AMY TAN

Amy Tan was born in 1952 in Oakland, California, the daughter of Chinese immigrants. She grew up in northern California and majored in English and linguistics at San Jose State University, where she received a BA and an MA. Tan's first career was as a business writer, crafting corporate reports and executives' speeches. Dissatisfied with her work, she began writing fiction. Her first book, The Joy Luck Club *(1989), a critical and popular success, is a series of interrelated stories about the bonds between immigrant Chinese mothers and their American-born daughters. Since* The Joy Luck Club *Tan has written four more novels:* The Kitchen God's Wife *(1991),* The Hundred Secret Senses *(1995),* The Bonesetter's Daughter *(2001), and* Saving Fish from Drowning *(2005). She has also published a collection of essays,* The Opposite of Fate *(2003), and two books for children.*

Mother Tongue

In this essay, Tan defines her sense of a mother tongue, exploring the versions of English that she has used as a daughter, a student, and a writer. The essay was first published in Threepenny Review.

I am not a scholar of English or literature. I cannot give you much more than personal opinions on the English language and its variations in this country or others. 1

I am a writer. And by that definition, I am someone who has always loved language. I am fascinated by language in daily life. I spend a great deal of my time thinking about the power of language—the way it can evoke an emotion, a visual image, a complex idea, or a simple truth. Language is the tool of my trade. And I use them all—all the Englishes I grew up with. 2

Recently, I was made keenly aware of the different Englishes I do use. I was giving a talk to a large group of people, the same talk I had already given to half a dozen other groups. The nature of 3

the talk was about my writing, my life, and my book, *The Joy Luck Club*. The talk was going along well enough, until I remembered one major difference that made the whole talk sound wrong. My mother was in the room. And it was perhaps the first time she had heard me give a lengthy speech, using the kind of English I have never used with her. I was saying things like, "The intersection of memory upon imagination" and "There is an aspect of my fiction that relates to thus-and-thus"—a speech filled with carefully wrought grammatical phrases, burdened, it suddenly seemed to me, with nominalized forms, past perfect tenses, conditional phrases, all the forms of standard English that I had learned in school and through books, the forms of English I did not use at home with my mother.

Just last week, I was walking down the street with my mother, and I again found myself conscious of the English I was using, and the English I do use with her. We were talking about the price of new and used furniture and I heard myself saying this: "Not waste money that way." My husband was with us as well, and he didn't notice any switch in my English. And then I realized why. It's because over the twenty years we've been together I've often used that same kind of English with him, and sometimes he even uses it with me. It has become our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with. 4

So you'll have some idea of what this family talk I heard sounds like, I'll quote what my mother said during a recent conversation which I videotaped and then transcribed. During this conversation, my mother was talking about a political gangster in Shanghai who had the same last name as her family's, Du, and how the gangster in his early years wanted to be adopted by her family, which was rich by comparison. Later, the gangster became more powerful, far richer than my mother's family, and one day showed up at my mother's wedding to pay his respects. Here's what she said in part: 5

"Du Yusong having business like fruit stand. Like off the street kind. He is like Du Zong—but not Tsung-ming Island people. The local people call putong, the river east side, he belong to that side local people. That man want to ask Du Zong father take him in like become own family. Du Zong father wasn't look down on him, but didn't take seriously, until that man big like become a mafia. Now important person, very hard to inviting him. Chinese 6

way, came only to show respect, don't stay for dinner. Respect for making big celebration, he shows up. Mean gives lots of respect. Chinese custom. Chinese social life that way. If too important won't have to stay too long. He come to my wedding. I didn't see, I heard it. I gone to boy's side, they have YMCA dinner. Chinese age I was nineteen."

You should know that my mother's expressive command of 7
English belies how much she actually understands. She reads the *Forbes* report, listens to *Wall Street Week*, converses daily with her stockbroker, reads all of Shirley MacLaine's books with ease—all kinds of things I can't begin to understand. Yet some of my friends tell me they understand fifty percent of what my mother says. Some say they understand eighty to ninety percent. Some say they understand none of it, as if she were speaking pure Chinese. But to me, my mother's English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural. It's my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of observation and imagery. That was the language that helped shape the way I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world.

Lately, I've been giving more thought to the kind of English 8
my mother speaks. Like others, I have described it to people as "broken" or "fractured" English. But I wince when I say that. It has always bothered me that I can think of no way to describe it other than "broken," as if it were damaged and needed to be fixed, as if it lacked a certain wholeness and soundness. I've heard other terms used, "limited English," for example. But they seem just as bad, as if everything is limited, including people's perceptions of the limited English speaker.

I know this for a fact, because when I was growing up, my 9
mother's "limited" English limited *my* perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say. That is, because she expressed them imperfectly her thoughts were imperfect. And I had plenty of empirical evidence to support me: the fact that people in department stores, at banks, and at restaurants did not take her seriously, did not give her good service, pretended not to understand her, or even acted as if they did not hear her.

My mother has long realized the limitations of her English 10
as well. When I was fifteen, she used to have me call people on

the phone to pretend I was she. In this guise, I was forced to ask for information or even to complain and yell at people who had been rude to her. One time it was a call to her stockbroker in New York. She had cashed out her small portfolio and it just so happened we were going to go to New York the next week, our very first trip outside California. I had to get on the phone and say in an adolescent voice that was not very convincing, "This is Mrs. Tan."

And my mother was standing in the back whispering loudly, 11
"Why he don't send me check, already two weeks late. So mad he lie to me, losing me money."

And then I said in perfect English, "Yes, I'm getting rather 12
concerned. You had agreed to send the check two weeks ago, but it hasn't arrived."

Then she began to talk more loudly. "What he want, I come 13
to New York tell him front of his boss, you cheating me?" And I was trying to calm her down, make her be quiet, while telling the stockbroker, "I can't tolerate any more excuses. If I don't receive the check immediately, I am going to have to speak to your manager when I'm in New York next week." And sure enough, the following week there we were in front of this astonished stockbroker, and I was sitting there red-faced and quiet, and my mother, the real Mrs. Tan, was shouting at his boss in her impeccable broken English.

We used a similar routine just five days ago, for a situation 14
that was far less humorous. My mother had gone to the hospital for an appointment, to find out about a benign brain tumor a CAT scan had revealed a month ago. She said she had spoken very good English, her best English, no mistakes. Still, she said, the hospital did not apologize when they said they had lost the CAT scan and she had come for nothing. She said they did not seem to have any sympathy when she told them she was anxious to know the exact diagnosis, since her husband and son had both died of brain tumors. She said they would not give her any more information until the next time and she would have to make another appointment for that. So she said she would not leave until the doctor called her daughter. She wouldn't budge. And when the doctor finally called her daughter, me, who spoke in perfect English—lo and behold—we had assurances the CAT scan would be found, promises that a conference call on Monday would be held,

and apologies for any suffering my mother had gone through for a most regrettable mistake.

I think my mother's English almost had an effect on limiting 15
my possibilities in life as well. Sociologists and linguists probably will tell you that a person's developing language skills are more influenced by peers. But I think that the language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child. And I believe that it affected my results on achievement tests, IQ tests, and the SAT. While my English skills were never judged as poor, compared to math, English could not be considered my strong suit. In grade school I did moderately well, getting perhaps B's, sometimes B-pluses, in English and scoring perhaps in the sixtieth or seventieth percentile on achievement tests. But those scores were not good enough to override the opinion that my true abilities lay in math and science, because in those areas I achieved A's and scored in the ninetieth percentile or higher.

This was understandable. Math is precise; there is only one 16
correct answer. Whereas, for me at least, the answers on English tests were always a judgment call, a matter of opinion and personal experience. Those tests were constructed around items like fill-in-the-blank sentence completion, such as, "Even though Tom was _____, Mary thought he was _____." And the correct answer always seemed to be the most bland combinations of thoughts, for example, "Even though Tom was shy, Mary thought he was charming," with the grammatical structure "even though" limiting the correct answer to some sort of semantic opposites, so you wouldn't get answers like, "Even though Tom was foolish, Mary thought he was ridiculous." Well, according to my mother, there were very few limitations as to what Tom could have been and what Mary might have thought of him. So I never did well on tests like that.

