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# Shamed If You Do, Shamed If You Don't

The Ethical Implications of Eco-shaming

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## 1. Introduction

You should be ashamed of eating meat. This is a sentiment that I've heard echoed with increasing frequency in recent years. Meat-shaming is an instance of what has become known collectively as *eco-shaming*: now thoroughly ingrained in our current zeitgeist. We are being pressured to feel moral shame over actions that are viewed as harmful towards other non-human animals and the environment at large, things that in most of modern western society are considered morally irrelevant. Given how important the climate crisis is, and the need to move people to action, perhaps eco-shaming is a useful tool. This paper explores what kind of effects meat-shaming could possibly have within the predominantly anthropocentric ethical systems currently in place, in Western cultures. I will argue that, rather, a radical shift in our moral groundworks to include other non-human living entities is needed, as eco-shaming practices like this will at best lead to inaction, at worst to a crippling disconnect from others.

Since meat-shaming is closely linked to how we rear animals for mass consumption in modern society, the first section of the paper is focused on the ethics of eating meat, primarily using Sobel's (2017) article by the same name to create an outline for why eating factory-farmed meat is morally worse than abstaining from doing so, and so, why we might want to consider ways to move people to this behavior. Arguments for why such practices should be reconsidered are presented along three different areas of impact: their harm to animals, to the environment and to humans. The second section explores the idea of eco-shaming: it offers some conceptual distinctions between shame, guilt, and embarrassment. A conception of shame is fleshed out in line with how Deonna and Teroni (2008) define and separate 'shame' from 'guilt'. Next, this conception of 'shame' is juxtaposed with the concept of 'embarrassment' and recognized, through the eyes of Ramirez (2017), as different context-dependent modes of experiencing the same emotion. The section concludes with an explanation of why the concepts of moral shame and moral ideals are of particular interest in regard to eco-shaming. Seeing as the need to include non-human living entities in our ethical judgements is a central tenet to the thesis presented in this paper, the third section is therefore dedicated to different ways of defending the moral value of both animals and the environment through the theories of Singer (1974), Bovenkerk and Meijboom (2011), Rolston III (1988), and Næss (1976). These theories are then applied to the concept of meat-shaming as a correctional tool in the fourth and final section, where I argue that such a concept is simply hollow without valuing the natural world as more than a vessel for human activity. In fact, I

believe there is reason to think that shaming based on such a faulty premise will only lead to confusion and inaction. Indeed, I question whether shaming, even on valid grounds, should ever be considered morally permissible.

## **2. The Ethics of Eating Meat**

To gain a better understanding of what meat-shaming entails, we'll first need to examine the industry this phenomenon is rooted in: modern industrialized livestock agriculture. In recent history, meat has been given an ever more important place in our Western diet and on our plates. The increase in demand has necessitated a need for improved efficiency in our production methods, resulting in factory farming being the standard means of rearing animals for food in most Western countries. While this certainly helps satiate the demand for meat, the accelerated pace of production more often times than not leads to a commodification of animals; they are treated merely as slaves, with no real value other than as a potential end product. This brings up some interesting questions in the realm of animal and environmental ethics, the most fundamental being: is eating meat a morally sound thing to do? By using David Sobel's paper "The Ethics of Eating Meat" as a framework, I will here argue that at least eating factory-farmed meat is morally worse than abstaining from doing so (2017, p. 14).

### **2.1 Harm to Animals**

It is not the eating of the meat itself that is of interest when determining the moral status of the act (in fact, eating meat might be perfectly justifiable), but *how* it is produced. Let's say you roast up some delicious, accidentally run-over, roadkill. Perhaps some scrumptious squirrel on a stick? Presumably, the animal on that stick was roaming free until its very last breath, acting in accordance with its own interests, needs and desires. Eating this squirrel, then, does not intuitively seem very wrong at all in a moral sense. If anything, it could be argued that you are doing the world a favor by scavenging this morsel that might otherwise spoil and waste away. Granted, the car that made mincemeat of it is a construction of mankind, but its true purpose was never to maim and kill animals. The squirrel's life was neither intentionally nor knowingly ended. One way to argue against factory farming is that it harms animals, and although it is not necessarily intentional, we at least *know* that it causes them harm. Castration of pigs and cattle without using anesthetics, boiling chickens alive, housing pigs in stalls so small they are unable to turn around; these are just some examples of

