appearances do not require detailed explications or justifications: it suffices that one feels or perceives them to be correct, right, or good. Simultaneously, emotions, wants and ensuing desires may color and mask arguments for animal liberation quite effortlessly as *aischron*, by vilifying their contents and their messengers as morally corrupt (veganism becomes “self-righteousness,” animal ethics “preaching,” animal equality “misanthropy,” animal advocates “terrorists”).

If wants, emotions, and desires offer violence the appearance of goodness and veganism the appearance of moral crookedness, how are we to find the way back to the “truth”? That is, how is a person suffering from omnivore’s *akrasia* to be pushed toward noting reasoned arguments and evidence? In *Gorgias*, Plato warns us that appetites become increasingly potent when nourished, and posits that thus we ought to discipline rather than

feed them, so as to render them weaker in their capacity to construct misleading appearances. Hence, Plato suggests that appetites and passions are to be corrected and controlled, in order for true knowledge to prosper. It is because of this that he urges us to follow the life of self-control: “A person who wants to be happy must evidently pursue and practice self-control, each of us must flee from lack of discipline as quickly as his feet will carry him” (*Gorgias* 507c8-e3). Otherwise, without such “art of measurement,” we will indeed continue to “wander all over the place in confusion” (see again *Protagoras* 356d6-7). What is required, then, is *ankrateia* (self-discipline) and *karteria* (moral endurance and perseverance) rather than *akolasia* (lack of discipline), and this requires one to control appetites and passions. It is here that we find one impetus for Plato’s (in)famous claim, according to which emotions should be the “slave” of reason, and restrained by the latter.

Following this suggestion, omnivore’s *akrasia* could be overcome by paying closer attention to the sorts of wants that feed an appetite for animal products, and to the sorts of emotions that spur ill-conceived desires to keep consuming nonhuman beings. The rather staunch stance would thereby be this: akratic individuals should practice self-discipline, controlling the sources of false appearances. Of course, this may sound overly Stoic. The notions of self-control and moral endurance are often viewed with startled hesitance, as if they signaled something quite negative, even a loss of a part of one’s humanity. Yet, it may be worthwhile to note that this hesitance has a cultural history of its own—a history which may be entwined with animal consumption. Self-control and moral endurance are quite alien to the consumerist society, which precisely rests on the desire to immediately, unreflectively, satisfy various wants, and which celebrates equally un-reflected emotions that feed that desire. This is what marketing is based on: spurring emotions that create wants and desires, and make us buy ever more things, ever more products, which we do not need. Moral reflection, the search for “goodness” and “truth,” is quite uncomfortable for the consumerist ethos, for many (if not most) of its practices are morally unsound—hence such reflection is suffocated under the cacophony of marketing. The question that emerges, then, is whether Plato’s teachings on self-control have been discarded too whimsically, based on a consumerist culture that views self-control with hostility precisely because it could undo

the very basis of that culture. That is, are we afraid of self-control, of *anerateia* and *karteria*, because of our wish to sustain our hedonistic wants, emotions, and desires? And if so, should we not endorse and bring back these notions?

Yet *akrasia* is not a matter of mere personal psychology, for—as evidenced by the powers of the consumerist society—it involves societal contexts and ramifications that push us toward given forms of behavior (Rorty, 1997). Therefore, next to self-control, attention also ought to be placed on unveiling the connections between societal, cultural, and political discourses and practices on the one hand, and the desire for meat, eggs, and dairy on the other. One focus of animal scholars and activists ought to be the social politics that create desires and wants, and on the social politics of emotions: Where do cravings for animal products, and emotions underlying those cravings, stem from? How are they linked to marketing, media, social identity, consumerism, education, the health system, financial institutions? Animal studies has been taking steps in this direction, but for *akrasia* to be addressed, such studies need to penetrate the public consciousness, and speak also via the practical advocate. In short, the person in a state of omnivore's *akrasia* would benefit not only from grasping the value of reflection, self-control, and moral endurance, but also by coming to terms with those cultural, social, and political mechanisms that push forward meat-enticing wants and emotions, and thereby render that reflection, that self-control, so very difficult.

Therefore, the suggestions for both the advocate and the *akrates* would be simple: to entice reflection on the emotions, desires, and wants which tend to glorify animal consumption; to place attention on their societal causes; and to encourage self-control. Through such routes, the akratic omnivore may—in the light of Plato's philosophy—become more inclined toward modes of action that recognize also the moral value of nonhuman beings.

Of course, some caution is warranted. Plato's insistence on the primacy of reason over emotion remains a densely contested and criticized issue. It branded the serene supremacy of rationality onto the surface of the Western cultural ethos, and gave rise to the notion that it is via (theoretical) reason that human beings step above animality (a notion that Aristotle was to develop and accentuate). Its consequence has been striking: the emergence of humanity defined as a wholly rational being, who is failing

her own humanity whenever she succumbs to emotion. According to this cultural caricature, to be human is to be wholly rational, and to view the world via emotions is a fault, a frailty, that requires weeding out. Plato thereby laid the grounds for a cultural heritage that includes a double dualism—that between reason and emotion, and (by implication) between humans and other animals—which has had an astonishingly strong impact on the Western psyche, and which inevitably has played no small part among the historical causes of anthropocentrism. The logic of the contemporary, anthropocentric interpretations of this legacy is simple: a “proper” human being will control her emotions when evaluating the status and treatment of other animals, and she will also draw a distinction between herself and those animals, grounded on her reasoning ability.

Ecofeminists and many others have offered astute criticism against these dualisms in the animal context. What emerges as relevant here, however, is the persistence of *akrasia*. Despite the criticism offered, Western cultures tend to reaffirm these dualisms, but perhaps with a paradoxical twist: it is appetites and passions—the very things Plato urged us to control—that enforce them. The suggestion here is that, from a moral psychology perspective, it may be wants (related to taste, identity, etc.), and particularly emotions (including a sense of superiority, insecurity, contempt, disgust, even hate), which maintain the belief in dualisms. In short, whilst being convinced of the unerring rationality of anthropocentrism and, when it comes to reason, of the presupposed abyss between herself and other animals, the meat-eater may in fact be motivated by something wholly non-rational: her unreflected, societally produced wants and emotions. This paradox gives rise to the strange yet common setting, within which one may insist that non-human animals ought not to be approached emotively, that they ought to be treated according to a rational, utilitarian logic of consumption, that humans excel in reason and hence have unique moral value—yet all the while the person so insisting refuses to listen to rational arguments that speak for animal liberation, and instead emotively follows her own desires to keep consuming animals. Plato's “blind emotions” are masked as Plato's “reason”; appearance takes over once more.

