

2021

Empathy, Animals, and Deadly Vices

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Recommended Citation

Jenni, Kathie, Empathy, Animals, and Deadly Vices, *Animal Studies Journal*, 10(2), 2021, 92-110.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/vol10/iss2/6>

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Abstract

In *Deadly Vices*, Gabriele Taylor provides a secular analysis of vices which in Christian theology were thought to bring death to the soul: sloth, envy, avarice, pride, anger, lust, and gluttony. She argues that these vices are appropriately singled out and grouped together in that 'they are destructive of the self and prevent its flourishing'. Using a related approach, I offer a secular analysis of gluttony and cowardice, examining their roles in common failures to empathise with animals. I argue that these vices constitute serious moral failings, for they enable continuing complicity in animal abuse and undermine integrity. While Taylor aims to show that 'deadly vices' are destructive of the self, I argue that they are ultimately deadly to other animals. I offer practical suggestions for overcoming them by cultivating agentic courage and better empathy with animals.

Keywords

agency, animals, courage, cowardice, eating, empathy, gluttony, images, integrity, love, vices, virtue

Cover Page Footnote

My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *Animal Studies Journal* for an exceptionally thoughtful critique of an earlier draft of this essay.

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In her 2006 volume *Deadly Vices*, Gabriele Taylor provides a secular analysis of the vices which in Christian theology were thought to bring death to the soul: sloth, envy, avarice, pride, anger, lust, and gluttony. She argues that, entirely apart from religious concepts, these vices are appropriately singled out and grouped together in that ‘they are destructive of [the] self and prevent its flourishing’ (1). Using a related approach, in a recent paper I use a secularized extension of the Christian vice of *sloth* to illustrate what empathic laziness or sloth entails – aversion to the burdens of caring relationships with other beings – and argue that it is a serious moral shortcoming (Jenni).

In this paper I extend this approach to two other vices: gluttony and cowardice. I argue that both vices inhibit empathy for other animals, and thus action to help animals that empathy ignites. I conclude that these vices are serious moral failings, for they enable continuing complicity in animal abuse and undermine integrity. While Taylor aims to show that ‘deadly vices’ are destructive to the self, I argue that they are ultimately deadly to other animals. I end with practical suggestions for overcoming them to cultivate effective empathy.

My discussion assumes a context of first world economies in the global North and West, and reflects my experiences discussing ethics with food-secure students and friends. I make no claims about vices or virtues outside of those settings.

Gluttony

Gregory the Great, an original enumerator of the seven deadly sins, characterized gluttony not simply as eating and drinking too much, but as consuming food and drink ‘too soon, too delicately, too expensively, too greedily, too much’ (qtd in Prose 7). Thus, impatience to eat, concerning oneself too much with fancy or elaborate foods, overspending on food, consuming it with unseemly lack of control, and eating simply too much are all versions of this particular ‘deadly sin’. As Taylor puts it, ‘Something has gone wrong with [the glutton’s] relation to food’ (98).

From a Christian perspective, Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung asks, ‘How does the mundane act of taking in food impact our spiritual life ...?’ (40) Secular virtue ethics asks: ‘How does the mundane act of taking in food impact our *moral* life?’

DeYoung notes that like other vices, gluttony ‘has been ... oversimplified and misunderstood’ (140). Her perspective is a Christian one, but her analysis carries power for secular animal ethics. Following Aquinas, she notes that the core of gluttony manifested in its various forms is ‘its focus on pleasure. One’s own pleasure. Excessive pleasure. Immediate, tangible pleasure’ (140). For Aquinas, what is common to all forms of gluttony is the ‘intemperate *desire* to consume food, not the intemperate consumption of food’ (DeYoung 141, my emphasis). What’s vicious about gluttony is that pleasures related to eating and the palate ‘dominate everything else that’s important’ (141).