how factory farming reduces animals to mere things (Sobel, 2017, p. 15). Intuitively, such a reduction feels wrong. This is because it only allows for the animals to be valuable in so far as they are useful to us. They are solely permitted *instrumental value*, in effect bypassing them completely in most moral discussions. To matter morally something needs to have value of itself, or what is known traditionally in philosophy as *intrinsic value* (Bradley & Zimmerman, 2019). The squirrel that ended up on a stick could be said to have intrinsic value on account of its ability to hold interests and feel pain, a common trait shared interspecifically among most animals, humans included (Singer, 1974, p. 320). All animals that exhibit this trait are equally intrinsically valuable; it is the foundation for animal equality. I will elaborate on this argument, which originally stems from ethicist Peter Singer, as well as lay out some other ways of defending the intrinsic value of both animals and the environment in relation to meat-shaming practices, a bit later in this paper.

## 2.2 Harm to the Environment

Factory farming is not only harmful to the animals themselves, but also to the environment at large. It is widely known to be a highly inefficient way of producing calories when it comes to use of land, water and energy resources. Every calorie of factory-farmed meat requires an average of 9 calories to produce, as well as a tremendous amount of water (Sobel, 2017, p. 16). In addition to the space needed to keep animals, growing food for livestock also takes up large amounts of space, which could instead be reforested and in turn help with global warming. Factory farming also generates a lot of waste, toxins and greenhouse gasses. Petrochemicals used in the process contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and leak into natural water reservoirs, polluting groundwater, streams and lakes (Sobel, 2017, p. 17). Cows produce large amounts of methane as well, an especially potent greenhouse gas. While it is crystal clear how the negative environmental consequences of this type of conduct impact humanity, both present and future, it is not immediately clear why the environment itself should matter when making moral judgements. One could argue that we would be better off if we were to use these resources directly on growing food for ourselves instead of on raising animals to eat, in practice “cutting the middleman”. This would also alleviate the situation by generating substantially less waste and greenhouse gasses. The problem with this line of reasoning is that it only takes into account the interests of mankind, it is *anthropocentric*. There is not much room for nature to matter beyond being a vessel for human activity (Routley, 1973, p. 206). In our current geological age, known as the *Anthropocene*, man is

commonly seen as the measure of all things and the only thing to be treated as an end in itself, i.e. the only being of any substantial inherent value. This leaves the environment and all non-human lifeforms it is home to with little more than instrumental value. As long as one's actions cause no harm to other humans, they are morally irrelevant. While it is certainly possible to defend the intrinsic value of nature, it is still morally wrong to eat factory-farmed meat within the narrower scope of the anthropocentric view presented here, a view Richard Routley (1973, p. 207) refers to as "*basic human chauvinism*", because of the ramifications harming the environment has for other human beings. It is worth remarking, however, that within this view you are free to treat the *commons*, that is the land or resources belonging to or affecting the whole of a community, as a cesspool as long as the general public is not harmed (Hardin, 1998, p. 355).

### 2.3 Harm to Humans

This leads me to a third and final argument against industrialized livestock agriculture: meat produced in this fashion can be directly harmful to humans. The often shabby, close-quarters and overcrowded living conditions provided to farm animals make them especially vulnerable to disease and infection. Animals are thus kept on a steady diet of antibiotics to combat their vulnerabilities to disease, which in turn contributes to the evolution of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can pose a real threat to human health (Sobel, 2017, p. 16). As I write this, the world is experiencing a pandemic due to the COVID-19 virus, which has caused everything to slow to a grinding halt with no cure in sight as of yet. If a resistant super-flu were to develop, we would have a global crisis of even worse proportions on our hands without any means to remedy it with. But a meat-heavy diet does not only bode badly for collective health, it can also have severely negative consequences for individual health by causing heart disease and other obesity related illnesses (Sobel, 2017, p. 17). The main reason for this is the amount of saturated fat animals and animal by-products contain, a type of fat known to increase the chances for cardiovascular disease. But why is this morally problematic? Is not a person free to destroy their personal health if inclined to? This is certainly one way to refute this as moral claim. A famous argument that shows why it belongs in the realm of ethics is Kant's second formulation of the categorical imperative, which states that you should "*Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end*" (Kant, 1970, p. 429). If you eat unhealthily, you are potentially putting your humanity at risk by using it merely as a

means to an end (in this case pleasure or gratification). This is because the categorical imperative, otherwise known as the supreme principle of the moral law, forbids us as rational beings and keeper of said law to in any way damage our capacity to be rational beings.

