# Meat Eating as a Moral Issue: Exploring the Bidirectional Causal-Consequential Influences of Moralisation

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<u>Abstract</u>

Further research is needed within the domain of moral psychology to help understand the processes which lead to something becoming a moral conviction. One area to be investigated is the causation mechanisms of moralisation. Due to a lack of clarity surrounding the causal processes underpinning moral reasoning, this thesis proposes a study to assess the plausibility of the Push-Pull Method of Moralisation whereby it has been claimed that both affective (i.e. moral emotions) and cognitive processes (i.e. moral piggybacking) serve as a cause and a consequence of moral reasoning. Additionally, this study would investigate who is most likely to moralise the issue of eating meat to the point where they become set in their views regarding their dietary pattern. Hence, it is proposed that a survey based on the 'dietarian identity questionnaire' could be distributed in order to identify the dietarian identity of the participants and compare this with the likelihood of that individual changing their views on their consumption or restriction of meat. Statistical analyses employed could confirm and conclude that: (1) vegetarians moralise eating meat more than omnivores; (2) moralisation is triggered by both moral emotions and moral cognitions; (3) those who experience greater moral emotions and moral cognitions, namely moral vegetarians, moralise the issue of eating meat the most and; (4) are less likely to change their diet than those who moralise the issue of eating meat less. These results provide an exploratory basis for more in-depth and specific research regarding the bi-directional causal-consequential influences of moralisation.

<u>Introduction</u>

The restriction of meat products from one's diet has become an increasingly relevant issue within the past few years. For example, in Britain, it has been predicted that by 2025 the number of vegans and vegetarians which make up the population is set to be around a quarter of the entire nation (Vegansociety, 2019). In fact, 1 in 3 Brits have stopped or reduced their meat consumption in current times (Vegansociety, 2019). Hence, the number of people choosing to follow a vegetarian diet is rising. But choosing to eat meat is not as simple a decision as one might think. The consuming of animals and animal products has found itself under much scrutiny both at the individual and societal level. For instance, as demand for meat in our diet increases, so too does the pressure to carry out intensive factory farming to supply our requests (Schmidt, 2015). This raises concerns because meat production is one of the largest contributors to global warming through the release of greenhouse gasses such as carbon dioxide and methane. Therefore, it is argued that currently, animal agriculture production is not a sustainable system. Furthermore, for individuals, there are concerns about consuming large amounts of meat products. For instance, the numerous antibiotics used to prevent animals from falling ill on farms enter our diet once we eat the meat, which is detrimental to our own health (Schmidt, 2015). But it is not just health or environmental concerns which come under scrutiny. In fact, one domain which incorporates the study of decisions regarding meat consumption is moral psychology. Here, researchers aim to understand more about the individual's process of moralisation and the influence it has on their dietary identities. For instance, some individuals see eating meat in the same light as other moral

transgressions. But for others, they do not engage in what they might see as moral behaviour even when the evidence presented to them suggests their behaviour conflicts with their beliefs. Hence, further research into the process of moralisation, whereby one begins to think of something as moral i.e. wrong/right or ethical/unethical (Rozin et al, 1997), is necessary to further understand human behaviour regarding moral issues.

Firstly, it is important to establish the foundations which underlie the process of moralisation. Previous research has established how cognitive processes such as cognitive dissonance and moral piggybacking; values and preferences; and affective processes, such as moral emotions and empathy, play a role in the formulation of our moral identity (Blidaru & Opre, 2015; Dowsett et al, 2018; Feinberg et al, 2019; Haidt, 2003; Kunst & Hohle, 2016; Loughnan et al, 2014; Rhee et al, 2019; Rothgerber & Mican, 2014; Rozin et al, 1997). This has led to an area of research within moral psychology which has aimed to establish what the causes of moralisation are. Currently, both affective processes and cognitive processes have been claimed to be the cause or the consequence of moralisation (Feinberg et al, 2019; Fessler et al, 2003; Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2003; Haidt, 2007; Huebner et al, 2009; Hussar & Harris, 2010; Skitka et al, 2005). Therefore, further research is necessary to learn more and to clarify which process, or processes, trigger moralisation.

Another area of interest is to observe the differences between those who moralise meat consumption to the extent where their views become concrete, and those who are still susceptible to change regarding their views on restricting meat products. One way to approach this is through assessing whether those who assign greater morality to the issue of eating meat, score higher or lower in the likelihood of changing their dietary pattern. Thus, this thesis proposes that those who experience greater moral emotions and moral cognitions, and so moralise the issue of eating meat more, are less likely to be open to changing their diet.

Moral vs Health Vegetarians

Most vegetarians living in the Western world do not begin their life avoiding meat. Instead, they make a conscious decision to change their eating habits. This can be due to numerous reasons, but most often these are health purposes and ethical concerns (Ruby, 2012). Interestingly, the most reported reason for excluding meat from one's diet is due to concerns about the ethics of raising and slaughtering non-human animals. However, the motivations for removing meat from one's diet are not static and can be added or dropped over time. Due to the different reasons for avoiding meat, different types of vegetarians are established, namely health vegetarians and moral vegetarians. These two types of vegetarians differ in the sense that one bears a focus on concerns for their own welfare whereas the other homes in on the welfare of others (Ruby, 2012).