Hence, although there are ample grounds to remain alarmed by the cultural ethos that categorically distinguishes emotions from reason—indeed, emotions and

reason are partly inseparable, and form chiasms which render a categorical dualism unsupportable—yet from the viewpoint of *akrasia* it appears that it is primarily emotion which reinforces the distinction, and again reinforces *akrasia*. The double dualism is maintained on the basis of wants and emotions. As long as this does not become evident, *akrasia* will carry on creating appearances, and thereby masking emotion as reason, and animal consumption as justified. It is here in particular that Plato's stance is of value, for he reminds us of the dangers of accepting emotions (and wants) at face value, without remembering to evoke the reflective element dormant in them, and without using reason as their partner—the danger at the root of omnivore's *akrasia*.¹

Another issue related to the critique of Plato's take on emotion also warrants attention. The criticism offered against the dualism between reason and emotion, and against Plato's insistence that the former should govern the latter, has remained overly generic. It tends to glorify emotions as valuable and morally praiseworthy, for it has tended to concentrate on positive emotions (empathy, compassion, love, etc.) as the prototype of "emotions," whilst overlooking the significance of negative emotions (hate, disgust, anger, contempt, etc.). Social psychology has brought forward the often pivotal impact that the latter also bear on our moral judgements (Haidt, 2001), and this impact ought to be taken into account within animal ethics and advocacy as well. Instead of merely highlighting the relevance of emotions *per se*, scrutiny must be placed on *which* emotions one is speaking of—and more precisely, instead of simply suggesting that emotions affect moral judgment, attention needs to be focused on which emotions *should* affect that judgement. Here we come back to Plato, for his insistence on maintaining control over emotions has perhaps been met with an unduly critical attitude. There are emotions that one needs to govern, emotions that do not enhance but rather hinder our capacity for moral perception. Plato was not the stern, unrelenting emotion-detester, a cold, detached reason-seeker as he is often depicted (after all, in his philosophy emotions are entwined with reason in the sense that they offer it motivation; ultimately, emotions are part of virtue), but rather a philosopher concerned about how particularly negative emotions can spark immoral behavior. It is this concern that laid the grounds for his suggestion that emotions must also be scrutinized and monitored reflectively, via reason. The dualistic take on emotion and reason, be-

tween human and animal, is a cultural phenomenon, the most vehement versions of which Plato did not lend support to: his aim was to guide us, not toward a pure, detached, callous world of sheer reason (understood in the modern sense), but toward goodness, moral clarity, and moral action (realms in which "truth" and thereby "reason" resided for the Ancient Greek). From here arises the value of self-discipline, a potential feature of human mindedness so eagerly overlooked in the contemporary era.

SPINOZA AND EMOTIONS AS BONDAGE AND JOY

Spinoza partly agreed with Plato's treatment of *akrasia*. Defiance of rational judgments, "truths," is grounded on passion overtaking one's conception of reality. Indeed, Spinoza was preoccupied with the tension between reason and passion, and argued that *akrasia* is the result of succumbing to the latter, and thereby overriding the former. Irrational passions can evoke desires that are stronger than those evoked by reason, particularly when the latter desires require longevity (i.e., their goal is far in the future), and this again motivates *akrasia*. Yet Spinoza also had something novel to add.

Like Plato, Spinoza called for self-control, the lack of which he termed "bondage," the inability to fight the gripping tentacles, the overpowering straightjacket, of passions. Here, we lose the ability to govern ourselves, and instead become administered by nothing more than the contingent flow of external effects that induce emotions within us, thus being thrown to the mercy of *fortuna*. It is bondage that sparks *akrasia* as we begin, rather helplessly, to follow emotions toward the evil, even when we see the good in front of us—the good that we were meant to pursue. Spinoza summarizes:

Man's lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call Bondage. For the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune, in whose power he so greatly is that often, though he sees the better for himself, he is still forced to follow the worse. (Ethics, part IV, Preface)

Yet one difference in relation to Plato emerges: Emotions do not always mask evil as goodness, but rather persuade us to follow the former, even when we note the glimmering light of the latter. Thus, emotions make us knowingly go against the good, and in so doing they be-

come a type of madness: “Greed, ambition, and lust really are a species of madness, even though they are not numbered among the diseases” (part IV, p44s). However, emotions may also suffocate that light of goodness, and thereby render us unable to distinguish right from wrong: “A desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil can be extinguished or restrained by many other desires which arise from affects by which we are tormented” (part IV, p15). In both cases, emotions often prompt us to follow the lead of *doxa*, opinions, rather than knowledge, with *akrasia* standing as the evident consequence: “With this I believe I have shown the cause why men are moved more by opinion than by true reason, and why the true knowledge of good and evil arouses disturbances of the mind, and often yields to lust of every kind. Hence that verse of the Poet: *videor meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor*” (part IV, p17s).²

Thereby, passions place us under bondage, wherein we can no longer pursue the good we recognize; they also smother the knowledge of that good, and make us follow opinion, the contingencies of the world instead of what is right. Again, the correlation to the akratic omnivore is not difficult to explicate. Just as the “lust” Spinoza speaks of can obscure understanding and immobilize us under its bondage, emotions of a whole variety can muddle our grasp of the moral dimensions inherent to the human-nonhuman animal relationship. The meat-eater, the milk-drinker, the egg-connoisseur, can see the animal ethics arguments in front of them, the video footage of misery gained from animal farms, note their importance and validity, and yet feel obliged to carry on their habits of animal consumption, as if unable to swerve, unable to desist, to control themselves; and at times the bondage becomes so potent that they lose the abilities of normative insight, lose their grasp of the “good” in the animal context. Again, the remedy would seem to be the control of those emotions that act as antagonists toward moral perception.