Eating ‘too delicately’ involves wanting a particular food prepared ‘just so’ and pursuing it regardless of the trouble it may cause others. Eating ‘too sumptuously’ involves seeking the pleasures of satiety and fullness, so that one eats rich food, and too much of it, to enjoy the satisfaction of feeling full. An overeater consumes too much simply to indulge her tastes (think chocolate); a greedy eater eats fast to ensure that there is more of what she wants when she goes back for seconds (think pizza). In every case gluttons are ‘dominated by their appetites, and their behavior is unabashedly ruled by them.’ The question about whether one is a glutton is not about how much one eats, but ‘whether we are eating to satisfy our own wants, in a way that elevates our own satisfaction above other good things’ (DeYoung 145).

For Aquinas, the main good that the glutton foregoes is spiritual well-being:

If we leave [spiritual] desires unfilled long enough, we tend to lose sight of them and become overly preoccupied with only physical desires in an escalating and futile cycle of avoiding spiritual starvation by indulging ourselves physically. When gluttony becomes a habit, we have effectively trained ourselves to appreciate the latter goods to the eclipse of the former. (DeYoung 146)

This does not mean that taking *any* pleasure in food is wrong; from a theological point of view, God endowed humans with taste buds and the need to eat in order to survive and do good

works. But guidance and temperance ensure we eat in a manner suitable to spiritual beings, rather than the ‘animals’ to which gluttons are often compared.

Aquinas offers practical guidance that seems wise from any perspective. First, we need to ask whether we are eating in a way that maintains our health and well-being. Second, we need to eat with regard for others with whom we live: ‘How and what and why we eat should reflect what is appropriate given the needs of others in our family and our community’ (DeYoung 151). We must not deprive others to gratify our own desire for pleasure. Aquinas’s third guideline stresses that choices in eating should be aimed at our flourishing as spiritual beings. When they are, we are ‘pursuing our good as whole persons, not just our physical gratification’ (DeYoung 152).

Elizabeth Telfer offers three criteria for gluttony that are secular echoes of Aquinas: ‘damage to one’s health...; failure to respect one’s obligations to others; and inability to carry out one’s own plans’ (110). The health standard is important both in terms of self-interest and from a moral perspective: if we have duties to others or ourselves, then we have a duty to stay reasonably healthy to fulfill them (110). This does not mean that we need to keep perfectly healthful diets, nor that we must give up all pleasures of food. ‘The glutton’s choice is not a stark one: it is the choice between ruining health for the sake of the pleasures of food and preserving it *at the price of a modification of those pleasures*’ (Telfer 111, my emphasis). As many vegetarians know from experience, such modifications are feasible and common.

Telfer’s second standard is ‘respect for our obligations to other[s]’ (111). Focusing on humans first, she argues that being excessively fussy in what we eat, or focusing too much on gourmet food, often involves putting other people out and causing them an inordinate amount of trouble; it can be inconsiderate and thoughtless. In addition, knowing that a billion human beings are in danger of dying from malnutrition, we should moderate our pleasures of the palate to make a decent life possible for others. Telfer argues that instead of spending lavishly to dine in fancy restaurants or travelling many miles to experience a special restaurant or dish, we should put aside money to donate to famine relief. Following Telfer’s logic, considering the enormous waste of food resources embedded in animal agriculture, where vast quantities of food that

could be consumed by humans are fed to animals to convert plants into meat, continuing to eat animal products can be seen as gluttonous disrespect for other people – especially for the starving.

Worse than neglecting the hungry, ‘we care too much about food if we actually cause suffering for the sake of pleasures we ourselves get from food’ (Telfer 112). Many people eat animals even when they are well-informed about the animal suffering involved and the nutritional adequacy of plant-based diets – and even when they know that other people have changed their tastes to embrace and enjoy plant-based foods. As ethics teachers know, students who judge that industrial animal agriculture is clearly wrong often declare that they could never give up its products, because they like meat too much. It is this manifestation of gluttony – allowing the pleasures of a meat-centered diet to eclipse moral concern for animals – that is my focus here.