The most common forms of ethical motivation for adopting a vegetarian diet are concerns for animal rights and welfare, and concerns about the environment (Ruby, 2012). On the other hand, the most common health reasons for adopting a vegetarian diet are general well-being and weight maintenance (Rosenfeld, 2018). The foundations of the motivations that foster a vegetarian diet act as powerful predictors of an

individual's attitudes and behaviours. For instance, ethically motivated vegetarians hold stronger beliefs about the role of vegetarianism in their life and exclude more animal products from their diet due to the moral associations they make between animals suffering and meat consumption. Furthermore, evidence suggests that moral vegetarians maintain their restricted diet over time (Rosenfeld, 2018). They also allocate greater primary emotions (e.g. happiness or sadness) and secondary emotions (e.g. loneliness or anxiousness) to other non-human animals, specifically pigs and dogs. In addition, it is not just ideological differences which exist between these two types of vegetarians. Moral vegetarians also dislike the taste and texture of meat more than health vegetarians and so are more likely to abstain from meat in a stricter fashion (Rosenfeld, 2018). The relationship between moral ideology and dislike of the taste of meat is further explored later in this thesis.

The Process of Moralisation

Ruby (2012) highlights the mounting evidence which suggests that omnivores and vegetarians think of meat in different terms. Eating meat can be seen in the same light as other moral transgressions, such as stealing. This thesis looks to explore the moralisation of eating meat, whereby the ethical (rather than health) concern regarding the eating of animal products has become an example of moralisation, and which has ultimately resulted in 'the meat paradox' (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). This is the concept that most people care for animals and do not wish for them to have harm inflicted upon them, however, their diet means that animals must be killed, which may often involve suffering (Loughnan et al, 2014). According to Rozin et al (1997), moralisation is when objects and actions which were formerly morally neutral acquire moral qualities. Once an act is identified as immoral, it has significant social implications such as motivating individuals to take part in collective action (Rhee et al, 2019). Furthermore, what we believe to be moral or immoral determines our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours. A behaviour may become fundamentally wrong or right and develops an inherent motivational position whereby it holds an 'ought to' or 'ought not to' element which influences subsequent behaviour (Skitka et al, 2005). Once we have internalised our moral convictions, there is little room for negotiation and our views become more extreme and concrete, which can lead to polarisation (Feinberg et al, 2019). Rhee et al (2019) highlight how morality changes over time both at the societal level and at the individual level. Embracing a vegetarian diet is an example of morality changing for the individual.

Moreover, our moral identity, which is fostered from our moral principles, concerns and aspirations, contributes to our self-concept. It plays a large role in the consistency principle which is the idea that people need to be true to themselves and so behave in accordance with their own identity. For instance, the more strongly an individual identifies as moral, the more likely they will engage in moral behaviours. In their study, Feinberg et al (2019) found that those who have a higher internalised moral identity, which is how much certain moral traits are crucial to their self-concept, and who have a higher symbolised moral identity, which is how much their actions show that they possess these moral traits, were the most likely to moralise the issue of eating meat. This

emphasises the influence pre-existing moral predispositions play in the likelihood of an individual moralising a behaviour.

*Moral Amplification and Moral Recognition*

Rhee et al (2019) discuss the distinction between moralisation and moral amplification. Whereas moralisation involves a neutral behaviour entering the moral realm, moral amplification is defined as those behaviours which turn from slightly wrong to more wrong. From the literature reviewed for this thesis, it appears that previous research into moral amplification has analysed its existence in terms of applying to wrongs only. Rhee et al (2019) believe that previous research has overlooked moral amplification and so they wished to expand on Rozin et al's (1997) definition of moralisation. They instead claim that moralisation is when the degree to which the moral relevance which is attached to behaviours or entities increases. Hence, moralisation can be understood as: (1) moral recognition – the psychological connecting of morality to an action, attitude or entity and (2) moral amplification – the process by which the moral significance of said action, attitude or entity increases (Rhee et al, 2019).

Moral recognition is affected by contextual factors and individual motivations. This means that the assignment and disengagement of moral significance changes over time within individuals and within the situation. In the case of moral amplification, it is argued that inducing feelings of disgust within the individual, which can be unrelated to the issue at the hand i.e. a bad smell, can increase the severity of moral disapproval that the individual assigns to moral transgressions (Landy & Goodwin, 2015). For instance, imagine a scenario in which an individual is subjected to the smell of someone who has passed gas. The individual will have visceral feelings of disgust and will perceive a norm violation, i.e. that someone did not stop themselves from passing gas whilst in company, which is felt alongside the perception that they have been made to suffer due to someone else's actions. Hence, the individual will condemn the action with greater moral disapproval (Royzman, 2014). The relationship between disgust and morality is further discussed later in this thesis.

*Cognitive Dissonance*

Most moral circumstances pit a morally defensible option against a self-serving option, generating a win-lose scenario. If an individual feels as though their behaviours are contradicting their moral identity, they will undergo an internal cognitive dissonance that pushes for a shift towards restoring harmony between behaviour and identity and beliefs (Feinberg et al, 2019). Most people find animals suffering emotionally upsetting (Loughnan et al, 2014) yet include meat products in their diet. Therefore, they need to alleviate the 'meat paradox', which is an example of cognitive dissonance.