It is ethical concerns about the permissibility of eating factory-farmed meat, like the ones presented in this section, that has sparked the recent discussion on meat-shame. If we are to determine if it is possible to feel shame in a moral sense over eating factory-farmed meat, within the predominantly anthropocentric frameworks currently in place, and equally importantly, to consider what the outcome of this shaming could be, we first need to explore the concept of shame.

### 3. What Is Shame?

Because of its notoriously ambivalent nature, there exist countless definitions of the concept of shame. According to Aristotle, shame is best viewed as a quasi-virtue, closer to a feeling than a state of character (Aristotle, 2009, 1128b). A phenomenological take on the concept, where shame is understood as an “*ontological provocation, constitutive of subjectivity as a being-for-others*”, is laid out by Sartre (Guenther, 2011, p. 23). One reason shame is so difficult to pin down seems to be its proximity to other negative emotions like guilt and embarrassment. A fruitful first step towards getting a clearer picture of what defines shame, then, would be to examine what separates it from these other two emotions.

#### 3.1 Shame vs. Guilt

The easiest of these emotions to draw a distinction between are shame and guilt. According to Julien A. Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (2008), shame differs from guilt along four dimensions: (1) shame is typically a social emotion, while guilt is typically personal. What this means is that shame sanctions what is *socially* undesirable, while guilt helps adjust *privately* held norms. (2) Shame is related to the entire self, while guilt is directed towards specific behavior. If you for example forget someone’s birthday one year, you will most likely feel guilty, wishing you had not *done* this. The *behavior* is what you would like to undo. If you on the other hand consistently forgot everyone’s birthday every year, you would most likely feel shame, wishing you *were* not like this. When it comes to shame, it is the *trait* you rue over and wish could be fixed. (3) Shame concerns failures to live up to one’s ideals, whereas guilt is linked to failures to respect prohibitions. According to *self-discrepancy* theory, perceived



disharmony between actual/own and ideal/other self results in vulnerability to shame, while discrepancies between actual/own and should/own self results in vulnerability to guilt (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, p. 727). Simply put, the dissonance felt in a shame experience is related to an external ideal, whereas it is related to internal prohibitions in a guilt experience. (4) shame is directed towards oneself, while guilt is other-oriented. Within this understanding, shame is essentially about punishment that at best leads to concealment because of its self-focused and defensive nature. Guilt, in contrast, echoes caring for others and responsibility; it is oriented towards others (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, p. 728). In short then, shame is a socially triggered global emotion concerning one's ideals, directed towards oneself. It is also worth noting that social triggers do not have to come from *actual* others, they can come from *imagined others* as well (Ramirez, p. 84).

### 3.2 Shame vs. Embarrassment

What is it then that distinguishes shame from embarrassment? Erick J. Ramirez (2017, p. 81) argues that these are not separate emotions at all, just two different sides of the same emotion. It is the context you are in that determines if you will experience shame or embarrassment. They both originate from the same affective mechanism that is put into gear when one's "*whole-self properties*" are judged by real or imagined others. Identity features like traits, gender or sexual identity are examples of whole-self properties. When these properties are judged by others (real or imagined), you will feel either shame or embarrassment depending on whether you think you possess the whole-self property in question or not. When the negative judgement of the whole-self property is deemed to be accurate, shame is triggered. When a situation seems to warrant the judgement you receive from others, but you do not really think you possess the specific whole-self property you are being judged on, the resulting emotion is to be understood as embarrassment. Let us say you are outside eating a candy bar and drop the plastic wrapper containing it on the ground. You are now in a position to be judged for (among other things) being careless about the environment. If you accept this judgement as an accurate, you would (or at least could possibly) feel shame. If, on the contrary, you reject the judgement because you believe do not have a careless attitude towards the environment, that dropping the wrapper was an accident and not a way you would normally behave, you would instead feel embarrassed.