The same was true with word analogies, pairs of words in 17
which you were supposed to find some sort of logical, semantic relationship—for example, "*Sunset* is to *nightfall* as _____ is to _____." And here you would be presented with a list of four possible pairs, one of which showed the same kind of relationship: *red* is to *stoplight, bus* is to *arrival, chills* is to *fever, yawn* is to *boring*. Well, I could never think that way. I knew what the tests were

asking, but I could not block out of my mind the images already created by the first pair, "*sunset* is to *nightfall*"—and I would see a burst of colors against a darkening sky, the moon rising, the lowering of a curtain of stars. And all the other pairs of words—*red, bus, stoplight, boring*—just threw up a mass of confusing images, making it impossible for me to sort out something as logical as saying: "A sunset precedes nightfall" is the same as "a chill precedes a fever." The only way I would have gotten that answer right would have been to imagine an associative situation, for example, my being disobedient and staying out past sunset, catching a chill at night, which turns into feverish pneumonia as punishment, which indeed did happen to me.

I have been thinking about all this lately, about my mother's 18
English, about achievement tests. Because lately I've been asked, as a writer, why there are not more Asian Americans enrolled in creative writing programs. Why do so many Chinese students go into engineering? Well, these are broad sociological questions I can't begin to answer. But I have noticed in surveys—in fact, just last week—that Asian students, as a whole, always do significantly better on math achievement tests than in English. And this makes me think that there are other Asian American students whose English spoken in the home might also be described as "broken" or "limited." And perhaps they also have teachers who are steering them away from writing and into math and science, which is what happened to me.

Fortunately, I happen to be rebellious in nature and enjoy the 19
challenge of disproving assumptions made about me. I became an English major my first year in college, after being enrolled as premed. I started writing nonfiction as a freelancer the week after I was told by my former boss that writing was my worst skill and I should hone my talents toward account management.

But it wasn't until 1985 that I finally began to write fiction. 20
And at first I wrote using what I thought to be wittily crafted sentences, sentences that would finally prove I had mastery over the English language. Here's an example from the first draft of a story that later made its way into *The Joy Luck Club*, but without this line: "That was my mental quandary in its nascent state." A terrible line, which I can barely pronounce.

Fortunately, for reasons I won't get into today, I later decided 21
I should envision a reader for the stories I would write. And the reader I decided upon was my mother, because these were stories about mothers. So with this reader in mind—and in fact she did read my early drafts—I began to write stories using all the Englishes I grew up with: the English I spoke to my mother, which for lack of a better term might be described as "simple"; the English she used with me, which for lack of a better term might be described as "broken"; my translation of her Chinese, which could certainly be described as "watered down"; and what I imagined to be her translation of her Chinese if she could speak in perfect English, her internal language, and for that I sought to preserve the essence, but neither an English nor a Chinese structure. I wanted to capture what language ability tests can never reveal: her intent, her passion, her imagery, the rhythms of her speech, and the nature of her thoughts.

Apart from what any critic had to say about my writing, I 22
knew I had succeeded where it counted when my mother finished reading my book and gave me her verdict: "So easy to read."

Meaning

1. For Tan the phrase "mother tongue" has a special meaning. How would you summarize this meaning? Why does Tan feel so deeply about her "mother tongue"?
2. In what ways does the English that Tan's mother speaks affect how people outside the Chinese American community think of her? What examples does Tan give to demonstrate this fact of her mother's life?
3. In paragraph 15, Tan writes, "[M]y mother's English almost had an effect on limiting my possibilities in life as well." What does she mean? Why does she use the qualifier "almost"?

Purpose and Audience

1. Why do you suppose Tan wrote this essay? Does she have a purpose beyond changing readers' perceptions of her mother's "broken" English? What passages support your answer?
2. How can you tell that Tan is not writing primarily to an audience of Asian Americans? If Asian Americans were her primary audience, how might the essay be different?

Method and Structure

1. How does Tan develop her definition of her "mother tongue"? That is, how does she best help readers understand her mother's speech?
2. Tan divides her essay into three sections, the second beginning in paragraph 8 and the third beginning in paragraph 18. What is the focus of each section? Why do you think Tan divided the essay like this?
3. OTHER METHODS In paragraph 2 and again in paragraph 21, Tan refers to "all the Englishes I grew up with." How does she classify these various "Englishes"?

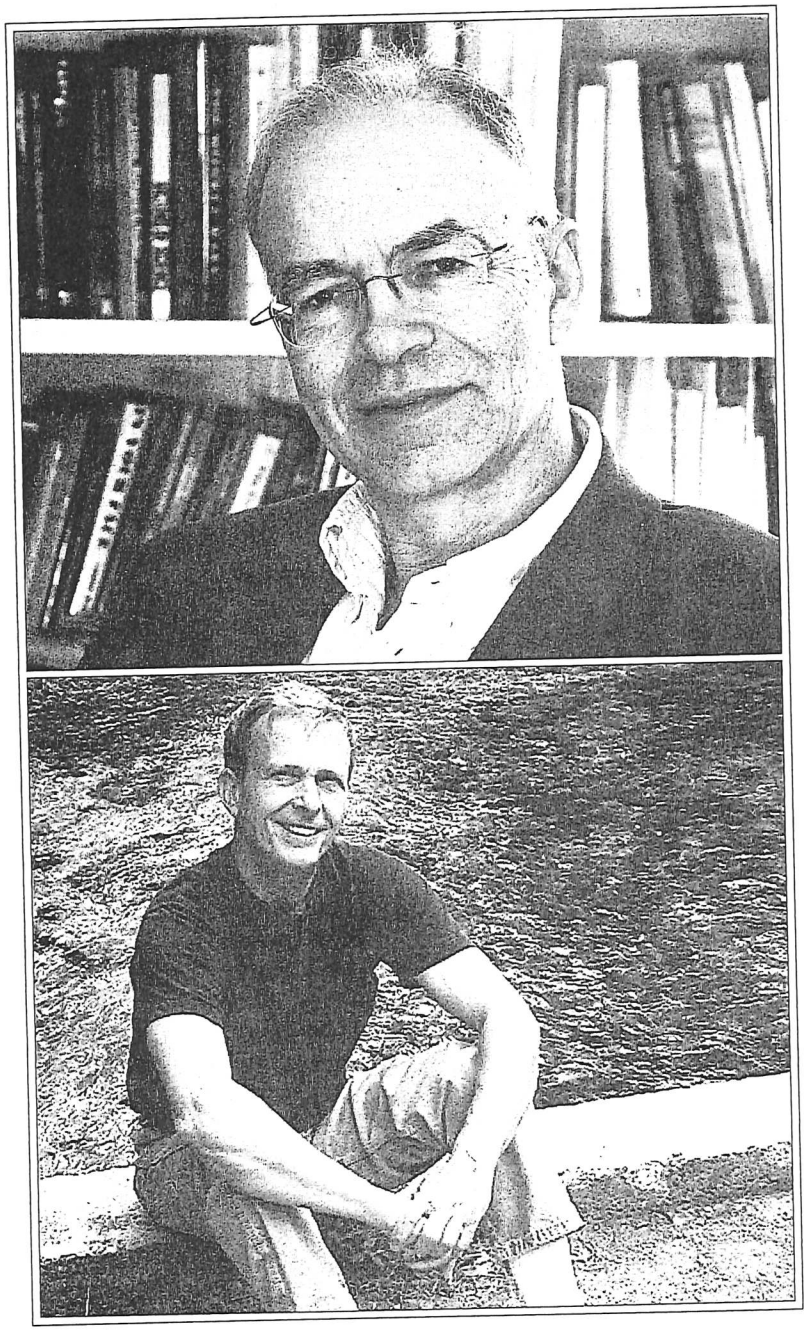
Language

1. What troubles Tan about the labels "broken," "fractured," and "limited" for her mother's English (paragraph 8)? How do these labels contrast with the way she views her mother's speech?
2. In paragraphs 16 and 17, Tan writes about the kinds of vocabulary items that appear on standardized English tests. In contrast to the precision of the answers to mathematical questions, why were the answers to vocabulary questions "always a judgment call, a matter of opinion and personal experience" for her?