To gain a better grasp of the notion of control, a closer look at Spinoza’s take on emotions is required. Spinoza was careful to underline that emotions, passions, in themselves are potentially highly positive: not all passions are ruinous. They are a form of “affect,” by which Spinoza referred to experiences and ideas connected to the power of the body and the mind to act. That is, they can motivate, spark, and provide impetus: lust can move the body, move the mind. Yet, in their grips, we are not

always autonomous, active individuals, but may also be thrown to the mercy of uncontrollable elements, and thereby pacified. Hence, emotions can motivate, but they can also render humans into wholly passive creatures. This dual, contradictory nature of emotions takes place due to the way in which affects work from two different directions. They can arise from ourselves, find their cause in our internal realms, and when this is the case, they (and we) act according to “adequate representations of the world and ourselves” (Lin, 2006, p. 399). The internally produced emotions are adequate, because they flow with reason, are enlightened by rational reflection. However, when we are not the cause, “the representations which guide us are mutilated and confused” (Lin, 2006, p. 399). In the latter case, instead of our internal realms, it is the eternal world which causes passions, and thereby we become the targets of contingencies; when affects (passions, emotions) are instigated by the external, they are “inadequate”, and hence can lead to confusion, muddlement. The inadequacy of these affects is related to the contingent form of the external, with *doxa* again acting as one example: *doxa* is confused, fragmented, arbitrary, and when our affects are caused by it, they reflect these qualities. Hence, the suggestion is that passions originating from oneself contain clarity, for they are reflected upon, influenced by our rational capacity, whereas emotions initiated by the external reality pacify us; we become their hapless targets, they pass through us without reflection. It is precisely these externally produced emotions that cause *akrasia*, and it is they that need to be controlled.

Could we claim, then, that when it comes to our conceptions of nonhuman animals, the external world is spurring emotions which direct attention away from reason and morality, and which rather make one follow public opinion? Here, omnivore’s *akrasia* would be caused by marketing, by our cultural and societal settings, by anthropocentric discourses and consumerist practices. Perhaps there is, within many human beings, an innate tendency toward intersubjectivity and positive emotions toward other animals, and perhaps this tendency is strongest before cultural and political influences begin to offer countering views on how one ought to perceive and relate to nonhuman animality. Here, emotions do not stem from the external world,³ but rather from our internal, inbuilt capacity to note otherness, to breathe in the specificity of other animals, and thus they include the element

of clarity, of consideration and reflection. Emotions with a more ruinous effect are, from this perspective, sparked by the external world: the anthropocentric discourses and consumption-based institutions that color political, social, and private language concerning other animals. Hence, contempt, the sense of superiority, disgust, and other related, muddling emotions are incited by the surrounding culture's depictions of pigs and cows, chickens and fishes as passive, incapable, purchasable products. In this way, moral clarity would be born from innate, perceptive emotions concerning the nonhuman, and *akrasia* would be founded upon the influences of the external cultural setting, and the emotions it ignites. Thereby, "control" would be directed toward the external rather than the internal, and this notion offers a further push for the suggestion offered in relation to Plato's passions: one needs to pay attention to the social, cultural, and political ramifications and contexts from which akratic emotions arise.

Yet Spinoza's remedy for *akrasia* is not restricted to control, for there is also a more encouraging element to his philosophy. Spinoza claimed that affects, passions, which stem from within, have an experiential reward, for they are linked to "joy"—a key passion for Spinoza.⁴ It is joy that lends us the capacity for moral agency, the ability to recognize goodness and distinguish it from evil (the latter of which is made evident by sadness); indeed, joy and sadness are paramount in that they reveal good and evil to us. This intrinsic connection between values and joy/sadness is related to motivation, for comprehension of good, experience of joy, improves and boosts self-preservation—joy intensifies our potency and hence enhances survival, whereas sadness bears the opposite effect. Thus, joy *becomes* "good," while sadness and melancholy become "evil": "By good here I understand every kind of joy, and whatever leads to it" (*Ethics*, part III, p39s). Simultaneously, joy also offers the motivating fire, the impetus, to act according to one's knowledge, and is the source of life's energy. Hence, internally produced emotions and their core—joy—strengthen the power of the mind and add potency to our actions; they spark vitality.

But why does joy spark motivation? Spinoza underscored "*conatus*," the effort toward self-preservation, and argued that it underlies all beings of nature. Rational ideas, originating from within, serve to preserve our own mindedness, and are thereby a form of *conatus*; irrational ideas and passions, by contrast, stem from the outside,

and bear the opposite effect by encumbering, hindering *conatus*. Rationality (the mode of thinking caused by our own being) requires that we pursue those actions that hold greatest long-term benefits—from the viewpoint of all eternity and all of existence. Ideas stemming from rationality are thereby prudent, for they facilitate life, being, actuality, and survival. Moreover, they are universal and abstract, not tied to a specific time or context. Hence, rationality and the *conatus* it provides render us into beings who are autonomous in both our thought and preservation, and who seek universal, objective knowledge—the type of knowledge which sees beyond particular temporal and contextual settings, and which can grasp matters on a meta-level, detached from the immediacy of things.⁵ Passions instigated from within, in line with reason, sparked by rational ideas, can similarly chance *conatus* and self-preservation—they *are* joy and its variations. (See also Lin, 2006.)

Yet rationality and the passions related to it are repeatedly under threat. First, we recurrently fail to step beyond time and particular contexts, to go toward a more universal understanding of things, and instead focus on matters that are close to us (in time or space), for they tend to have more intensity. They become more vivid and thereby more inviting, even sparkling, mesmerizing, in comparison to the mind-bending viewpoint beyond time and place, the viewpoint concerning the whole of existence. In short, intensity increases with closeness, and this leads us to act impulsively, unthinkingly—the reflective meta-perspective is abandoned, and we lose the paths of reason, lose our grip of rationality. Second, passions originating from the external are always more powerful than one individual. This is because the external is nearly infinite in its variation and plurality, whereas an individual is just one being; that is, the external is the world, and one individual cannot fight the world (Lin, 2006). Because of this, externally produced passions tend to throw us down, twist and bend our grasp of reason, until we are acting wholly irrationally, following our lusts wherever they may lead. In the process, we become mad, lose *conatus*, lose much of our striving for life—and with it, joy.