### 3.3 Moral Shame

An important aspect of the conception of shame presented here I would like to elaborate on, is how it relates to ideals, and especially moral ideals. I believe this aspect to be integral to whether or not meat-shaming could possibly have an effect in changing the Western world's attitude towards factory farming, and I will make apparent why I believe this after I finish unpacking the concept of moral ideals. "*An ideal is a principle about how something should be, or a goal one wishes to achieve*" (Tranøy & Zawadzka Persvold, 2019). In essence this means that ideals have to do with what one finds *valuable* in oneself and the world. A value can in turn be described as global or abstract ideas that are pursued through certain types of behavior (Royackers & Van der Poel, 2011, p. 74). Since ideals are closely linked with feelings of self-worth and the self, they are therefore a crucial component of a person's identity. While the *primary object* in a shame experience is the self, there is always also a *secondary object*, something else other than the self that shame is directed towards (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, p. 730). Said in simpler terms, there needs to be a reason to feel ashamed of oneself. This reason can be a trait, behavior, action, etc. It is when I am seen as acting or being in ways that undermine my ideals. It is when the secondary object does not correspond with the primary object, that shame occurs (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, p. 732). What happens then if I am seen as acting or being in ways that undermines an ideal, but I don't think I hold the ideal I'm being judged on in the first place? As show earlier, I would simply be embarrassed. There are various types of ideals, for instance epistemic ideals (open-mindedness) and aesthetical ideals (beauty) (Deonna & Teroni, 2008, p. 732). but it is moral ideals that I want to focus on here. Courage, honesty and respect are just a few examples of moral ideals, all of which can be idealized both communally and individually. An internalized cluster of ideals such as these make up an individual's moral core, and it is this core that is acted upon when making moral judgements that may or may not result in a shame experience.

If something is to have moral significance, it has to have intrinsic value, or at the very least more than instrumental value (Bovenkerk & Meijboom, 2011, p. 847). The reason moral ideals are relevant to ethical discussions is precisely because they are deemed valuable beyond their ability to be of use to us. What happens, then, when we are provoked to feel shame in a moral discussion about the validity of eating factory-farmed meat on account of its impact on animal welfare and the environment - things traditionally thought of in philosophy

as solely possessing instrumental value (Routley, 1973, p. 207)? Sure, we can be ashamed over the possible implications this type of conduct might have for present and hypothetical future humans, but this is not really what the aim of the ethical discussion seems to be. This line of reasoning will only derail the discussion and making us feel ashamed on the wrong premise, quite possibly leading to confusion. To get us on the right track, I will argue that in order for meat-shaming to possibly have the desired effect of decreasing consumption of factory-farmed meat, we need to show the intrinsic value of all lifeforms, so that we can meaningfully include them in our moral ideals.

#### **4. The Moral Significance of Animals and the Environment**

*“Animals have an intrinsic value which is irrespective of the usable value they may have for man. Animals shall be treated well and be protected from danger of unnecessary stress and strains.”*

(Animal Welfare Act, 2009, § 3)

What follows in this section are some possible approaches to defending the intrinsic value of both animals and the environment itself. By recognizing them as valuable of themselves, we should be able to include them in our moral ideals, thus making it possible to feel moral shame when we are seen as acting in ways that violates their worth, for example by supporting the factory farming industry.

##### **4.1 All Animals Are Equal**

A famous argument defending the intrinsic value of animals stems from the Australian moral philosopher and utilitarianist Peter Singer. He claims that the idea of man being the only animal worthy of consideration in moral dealings, a concept Singer calls *speciesism*, violates the principle of equality just as much as racism and sexism does (Singer, 1974, p. 320).

Species membership is just as morally irrelevant a characteristic as gender, sexual orientation and skin color, since it is based solely on biological coincidence. It therefore will not do as the foundation for true equality between all animals, mankind included. Singer argues that we need to find some characteristic shared by all animals, a common denominator, as a basis for an all-encompassing morality. Neither the ability for language nor intellect are common

enough traits to use for this purpose, but *sentience* is. The ability to have and to hold interests, and to suffer, is something shared interspecifically. This, Singer proposes, is a good starting point if we are to build an ethical system founded true equality between species, thus effectively putting an end to animal cruelty. He further argues that if we are to avoid speciesism, we must stop eating animals altogether. It is at mealtimes that most humans, particularly in urban, industrialized societies, are in contact with members of other species. Through this practice we treat animals solely as a means to an end, as an instrument. According to Singer, each and every one of us has a moral obligation to discontinue such practices for the sake of including animals in our moral community (Singer, 1974, p. 321).