Consider again Gregory the Great’s enumeration of gluttonies: eating ‘too soon, too delicately, too expensively, too greedily, too much’. An informed carnivore may consume a reasonable amount of food (so as not to eat ‘too much’), not spend much money on it (since meat is sold at artificially low prices), be patient about waiting to eat (thus not eating ‘too soon’), be not at all fastidious about how her meat is prepared (frequenting fast-food restaurants with minimal standards of care), and may not at all match the common image of an obese, slovenly person who stuffs their face at any opportunity. She may be a polite, healthy, frugal, attractive, slender person. Yet when she consumes animal products in the knowledge of the animal suffering and waste of resources such foods entail, she is most certainly a glutton. In terms of the real (externalised) costs of animal agriculture, she indeed eats too expensively. In terms of the invisible food resources implicated in meat, she consumes too much. In refusing to change her eating habits to address the moral costs borne by animals who suffer, she consumes too greedily. She cares too much about the pleasures of eating animals and the potential discomfort of changing her habits; and she does not care enough about other values – preventing animal suffering, in particular – that she herself, upon reflection, acknowledges as being more important.

Telfer's third criterion for gluttony is that too much concern for the pleasures of food interferes with the ability to carry out one's plans (113). St. Thomas's formulation is different, but related: Our choices about eating should be aimed at our flourishing as spiritual beings, so that we are 'pursuing our good as whole persons, not just our physical gratification, in our eating' (DeYoung 152).

One might argue that carnivores do pursue their good as whole persons: people who are gluttonous in the ways described here may happily pursue plans of becoming musicians or artists, marrying and having children, or pursuing academic careers. Yet if people wish to flourish as *moral* agents, they will need to actively bring their habits and choices into line with their fundamental values. If a presupposition of carrying out one's plans is that one will do so only in ways one judges to be morally acceptable, which surely is a common assumption, then knowing 'too much' about animal foods poses a serious problem for those who judge factory farming to be cruel and wrong, yet are steeped in carnivorous diets. Gluttony, then, interferes with actions called for by one's values if one cares about animals' well-being. But it also blocks empathy itself – empathy which we know carries with it a moral motivation to change (Eisenberg and Miller; Hoffman 'Empathy, its Development', 'Empathy and Prosocial Behavior', 'Empathy, Justice and the Law'; Maibom; Decety; Krznaric).

People who initially empathise with animals shown in images of factory farms often leave the empathy behind as time passes; they allow themselves to forget the images, the moral arguments, and their own empathic distress. Indeed, given that most people recognise the action-guiding force of empathy – the moral urge to act that it arouses – many consciously choose not to expose themselves to images that would elicit empathy. They reveal that they do not want to know, because they do not want to 'have to' go vegetarian. Those who do behold the images are often profoundly moved and give up animal products for a time; but as time goes on the images fade in their memories, and with them fades their empathy. Considering the busyness of our lives, it is easy to let even a deeply felt moral resolve slip away without making a conscious decision to do so. Our short attention spans compound the problem. So does being caught up in the momentum of an overwhelmingly meat-centered culture such as that of the United States, with capitalist structures and conditions of production and marketing that alienate

us profoundly from the origins and histories (or biographies) of what we eat. All of these factors make it easy to lose track of empathy that was genuine at the time one witnessed egregious animal abuse.¹ But at bottom, many *allow* such factors to erode their empathy because of gluttony: attachment to the pleasures of eating animals.

Cowardice

While it is not on Gregory's list of deadly sins nor Taylor's list of deadly vices, *cowardice* also plays a central role in thwarting empathy for animals.

Rachel Fredericks makes a compelling case for courage as an 'environmental virtue'. She notes that virtues such as care, compassion, humility, respect, and love have received attention in environmental ethics, and that this is appropriate since those virtues involve 'a new mental orientation' toward the natural world. Yet the environmental crises we face require 'more than just widening the scope and depth of our positive attitudes to include nonhuman natural entities. We need more than positive attitudes to address environmental problems; we desperately need action at both the individual and collective levels' (340-41).