To relieve the discomfort which comes from this internal conflict, some people may choose to adopt a meat-free diet as a moral vegetarian. On the other hand, rather than engaging in moral behaviour, an individual may instead further reduce the dissonance by changing their belief. For instance, hedonism and self-interest serve as barriers to moral behaviour by encouraging cognitive processes which allow a person not to moralise, even when there is evidence, intuitions or emotions which suggest

moralisation is the correct thing to do. Instead, people employ dissonance reduction strategies to rationalise their immoral actions. Examples of these strategies in the case of eating meat are minimising the animal's moral relevance or convincing oneself that the animal does not feel pain (Feinberg et al, 2019). For instance, Loughnan et al (2014) found a strong negative relationship between the attributed mind their participants allocated to the animal and the edibility they assigned to the animal. By denying an animal's emotional and cognitive capacities, it means an individual is psychologically prepared to eat meat because they partially diminish the dissonance through morally disconnecting from their plates (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). This serves as a defence mechanism against the mental discomfort.

It is the people who see animals as dissimilar to humans who ascribe them lesser minds and subsequently see them as less worthy of moral concern (Loughnan et al, 2014). This denial of the mind represents a more cognitive-evaluative pathway for sustaining meat consumption (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). Furthermore, not only does this mean that individuals justify the eating of that animal, but in turn, it leads to the people who engage in these cognitive strategies to be less likely to moralise the issue of eating meat. Feinberg et al (2019) found that a portion of their participants in their study showed this example of psychological reactance. Therefore, how we perceive animals plays a role in our consumption of meat (Loughnan et al, 2014).

Cognitive dissonance, therefore, suggests that if one feels discomfort, there is a need to reduce the discrepancy between eating animals and the belief of 'I like animals' (Dowsett et al, 2018). One study aimed to make obvious to its participants the meat-animal connection to see whether it would change their discomfort, meat attachment, and attitude towards animals. Although their discomfort increased, the participants' attachment to meat and attitudes towards animals did not differ. Dowsett et al (2018) found that some participants appeared to deny the meat-animal connection. For those participants, disregarding the link between meat and animals means that the inconsistency of eating animals whilst not wanting to hurt them becomes less obvious, so the individual does not undergo additional cognitive dissonance (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). Furthermore, like Fienberg et al (2019), Dowsett et al (2018) found that some participants had a defensive reaction to their moral inconsistencies. The researchers termed this attempt to reduce dissonance as 'neutralisation'. By justifying their own self-serving actions, participants were able to hold moral principles whilst preserving their own interests. Examples of these neutralisations were that the individual would diminish their personal impact or responsibility by contrasting their meat consumption with alternatives for which they perceived a greater moral burden, or they challenged the harmful consequences of meat-eating by presenting ethical approaches towards consumption i.e. reducing meat intake or buying ethically conscious meat (Dowsett et al, 2018).

*Empathy Towards Animals*

Empathy towards animals is comprised of both cognitive and affective elements. These both play a role in an individual recognising and understanding the animal's emotion and responding with an emotional response in line with the animal's emotions (Rothgerber & Mican, 2014). Empathy most often implies the emotional concern a human

feels when thinking about or witnessing the suffering of another living being. Therefore, empathy is not exclusive between humans, it is also inter-species and is particularly apparent towards domesticated animals. Rothgerber and Mican (2014) carried out a study whereby they observed the connection between childhood pet ownership, empathy, and adult vegetarianism. Owning a childhood pet was positively associated with empathy towards animals because inter-species relationships and friendships are essential for developing empathy towards animals. Participants who reported having a closer connection to their childhood pets also reported avoiding meat more. This was found to be accounted for because those participants demonstrated greater empathy towards animals. Thus, empathy is capable of changing entities (i.e. meat) into living beings (i.e. animals) whose welfare we cannot ignore. Furthermore, the more moral concern we attribute to something, the more immoral it becomes to inflict harm upon it (Loughnan et al, 2014). Therefore, the degree to which someone experiences feelings of compassion and sympathy towards the animals that humans consume, predicts whether they moralise the issue of eating meat (Feinberg et al, 2019).

Vegetarians show greater empathy which makes it more cognitively and emotionally difficult for them to justify eating animals. A lack of empathy supports meat consumption because dissociating meat from animals makes it easier to ignore the argument that eating meat causes unnecessary pain and suffering. This dissociation is facilitated in numerous ways, for instance: via language in the sense where 'pig' become 'pork' and 'cow' becomes 'beef' once it reaches our plate; via the fact that the treatment of animals (i.e. their slaughter for meat) is invisible to the consumer; and via the fact that meat is readily accessible in a form where it is unrecognisable to its former living body (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). Empathy, along with feelings of disgust, facilitates the effects that the dissociation of animals from meat has on attitudes towards meat consumption. Hence, the use of cognitive strategies to diminish the impact of eating meat is negatively correlated with empathy towards other animals (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). In essence, when an individual dissociates animals from meat, they remove the cognitive connection between the two which reduces the level of empathy that person feels towards animals and reduces the level of disgust the individual feels, as they do not make the connection that they are eating a dead animal. This, in turn, maintains the individual's motivation to eat meat because the suppression of empathy and disgust provides an immediate and affective pathway for continuing meat consumption (Kunst & Hohle, 2016).