#### 4.2 What About the Fish?

Although Singer presents a good case for the moral significance of most animals based on the criteria of sentience, there is still a large group of animals where this criterion is difficult to gauge: fish. Because we cannot hear their cries or read their facial expression, it is hard to tell whether they can suffer or have awareness (Bovenkerk & Meijboom, 2011, p. 845). We are also anatomically dissimilar from fish in a lot of ways, for example in brain structure, which further complicates the problem when it comes to devising experiments for gathering empirical evidence. On top of this, there's a plethora of fish species with a lot of variation between them, making generalization difficult. But why should the moral status of fish even be a topic of discussion in a paper about meat-shaming? Similar to the global demand for meat, the demand for fish as a source of protein is on the rise, and the growing aquaculture industry is dealing with a lot of same environmental and animal welfare concerns as the factory farming industry. It is reasonable to believe, then, that one could be shamed for eating fish meat on the exact same grounds that one could for eating meat from any other animal.

If we are to include fish welfare in our moral ideals, we need a theoretical basis for why fish matter morally. According to Bovenkerk & Meijboom (2011, p 857), The main issue we run into when trying to determine the moral status of fish, is that there is no theory-neutral viewpoint to discuss this from. The answer to the question about whether or not to include them in our moral community differs dramatically from one ethical framework to another. If you ask a strict utilitarian like Singer, the answer will undoubtedly be yes on account of fish's apparent preferences and ability to feel pain. After all, do they not fight back when caught by a fisherman and struggle to stay alive in the same way other animals do? For singer, sentience

is both a necessary and sufficient condition to meet for inclusion in the moral community (Bovenkerk & Meijboom, 2011, p. 850). A deontologist like Tom Regan will disagree, saying that sentience is a necessary but not sufficient condition. To be welcomed into the moral community you also need certain cognitive capacities such as beliefs, desires, memory, a sense of the future, a psychosocial identity over time, and being able to act intentionally. There are many more ethical theories that I could have chosen here, including virtue ethics, contractarianism and care-ethics, but I since I do not need them to make my point, using deontology and utilitarianism as examples will suffice. The obstacle with the deontological viewpoint is that it excludes a lot of lifeforms, moving us in the direction of an anthropocentric ethic again, which is exactly what we are trying to avoid if we are to include animal welfare and the environment in our moral ideals. Utilitarianism is not without its issues either, since it is hard to state with any real certainty that fish are indeed sentient. But maybe the problem does not lie in the difficulty of gauging this, but the criterium of sentience itself? There are alternative theories that really on another criterium that might make it easier to account for the inherent value of fish, as well as all other living things, namely the criterium of *life* itself.

### 4.3 Systemic Value

The American philosopher and ethicist Holmes Rolston III (1932-) is one thinker who has stood up for animal rights on the criterium of life. He argues that animals lead psychological lives filled with feelings, interests and subjective experiences (Rolston III, 1988, p. 93). Since these qualities are considered intrinsically valuable and therefore matter morally when we see them in humans, there is no rationale that can be given for why this should be any different for animals. But this is just one of many sides that must be taken into consideration in environmental ethics, according to Rolston III. A truly vital ethic does not only pay heed to human preferences and the pleasures and suffering of animals, but all life. In fact, Rolston III sees life itself as a basic condition for everything that lives; Any entity that has been given life will defend and maintain it, and therefore it has intrinsic value (Rolston, 1988, p. 187). A ladybug does not for example eat aphids to be able to feed itself to a bird. Life will always be maintained as an end in itself by individuals of a species. The traditional conceptual pairing of instrumental/intrinsic value is according to Rolston III not enough to describe value in higher level of nature, for example in biotopes or ecosystems. These systems *produce* value but do not *own* the value; They have value *in* themselves, but not *to* themselves. Rolston suggests

introducing a third term to adequately address the value found in these types of systems, what he calls *systemic value*. Here Rolston seems to understand nature both *holistically* and *hermeneutically*; as a dialectical process between whole and part that cannot be understood through reduction.