Fredericks notes that 'many Americans ... identify as environmentalists in terms of their attitudes toward nature and its value, and yet do not habitually act in accordance with those attitudes... [M]ost Americans do not take significant action on the basis of the concern they say they feel' (341). They continue to contribute to environmental degradation by eating meat, driving gas-guzzling vehicles, and engaging in consumerism. Fredericks addresses several possible explanations for these failures: the presence of so many concerns that environmental ones are not prioritized; ignorance of how to put environmental concern into action; the belief that an individual's actions by themselves cannot have a significant impact. She handily debunks these explanations and highlights a virtue needed for environmental action:

... in a significant number of cases, what explains the tension between expressed attitudes and inaction is a lack of willingness to take risks in support of one's concerns, a lack of courage.... If one lacks moral courage, then the care, compassion, humility,

respect, and love that one feels for natural entities will simply be causally inert or ineffective attitudes, not true virtues (which require habitual activity). (343)

Fredericks' focus is specifically moral courage. Emphasising that improving our relationships with the natural world must take place 'in the context of our relationships with other humans' (344), she uses Matthew Pinalto's analysis of moral courage to show its importance to environmental action. For both authors, 'moral courage involves facing the particular fears and dangers arising from the possibility that one will be punished ... for taking a moral stand' (Pinalto 167). The punishment referenced here would be social, rather than physical injury or death. Environmental action often requires moral courage, for such action may result in 'ridicule, retaliation, and social rejection' (167). In addition, Pinalto's notion of moral courage requires 'facing other persons as subjects or agents rather than simply as objects or obstacles (166)' while 'upholding some morally motivated cause' (165).

Fredericks convincingly extends Pinalto's notion of moral courage to environmental action. Environmental activists face the potential for punishments that may be 'political, professional, financial, personal, or some combination of these' (Fredericks 348). Beyond this, participants in non-violent protests and civil disobedience show a willingness to face those who might oppose them (police, journalists, bystanders) as persons who might be persuaded, not simply as obstacles.

Fredericks poses a question that is crucial to this discussion: Can one demonstrate environmental moral courage 'when one faces no *social* forms of punishment, but rather only internal obstacles?' (350, emphasis in original). On Pinalto's analysis it would seem not, since in these cases one need not face social punishment for a contemplated action and may not need to interact with other people as agents *or* as obstacles to overcome. But Fredericks' position is that one can:

... for there seem to be cases in which standing up for one's convictions in an environmental domain requires sacrifices in other important domains of one's life, which feel like punishments brought upon oneself and which can destabilize one's sense of self in a frightening way. (350)

Her example is someone who has dreamed of having ‘numerous biological children, only to decide that doing so is not justifiable given its . . . negative environmental impacts’ (350). For this to be a case of environmental moral virtue in Pianalto’s sense, she says, ‘one must treat others *and oneself* as persons, not merely obstacles’ (351, emphasis in original).

What would it mean to treat *oneself* as a person and not a mere obstacle to the changes one seeks? Ordinary ways of talking acknowledge that one can treat oneself as an obstacle: people declare that they are ‘addicted to cheese’ or say, ‘I could never be a vegetarian’. These thoughts can be humble acknowledgements of weakness, but they are problematic in that they imply that one’s cravings and tastes are outside of one’s control and compel one to act in ways one knows or believes are problematic. Such persons exhibit moral cowardice in an extended sense of Pianalto’s meaning in that they fail to acknowledge themselves as moral agents capable of change. To treat oneself as a person in this context would be to acknowledge the force of moral arguments, the importance of one’s values, and one’s capacity to be moved by reasoned persuasion – not just by force of habit, social pressure, or strong desires. To distinguish it from the common understanding of moral courage (which involves potential social punishment), I will call this virtue *agentic courage*.