*Values and Preferences*

Moralisation can also occur when an individual's or society's preferences are converted into values, which are more long-lasting than preferences and are more central to the self (Rozin et al, 1997). When a preference becomes a value via moralisation, it gains certain psychological attributes such as higher identity centrality and stronger emotional and motivational salience (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). Values are also powerful in the sense that they tend to evoke strong moral emotions (Rozin et al, 1997). Johnathon Haidt defines moral emotions as those emotions which relate to the interests and welfare of society or persons other than the agent (Haidt, 2003). The more an emotion tends to be elicited by triggers which are associated with the welfare of society rather than the interests of the individual, the more it is considered a typical moral emotion. When

exploring the removal of meat from one's diet, it is essential to discuss the moral emotion of disgust. Disgust is an 'other-condemning' emotion and is a response to both physical and social violations.

> "Disgust refers to something revolting, primarily in relation to the sense of taste, as actually perceived or vividly imagined; and secondarily to anything which causes a similar feeling through the sense of smell, touch, and even eyesight" (Haidt, 2003, p.857)

But it is not just taste that causes disgust to arise when eating. Haidt (2003) notes how the principal reason for rejection is due to the ideational properties of the food. For instance, thinking about where the food comes from can lead a person to feel revolted due to concerns regarding animal welfare. Vices connected with the suffering of animals, such as hypocrisy, betrayal, and cruelty, are those which are foremost in eliciting disgust. However, this mainly appears in the West, presenting itself as a motivation for moral vegetarianism.

*Moral Emotions and Moral Piggybacking*

Moral emotions and moral piggybacking serve as important predictors of moralisation (Rhee et al, 2019). Moral piggybacking occurs when an experience, or the learning of new information, causes an individual to see a contradiction between a behaviour which had no connection with one's moral principles (e.g. eating meat) and a view which they believe is in line with their moral principles (e.g. killing is wrong) (Feinberg et al, 2019). In their study, Feinberg et al (2019) found that the degree to which participants felt moral emotions, such as disgust, and moral piggybacking positively predicted the increase in moral weight they assigned to meat-eating attitudes. Skitka et al (2017) found strong support for the view that moral emotions play a role in moral amplification because the emotion can be bound to a specific attitude. In their study, they compared participants' views on abortions and the degree of moral conviction they associated with this issue to establish whether there was a difference between: (1) those who were exposed to disgust-inducing images of harm related to abortions (e.g. aborted foetuses); (2) those who were exposed to disgust-inducing images of harm unrelated to abortions (e.g. animal abuse) and; (3) those who were placed in a control group who saw neutral pictures (e.g. chairs). When placed in the abortion-related disgust condition of their experiment, participants reported higher levels of moral conviction regarding abortions compared to the control group. The study found that an internal emotion, disgust, was needed to moralise the participant's attitudes regarding abortions. Hence, this evidence suggests that it was the invoking of disgust within the context of attitude-related images which fostered moral amplification. Therefore, for those whom an issue or a behaviour fosters a moral emotion response, they are more likely to judge that behaviour as immoral.

## Disgust and Morality

An individual will feel revulsion at the thought of consuming offensive food. These foods are also considered contaminants whereby they have the power to render

another food unacceptable if it encounters it (Haidt et al, 1997). Therefore, disgust plays a role as a guardian of the mouth. Haidt et al (1997) discuss the prospect of disgust having its roots in evolution. However, they also discussed its position as a cultural product. Hence, disgust is an emotion related to food which makes us apprehensive about what we consume because of where it has been and what it has touched. It is so powerful that it is not only capable of making an individual feel nauseous but can also induce vomiting. So not only does disgust include a motive to avoid the offending object (feelings of nausea), it is often followed by an incentive to purify oneself after contact with it (vomiting). In this sense, disgust prompts us to break our contact with the offending object and because it is such a powerful emotion, we feel the need to remove the moral taint which the offending object leaves behind. This is because disgust is not solely a response to physical violations but also serves as a reaction to social violations. For instance, one may choose to reject meat because of its ideational properties e.g. because it has come from another sentient being. Therefore, disgust has extended beyond being a defender of the mouth, in relation to the sense of taste, and is also considered as a guardian of the moral order. Hence, disgust encourages people to change their relationship with moral offenders (Haidt, 2003) as it makes us step back, push away, or draw a protective line between ourselves and the threat (Haidt et al, 1997). Furthermore, the more disgust an individual experiences regarding a morally dubious behaviour, the more likely the individual will view the behaviour in moral terms (Feinberg et al, 2019). For instance, in Horberg et al's (2009) study, participants were given two purity-violation vignettes, e.g. being told that a brother and sister were involved in an incestuous relationship together, and were asked to rate the extent to which they criticised the violations and the extent to which the violations had provoked disgust and anger. It was found that the arousing of disgust, but not anger, predicted harsher judgements of the purity-violation vignettes. Therefore, disgust can serve as a type of moral emotion, pointing towards an individual's morality.