Furthermore, Rolston argues that value is not only extended spatially through ecosystems and geosystems, but also temporally through historicity (Rolston III, 1988, p. 202). Science has increasingly shown us how the consequences (life, mind) are based on the precedents (energy, matter). This gives good reason to believe that value is spread throughout the continuum, although, according to Rolston, it has an accumulative effect over time. Based on this idea, one can give entire species intrinsic value which increases over time. This gives us a moral foundation to speak out against driving species to extinction. For who can really predict what the future will bring for any of the Earth's species? Let us imagine that someone or something eradicated human predecessors before they could develop into Homo Sapiens. Everything we know and love about our civilization today would never have been possible. We would have been stopped in our tracks as nothing more than wasted potential. Another more instrumental concern about driving species to extinction is that it is conceivable that the solution to some of our greatest challenges may lie in their gene material, such as for example a cure for cancer. Systemic value is an interesting idea because it allows us to reallocate the moral wealth mankind has hoarded for ourselves throughout much of western philosophy, in effect welcoming all lifeform back to the table as equals. When we found said table sometime in the past it was unclaimed, so we simply took it under the assumption that it did not belong to anyone. Now it seems this might have been a faulty assumption. Perhaps the table and its powers were not meant to be commandeered, but shared? To bring this rather strange furniture analogy to its natural conclusion, it is not our overgrown frontal lobes or any other arbitrary property we humans possess that makes us inherently valuable, it is the table itself, and the simple fact that we are seated at it. The true beauty of the notion of systemic value is that it is egalitarian at its core. It passes the torch from mankind to life itself, making it a *biocentric* worldview instead of an anthropocentric one.

#### 4.4 Deep Ecology

The inherent value of life itself is also central to the Norwegian philosopher and ethicist Arne Næss (1912-2009), and his concept of *deep ecology*. In stark contrast with what he calls a

*shallow ecology*, where mankind is the measure of all things, deep ecology attributes life, and also crucially, the possibility all life has to realize its potential, equal intrinsic value (Hverven, 2018, p. 66). This value does not depend on humans to exist, it is always there regardless if we decide to recognize it or not. Furthermore, Næss sees biodiversity as valuable in itself because of how it contributes to the realization of the good life for everything that partakes in it, humans included. Throughout his philosophy, the term life is used in an expanded sense to include things such as rivers, landscapes and ecosystems, things that normally would be considered lifeless (Hverven, 2018, 69). Deep ecology is therefore focused on the symbiotic relationships in the natural world, where all parts draws equal use of each other (Næss, 1976, p. 18). Like Rolston, Næss clearly advocates a holistic approach, where a move away from the anthropocentric principles at the root of most traditional ethical theories is key. Although humans have special obligations for protecting each other, the principle right to life and its possibilities are the same. Man should therefore not get to occupy the central position everything else is organized around, life should. Putting life in the center is exactly what makes Næss' worldview biocentric, and what provides a foundation for equality among all that possess it. Næss calls this "egalitarianism *in the biosphere*", the principle equal right all life has to blossom (Næss, 1976, p. 18). On the basis of such a principle, Næss argues, traditional natural law could be expanded from a "me-it" relationship with nature, to a "me-you" relationship, thus truly acknowledging the interdependence of all things through solidarity. It is the circle of life that binds all living and non-living entities to each other.

The arguments in this section are some possible routes to take if we are to defend the value of non-human lifeforms and include them in ethical discussions, as well as our moral ideals. Expanding the scope of our ethical groundworks should open up for feeling moral shame when real or imagined others regard us as acting or being in ways that undermine these ideals. The question now becomes what purpose such a shift would serve. Is correcting unwanted behavior by applying shaming practices desired or even acceptable? I will argue that even with the moral ideals necessary for meat-shaming to work in place, it is still an unjustifiable practice on account of being a direct attack on the self that could only possibly lead to inaction and feelings of painful disconnect.

## 5. Meat-shaming

The permissibility of using shaming practices is a dividing subject, with opinions ranging from completely condemning them as fundamentally degrading (Nussbaum, 2004), to accepting them as justifiable tool for positive change in certain cases (Ramirez, 2017, p. 92). When it comes to meat-shaming specifically, I have so far argued that without a radical change in dominant ethics that will allow for the inclusion of non-human lifeforms in our moral ideals, meat-shaming practices will be ineffective. This is because the reasons for *why* you should feel ashamed of eating industrially farmed meat are largely unclear in anthropocentric worldviews. Morally speaking, there's not much idealization of the natural world outside of homo sapiens role in it, so why should we care about the impact industrialized livestock agriculture has outside of human culture?