Daniel Putman offers a helpful Aristotelian analysis of the emotions of courage, exploring ‘the independent roles played by fear and confidence in courage and its corresponding vices, particularly cowardice’ (Putman 463). The kind of confidence involved in courage, for Putman, is ‘a confidence that an individual *can* do what is fine or best in difficult circumstances, that one can face a threat . . . for the sake of a worthwhile cause’ (464). Putman notes that the appropriate level of confidence involves both confidence in the worth of a cause that motivates action and ‘knowing our own skills and abilities’ (465).

Putman outlines various combinations of fear and confidence that can result in courage or cowardice, showing that the two emotions are ‘deeply intertwined,’ but rely on distinct perceptions of ‘the danger of the situation, the worthiness of the cause, and the perception of one’s ability’ (469). One combination is having a ‘[h]igher level of fear than a situation calls for [and a] low level of confidence: the common perception of the coward’ (467). This scenario

seems to capture the plight of the newly awakened carnivore who cares about animals but ‘could never be a vegetarian’. Is this person cowardly when she fears a change in lifestyle and a new identity? For Putman, that would depend on whether her fears and level of confidence are appropriate to the circumstances. Given the typical situation of educated people in affluent nations, including the ease of finding vegetarian food and vegetarian friends, I would argue that she *is* cowardly if she declines to make the effort to change.

Like gluttony, then, cowardice thwarts *putting one’s values into action* by changing one’s habits; but does it play a role in *inhibiting empathy*, as well? I think that it does.

Activists who have witnessed cruelty to animals, in industrial farming and many other contexts, can reasonably be afraid of what more exposure will do to their psyches. Some human treatment of animals is so brutal that its images, once seen, can haunt one forever; one ‘cannot un-see’ them. For this reason, some activists draw a personal line at what they will witness in an effort to protect themselves from trauma. This does not seem cowardly, for such activists have long since witnessed what they needed to in order to change their lives and withdraw support from such cruelty. In addition, they need to protect themselves from depression, burnout, and grief so they can continue to act effectively for animals. There is real fear of what viewing yet more violent abuse can do to oneself – not just for activists, but for anyone who cares about animal suffering. Such people are not cowardly: their fear of trauma is reasonable and stems from self-knowledge based on experience, and they shield themselves from trauma *in order to carry on* serving the worthy cause of helping animals.

For the newcomer, the situation is different. Think of the college student who has heard about ethics courses and their disturbing documentaries. It’s not uncommon for students who have decided to take the risk to report friends who refuse to watch films about factory farming, because they do not want to ‘have to’ go vegetarian. What is at work here is fear of what empathy will bring: a moral conviction that one should change. Not just scholars, but many ordinary people know that vivid images can arouse empathy and the impulse to help in a way that words alone do not (Lopes; Hoffman, ‘Empathy, Justice, and the Law’; Kaplan). In these cases, one’s fear is of *morally motivating empathy itself*.

Cowardice explains why many who care about animals fail to empathise with animals they eat: they fear the emotional upheaval, threat to self-regard, and confrontation with the need to change that empathy can bring. This involves cowardice in that one's fear of empathising and its attendant distress is disproportionately high, and confidence in one's capacity to endure an unpleasant awakening and change one's eating habits is disproportionately low, in light of the importance of the cause, the values at stake, and available supports.

Cultivating Empathy

Aquinas speaks of a special kind of courage transformed by love of God, which can focus our energy and enable us to embrace actions that would normally make us cringe and run. Rather than needing to resist fear, a person with this love-inspired courage meets what would normally be fearful experiences with calm and a 'form of benevolence' directly inspired by concern for the other (Wensveen 140-41). Analogously, Louke van Wensveen argues that courage as a 'preservative' virtue can be transformed into an 'inclinal' or substantive virtue – a 'form of benevolence' directly inspired by concern for the natural world and beings whom one cares about. This love-inspired virtue is 'courage in its most perfect and sustainable form' (141). We associate it with inspiring activists, but we can also cultivate it in ourselves: 'we can prepare ourselves for the transformation of courage through love by ... creating and cultivating the conditions that make love possible' (141).