When a person begins thinking about or behaves in a way which induces these moral emotions, then they are more likely to make negative moral judgements about themselves. This encourages them to change so that they live up to their own moral standard (Feinberg et al, 2019). Interestingly, it has been found that after they relate eating meat with disgust, moral vegetarians adopt their diet more abruptly than health vegetarians (Ruby, 2012). This shift from 'liked to disliked' of eating meat is an example of internalisation of preferences. In other words, the avoidance of meat by moral vegetarians is driven by disgust and is an example of moralisation (Rozin et al, 1997). Additionally, moral vegetarians find meat more disgusting and give more reasons for their restricted diet (Ruby, 2012). Fessler et al (2003) found that the reason moral vegetarians find meat more disgusting is because they connect the behaviour with powerful emotions which motivate their position as a moral vegetarian. Rozin et al (1997) carried out an experiment which supported this view. Through the distribution of questionnaires, they found that moral vegetarians show significantly higher disgust scores than health vegetarians, making disgust selectively linked with moral vegetarianism. Furthermore, moral vegetarians also have more emotional reactions to eating meat.

The Causality of Moral Reasoning: Moral Emotions as a Cause or a Consequence

The traditional views on moral reasoning were brought to light by American psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg. He introduced the view that moral reasoning follows from moral development, which is progressive and depends on a person's cognitive development (Nokes, 1989). He argued that moral development is constituted of six stages and it is influenced by factors such as age and level of education. An individual with a higher level of moral development will think more comprehensively about a moral issue and will also behave more morally. Therefore, his theory is based on thought and cognitive processes, rather than affective processes (Nokes, 1989) as he believed that experiencing a negative affect, such as disgust, is not enough on its own to be able to label something as immoral or influence behaviour (Skitka et al, 2005). However, critiques of his work have argued that simply relying on cognitive processes does not explain moral reasoning. For instance, Carol Gilligan (Nokes, 1989) challenged Kohlberg's views by suggesting that social experiences were also influential, if not more important, in the development of an individual's morality. Hence, further research studying the role of both affective and cognitive processes has occurred within the domain of moral psychology, in an attempt to determine the causality of moral reasoning.

Research since Kohlberg's initial ideas has been carried out to examine whether moral positions come from cognitive processes, which in turn result in moral emotions, or whether moral reasoning is a consequence rather than a cause of moral emotions (Fessler et al, 2003). In their study, Rozin et al's (1997) findings support the more traditional view on moral reasoning. They concluded that disgust is a consequence, rather than a cause of, adopting a moral position. In this sense, moral emotions do not drive moral judgement, rather they serve as a post hoc justification of moral reasoning. Fessler et al (2003) conducted a study to determine whether people become disgusted by meat because they are moral vegetarians, or whether they become moral vegetarians because they are disgusted by meat. In other words, they observed whether moral emotions drive vegetarianism or whether moral emotions develop because of a person undertaking a vegetarian diet. They used the emotivist explanation to explain the higher level of disgust sensitivity seen within moral vegetarians. The model states that individual differences in the tendency to feel spontaneous disgust responses, i.e. to feel a moral emotion, to meat help to explain the existence of moral vegetarians. Hence, using this model, they predicted that moral vegetarians should respond to stimuli with greater disgust and that this results in them exhibiting greater disgust sensitivity overall, which is why they adopt a diet which rejects the consumption of meat. Contrary to their predictions, their first finding supported the view that meat consumption is positively correlated with overall disgust sensitivity. They also found that moral vegetarians did not differ from health or taste vegetarians on overall disgust sensitivity (Fessler et al, 2003). Therefore, their prediction derived from the emotivist model that moral vegetarians exhibit greater overall disgust sensitivity, was not supported. Instead, they concluded that disgust sensitivity does not drive moral vegetarians to adopt the diet, instead it develops after becoming a moral vegetarian. Hence, they supported the finding that affective reactions are a consequence and not a cause of moral reasoning. Although the findings from this study do not support the claim that moral vegetarians show greater disgust sensitivity, one would assume that if feelings of disgust are a consequence of moral reasoning that

moral vegetarians should, in fact, show greater disgust sensitivity. Other studies have found that moral vegetarians find meat more disgusting as they associate their dietary choice with a philosophical framework (Ruby, 2012). These contradictory findings drive support for why further research into the causal factors of moral reasoning is necessary.

Furthermore, Huebner et al (2009) also attempted to identify the role of emotions in moral psychology by presenting an alternative source for moral judgements. They argue that the neurological, behavioural, developmental, and evolutionary evidence which has been presented is not enough to demonstrate that emotion is fundamental in making moral judgements. They put forward the view that the source of moral judgements falls within causal-intentional psychology. By this, they mean that emotion plays a role in our moral psychology, in the sense that it might motivate actions, but emotions follow from causal-intentional judgements. To elaborate, emotions may stop us from partaking in immoral actions. However, more evidence is needed to explain when and how emotion plays a role in our moral judgements. In other words, the researchers argue that emotions are associated with some of our moral judgements, but this does not mean that they formulate these judgements. In fact, the reason emotion fosters moralisation is because it makes us pay attention to morally salient aspects of the environment, and this triggers moral cognition. Interestingly, Huebner et al (2009) specifically discuss disgust in their work. As has been mentioned, many works focusing on disgust claim that it is the source of moral judgements. However, these works fail to pinpoint the precise moment at which emotion plays a role in moral psychology. By this they argue that previous research leaves them with questions such as: does emotion affect our interpretation of the scenario, interpretation of the question or the production of the moral judgement?