Writing Topics

1. Think about the language you speak with close friends or family members. What are some characteristics of this language that outsiders might find difficult to understand? Write an essay that focuses on the idea of "personal" language—that is, language that creates or reflects closeness among people. In developing your essay, you may call on your own experiences, your observations of others, and your reading (of both fiction and nonfiction). Be sure to provide as many specific examples of language use as you can.
2. How do you define "standard English" (paragraph 3)? To what extent do you believe that nonstandard English marks people as "limited"? On what occasions is standard English absolutely required? Are there any occasions when nonstandard English is entirely appropriate? In an essay, explain and illustrate both the drawbacks and the benefits of standard and nonstandard English. (The Glossary discusses both under *diction*.)
3. Tan writes that as a student she didn't do well on standardized English tests. In recent years, such standardized testing has grown increasingly prominent in evaluating students' achievement. In an

essay, discuss your ideas about standardized tests. How accurately do you think they assess students' academic abilities? How do you respond to the claim that many such tests are biased in favor of affluent white students? How, in your experience, have they affected classroom teaching strategies? You can consider any of these questions or other related ones that interest you.



Top photo: Peter Singer; bottom photo: Jim Mason

PETER SINGER AND JIM MASON
The Ethics of Eating Meat

PETER SINGER (b. 1946) AND JIM MASON (b. 1934) have long had profound concerns for animal rights and the ethical issues raised by the interrelationship of animals and people. They feel that any genuine system of ethics must address our moral relationship to animals just as scrupulously as it does our moral relationship to each other. Peter Singer, an Australian, was educated at the University of Melbourne and at Oxford University in England. For two years he was Radcliffe lecturer at Oxford, then he moved to New York University, and in 1977 returned to teach at Melbourne. Since 1999 he has been Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University. He is considered one of the most controversial of modern philosophers of ethics. He is also one of the most visible of modern philosophers, with books on animal rights, sociobiology, politics, and even philanthropy. His *What Should a Billionaire Give—and What Should You?* (2006) is his beginning foray into the question of philanthropy, the how and why of giving excess wealth away.

Jim Mason is an attorney who is also a journalist, author, lecturer, and editor. His concerns have paralleled those of Singer, focusing on animal rights. He grew up on a farm in Missouri and established an early understanding of animals and their behavior. He is best known for his 1980 book with Singer, *Animal Factories,* which details how animals raised for food are treated. He visited thousands of factory locations and photographed the conditions of confinement and mistreatment that are commonplace in the business of producing meat for our tables. His photographs are particularly disturbing to anyone who responds to evident pain and discomfort of animals.

Mason's book *An Unnatural Order: Roots of Our Destruction of Nature* (2005) attacks what he feels is the root of the problem of ethics in regard to animals. When he reviewed the historical record, he found the biblical declaration of "dominion" to be the cause of our

casual mistreatment of animals. The very first page of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1.26). Dominion has been taken to mean control, but neither the Bible nor commercial interests seem to have included the concept of responsibility toward or a sense of conscience about our treatment of living things. Mason, in his analysis, suggests that the biblical declaration of dominion was related to the shift in ancient cultural practices from matriarchal to patriarchal structures of religion and government. Whether this is true or not cannot be demonstrated, but it remains a central core of his analytic.

The question of dominion is not merely academic. It is employed by modern commercial and religious groups as a justification for ridding land of vermin and pests, as well as for damaging land and water sources for economic advantage. The concept is with us today and will be with us for some time.

Singer is also a controversial figure for his views of the relationships of humans and animals. To begin with, he feels there is no reason to privilege one species over any other. This statement alone is in our time what Galileo's discovery—that Earth was not the center of the universe—was in the Renaissance. It has brought religious and political forces against him because he places humans and animals on the same plane.

In his book *Practical Ethics* (1979; 1993), Singer has taken an unusually reasoned stand approving abortion within a certain limit of gestation. His stand is essentially utilitarian in that it takes into consideration the interests of those people involved in the pregnancy—the woman and the fetus—in terms of what their preferences are. He reasons that the woman has a preference and an understanding of pain but that up to the eighteenth week of gestation the fetus has no sense of preference and no understanding of pain. Therefore, if the woman wishes an abortion and times it properly, she may have one with no moral implications whatever. Naturally, this view has made Singer the target of attack and he has been called "the Doctor of Death" by his many critics.

One of his earliest books, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (1975), made him one of the best-known modern philosophers and led to a worldwide movement. The concern for animal rights is related to his work in this early book, and his theories of ethics in relation to animals developed from this beginning. His edited volume *In Defense of Animals* followed in 1985. *The Ethics of What We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter* (2005), with Jim Mason, provides the essay that follows, "The Ethics of Eating Meat."

Singer and Mason's Rhetoric

Singer and Mason use subheadings, as many contemporary writers do, especially those with a journalistic background. The selection that follows is the central part of a chapter that considers arguments on both sides of the issue of eating meat. As a result, the authors present the arguments of the opposition carefully; then they analyze the arguments and attempt to show their weaknesses in order to establish the arguments' fallibility. In the process of this approach, they present their claims and warrants carefully so as to represent their own argument in favor of either avoiding eating meat entirely or of being a conscientious omnivore (para. 46).

They have several interesting techniques for examining a contradictory argument. They show, for example, that while there may be distinctions between human and nonhuman animals, to claim that humans are superior depends on an argument that can be turned to prove one race or one gender is superior to the others. Turning the argument around is a powerful analytic that helps clarify the deep structure of any claim to truth. In paragraph 34, they examine an argument by the distinguished philosopher Roger Scruton, who has argued in favor of eating meat partly on the grounds that people are conscious, aware of themselves and their ambitions and hopes, and can see possibilities for future generations. Animals do not have these qualities and thus can be domesticated for food. Singer and Mason point out that babies and many brain-damaged individuals are essentially on the same level as the animals Scruton describes, and by his reasoning, they too could be a useful source of meat. By this time, Singer and Mason have already cited Jonathan Swift's "modest proposal" to serve up Irish one-year-olds as roasts on English tables. The argument collapses.

Starting in paragraph 39, Singer and Mason talk about the use of land to produce food, pointing to data that say an acre of land planted with crops will feed ten times the number of people that an acre of land given to grazing cattle will. Even the most humane of farms, like Polyface Farm that Michael Pollan praises for its careful treatment of animals, have their unpleasant aspects, as they demonstrate beginning with paragraph 41. Both Singer and Mason use the rhetorical device of developing paragraphs with testimony. In the case of their discussion of Polyface Farm, they derive the testimony directly from the farm itself (para. 41).

Much of the last part of the essay is devoted to establishing humane ways to treat farm animals destined for slaughter and eventually our table. They ask very clearly, "How humane is humane enough to eat?" (para. 44), and they suggest that the line between the humane and the inhumane treatment of animals destined for consumption is so vague that the only way to establish an absolutely clear ethical position is to abstain from eating them at all. The paragraphs that Singer and Mason devote to this issue are interesting because they include a powerful description of methods of slaughter, and therefore we can say that they are resorting to an emotional appeal in the middle of what seemed to be a thoroughly rational examination. Perhaps that is unavoidable—or perhaps we can say that if we are to talk about humane behavior then we need to consider how humane the treatment can be. It may not be humane enough. Conscientious omnivores, the authors decide at the end of the essay, may in fact be the best that they can hope for if they cannot convince everyone to be vegetarian.