Could we take Spinoza's suggestions on joy and *conatus* to further explicate omnivore's *akrasia*? First, it should be noted that animal ethics has largely followed Spinoza's recommendation that we adopt a universal stance on things, that we step beyond specifics (immediate culinary

satisfaction, prejudices based on similarity, familiarity, and proximity, etc.) in order to discover (or create) rationally founded grounds for value that cover all sentient beings. Yet what these theories often—almost without fail—overlook is the possibility that sheer rationality may not be adequate in order to spark change. Morality is not detachment, nor mere logic. What Spinoza is positing is that morality, despite being rational, is also something much more. It emerges as joy, it enhances our *conatus*, our will to live, our capacity to exist (despite being a rationalist, because of these elements Spinoza has also been termed the “philosopher of joy”). There is something quite graceful in the notion that goodness equals joy, and that joy equals not only the willingness to pursue moral actions, but also the willingness to pursue life itself. Joy, goodness, and life become entangled, intertwined, a glowing, radiant whole. Perhaps these elements, and the whole they weave, have been ignored in much of animal ethics and advocacy.

Indeed, from the perspective of the omnivore, animal advocates often (although by no means always) present animal liberation as a solemn, joyless affair, filled with demands that appear to erode the quality of life. Emphasis is often on mere rationality, stripped bare of joy, and on the type of demands (“stop doing x , y , and z ”) that pure rationality and moral arguments stemming from it pose. Many feel that they are told they must give up a variety of things, change their lives, and make sacrifices: they interpret the situation as one where they are subjected to various demands, various “losses,” and the demands may appear truly staggering to many who are utterly absorbed in the life-styles that rest on animal use. The perception, then, is negative: concern for nonhuman animals requires sacrifice (“give up” meat, leather, hunting, even one’s identity as stereotypically “masculine,” and so forth). It is not a matter that offers one something, that enhances life, adds color and density, richness to existence, but rather a matter that takes away, impoverishes. This often un-noted discourse of sacrifice, in turn, eradicates motivation, dims the impetus to change—taking other animals seriously is, in short, perceived as antagonistic to joy and *conatus*. Reason and logic taken on their own, without links to forms of mentation that render them appealing, emerge as hollow, even harrowing. Perhaps it is this grey depiction of sacrifice and reason that masks *akrasia* with veils of temptation. Why fol-

low vegan “sacrifice,” when one can follow a lust for flesh, desire for dairy, carry on as “normal”?

Moreover, even when advocacy is less reason-orientated and grounded more on inviting compassion or empathy toward the plight of nonhuman animals, this may spark nothing but melancholy, the type of sadness that extinguishes vitality. Here, the omnivore may feel such torment over the suffering of nonhuman creatures that she becomes apathetic, passive, withdrawn from the issue, despondent in her misery—and thereafter, rather paradoxically, in order to avoid her own torment, carries on with her consumer habits as if the suffering did not exist, as if she had never heard of it. In such instances, “compassion fatigue” is explained via Spinoza’s stance on melancholy: without noting the good and joy, and by paying attention only to evil and melancholy, we lose *conatus*, the striving toward life and morality.

What Spinoza is reminding us is that reason and morality can glow with joy, that they are appealing, capable of pushing us toward life and its myriad of riches rather than away from them. To acknowledge this holistic stance on motivation, joy, reason, and morality within the nonhuman context requires a shift in emphasis away from detached information, detached logical arguments so common in animal ethics and some advocacy, even away from accentuating scenes of suffering (as important as they are), and toward a stance which celebrates moral concern for cows and fishes as something inclusive of elevation and motivation. Following the Spinozian framework, more emphasis should be placed on how moral attention in the nonhuman context facilitates a richer, more profound view of the world—it adds to life, to reality, rather than impoverishes them, for as we begin to appreciate how that world is bursting with almost countless ways of experiencing, almost countless subjects-of-a-life, we also find new perspectives onto the world. Accordingly, it does not require sacrifice, but instead adds color and depth to our existence, enables and facilitates new directions. To come face to face with a nonhuman as a valuable other is to gain a new reality—one marked by joy, value and actualized moral agency. Here *conatus* enters the stage, for with a joyful rather than a detached recognition of the value of others, we become motivated to act in ways that enhance the lives of others, and ultimately those of ourselves (perceived from a meta-level, we are only one among many, specific, spec-

tacular creatures—creatures with whom we share the world, and to whose wellbeing ours is tied). In short, noting value in nonhuman animals becomes a form of increasing joy and will for life also in the human animal. The lesson, then, is simple: to talk of animal ethics, or animal liberation, in ways that tie together joy, reason, morality, and conation in the human creature, immersed as she is in the fibers of animal life.

Yet external passions remain a threat, for they are stronger, and invite focus on short-term solutions. The lust for flesh, for habit, obscures and distracts from the “good,” makes one concentrate on immediate desires rather than the more distant moral aims. Hence, the external remains a threat, and this is why constant vigilance and action against the oppressive pull of anthropocentric politics—personal and particularly public—are required for *akrasia* to be diminished. For Spinoza, the core of moral life consists of becoming freer by becoming more active. Activity includes the actions of the mind, the capacity to reflect on emotions, and to exclude and reject those that muddle our understanding of the “good.” Because of the strength of the external, the process is ongoing, constant, but it will ultimately ensure freedom. Thus the akratic omnivore, and indeed all of us, will have to continuously battle external influences—yet this is evidently worth the struggle, for as a result, our moral actions, emotions, and thoughts will, in the Spinozian sense, become “free.”