However, other studies which question the direction of causality in the relationship between emotions and moral reasoning, instead claim that emotions drive decision making with moral rationales, i.e. cognitive processes, following. Greene and Haidt (2002) highlight how mounting evidence suggests that moral judgement stems more from automatic emotional processes and intuition more so than thoughtful reasoning processes. They found that some moral emotions are more fundamental to our moral lives than others, but all emotions can add to moral judgement under some circumstances (Greene & Haidt, 2002). However, there is no specific moral region in the brain, so they conclude that moral judgement refers to both affective and cognitive processes. These affective processes are known as moral intuitions and the more controlled process is considered moral reasoning (Haidt, 2007). Haidt (2007) claims that moral reasoning is a post-hoc process which takes place because we search for evidence that supports our initial affective processes. Furthermore, although we are self-interested, we do care about how we treat others, as well as how others treat others, which can influence our moral judgements. In this sense, moral behaviour has a social and cultural element, which can be seen by the social intuitionist model. The model states that changes in behaviour can occur due to intuitive and affective feelings that come from social interaction, which is followed by moral reasoning. Additionally, this moral reasoning is used to persuade others of their moral positions (Haidt, 2003).

Building on the social elements of moral reasoning, one study attempted to further understand the moral decision-making of children. Hussar and Harris (2010) observed the moral reasoning of three groups of children: non-vegetarians, family vegetarians and independent vegetarians. Both the family and independent vegetarians choose not to eat meat for moral reasons, i.e. they justify their moral judgements by referring to the harm and suffering that moral transgressions inflict on the victim. In the case of vegetarian children, they expand the circle for which concerns about suffering apply so that it extends beyond humans to non-humans. It has been found that emotions are developmentally necessary for moral decision-making (Huebner et al, 2009). For instance, internal emotional circuits within the individual help to inform them of the negative impact that behaviours which induce distress in others has. Hence, these emotional circuits help teach individuals to stop carrying out these behaviours. The researchers did find that all three groups of children held similar judgements about others who eat meat. However, when it came to themselves, vegetarian children condemned themselves for eating meat whereas non-vegetarian children did not disapprove of themselves eating it. The vegetarian children judged themselves for eating meat just as they would criticise any moral transgression, because children judge moral transgressions, such as eating meat, more harshly than personal choices and acts which violate the social order (Hussar & Harris, 2010). Hence, these findings challenge the social intuitionist model as vegetarian children abstain from eating meat but accept that other people do not do the same. These children behave in a certain way which has followed from their own moral reasoning; however, they do not enforce their moral viewpoint on the decisions which other people choose to live by.

With all the conflicting evidence regarding the direction of causality in moral psychology, it leads one to question whether it is, in fact, a mix of both cognitive and affective processes which lead to moral reasoning, rather than one and not the other being the cause. One can see that moralisation is a deep and complex process which is made up of numerous elements, both stemming from cognitive and affective foundations. Hence, one framework proposed by Feinberg et al (2019), which acts as an explanation of moral reasoning, is the Push-Pull Method of Moralisation (PPMM). The PPMM begins with a stimulus which evokes a moral response. This response is made up of both moral emotions and cognitive processes which both highlight the moral relevance of the stimulus. The stronger these affective and cognitive processes are felt, the more fitting the stimulus is in the moral domain, and this pushes the individual to moralise the stimulus (Feinberg et al, 2019). Each of these processes can affect moralisation independently and directly, or they may affect moralisation indirectly via the other. That is to say, moral emotions can lead to cognitions and vice versa. Furthermore, the two processes may interact with one another which means that moralisation only takes place when the individual encounters both moral emotions and cognitions together. However, not only is the individual pushed towards moralisation, but there are various elements which pull individuals away from moralisation. As discussed earlier, these may be hedonic forces which encourage the individual to engage in psychological reactance, such as moral dissonance reduction strategies, to persuade themselves that the stimulus is not morally relevant (Feinberg et al, 2019). If a person does end up moralising the issue, the PPMM proposes that at a given time point, the individual reaches an equilibrium of how

much they moralise the issue which leads to a balance within their moral reasoning process being reached. However, each time an individual is subject to or remembers the moral stimulus, the PPMM will occur and the balance previously found will be subject to change. Feinberg et al (2019) claim that at whatever point the equilibrium was left at, it will then serve as the starting point for the next turn of the PPMM. Therefore, the PPMM insinuates that moralisation takes place on a continuum. This allows for both affective and cognitive processes to play a role in moral reasoning at any given time. In their studies, Feinberg et al (2019) found evidence of both affective and cognitive pathways to moralisation, specifically moral emotions (affective route) and moral piggybacking (cognitive route). As predictors of moralisation, both had a significant result even when tested simultaneously. This suggests that moralisation can be invoked by either of these push mechanisms and there is no need to experience both for moralisation to occur. Furthermore, they continued to assess whether one mechanism mediates the relationship of the other with moralisation. They found evidence of a feedback loop where each push mechanism can prompt and reinforce the other one.