PREREADING QUESTIONS: WHAT TO READ FOR

The following prereading questions may help you anticipate key issues in the discussion of Peter Singer and Jim Mason's "The Ethics of Eating Meat." Keeping them in mind during your first reading of the selection should help focus your attention.

- What is the prevailing Western ethic toward animals?
- What is the best argument in favor of eating meat?
- How do farmers go about humanely raising animals for food?
- What defines a conscientious omnivore? Is it possible to be one?

The Ethics of Eating Meat

Many people, like Jake Hillard and Lee Nierstheimer, eat whatever meat takes their fancy at the supermarket or in fast-food restaurants. Some, like Mary Ann Masarech and her daughters, make an effort to eat meat from humane and organic farms. Others, like the Farb family, eat no animal products at all. In this chapter we focus 1

solely on the impact these diets have on animals. What does ethics require of us with regard to eating animals and animal products? In this chapter, the ethics of what we eat become more philosophically complex.

Let's start with factory farming. We have seen how it inflicts prolonged suffering on sows who spend most of their lives in crates that are too narrow for them to turn around in; on caged hens; on chickens kept in unnaturally large flocks, bred to grow too fast, and transported and killed in appalling conditions; on dairy cows who are regularly made pregnant and separated from their calves; and on beef cattle kept in bare dirt feedlots. Though we like and respect Jake and Lee and take into account the time and economic pressures on families with children, we think that buying factory-farm products is not the right thing to do. 2

You don't have to be a vegetarian to reach this conclusion. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall[1] is the author of *The River Cottage Meat Book*—a large, glossy book devoted to the cooking and eating of meat. Yet he writes: "The vast majority of our food animals are now raised under methods that are systematically abusive. For them, discomfort is the norm, pain is routine, growth is abnormal, and diet is unnatural. Disease is widespread and stress is almost constant." Fearnley-Whittingstall lives in England, where laws protecting animals are much stricter than in the United States. American-style crates for sows or veal calves are illegal in Britain, and caged hens have at least 50 percent more space than many American hens are granted. Even so, he considers these conditions abusive to animals. Michael Pollan,[2] another meat eater, says that factory farms are designed on the principle that "animals are machines incapable of feeling pain" and that to support them requires "a willingness to avert your eyes" from the reality that animals can feel. 3

Roger Scruton,[3] a critic of animal rights and vigorous defender of the traditional English sport of foxhunting in the years before Parliament banned it, lives on a farm in Wiltshire, where he raises animals for his own table. His attitude to animal rights is perhaps best 4

[1] **Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall (b. 1965)** Chef on British television and an advocate of "real food"; Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, *The River Cottage Meat Book*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2004, p. 24. [Singer and Mason's note]

[2] **Michael Pollan (b. 1955)** American author of numerous books on food; Michael Pollan, "An Animal's Place," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, November 10, 2002; see also Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*, Penguin, New York, 2006. [Singer and Mason's note]

[3] **Roger Scruton (b. 1944)** British philosopher and leading aesthetician.

illustrated by the following incident, as reported by Sholto Byrnes, who visited him at his farm for an interview in the *Independent:*

> After a drink, we move through to begin lunch, components of which have been produced on the Scruton farm. "That's Singer," declares Roger, pointing at a plate of leftover sausages. Singer the pig, mischievously named after Peter Singer, the philosopher and animal-rights theorist, has been "ensausaged" personally by his former owner.[4]

Nevertheless, Scruton flatly rejects factory farming. "A true morality of animal welfare," he writes, "ought to begin from the premise that this way of treating animals is wrong."[5] 5

In America, those opposed to factory farming include Matthew Scully, a former speech writer in George W. Bush's White House and the author of *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy.* Although "animal rights" tend to be associated with those on the left, Scully makes a case for many of the same goals using arguments congenial to the Christian right. In Scully's view, even though God has given us "dominion" over the animals, we should exercise that dominion with mercy—and factory farming fails to do so. Scully's writings have found support from other conservatives, like Pat Buchanan, editor of the *American Conservative,* which gave cover-story prominence to Scully's essay "Fear Factories: The Case for Compassionate Conservatism—for Animals," and George F. Will, who used his *Newsweek* column to recommend Scully's book.[6] 6

No less a religious authority than Pope Benedict XVI has stated that human "dominion" over animals does not justify factory farming. When head of the Roman Catholic Church's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the future pope condemned the "industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds." This "degrading of living 7

[4] Sholto Byrnes, "Roger Scruton: The Patron Saint of Lost Causes," *Independent,* July 3, 2005, http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/books/features/article296509.ece. [Singer and Mason's note]

[5] Roger Scruton, *Animal Rights and Wrongs,* 3rd ed., Claridge Press, 2003. [Singer and Mason's note]

[6] Matthew Scully, "Fear Factories: The Case for Compassionate Conservatism—for Animals," *American Conservative,* May 23, 2005; George F. Will, "What We Owe What We Eat," *Newsweek,* July 18, 2005; Matthew Scully, *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy,* St. Martin's Press, New York, 2003. [Singer and Mason's note]

creatures to a commodity" seemed to him "to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible."[7]

On this issue we agree with Scully, Buchanan, Will, Pollan, Fearnley-Whittingstall, Scruton, and Pope Benedict XVI: no one should be supporting the vast system of animal abuse that today produces most animal products in developed nations. 8

Unsound Defenses of Factory Farming

What possible arguments can there be in defense of factory farming? We will review some of them and show why they are unconvincing. First, it is sometimes said that we have no duties to animals, because they are incapable of having duties toward us. This has been argued by those who believe that the basis of ethics is some kind of contract, such as "I'll refrain from harming you, if you refrain from harming me."[8] Animals cannot agree to a contract and thus fall outside the sphere of morality. But so, on this view, do babies and those with permanent, severe intellectual disabilities. Do we really have no duties to them either? An even bigger problem for the contract view of ethics is that it cannot ground duties to future generations. We could save ourselves a lot of money and effort by storing radioactive waste from nuclear-power plants in containers designed to last no more than, say, 150 years. If we only have duties to those who have duties towards us, why would that be wrong? There is an old joke that goes, "Why should I do anything for posterity? What did posterity ever do for me?" The problem with contract theorists is that they don't get the joke. 9

Second, when ethical issues are raised about eating meat, many people use what might be called "the Benjamin Franklin defense." Franklin was for many years a vegetarian, until one day, while watching his friends fishing, he noticed that some of the fish they caught had eaten other fish. He then said to himself: "If you eat one another, I don't see why we may not eat you." The thought here may be that if a being treats others in a particular way, then humans are entitled to treat that being in an equivalent way. However, this does not follow as a matter of logic or ethics. Quite rightly, we do not normally take the behavior of animals as a model for how we may treat them. We 10

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time. A Conversation with Peter Seewald.* San Francisco: St. Ignatius Press, 2002, p. 78. [Singer and Mason's note]

[8] See, for example, Peter Carruthers, *The Animals Issue: Moral Theory in Practice,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992. [Singer and Mason's note]

would not, for example, justify tearing a cat to pieces because we had observed the cat tearing a mouse to pieces. Carnivorous fish don't have a choice about whether to kill other fish or not. They kill as a matter of instinct. Meanwhile, humans can choose to abstain from killing or eating fish and other animals.

Alternatively, the argument could be made that it is part of the 11
natural order that there are predators and prey, and so it cannot be wrong for us to play our part in this order. But this "argument from nature" can justify all kinds of inequities, including the rule of men over women and leaving the weak and the sick to fall by the wayside. Even if the argument were sound, however, it would work only for those of us still living in a hunter-gatherer society, for there is nothing at all "natural" about our current ways of raising animals. As for Franklin's argument about the fish who had eaten other fish, this is a selective use of an argument we would reject in other contexts. Franklin was a sufficiently acute observer of his own nature to recognize how selective he was being, because he admits that he hit upon his justification for eating the fish only after they were in the frying pan and had begun to smell "admirably well."[9]

Third, we have said that the suffering inflicted on animals by fac- 12
tory farming, transportation, and slaughter is unnecessary because—as the Farbs and many other vegan families demonstrate—there are alternatives to meat and other animal products that allow people to be healthy and well-nourished. It might be argued that food from animals is a central part of the standard Western diet and important, if not always central, to what people eat in many other cultures as well. Because animal products are so significant to us, and because we could not buy them as cheaply as we can now without factory farming, factory farming is justifiable despite the suffering it inflicts on animals. But when cultural practices are harmful, they should not be allowed to go unchallenged. Slavery was once part of the culture of the American South. Biases against women and against people of other races have been, and in some places still are, culturally significant. If a widespread cultural practice is wrong, we should try to change it.