Viewed from the perspective of Spinoza’s philosophy, the akratic omnivore would thereby be suffering from bondage originating from the surrounding, anthropocentric society. She stands as the target of the external social reality, and either fails to follow her own moral vision, or becomes confused over what “goodness” is in the context of the nonhuman. She notes the arguments given to her, but is overtaken by lust for meat, by habits of consumption, and so enters a type of madness, living by *fortuna* rather than moral judgment. It is in this state that she “sees better, but worse pursues.” The advice given to her by Spinoza (if Spinoza had ever harbored positive moral attitudes toward pigs and cows) would have been the same as that of Plato: self-control. Yet for Spinoza this control refers to something specific, a type of autonomy within which the omnivore lets the internal rather than the external guide her judgment, and within which she is ultimately directed by joy.

DESCARTES AND EMOTIONS AS DEFECT AND GENEROSITY

Descartes is the philosopher perhaps most derided for his stance on nonhuman animals. His rigid dualism, his insistence on skepticism, and his mechanomorphic view of other animals have all paved the way for the assumption that his philosophy cannot accommodate animal ethics. Yet Descartes did offer some insights that may be of value even to the latter. Surprisingly, these stem from his rationalism—the very grounds from which he excluded the possibility of nonhuman mindedness. Here we come back to emotions and their way of evoking *akrasia*.

Like Socrates, Plato, and Spinoza, Descartes argued that knowledge instigates morally sound and viable actions. Yet he recognized also that passions can obscure such knowledge, and thereby prompt *akrasia*. Like Plato and Spinoza, Descartes suggested that moral failures often originate from malfunctioning passions, and it is by training and controlling the latter that the former can be overcome. Here, *akrasia* once more emerges as a refusal of the genuine moral good, based on misconceptions pushed forward by passions—the passions show us the “good” in a misleading, defective light, and moral wrongs ensue. Thereby, “appearance,” also underlined by Plato and Spinoza, rises to the surface once more, as emotions are depicted as factors capable of masking moral wrongs as acts of goodness. Descartes, however, had a very particular understanding of how such appearances occur. First, a person can have intrinsic shortcomings, such as mental illnesses, that hinder her from witnessing the good. Second, societal attitudes force various habits on us, which again render the perception of the “good” an arduous task. Third, we quite simply mistake the “evil” for the “good.” The latter is caused by “attention-withdrawal,” wherein we see the good but withdraw our attention away from it, and in a delusional manner attribute goodness to what is in fact evil. This, again, forms “an akratic break.” (Williston, 1999, p. 42) From the viewpoint of omnivore’s *akrasia*, it is particularly worthwhile to consider whether the first two of these ways of “emotion-created appearance” are intertwined—that is, whether mental “defects” and societal habits form an entanglement which pushes one toward *akrasia*.

Let us begin with habits. The anthropocentric modes of behavior pushed forward by our society, the

instrumentalizing and mechanomorphic ways of perceiving and utilizing nonhuman animals, are abundantly present everywhere we look, and robust in their capacity to block other modes of perceiving and valuing animality. The stereotypes, meanings, and discourses of anthropocentrism become lived, real habits, with real, often violent consequences, and these habits again may misguide us away from grasping the “good” in the animal context. They invite emotions that strengthen their own underlying presumptions—presumptions founded on the idea of nonhuman creatures as lesser in ability and worth, and as instrumentally usable. As already posited by Spinoza, it is this phenomenon of habit-internalization that can evoke *akrasia*. One simultaneously nods to the animal liberation arguments offered, whilst being nonetheless overtaken by emotions that conform to and reinstate the habits of anthropocentrism. In other words one hears the arguments, notes the “good” that they may contain, but still follows the mode of habit.

Again, these habits may be linked to the first of the above sources of *akrasia* mentioned by Descartes—psychological defects. They become so robust in their grip, so expansive, widespread, and obtrusive, that they are internalized on the psychological level. Our surroundings play a role in shaping our minds on an intrinsic level. Habits of the society become habits of the mind, the most obvious example of which is the familiar hypothesis that a neo-liberalistic, egocentric society structured around self-directedness, hierarchies, utilization, hedonism, competition, and instrumentalization of others is manifesting itself as a rise of the narcissistic personality disorder. We evolve, as individuals and as a species, against settings of our own making, and here our minds become the landscapes of continued alteration. Spinoza and Descartes would have agreed that the external can evoke passions in us, but the impact may be much more foundational than this—it may involve our capacity to form passions, the very constitution of our minds, the way in which we are able to perceive the world and its beings, and the way in which we are able to act. In short, our tendencies, our cognitive configurations, are impacted by societal habits, and hence, anthropocentric habits can cause alterations in our mentation, to a point where we become “defective” in our ability to empathize with nonhuman animals and to perceive them as something other than utilities.

First, some are inherently, constitutionally prone to ignore the arguments for animal liberation (even when they recognize the rationality of these arguments) due to “intrinsic shortcomings.” Such people may include the aforementioned narcissists, or their more vicious, malign kin, the psychopathically orientated, who note the rational validity of the arguments offered to them, but who nonetheless—perhaps with some amusement—scoff at their content, finding them experientially absurd in relation to their own egocentric way of approaching the reality. They may appreciate the logic of animal ethics, but still find it irrelevant due to their own habitual, internalized manner of relating to others; and so they follow *akrasia*. People psychologically prone to *akrasia* may also include those with innate difficulties in controlling impulses or various emotions, those with a tendency toward apathy, or loss of goal-directedness, and those with a tendency toward ambivalence. Indeed, *akrasia* has been studied also within psychiatry, and here precisely these forms of character disorders, or psychological traits, are discussed (Kalis et al., 2008). Apathy, for instance, may simply render one quite passive, quite incapable of putting into practice what one knows on the level of reason (apathetic individuals struggle with cognitive inertia, and do not transform beliefs or values into actions; they lack motivational drive). Ambivalence, on the other hand, refers to a tendency which manifests as such an intense divergence of emotions and thoughts that one becomes unable to choose, to follow a specific course of action. Considering the astounding, often chaotic plurality of the world, it is remarkable that we are not continually pulled into a state of absolute ambivalence, and due to this same consideration, it has been suggested that 1) most avoid ambivalence by resting on biased, easily absorbed information, and 2) many cases of *akrasia* may arise from ambivalence (Kalis et al., 2008). This implies that perhaps omnivore’s *akrasia* often stems not only from culturally produced narcissistic tendencies, but also from political and moral apathy (“I have no strive to change”), from impulsiveness (“I want meat, now!”), from ambivalence (“I don’t know what to do”), and from the ensuing need to follow biased, familiar beliefs continuously offered by anthropocentric discourses.