### 5.1 The Power of Education

By following the reasoning of Ramirez' (2017, p. 81) distinction between shame and embarrassment from earlier, you would simply feel embarrassed when you are judged on behavior or ways of being that do not correspond with the ideals you hold, not shameful. According to Kurth and Nelson (2019, p. 1), the moral value of shame is that it can leave us open to criticism and show us the standing of others. On this basis I would argue that embarrassment can in a similar fashion show us the moral standing of others, but unlike shame it does not open us up to criticism since there is no held ideal or whole-self property that corresponds with the critique. This means that embarrassment does not warrant actions of self-improvement, it instead leads to *inaction* in matters of morality. Although feeling embarrassed might alter perceived unwanted behavior in specific social settings, this would only to be a surface deep revision. Let's say you treat yourself to a nice, juicy hamburger with extra bacon at lunch with some colleagues one day. One of your co-workers suddenly calls you out for what they consider is a dubious dietary choice, raving on about the implications this particular purchase has for the environment and animal welfare. You have always thought yourself a proud carnivore, firmly subscribing to man's natural place at the very top of the food chain, and you most certainly do not recall ordering the burger with a side of judgmental hippie monologue. The whole scene leaves you feeling embarrassed, and while you may not frequent this specific establishment or go out to lunch with your co-workers ever again, nothing has changed in your core believes. You are basically free to lick your wounds and carry on exactly as before.



If lasting changes in meat consumption habits are to occur, I would suggest focusing efforts on preemptive educational tactics instead of punitive meat-shaming practices. By providing grounds for why nature is valuable, not only for our species, but for the totality of life, we could quite possibly be able to face out harmful industrialized animal farming for good. But even if such a utopia was reality, with the moral ideals necessary to feel shame over eating factory-farmed meat in place, shaming practices could still in fact be counterproductive.

## 5.2 Is Shaming Ever Permissible?

When we experience shame, either if it is attributed by oneself or by perceived others, we view ourselves as possessing an unwanted identity (Brown, 2006, p. 47). This in turn works towards undermining our self-ideals. Shaming practices are therefore to be considered a direct attack on the self, ineffective in bringing about change because of how it makes us feel trapped, powerless and isolated (Brown, 2006, p. 45). The unrealistic expectations thrust upon us in a shaming experience causes us to feel *trapped*, with only a limited palette of options to choose from when trying to meet these expectations. Because of the secret and silencing nature of shame, a shaming experience will also manifest itself in feeling *powerless*, making identifying and acting on the choices that will facilitate change very difficult. Additionally, the experience will leave us feeling *isolated* through the disconnect and lack of choice it produces. These three negative components work together in an intricate web to produce shame, making us believe we are flawed and therefore unworthy of belonging and acceptance. It is the complex interwovenness of this trifecta that is the main reason shame is so difficult to overcome and why bringing about change through shaming is futile. When a person who identifies as someone who cares about the environment and animal welfare is shamed for eating factory-farmed meat, they are put under an immense duress to either fit in or get out. The stress brought on by such a threat will most likely overshadow any impulse the person might have had to bring about a change of their ways, in effect paralyzing them from acting at all. It may even force the person to hide the parts of themselves they are ashamed over, further amplifying the painful disconnect they already experience. According to Brené Brown (2006, p. 47), the best route to counteract and build up a resilience to shame is through empathy. By seeing, hearing and experiencing the unique world of the other, we can create an understanding of their perspective, effectively including them in society instead of forcing

them to feel like outcasts through shaming.

## 6. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that without a moral foundation which values the totality of life in equal measures, eco-shaming might in fact be counterproductive. I argued through considering the case of meat-shaming, that shame is more likely to prompt inaction instead of achieving the desired decrease in consumption of factory-farmed meat. Even in a hypothetical scenario where a biocentric ethical system was the norm, shaming would still be impermissible on the basis of being a direct attack on the self that leaves those on the receiving end feeling flawed and disconnected from others. I have further suggested the employing preemptive educational tactics and empathy in place of meat-shaming practices are possible solutions to the problems brought on by the factory farming industry and the subsequent meat-shaming practices it has spurred.

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