How can we cultivate 'the conditions that make love possible' so that we might develop the kind of love-infused courage that we witness in heroic activists?

As Leslie Jamison observes, empathy isn't something that just happens to us. It often involves choices we make to pay attention and extend ourselves. It is enhanced by things we can do – by deliberate exertion and a certain kind of work (23). Elisa Aaltola expands on this idea in her discussion of 'empathy pedagogy', identifying various 'tools of evoking empathy' (in others but also in ourselves) to which we all have access (219).

Empathy is strengthened by similarity, proximity, and familiarity; and weakened by their opposites (Batson et al.; Brown et al.; Sturmer et al.; Hoffman, ‘Empathy, Justice, and the Law’). It is easier for us to empathise with those who are like us, near us, and known to us. Other animals are in many ways vastly different from us, unfamiliar to many, and far removed from everyday life (both physically and in our field of awareness); but one can overcome difficulties of unfamiliarity and difference by becoming more familiar with them. To empathise better with unfamiliar animals, we must acquire knowledge of them. The more one learns about animals’ cognitive and emotional capacities, instinctual drives and sources of frustration, body language and methods of communication, the more one can imaginatively put oneself in their place.

Ethologists emphasise that there is no substitute for direct experience with other animals, to come to understand them. Barbara Smuts suggests that ‘for the heart to truly share another’s being it must be an embodied heart, prepared to encounter directly the embodied heart of another’ (108). By spending months in close proximity with chimpanzees, Smuts came to know each one as ‘a highly distinctive individual’ (111); this, of course, made greater caring for each one possible (Hamington 182). The best thing we can do to strengthen empathy for farmed animals, too, is to be with them physically: spend time with cows and chickens, turkeys and pigs, observing closely and interacting with them. We need to return to the ‘embodied, attentive encounters with animals’ of which our mass market-based, fragmented, urbanised society has deprived us (Aaltola 207). Aaltola adds that ‘it is not *that* we spend time with others that evokes empathic concern but rather *how* we spend that time’ (213, emphasis in original). In contrast to ranchers or researchers who blunt empathy for the animals under their control and manipulate their bodies for profit or knowledge, we need to allow ourselves ‘rich proximal and tactile interactions’ with animals to enable empathy. We can overcome the ‘empathetic challenge’ of imagining the experience of animals with different bodies, brains, minds, and capacities through direct tactile contact with them, in the way that we already do with animal companions.

Even if we cannot be in their actual presence (many will not have the opportunity), and even though we cannot come to know the personalities of individual farmed animals in their

billions, we can intentionally try to overcome prejudice (that chickens are insensate, cows are dumb, pigs are dirty), avoid the temptation to see only what we want to see (pastoral scenes of grazing cows before they are taken to feedlots), and direct our attention to animals' actual natures as revealed by biology (they have sensitive nervous systems), ethology (they find being crowded stressful), and behaviour (they writhe in terror and pain).

Lori Gruen adds that 'the relationships we [have] with immediate others who [are] different could help us expand our perception to even more different others' (77). Having experienced deep connections to animal companions, she notes that:

drawing on the lessons we can learn about friendship, attraction, and respect in those relationships [seems] like a good starting point [for enhancing empathy for other animals] ... [T]he skills we learn in our closest relations can help us to make our more attenuated relationships better. (77)

For this reason, activists highlight the similarities between dogs and pigs, noting their shared intelligence, sociability, and capacity for affection. Asking 'How would you feel if your dog were treated that way?' is an effective way to bring home the horror of gestation crates and other torments visited on pigs in factory farms. Thinking of a pig as a disguised dog is not ideal, for of course pigs have unique characteristics and are not the same as dogs. But realising the similarities can help some people get beyond their perceptions of pigs as stupid or unfeeling, and in this way get people closer to seeing them as they really are. As Iris Murdoch would put it, knowing about the similarities can help us to see pigs *justly* (22).