It's true that the alternatives to factory farming we've examined, 13
whether Cyd Szymanski's eggs or Niman Ranch pork, are more expensive. Let's grant, too, that switching to a totally vegan diet is something that many people would find difficult, at least at first. But these assumptions are still insufficient to justify factory farming. The choice is not between business as usual and a vegan world. Without

[9] Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiograpy*, New York, Modern Library, 1950, p. 41. [Singer and Mason's note]

factory farming, families with limited means would be able to afford fewer animal products, but they would not have to stop buying them entirely. Nutritionists agree that most people in developed countries eat far more animal products than they need, and more than is good for their health. Spending the same amount of money and buying fewer animal products would therefore be a good thing, especially if those animal products came from animals free to walk around outside, which would make the meat less fatty, and if the reduced consumption in animal products were offset by increased consumption of fruit and vegetables. That is the recommendation of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and few people are more devoted to food than he is.

For perhaps a billion of the world's poorest people, hunger and 14
malnutrition are still a problem. But factory farming isn't going to solve that problem, for in developing countries the industry caters to the growing urban middle class, not the poor, who cannot afford to buy its products. In developing countries, factory-farming products are chosen for their taste and status, not for the consumer's good health. The world's largest and most comprehensive study of diet and disease has shown that in rural China, good health and normal growth are achieved on a diet that includes only one-tenth as much animal-based food as Americans eat. Increases in the consumption of animal products above that very low base are correlated with an increase in the "diseases of affluence": heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and cancer.[10]

The great suffering inflicted on animals by factory farming is not 15
outweighed by a possible loss in gastronomic satisfaction caused by the elimination of meat from animals raised on factory farms from the diet. The harder question is whether we should be vegan or at least vegetarian? To answer that question, we need to go beyond the rejection of unjustified suffering and ask whether it is wrong to kill animals—without suffering—for our food. We need to ask what moral status animals have, and what ethical standards should govern our treatment of them.

Ethics and Animals

The prevailing Western ethic assumes that human interests must 16
always prevail over the comparable interests of members of other species. Since the rise of the modern animal movement in the 1970s,

[10] T. Colin Campbell and Thomas Campbell, *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-Term Health*, Benbella, Dallas, TX, 2005. [Singer and Mason's note]

however, this ethic has been on the defensive. The argument is that, despite obvious differences between human and nonhuman animals, we share a capacity to suffer, and this means that they, like us, have interests. If we ignore or discount their interests simply on the grounds that they are not members of our species, the logic of our position is similar to that of the most blatant racists or sexists—those who think that to be white, or male, is to be inherently superior in moral status, irrespective of other characteristics or qualities.

The usual reply to this parallel between speciesism and racism 17
or sexism is to acknowledge that it is a mistake to think that whites are superior to other races, or that males are superior to women, but then to argue that humans really are superior to non-human animals in their capacity to reason and the extent of their self-awareness, while claiming that these are morally relevant characteristics. However, some humans—infants, and those with severe intellectual disabilities—have less ability to reason and less self-awareness than some non-human animals. So we cannot justifiably use these criteria to draw a distinction between all humans on the one hand and all non-human animals on the other.

In the eighteenth century, Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's* 18
Travels, made a "modest proposal" to deal with the "surplus" of the children of impoverished women in Ireland. "I have been assured," he wrote, "that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled."[11] The proposal was, of course, a satire on British policy towards the Irish. But if we find this proposal shocking, our reaction shows that we do not really believe that the absence of an advanced ability to reason is sufficient to justify turning a sentient being into a piece of meat. Nor is it the potential of infants to develop these abilities that marks the crucial moral distinction, because we would be equally shocked by anyone who proposed the same treatment for humans born with serious and irreversible intellectual disabilities. But if, within our own species, we don't regard differences in intelligence, reasoning ability, or self-awareness as grounds for permitting us to exploit the being with lower capacities for our own ends, how can we point to the same characteristics to justify exploiting

[11] **Jonathan Swift (1667–1745)** Anglo-Irish satirist and dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin; Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People from Being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public*, first published 1729, reprinted in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, eds., *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1976, pp. 234–37. [Singer and Mason's note]

members of other species? Our willingness to exploit non-human animals is not something that is based on sound moral distinctions. It is a sign of "speciesism," a prejudice that survives because it is convenient for the dominant group, in this case not whites or males, but humans.

If we wish to maintain the view that no conscious human 19
beings, including those with profound, permanent intellectual disabilities, can be used in ways harmful to them solely as a means to another's end, then we are going to have to extend the boundaries of this principle beyond our own species to other animals who are conscious and able to be harmed. Otherwise we are drawing a moral circle around our own species, even when the members of our own species protected by that moral boundary are not superior in any morally relevant characteristics to many nonhuman animals who fall outside the moral circle. If we fail to expand this circle, we will be unable to defend ourselves against racists and sexists who want to draw the boundaries more closely around themselves.

Equal Consideration for Animals?

Those who defend our present treatment of animals often say 20
that the animal-rights movement would have us give animals the same rights as humans. This is obviously absurd—animals can't have equal rights to an education, to vote, or to exercise free speech. The kind of parity that most animal advocates want to extend to animals is not equal rights, but equal consideration of comparable interests. If an animal feels pain, the pain matters as much as it does when a human feels pain. Granted, the mental capacities of different beings will affect how they experience pain, how they remember it, and whether they anticipate further pain—and these differences can be important. But the pain felt by a baby is a bad thing, even if the baby is no more self-aware than, say, a pig, and has no greater capacities for memory or anticipation. Pain can be a useful warning of danger, so it is sometimes valuable, all things considered. But taken in themselves, unless there is some compensating benefit, we should consider similar experiences of pain to be equally undesirable, whatever the species of the being who feels the pain.

We have now progressed in our argument beyond the avoidance 21
of "unnecessary" suffering to the principle of equal consideration of interests, which tells us to give the same weight to the interests of non-human animals as we give to the similar interests of human beings. Let's see whether this principle can help us to decide whether eating meat is unethical.

Eating Meat: The Best Defense

The most thoughtful defenses of eating meat come from those 22
writers who are strongest in their condemnation of factory farming: Michael Pollan, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and Roger Scruton. Pollan's the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* essay "An Animal's Place," begins with the line: "The first time I opened Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, I was dining alone at the Palm, trying to enjoy a ribeye steak cooked medium-rare." From there he goes on to describe factory farming and acknowledge that we cannot justify eating the food that this system produces. Pollan then juxtaposes his grim account of modern industrial agriculture with a lyrical portrayal of Polyface Farm, spread over 550 acres of grass and forest in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Here, Pollan tells us, "Joel Salatin and his family raise six different food animals—cattle, pigs, chickens, rabbits, turkeys, and sheep—in an intricate dance of symbiosis designed to allow each species, in Salatin's words, 'to fully express its physiological distinctiveness.'" We learn about Salatin's rotation method: first cows graze on the pasture, then laying hens feast on the grubs attracted by the cowpats, then sheep come and eat the weeds that the cows and hens don't like. There are pigs, too, rooting around in compost in a barn.