Secondly, and more importantly, the anthropocentric settings of the society may structure these and other similar tendencies within us, rendering them internal and in

trinsic. Indeed, although this claim may seem somewhat stark at first glance, one cannot help but note that anthropocentrism appears to follow the logic of narcissism and psychopathy in its insistence on grandiose belief in human superiority, its emphasis on utilitarianism and hedonistic human benefit, its way of excluding empathy and morality from the animal realm, its insistence on manipulation, domination and coercion of nonhuman beings, and its tendency to perceive the world instrumentally. Via its own “character,” it may be affecting human characters, accentuating and inviting those traits and tendencies that follow the logic of narcissism and even its more extreme variations. This, again, would suggest that habit is affecting psychology, and spurring ways of relating that are “defective,” and thus ultimately unable to yield to anything more than *akrasia*. The same applies to other tendencies. Apathy, impulsiveness, and ambiguity all seem to be psychological characteristics that the contemporary culture evokes. As suggested earlier, within consumerist societies, we are told to seek instant hedonistic gratification, to remain politically and morally apathetic, and to choose from the rich variety of options those that are most biased toward our own benefit (or the benefit of those who gave us the biased option). In the context of animal issues, apathy, impulsiveness, and ambiguity are particularly obvious, and particularly prone to spark *akrasia*, for the anthropocentric habits tells us that we need not care, that other animals are to be objects of hapless hedonism, that one ought to veer toward those ways of treating other animals which stand as most “traditional.” Consequently, one may become integrally, psychologically antagonistic toward messages offered by animal ethics and advocacy: the content of the messages may appear rational, valid, even persuasive, but one’s attitudes and core character traits enforced by the society render one unable to follow their lead.

Hence, the disturbing danger is that anthropocentrism is strengthening those character traits that evoke both *akrasia* and egoism. Following the logic of a vicious circle, anthropocentrism invites psychologies of carnivorous *akrasia*, which in turn maintain anthropocentrism. This, again, poses a challenge for animal ethics and animal liberation advocacy to invite and evoke opposing psychological tendencies within us—those that are affiliated with political action, *thumos* (energy, spiritedness, or vibrancy), unbiased consideration, other-directedness, and empathy. If animal liberation philosophy and advo-

cacy is to learn anything from Descartes, the first thing, then, would be more thorough attention to how anthropocentric habits inform and affirm psychological traits such as narcissism, impulsivity, apathy and ambiguity, and how to combat these traits by offering alternative psychological modes of relating to the world.

But what of the third option offered by Descartes—that of “attention withdrawal” and “*acratia* break”? Here we return to passions,⁶ as with *akratic* breaks our attention is redirected away from the moral argument, the “good”, and back to various ways of side-lining that good; from justice to, say, resentment, envy or greed. In the context of omnivore’s *akrasia*, one hears and accepts the arguments offered by advocates, and is ready to pursue them in practice, when attention is pulled back away from the arguments onto one’s emotions. Within the *akratic* omnivore, emotions such as sense of superiority may suddenly misrepresent the situation by portraying animal liberation arguments as something morally crooked, misanthropic, exaggerated, thereby—in a Platonic fashion—masking as “evil” that which was accepted by reason as “good.” To add a further element into the *acratia* process, behind emotive misplacements of attention, we find (again, echoing Plato) desire. For Descartes, desire is a passion linked to the will, and thus it motivates our actions—in brief, passions spark desires, and desires spark actions. When action is absent or goes awry—that is to say, when *akrasia* takes place—we are to pay scrutiny to the relevant desire and its underlying passions (something Descartes saw as a central task of moral life) (Williston, 1999). Indeed, it is often the desire itself that instigates attention withdrawal, for it suddenly paints a previous “bad” or “evil” as “good,” against our intellect.⁷ Again, the relevance to omnivore’s *akrasia* becomes evident. It is often hedonism (related to culinary custom, indolence, conformance, financial gain, entertainment, societal status, and so forth), which persuades one toward apathy.

Here we come back to the solution offered earlier, which is to cultivate and educate passions via the cultivation and education of desire. Hence, just as Plato and Spinoza did, Descartes suggests that cultivation is the key out of *akrasia*. Indeed, we are to cultivate our character toward a less defective, less habitual form, less prone to following irrational emotions or desires. But how is such cultivation to be achieved?

The answer is “generosity,” a key term in the Cartesian stance on morality. Descartes uses “generosity” to

refer to the freedom we have in making choices, and to our emotive wish to be able to make those choices good, sound, viable, something that flows with the teachings of reason—hence, generosity emerges as the “passion which disposes us to seek the ideal concurrence of will and reason” (Williston, 1999, p. 43). It involves “suspension of the will”: if a desire that is contrary to reason is present, we are to desist from it with the power of the will, and enter a mode of deferral, a pause. The ensuing state of “irresolution” expresses our freedom, our autonomy in making decisions and formulating judgments. It offers a pause, a step back, a way to enter a meta-level, from which to pursue lucidity.⁸ Generosity is a passion that prompts us toward cultivation and toward rendering our other passions such that they follow ideas produced by will and reason; it is a passion that coaxes us to refine our own emotive life in a manner that is compatible with and instructed by rationality. Moreover, it includes “good will,” and is indeed formed from it, as generosity is continuously informed by the will that others should fare well and flourish. To reiterate, within a state of generosity, we only follow desires and passions that stem from true knowledge, and are guided by good will. Due to the manner in which generosity supports the co-involvement of passion, will and reason, the way in which it sparks the cultivation of passion, it surfaces as nothing less than the foundation of virtue.