Furthermore, Skitka et al (2005) carried out a study to analyse moral convictions and the effects they have compared to nonmoral behaviours. They found that as the moral conviction attached to a specific attitude (i.e. eating meat) increases, so does the distance a person places between themselves and someone who holds views dissimilar to that attitude. This moral conviction effect can be argued to be a consequence of both affective and cognitive processes. For instance, the researchers found that stronger judgements around moral convictions may result because of the emotions which are evoked when thinking about moral convictions, which are not elicited when thinking about nonmoral behaviours. Or alternatively, these stronger judgements may result from mindsets which are cognitively rigid in the sense that the individual has become more uncompromising when considering moral convictions. Then again, the researchers recognised that moralisation is not static and so suggested that the strength of a moral conviction may be weakened if an individual undergoes moral reasoning which has been fostered through cognitive and rationalising processes, rather than by an emotional means (Skitka et al, 2005). Either way, studies such as this make clear that there is still much uncertainty as to whether affective or cognitive processes serve as a cause or a consequence of moralisation.


Research Proposal: Studying the Simultaneous-Causation Mechanism Which Influences Moralisation

Previous research has highlighted the differences in the moralisation of eating meat between moral vegetarians, health vegetarians and omnivores. But when studying the causality of moralisation, no single previous study can be used to claim that moral emotions cause moral reasoning, or that alternatively, they serve as post hoc justifications after moral reasoning has occurred. Because of the inconclusive nature of the work studying the causality of moral reasoning, further research within the domain of moral psychology would benefit from approaching causality with the view that both cognitive and affective processes play a role in triggering moralisation. The PPMM, as brought to attention by Feinberg et al (2019), is a theory which offers an explanation of

this simultaneous-causation mechanism. In essence, it claims that moral emotions and moral piggybacking, an affective and a cognitive process, both play a role in stimulating moralisation. They can do this directly when they are elicited as well as indirectly in the sense that one can trigger the other. Therefore, both processes mediate the relationship of the other with moralisation. The PPMM applies generally to moral transgressions (Feinberg et al, 2019) but for the purpose of testing the model, this study will focus on the issue of eating meat. Furthermore, something else worth researching is whether the PPMM is a continuous process or whether a point is reached whereby the individual's views are no longer susceptible to change, and the issue at hand is considered inherently wrong or right. In other words, this study will analyse whether those who undergo greater moralisation are more set in their beliefs about their diet, i.e. are they less willing to make changes to the way they eat.

This study will be carried out as further research which supports the argument that moralisation is influenced by both cognitive and affective processes. In addition to this, it will also pay attention to the differences in dietarian identity between those who moralise the issue of eating meat the most and those who moralise the issue to a lesser extent. Hence, the research question this study wishes to answer is:

*Are Those who Experience Greater Moral Emotions and Moral Cognitions Regarding the Issue of Eating Meat Less Likely to Change Their Views About Their Diet?*

It is predicted that (1) vegetarians moralise eating meat more than omnivores; (2) moralisation is triggered by both moral emotions and moral piggybacking; (3) those who experience greater moral emotions and moral cognitions, namely moral vegetarians, moralise the issue of eating meat the most and; (4) are less likely to change their diet than those who assign less morality to the issue of eating meat.

*Methodology*

The research carried out will be quantitative and will require the collection of data from a participant group. Due to the assumed generalisability of the PPMM to all morality evoking stimuli, no specific participant group is required for this study. Instead, it would be interesting for the participants to come from a variety of backgrounds as this would allow us to observe cultural, sex or age differences if deemed beneficial to the research. Hence, the easiest way to carry out this study is by distributing a survey online. One potential way to gather participants is through a snowball sampling method. For instance, sending the survey via an email within a University or institution, or through announcements on social media helps to avoid a small participant pool. Particularly because using an online media makes it easier to encourage participants to recruit other individuals who can take part in the study, as they do not have to go out of their way to inform others of the survey. After the survey has been completed, a statistical analysis will be necessary to determine whether the hypotheses proposed are supported.

*Data Collection: Online Survey*

The data will be collected and recorded by means of an online survey which contains a questionnaire, consisting of questions to be answered using a Likert-scale. After answering a set of demographic questions such as age, gender, and cultural background, it is essential for the next part of the survey to assess whether the participants moralise the issue of eating meat. Food choice is varied, dynamic and multilevel (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2018). The Dietarian Identity Questionnaire (DIQ) has been generated by Rosenfeld and Burrow (2018) by building on Rosenfeld and Burrow's (2017) Unified Model of Vegetarian Identity (UMVI). The UMVI helped to better understand the distinct and measurable aspects which make up a vegetarian. However, there was a need to create a survey which tests both vegetarians and omnivores' responses to the question 'who am I when it comes to eating or rejecting animal products?'. Therefore, the DIQ was developed as a means of testing one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours towards consuming or avoiding animal products. The DIQ contains both personal and social identity components and allows for a comparison of different types of vegetarians (i.e. health and moral) and omnivores. To establish the participants' dietary pattern, the survey contains the question: 'in general, which of the following food groups do you not eat?' and requires the participant to select all which do apply. The subsequent dimensions which the DIQ test, and examples of the questions which will be answered using a Likert-scale with the options 'Strongly Disagree', 'Somewhat Disagree', 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 'Somewhat Agree' and 'Completely Agree', are (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2018):