If we can recognize animal suffering in a factory farm, Pollan 23
says, "animal happiness is unmistakable too, and here I was seeing it in abundance." That happiness ends, of course, when the animals are killed, but for the rabbits and chickens, at least, that death is not preceded by the terrifying experience of being trucked off to a slaughterhouse. Salatin slaughters them on the farm. (He would like to slaughter the cattle, pigs, and sheep on the premises, too, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture will not let him.) Salatin's killing is done on Saturday mornings, and anyone is welcome to come along and watch. This leads Pollan to comment that if the walls of both factory farms and slaughterhouses were made of glass, industrial agriculture might be redeemed. Some people would become vegetarians, but others, forced to raise and kill animals in a place where they can be watched, would do it with more consideration for the animal, as well as for the eater. We would have "poultry farms where chickens still go outside" and "hog farms where pigs live as they did fifty years ago—in contact with the sun, the earth, and the gaze of a farmer."

In the light of his experience at Polyface Farm, Pollan tells us that 24
to see the domestication of animals as "a form of enslavement or even exploitation" is a mistake. It is, instead, "an instance of mutualism between species" and an evolutionary, not a political, development.

Here Pollan may have been influenced by Stephen Budiansky's book *The Covenant of the Wild*.[12] Budiansky's argument is that domestication occurred when some species of animals began to hang around human settlements in order to eat waste or leftover food. Since the animals were edible—or perhaps gave milk and eggs that could be eaten—our ancestors encouraged them to stay around by providing food for them and protecting them from predators. The result has been the evolution of animal breeds that do well, in terms of species survival, by being domesticated. There would be far fewer chickens, pigs, and cattle in the world today if their ancestors had remained wild.

The entire story of domestication is speculative, but one thing is 25
clear: Pollan describes it in a way that cannot be correct and uses it to suggest an ethical justification for our use of animals that it cannot support. He writes that "domestication happened when a small handful of especially opportunistic species discovered through Darwinian trial and error that they were more likely to survive and prosper in an alliance with humans than on their own." No mistake is more common, in accounts of evolutionary processes, than attributing purposiveness either to the process of evolution itself or to entities like genes or species, which are not capable of forming purpose at all. Species do not "discover" anything, through trial and error or in any other way. Individual animals survive and leave offspring, and others, with slightly different characteristics, do not. In this case, on Pollan's account, some animals were attracted to human settlements and were themselves sufficiently attractive to the humans to receive food and protection, while other animals were either not attracted to the human settlements or were not attractive to the humans. More of the offspring of those animals that were attracted and attractive survived and reproduced than was the case with those animals that were not attracted or not attractive.

Pollan then notes that "Cows, pigs, dogs, cats, and chickens 26
have thrived, while their wild ancestors have languished" and that there are now only 10,000 wolves in North America, but 50 million dogs. From this he draws the conclusion that "From the animals' point of view, the bargain with humanity has been a great success, at least until our own time." But just as species are not capable of discovering anything, neither are they capable of making a bargain. Whether individual animals are capable of making a bargain is a separate question, but Pollan is surely not asserting that any individual animal ever consciously made a bargain with humans, to, for

[12] Stephen Budiansky, *The Covenant of the Wild*, HarperCollins, New York, 1992. [Singer and Mason's note]

example, trade her eggs or milk, or even his or her flesh, for a year or two's food and protection from predators.

Talk of bargains between humans and animals cannot justify 27
anything about how we treat animals today. There is, however, a better point that can be disentangled from Pollan's account of domestication. We can take Pollan to be arguing that since domestic animals have evolved to be what they now are through their symbiotic relationship with humans, their "characteristic form of life"—a phrase Pollan borrows from Aristotle—is one lived in domestication with humans, and that means—for chickens, pigs, cows, and sheep—a life on a farm or ranch. This is their nature, and the Good Life for them is one in which they can live, in accordance with their nature, on the Good Farm, until they are killed and eaten. The killing and eating is unavoidable, for without it neither farms, nor the animals on them, would exist at all.

Fearnley-Whittingstall's defense of meat-eating in *The River Cot-* 28
tage Meat Book is in some respects strikingly similar to that of Pollan, but it reaches this last point more directly. Fearnley-Whittingstall refers to Budiansky's *Covenant of the Wild* when explaining how "consensual domestication" came about—but he is careful to note that this kind of cooperation between species has nothing to do with individual consent and does not carry the moral implications of individual consent. His point is rather that the nature of farm animals has been shaped by their relationship with us, and they "can be healthy, contented, and even, at least in a sense that suits their species, fulfilled—for the duration of their short lives." Then he adds: "And I believe that these short, domesticated lives are, on balance, better than no lives at all." This gives us moral authority for eating them, but only if we buy from farmers who "embrace the notion of a contract with their meat animals" and "do all they can to uphold it, honorably, morally, and responsibly." *The River Cottage Meat Book* instructs its readers on how to find meat produced by the minority of farmers who do this.[13]

Questions About The Best Defense

Pollan's and Fearnley-Whittingstall's defenses of meat-eating are 29
essentially variants on one that is familiar to philosophers who have studied earlier debates about meat-eating. The argument occurs, for

[13] Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, *The River Cottage Meat Book*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2004, pp. 23–25. [Singer and Mason's note]

instance, in *Social Rights and Duties*, a collection of essays and lectures published in 1896 by the British essayist—and father of the novelist Virgina Woolf—Leslie Stephen. Stephen writes: "Of all the arguments for Vegetarianism none is so weak as the argument from humanity. The pig has a stronger interest than anyone in the demand for bacon. If all the world were Jewish, there would be no pigs at all." Henry Salt, an early advocate of animal rights, thought there was a philosophical fallacy at the core of Stephen's argument: "A person who is already in existence," Salt writes, "may feel that he would rather have lived than not, but he must first have the *terra firma* of existence to argue from; the moment he begins to argue as if from the abyss of the non-existent, he talks nonsense, by predicating good or evil, happiness or unhappiness, of that of which we can predicate nothing."[14]

Salt has drawn our attention to a deep issue that the argument 30
raises. We don't normally think of bringing people into existence as a way of benefiting them. When couples are uncertain about whether or not to have children, they tend to think of their own interests, or perhaps the interests of other existing people, rather than of the benefit they may be conferring on their future children by bringing them into existence—assuming that these children will come into existence in circumstances that make it likely that they will have good lives. But our ordinary way of thinking about such questions might be mistaken. Ask yourself if it would be wrong to bring a child into existence, knowing that the child suffered from a genetic defect that would make her life both brief and utterly miserable for every moment of her existence? Most people will answer "yes." Now consider bringing into existence a being who will lead a thoroughly satisfying life. Is that a good thing to do, other things being equal? If you answer this in the negative, you need to explain why it is wrong to bring a miserable being into existence, but not good to bring a happy or fulfilled being into existence. Sound explanations for this are extraordinarily difficult to find.

We will not attempt to resolve these challenging philosophical 31
questions here. Instead, we'll accept that, as long as a pig has a good life and a quick death, it is a good thing (or at least not a bad thing) for the pig that he or she exists. The argument, then, is that eating meat from farms that give pigs good lives cannot be bad for the pigs,

[14] **Henry Salt (1851–1939)** British prison reformer; Henry Salt, "The Logic of the Larder," first published in Henry Salt, *The Humanities of Diet*, The Vegetarian Society, Manchester, 1914, reprinted in Tom Regan and Peter Singer, *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1976, p. 186. [Singer and Mason's note]

since if no one ate meat, these pigs would not exist. To eat them, however, we have to kill them first, so killing them must be justifiable.

Pollan seems to feel some discomfort about his own argument, 32
because he acknowledges that he has been using what is essentially a utilitarian argument for meat-eating and then recalls that "utilitarians can also justify killing retarded orphans. Killing just isn't the problem for them that it is for other people, including me." So he goes back to Joel Salatin and asks him how he can bring himself to kill a chicken. Salatin replies: "People have a soul. Animals don't. It's a bedrock belief of mine. Unlike us, animals are not created in God's image, so when they die, they just die." As Salatin's answer reminds us, religions often reflect the speciesism of the human beings who developed them. Pollan doesn't comment on Salatin's answer. If he has objections to killing that go beyond utilitarian arguments, he owes us an account of why these objections do not apply to animals.