Indeed, generosity emerges as the passion that one ought to strive toward, for it controls and rejects the less worthy passions, ranging from uninformed hate to greed; it enables one to step above the flux of petty sentiments, and to refute their tendency to coax one in the direction of ill-conceived impulses. Moreover, generosity can curtail the lure of banal, hedonistic desires, and thus ensure moral action. Emer O’Hagan clarifies:

Cartesian generosity is both a virtue and the master passion. The generous person has a form of self-mastery that leaves her full of good will for others and, fortified by sound judgement about what is most valuable in her person, invulnerable to slights and petty wrongs. Generosity is the perfection of our dispositions as practical reasoners in the sense that it includes a theoretical understanding of what is most valuable in us and the disposition to act in a manner which honors that value. It includes the identification of oneself with one’s will and the resolve

to use that will well ... Generosity is useful to us because it combats vain desires, manifesting an understanding and appreciation of the will which curtails futile concerns ... Generosity also counters excessive anger, results in a virtuous humility, leaves one full of good will for others, and makes one the master of her own passions. (O’Hagan, 2005)

And how is generosity sparked? First, one is to note one’s capacity for autonomy and reason; second, she is to recognize that responsibility stems from such autonomy; and third, she is to want to use autonomy and reason vigorously and well, in accordance with what is virtuous and good (O’Hagan, 2005). Descartes summarizes this in the following:

[Generosity comes to exist] [b]y a firm and constant resolution to carry out to the letter all the things which one judges to be best, and to employ all the powers of one’s mind in finding out what these are. This by itself constitutes all the virtues; this alone really deserves praise and glory; this alone finally, produces the greatest and most solid contentment in life. So I conclude that it is this which constitutes the supreme good. (Descartes, 1991, V 83)

Therefore, generosity requires the will to follow knowledge of good and evil; it stems from the wish to move in directions that are illuminated by a rational familiarity with the “good.” Interestingly, this definition attaches generosity to our self-perception and esteem, for only those who follow generosity achieve a grasp of themselves as moral individuals—accordingly, it forms the basis for our very quality of life. Descartes specifies:

True Generosity, which makes a man esteem himself as highly as he can legitimately esteem himself, consists only in this: partly in his understanding that there is nothing which truly belongs to him but this free control of his volitions, and no reason why he ought to be praised or blamed except that he uses it well or badly; and partly in his feeling within himself a firm and constant resolution to use it well, that is, never to lack the volition to undertake and execute all the things he judges to be best—which

is to follow virtue perfectly. (Descartes, 1989, p. 153)

In this way, generosity, the will toward goodness, forms the quality of not only our sense of responsibility, but also our sense of self, and requires nothing short of humility.

Hence, generosity, and thereby ultimately the cultivation of emotions, is linked not only to autonomy, but also to good intention, good will, moral grasping, and humility, even altruism. A generous person will do what is morally sound, because she notes that nothing in life is of more worth than the wish to follow goodness, to be of use to others, even when this requires personal sacrifice. Indeed, what Descartes is offering is a wholly non-egoistic image of humanity, wherein we rather mindfully note that factors related to the ego, ranging from ambition to greed and pride, have no place within moral life; in place of them one's sense of self is to be sculpted on the foundations of good will, the wish to do good for others. Descartes posits that:

[t]hose who are Generous in this way are naturally inclined to do great things ... and because they esteem nothing more highly than doing good to other men and for this reason scorning their own interest, they are always perfectly courteous, affable, and of service to everyone. (Descartes, 1989, p. 156)

The ruthless dualist reveals a gentler side.

Akasia thus may be overcome by stepping back, and paying closer attention to one's capacity to make autonomous, reasoned choices. Here, both habit and those emotions entwined with it are reflected upon rather than merely accepted at face value; it is one's capacity to make autonomous, reflective decisions rather than remain pre-determined by habit and emotion that emerges as pivotal. Hence, once again Spinozian awareness of the causes of one's desires (i.e., the awareness of externally produced habits and emotions) surfaces as central if omnivore's *akasia* is to be avoided. But Descartes is also offering something new. According to him, we are to practice good will and humility, focusing attention away from the ego toward the good of others. Indeed, it is partly via such redirection of attention that generosity comes into full bloom. Perhaps this is something often ignored in animal liberation—the epistemological role of self-directedness,

and particularly the human ego, go undiscussed, even undetected. Ways of relating to the world that draw from non-egoistic sources have to be more elaborately addressed, for as suggested above, the consumerist, neo-liberal society is heavily built on self-indulgence, and arguably much of the persistent consumption of animal products can be explained on these grounds: it is the “self” rather than the “animal other” who is repeatedly, as if self-evidently, prioritized. Following suit, perhaps it is this blind, unreflective self-directedness that feeds the tendency to follow ill-conceived desires, habits, and emotions into sinking one's teeth in flesh. Bringing this “epistemology of egoism” onto the table, addressing its cultural, societal and political underpinnings, urging individuals to examine it on the personal level, may be one key to solving *akasia*.

Generosity in its different variations speaks of the need for cultivation. Descartes goes so far as to suggest that via these methods, humans can gain “an absolute dominion over all their passions if one explored enough skill in training and guiding them” (Descartes, 1989, p. 50). Now, as suggested above, arguably cultivation is viewed with suspicion and hostility in the consumerist society geared toward enjoyment, impulse, and instant gratification. Yet, simultaneously, what is lost is the notion that there is beauty to control and cultivation. In the face of the banality of impulsive hedonism and political apathy, these methods invite us to reflect on what type of beings we are, how we approach others, what moves us, and—most importantly—what type of beings we could be (the question Alasdair MacIntyre famously suggested to be missing from the contemporary era; see MacIntyre, 1984). When approached via Descartes' notion of generosity, they remain far removed from merciless, detached demands, and instead come to signify an embracing attitude toward the world, a commitment toward oneself and others, a binder to moral reflection and consideration. Generosity thereby signals a form of control and cultivation, which stands as sincere, embedded, concerned, and rooted. Perhaps ignorance concerning generosity forms one of the key triggers of omnivore's *akasia*, for in the midst of the floods of hedonistic desires and passions, impulses and wants, the possibility of stepping back, of reflecting on which desires and passions one is pursuing, what one is and wants to be as a person, whether one is guided by good will or one's ego, what happens to others as a consequence of one's actions,

never surfaces. In other words, one loses track of personal responsibility.