Following Susan Sontag, Elisa Aaltola offers a key insight about how to combat agentic cowardice. Sontag observes that 'it is when we feel defeated and passive that we cease paying notice to the suffering of others, and it is when we feel capable of taking action that we are open to reflectively, with moral care, witness such suffering' (Aaltola 197). Sontag notes that 'it is ... passivity that dulls feeling', concluding that compassion 'needs to be translated into action, or it withers' (90-91). The 'relation between moral agency and empathy' is mutually reinforcing: empathy may lead to action, but action also helps to cultivate empathy. 'When we feel capable

of taking ... moral action, we are ... more persuaded to keep training and using our empathy skills' (Aaltola 198).

Aaltola observes that while contemplation of animal suffering can be paralysing, attending to 'smaller successes' can render empathy 'inviting rather than exhausting'. We can develop agency by 'cultivating everyday empathic concern' and caring for others on a practical level: rescuing a lost dog from the street; taking an injured bird to a wildlife vet (199). Such action in turn enables empathy, for it makes inroads against agentic cowardice. We see that we are capable of making a difference for individual animals in need; this bolsters our courage and empathic skills alike; and this in turn makes us more likely to take action for others, in a virtuous circle. The more we take 'small' actions to help animals, the more we see ourselves as the kind of persons who do such things (Staub, 'The Evolution of Bystanders', *The Roots of Evil*); agentic courage bolsters further action and opens us to expanded empathy.

Conclusions

Is it wise to focus on vices in this way? Does it betray an unfortunately judgmental perspective? Meat-eaters already react (badly) to perceptions of moral judgment even when their vegan friends scrupulously avoid expressing or feeling it. Will it not backfire to argue that such people are not only mistaken and uninformed, but also gluttonous and cowardly? In response, I note first that this question relates to how publicly to frame discussions of the issue, rather than to ethical analysis and virtue theory itself. But secondly, I agree with Fredericks that at a practical and social level, attention to these vices can be helpful.

Fredericks highlights three advantages of recognising courage as an environmental virtue. First, it helps us to recognise that environmental activism carries high stakes, and that the stakes are high if we fail to exercise the virtue. Secondly, as Pianalto notes, moral courage is connected to integrity in that 'if one lacks moral courage, one is unable to act on one's convictions and thereby becomes alienated from oneself' (Fredericks 352). Cowardice enables continued complicity in animal abuse, erodes integrity, and undermines authentic agency (352). Third, we can show courage to coexist with being 'nurturing, loving, and humble, rather than

... combative, violent, and emotionally distant' (354). I would add that if agentic courage becomes widely recognised in moral contexts, the prospect of changing one's habits to protect animals takes on a new light: it is not an annoying and self-righteous quest for purity, but a courageous transformative project. If the connection is socially made between virtues, empathy, and action for suffering animals, many may act to preserve their self-respect. Who wants to regard herself, even privately, as gluttonous or cowardly?

A last observation: the vices identified here are not deadly only in Aquinas's sense of bringing death to the soul, or Taylor's sense of being harmful to the self: when present in a broad population, they enable the deaths of countless sentient animals each day. If there is any hope that a focus on vice can awaken agents to their power to change themselves and thus the world, such discussions will be practically useful – and essential.

I have argued that gluttony and cowardice play an important role in blocking empathy and action on behalf of animals, even in those who care about animal suffering. These vices are serious moral failings, for they enable continuing complicity in animal abuse and undermine integrity. One can act to remedy such failings through tactile interactions with animals informed by understanding of their natures, and through taking 'small steps' in practice to help them. Finally, social recognition of these vices and of the corresponding virtue of agentic courage could usher in a new era of action for the most neglected and tormented animals of all: the ones we eat.

Notes

¹ Susan Sontag's work (1977) shows that politics, history, saturation, and other contextual factors can profoundly influence our responses to images of atrocity. I ignore these important points here due to space considerations, and because my teaching experience bears out what I say about documentary images arousing empathy.

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Acknowledgements

My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for *Animal Studies Journal* for an exceptionally thoughtful critique of an earlier draft of this essay.