Fearnley-Whittingstall has noticed that most meat eaters are 33
protected from thinking about the fact that animals are killed in order to produce meat. He thinks this is wrong, and so he includes in his book a double-page series of color photographs that begins with him taking two of his beef cattle to slaughter, and then shows them being killed, bled out, skinned, disemboweled, and sawn in half. He reports that he watched the process itself and found it "somewhat shocking," although he says that the process "does not seem to me to cause much suffering" and did not make him feel "angry, or sick, or guilty, or ashamed." It compares well, he argues, with almost any other form of death for either a wild or a farmed animal. But Fearnley-Whittingstall doesn't consider that his cattle, like all the animals we eat, died while still very young. They might have lived several more years before meeting one of these other forms of death, years in which they matured, experienced sexual intercourse, and, if they were females, cared for their children. We humans, after all, are prepared to pass up many rapid and humane forms of death in order to live a few more years, even if we are then likely to die of a disease that causes us to suffer before we die.

Scruton's background in philosophy leads him to put his 34
defense of killing animals for food on a more philosophical basis than Pollan or Fearnley-Whittingstall. He writes: "Human beings are conscious of their lives as their own; they have ambitions, hopes, and aspirations." To be "cut short" before one's time is tragic, because "human beings are fulfilled by their achievements and not merely by their comforts." In contrast, animals like cattle do not look forward to future achievements, nor do they seek to achieve anything that will make their lives more fulfilling.[15] Scruton may be right about cattle, but his argument implies that it would be permissible to kill humans who, because of profound intellectual disabilities, are not conscious of their lives as their own and do not look forward to future achievements. Those who find this conclusion too shocking to accept cannot defend the killing of animals for meat on the grounds that animals lack the higher mental abilities that make it wrong to kill normal humans.

Drawing Conclusions

Suppose, though, that some people do accept this disturbing 35
conclusion and eat only humanely raised animals. Does that allow them an impregnable defense of their diet? Not quite. If there were no demand for bacon, nor for any other animal products, farms that now raise animals would convert to growing crops or else go out of business, and humans would replace animal protein with plant protein. Since, as we have seen, we can produce a specified amount of both protein and calories from a smaller area of land when we grow plant foods rather than animal foods, this change would release significant areas of land from agriculture or would render unnecessary the appropriation of more land for agriculture. If that land were allowed to return to forest, or in the case of existing wild habitat allowed to remain undisturbed, the total number of animals leading lives unconfined by factory farming would increase—for birds and animals are much more abundant in forests than on either cropland or pasture. In North America, for example, there are squirrels, chipmunks, racoons, rabbits, mice, and deer, as well as blackbirds, crows, cardinals, pigeons, sparrows, and starlings—to name just a few. In other countries the species that inhabit forests vary, as do the densities of individual birds and animals, which are highest in tropical forests.

Gaverick Matheny and Kai Chan have attempted to calculate the 36
overall net gain or loss of animal life that will result if people in developed countries should start to switch from their present heavily meat-based diet to one based on plant foods. By calculating the amount of land that could be allowed to return to forest or become

[15] Roger Scruton, "The Conscientious Carnivore" in Steve Sapontzis, ed., *Food for Thought: The Debate over Eating Meat*, Prometheus, Amherst, NY, 2004, p. 88. [Singer and Mason's note]

some other kind of natural habitat and the number of wild birds and animals who would live on that land, they conclude that even when meat is obtained from grazing cattle living decent lives, the number of animals living free of close confinement will be greater when we obtain protein from plant foods rather than from grazing cattle. The same is true for raising pigs, even if the pigs derive half of their food from waste. In the case of eggs and poultry, with the farming methods like those used at Polyface Farm, the balance may favor continued farming, but this depends on how much grain they need to be fed, in addition to what they can eat on pasture.[16]

Conscientious omnivores might reply that there is no reason to 37
believe that land freed from agricultural use by a switch to a plant-based diet actually would be allowed to revert to wild habitat that could then support the increased number and diversity of animal life. Perhaps it would be bought up for suburban or industrial development. That may be true in some cases in developed countries, especially if the land is near a metropolitan or industrial area. But we should consider the globalized market that now exists for meat. The land no longer needed to produce meat for us may still be used to raise animals whose meat would then be available for export and therefore could slow the rate of forest clearance in, say, Brazil.

There are, of course, exceptions, where animals are raised on 38
land unsuitable for growing crops, and the meat produced is too expensive to be exported. Raising lambs in the Welsh hills, for example, is a traditional form of husbandry that has existed for many centuries and makes use of land that could not otherwise produce food for humans. If the lives of the sheep are, on the whole, good ones, and they would not exist at all if the lambs were not killed and eaten, it can be argued that doing so has benefits, on the whole, for both human and animals.

Pollan also refers to a different argument for eating meat from 39
grazing animals, which he owes to Steve Davis, an animal scientist at Oregon State University. According to Davis, we cannot avoid being responsible for killing animals, even if we are vegan. A tractor plowing a field to plant crops may crush field mice, and moles can be killed when their burrows are destroyed by the plow. Harvesting crops removes the ground cover in which small animals shelter, making it possible for predators to kill them. Applying pesticides

[16] Gaverick Matheny and Kai Chan, "Human Diets and Animal Welfare: The Illogic of the Larder," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, vol. 18 (2005), pp. 579–94; and personal correspondence with Gaverick Matheny, April 2005. [Singer and Mason's note]

can kill birds. Davis then tries to calculate the number of animals killed by growing crops and the number killed by rearing beef cattle on pasture and argues that twice as many animals die per acre when growing crops as in pasture-reared beef production. He then concludes that if we are trying to kill as few animals as possible, we will do better to eat beef—as long as it is fed entirely on grass and not fattened on grain—than to follow a vegan diet.[17] Davis has, however, made a gross error in his calculations: he assumes that an acre of land will feed the same number of people irrespective of whether it is used to raise grass-fed beef or to grow crops. In fact, an acre of land used for crops will feed about ten times as many people as an acre of land used for grass-fed beef. When that difference is fed into the calculations, Davis's argument is turned on its head, and proves that vegans are indirectly responsible for killing only about a fifth as many animals as those who eat grass-fed beef.

Even if it is ethically acceptable to eat animals who have been 40
well-cared for during their lifetimes and then killed without experiencing pain or distress, for those unable to raise their own animals, it is difficult to be sure that the meat you buy comes from such animals. No farm gets more publicity for its exemplary treatment of animals than Polyface Farm. Pollan is not the only one to praise it. The "Style" section of the *New York Times* raved about it and called Joel Salatin, its owner, the "High Priest of the Pasture." Salatin's son has said that his father "has achieved almost godlike status in some circles."[18] But is Polyface really such a good place for animals? Rabbits on the farm are kept in small suspended wire cages. Chickens may be on grass, but instead of being free to roam, they are crowded into mobile wire pens. A review of sustainable-poultry systems by the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service noted that with Salatin's pens "The confined space inside the pens makes bird welfare a concern" and that the crowding "can lead to pecking problems, because the birds lower in the pecking order cannot run away." Out of five sustainable-poultry systems investigated, the mobile wire pens were placed last for animal welfare, with a "poor to fair" rating. Herman Beck-Chenoweth, author of *Free Range Poultry Production and Marketing* and a poultry producer himself, calls

[17] Steven Davis, "The Least Harm Principle May Require that Humans Consume a Diet Containing Large Herbivores, Not a Vegan Diet," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, vol. 16 (2003), pp. 387–94. [Singer and Mason's note]

[18] Todd Purdum, "High Priest of the Pasture," *New York Times Style Magazine*, Living, Spring 2005, pp. 76–79. The comment from Daniel Salatin about his father is taken from the 13th Annual Wisconsin Grazing Conference, February 14, 2005, www.grassworks.org/Conference/conference.htm. [Singer and Mason's note]