The task at hand, then, is for animal ethics and animal liberation advocates to invite generosity, and—more generally—to redefine control and cultivation as something with positive potential. Here, we come back to self-esteem, for this touches on human identities: what we are as people; how we want to relate to nonhuman animals; what type of a world we wish to co-constitute. Fighting *akrasia* is not only about rendering nonhuman animals more manifest in the public psyche, it is also dependent on rendering more manifest what we, as human beings, are and could be. As a potential consequence stands a sense of humanity, a sense of identity, which is linked to doing what is right, to actualizing one's moral beliefs: "Virtue consists only in the resolution and vigor with which we are inclined to do the things we think good." (Descartes, 1991, V 84). This is the ultimate opposite of omnivore's *akrasia*: doing things that are good for our own sense of self, and good for nonhuman animals.

CONCLUSION

The rationalists explain *akrasia* primarily via emotions and desires. It is emotion and its tendency to evoke habits, wants, and ill-founded desires that lead a person to do what they know is morally dubious—or even to become incoherent enough to lose grasp of the good altogether. For Plato, wants and emotions feed desires, which again weave false appearances around morality, making one confuse wrong with right; for Spinoza, emotions that are caused by the external world have the ability to induce a state of bondage, within which we know what goodness is, but fail to act according to it; and for Descartes, cognitive defects, habits, emotions, and desires spark akratic breaks, wherein we fail to follow moral reason. If the critique of emotion in particular is the unifying content of these philosophers, the unifying solution is cultivation. One is to become aware of those emotions (and the wants, habits, desires, defects, and opinions entangled with them) which spin *akrasia* into existence, and to cultivate one's way of relating toward the world. There is a reward to be found here. For Plato, it was *eudaimonia*; for Spinoza it is joy and conation, the fire of life; and for Descartes it is generosity, humility, even other-directedness and good will.

It has to be noted that emotions also serve positive functions, and indeed stand as elemental aspects of hu-

man mentation. They cannot be separated from reason—there is no categorical dualism of the variety that the rationalists tended to presume. However, a wholesale acceptance of any emotion will not do—and it is such a wholesale, naively favorable attitude toward "sentimentalism" which has colored some of animal studies, philosophy, and even animal liberation advocacy. Empathy, care, even love are required for moral understanding of the human-nonhuman relation, but this is possible only when superiority, disgust, greed, contempt, hate, and other similarly confusing emotions are controlled; when the notion of "cultivation" is brought forward. Significantly, such cultivation involves not only the personal, but also the societal and political realms. Wants, desires, habits, opinions, and emotions are often produced by the society and its various instances, and in the case of omnivore's *akrasia*, by anthropocentric discourses and institutions. In order to spark cultivation, awareness of these realms, these factors and their contents and impacts, needs to be evoked. Personal choices to go against the "good" in the nonhuman context, to keep on eating meat, eggs, and dairy despite knowing and accepting the counterarguments and points of evidence, are never only "personal."

These depictions also help to illuminate omnivore's *akrasia*, as it may be grounded on emotion, desire, wants, external influence, habit, and cognitive defects such as impulsiveness and apathy. Moreover, perhaps the akratic omnivore can be freed from her paradoxical condition if she follows self-control, the notion of cultivating internal emotions and of following reasoned reflection, and the notion of generosity as a state of good will. In so doing, she would have much to gain—a deeper, fuller understanding of nonhuman animality, and indeed perhaps of herself, all interlaced with nothing less than joy. Thus, it is with notions of self-cultivation, joy, and generosity that animal scholars and advocates ought to be addressing *akrasia*.

NOTES

¹ However, can one talk of *akrasia proper*, when emotions have muddled knowledge of what is right? Strictly speaking, Plato's answer seems to address moral confusion rather than *akrasia*, for he does indeed rest on the Socratic belief that knowledge always sparks moral actions. However, he can still be seen to address the cultural phenomenon of *akrasia*, broadly speaking. (See Brickhouse & Smith, 2007; Taylor, 1980.)

² Verse from Ovid: “I see the better and approve, yet still the worse pursue”; see also Lin (2006).

³ Of course, it can be argued that emotions are always partly cultural and affected by the external world. Yet, what matters here is their *primary* origin, and their relation to reason: it is these aspects that the notion of “internal passions” is founded upon.

⁴ Its opposite being sadness, the passion that decreases the capacity for thought and action. Indeed, joy and sadness stand as the primary passions, and other passions are constructed of them, in combination with various beliefs.

⁵ Here, we ultimately strive to become god-like figures. Spinoza scholar Martin Lin clarifies: “When I am perfectly rational, i.e. the adequate cause of whatever happens to me, I do not need anything. I am entirely self-sufficient. Spinoza belongs to an ethical tradition—which goes back at least to the ancient Platonists—which holds that to be virtuous is to be like God” (Lin, 2006, p. 405). Yet, of course, we never achieve perfection, and thus never become gods.

⁶ Passions do not always spark akratic breaks. Like Plato and Spinoza, Descartes was careful to underline the potential value of emotions. He maintained that they can act as sources of information: nature teaches us the useful and the harmful via bodily pains and pleasures (moreover, emotions, such as love and joy, can guide the will toward what is good by producing desires in us). Hence, Descartes stipulates that the use of passions “[c]onsists in this alone: They dispose the soul to will the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition” (Descartes, 1989, II 372). Here, even the harshest negative emotions can serve a function. Yet passions need to be controlled and cultivated, for they suffer from two common deficiencies: they may misrepresent the world, and they tend to exaggerate goodness and evil, which causes us to undergo unnecessary fervor or anxiety (see also Williston, 1999). It is here that *akrasia* becomes possible: hate no longer reveals what is harmful, but may instead be targeted against that which is beneficial and good, thus misleading us toward unjust actions.

⁷ It is the desire in itself that may mislead. Passions hold the potential of manifesting the truth in objects, whereas desire makes us see that object in a misleading fashion (Williston, 1999).

⁸ However, such suspension should not be so excessive as to pacify us—instead, we ought to train ourselves to make decisive judgments with the evidence available, whilst resisting those pulls and tugs that invite us to overlook reason (Williston, 1999).

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