Salatin's way of raising chickens "a confinement system with a grass floor," adding that although it is "a big improvement over the broiler houses used by companies such as Tyson and Perdue . . . it is a confinement system just the same."[19]

There is also the question of slaughter. The U.S. Federal Meat 41
Inspection Act does not permit Salatin to sell meat from animals that he kills on his farm, so his pigs and cattle are trucked off to conventional slaughterhouses. The crowded transport is likely to be very stressful for them, and it is impossible to know how humanely they are actually slaughtered. Because chickens and rabbits are not covered by the Meat Inspection Act, Salatin can kill them on the farm, sparing them the ordeal of transportation and the strange and sometimes frightening environment of the slaughterhouse. Nevertheless, an account of the killing of chickens at Polyface Farm isn't reassuring:

> Slaughter begins promptly at 8:30 a.m. The goal is to be completely finished by 10:30 a.m. O'Connor, the least skilled of the workers, manhandles the first of thirty crates of birds from a stack on a tractor-drawn trailer outside the pavilion. The birds were taken off of feed and crated about twelve hours earlier so that their craws would be clear for slaughter. He grabs the birds by their feet. Wings flap. Eight white chickens are up-ended in the galvanized metal "killing cones" at the far end of the processing line. Razor-sharp boning knives flash in the early morning sun. The chickens' throats have been slit. Bright red blood flows down a metal trough and into a large plastic bucket. In a minute or so, the chickens are "bled out." They're moved on to the next station in the processing line. And a fresh batch of birds is inserted into the cones.[20]

As this account indicates, birds are crammed into crates with 42
seven other birds—probably including some more aggressive birds they would normally keep away from—and they stay there for twelve hours. Then they are grabbed by the "least skilled of the workers," and passed on, upside down, to other workers who will cut their throats—without any prior stunning. It seems that at Polyface, as elsewhere, it is economics, more than concern for animals, that determines how the animals are treated.

[19] See Herman Beck-Chenoweth, *Free-Range Poultry Production and Marketing*, Back40Books, Hartshorn, Missouri, 2001. The quote is taken from the same author's "Free Range, Pastured Poultry, Chicken Tractor—What's the Difference?" www.free-rangepoultry.com/compare.htm. [Singer and Mason's note]

[20] George Devault, "'Chicken Day' at the Farm of Many Faces," *The New Farm*, August 2002, www.newfarm.org/features/0802/chicken%20day/print.html. [Singer and Mason's note]

If there are grounds for concern about a farm so often admired, 43
many other supposedly "humane" farms are going to be worse. Not all, of course—we have described visits to some good ones in this book—at least, as far as we could tell from our brief visits. (We were not able to see how any of the animals from these farms were slaughtered.) In practice, as long as animals are commodities, raised for sale on a large scale in a competitive market situation, there will be conflicts between their interests and the economic interests of the producer, and the producer will always be under pressure to cut corners and reduce costs.

Psychological aspects of our choice of diet need to be considered 44
too. Just as farmers who start by raising animals "humanely" may slide into practices more profitable but less humane, so individuals may slide as well. How humane is humane enough to eat? The line between what conscientious omnivores can justify eating and what they cannot justify eating is vague. Since we are all often tempted to take the easy way out, drawing a clear line against eating animal products may be the best way to ensure that one eats ethically—and sticks to it.

The impact we will have on others is even more important. 45
Since factory farming inflicts a vast quantity of unjustifiable suffering on animals, persuading others to boycott it should be a high priority for anyone concerned about animals. In this respect, a broad brush-stroke may be better than a more finely tuned approach. Vegans and vegetarians draw clear lines by refusing to eat all, or some, animal products. Whenever they dine with others, that line is evident, and people are likely to ask them why they are not eating meat. That often leads to conversations that influence others, and so the good that we can do personally by boycotting factory farms can be multiplied by the number of others we influence to do the same. When conscientious omnivores eat meat, however, their dietary choices are less evident. On the plate, ham from a pig who led a happy life looks very much like ham from a factory-farmed pig. Thus the eating habits of the conscientious omnivore are likely to reinforce the common view that animals are things for us to use and unlikely to influence others to reconsider what they eat.

Where does all this leave the diet of conscientious omnivores? 46
Perhaps it's not, all things considered, the best possible diet, but the moral distance between the food choices made by conscientious omnivores and those made by most of the population is so great that it seems more appropriate to praise the conscientious omnivores for how far they have come, rather than to criticize them for not having gone further.

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL READING

1. What is speciesism? Is it avoidable?
2. Singer and Mason make a great deal of the capacity of animals to suffer pain. Why is that important to their argument?
3. What rights should animals share with humans?
4. Should farms become more like Polyface Farm? Would that solve the problem?
5. What is Michael Pollan's argument concerning the benefits to domesticated species versus those that remain wild?
6. To what extent are Singer and Mason convinced by Michael Pollan's argument?
7. Are the short lives of cattle bred for the market better than no lives at all? How does your answer satisfy or negate Singer and Mason's general complaints?
8. To what extent do you think animals are conscious of their lives? Are your pets more conscious than livestock?

SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITICAL WRITING

1. If you have experience with animals, especially with domesticated livestock, poultry, fish, or birds, how do you respond to Singer and Mason's suggestion that you refrain from eating meat? Does your personal experience have anything like the weight of an argument in helping to shape your behavior? Describe your experiences in detail and correlate them to the discussions that include references to Michael Pollan, Joel Salatin, and Roger Scruton. What would you say to these people if you had the chance to affect their views?
2. Joel Salatin (para. 32) says that he can bring himself to kill a chicken and serve it for dinner because "[p]eople have a soul. Animals don't. It's a bedrock belief of mine. Unlike us, animals are not created in God's image, so when they die, they just die." Do you agree with this view? Is the Bible clear on this point, or is Salatin simply rationalizing the situation to make himself feel more comfortable? Is it possible that this apparently religious comment is a disguise for everyday speciesism? What justifies your position on either side of this argument? If you owned a pet, would Salatin's argument be less convincing to you?
3. After reading this essay, do you find yourself prepared to change any of your eating habits? Do you think any of your friends might change their eating habits? Would adding more plant protein to and reducing animal protein in your diet be likely to please Singer and Mason? Would they be more pleased if you ate humanely treated animals? Would you be more comfortable? Do you think your health might be affected by changing your diet? Could you become a conscientious omnivore?
4. What is the weakest part of Singer and Mason's argument? They spend a great deal of time dissecting the arguments of those who support eating meat. Are they wrong in how they deal with any of the experts they disagree with? Is Michael Pollan's argument not worth taking into consideration? Is there only one way to solve the ethical problem of eating animals? If you do not feel there is an ethical problem with eating animals, construct an argument that takes issue with Singer and Mason's.
5. Singer and Mason argue that an acre of land that will produce enough crops to feed ten people will only produce enough grazing cattle to feed one person. Considering the widespread famine and starvation in the world now and to come, wouldn't this be the most powerful ethical argument against eating meat? But would it not also be an ethical issue regarding only humans and not animals? What has this to do with establishing an ethical position regarding animals rather than humans? What argument against eating meat can you construct from the detail regarding the amount of food that can be produced from a single acre of land?
6. CONNECTIONS Opposing the argument based on the notion of dominion is central to the views of Aldo Leopold (p. 745). What position would Leopold have taken on the question of eating meat? He clearly expresses concern for the biota on the land, although he says little or nothing about the treatment of animals. Yet, he sees, as do Singer and Mason, that the biblical passage that says mankind has dominion over the land and the animals gives a kind of license to people to use and abuse it as they will. What does Leopold have to say that will strengthen Singer and Mason's argument?
7. SEEING CONNECTIONS What is the ethical situation in Wright's *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump* (p. 687)? Consider two possible scenarios: (1) that after the experiment the bird will be cooked and mixed in a meat pie that all the onlookers will enjoy or (2) that the bird will be returned to the cage that the boy on the right is lowering. How would Singer and Mason construe either or both of these situations from an ethical standpoint?