- Prosocial Motivation:
    - e.g. 'I follow my diet because I want to benefit society'
    - e.g. 'I follow my diet because eating this way helps the world'
- Out-group Regard:
    - e.g. 'It annoys me when people eat foods that go against my diet'
    - e.g. 'People should feel bad about eating foods which go against my diet'
- Centrality
    - e.g. 'Following my diet is a crucial part of who I am'
    - e.g. 'A significant part of my lifestyle revolves around my diet'
- Personal Motivation
    - e.g. 'I follow my diet because I worry about the effects my food choices have on my own well-being'
    - e.g. 'I follow my diet because eating this way improves my life'
- Private Regard
    - e.g. 'People who follow my diet tend to be decent people'
    - e.g. 'Following my diet is a good way of living'
- Strictness
    - e.g. 'From time to time, I eat foods which go against my diet'
    - e.g. 'I would eat a food product that goes against my diet if I were told that it tastes extraordinarily good'
- Public Regard
    - e.g. 'Following my diet is associated with negative stereotypes'

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- e.g. 'People who follow my diet are judged disapprovingly for their food choices'
- Moral Motivation
    - e.g. 'I am motivated to follow my diet because eating foods that go against it is immoral'
    - e.g. 'I feel a moral obligation to follow my diet'
- Moralisation of Eating Meat
    - e.g. 'When I think about eating meat, I just know it is wrong'
    - e.g. 'My feelings about eating meat are deeply connected to my beliefs about right and wrong'

The original DIQ did not contain the 'Moralisation of Eating Meat' dimension. Instead, this was included in the questionnaire to better make explicit the participants' relationship between morality and eating meat. This section of questions was influenced by the work of Feinberg et al (2019).

It is interesting to note that in their article discussing the DIQ, Rosenfeld and Burrow (2018) suggest that future research based on their work could include trying to differentiate between motivations which come before food choice and those which serve as a justification following from making a food choice. To do this, it is fundamental for the survey to establish how participants moralise the issue of eating meat. In other words, the survey would include questions which allow researchers to better understand what processes predict moralisation. Building on the work of Feinberg et al (2019), the second part of the survey needs to assess the processes which are associated with moralisation in the participants. Examples of the questions which will examine moralisation predictors through the use of a Likert-scale consisting of 'Not at all', 'Slightly', 'Moderately', 'A lot', 'Significantly', are (Feinberg et al, 2019):

- Moral Emotions:
    - e.g. 'How strongly do you feel *disgust* when thinking about eating meat?'
    - e.g. 'How strongly do you feel *sympathy* when thinking about eating meat?'
- Moral Cognitions
    - e.g. 'When issues regarding animal welfare and eating meat are raised, to what extent does it lead you to think about your own morality and the values you hold?'
    - e.g. 'How much do you believe eating meat causes suffering to animals?'

Lastly, the study will investigate the differences in openness to dietary change between those who moralise the issue of eating meat more (moral vegetarians) and those who moralise it less (health vegetarians). In their research, Feinberg et al (2019) discuss the potential existence of a moralisation threshold. This manifests itself as a changeability threshold in the sense that it is considered as the point that once surpassed, individuals view the issue of meat-eating as inherently wrong and so will not change their views surrounding the topic (Feinberg et al, 2019). However, before this point, a person's views are still susceptible to change. For this research, the way to assess a difference

between the two populations is to test the rigidity of views and to see how open-minded a participant is regarding their moral positions. An example of the questions which test the likelihood of a person changing their diet, which would be answered on a Likert-scale with the options 'Very Unlikely', 'Slightly Unlikely', 'Neither Likely nor Unlikely', 'Slightly Likely' and 'Very Likely', is:

- Openness to Changing Their Views
    - e.g. 'How likely are you to change your diet by removing or consuming meat permanently?
    - e.g. 'How likely are you to change your diet by (only) following a meat-free diet one day a week?'

*Analysis of Data*

A statistical analysis of the data will be necessary to better understand the difference in levels of moralisation between the participants. Firstly, an analysis of the questions which make clear the dietary pattern of each participant is necessary. To better understand the dietary demographic of participants, it makes the most sense to organise participants into groups. The groups will be vegetarians and omnivores. The vegetarian group will be made up of people who always restrict certain meats and animal products, and the omnivore group will be made up of participants who never restrict their meat consumption. Previous work has found that vegetarians and omnivores differ from one another significantly on all eight of the original DIQ variables (Rosenfeld & Burrow, 2018), hence:

*Hypothesis 1 ($H_1$): On average vegetarians will score higher on the 8 dimensions tested than omnivores will*

To test this, an independent t-test will be necessary to analyse the means of the two groups for each dimension to see whether the difference between them is 0. Once a p-value is calculated then if $p<0.05$, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept $H_1$ which implies that the means of both population samples are significantly different. However, if $p>0.05$ then we cannot reject the null hypothesis and thus cannot conclude that the difference between the means is significantly different from 0.

Secondly, the research will need to analyse the role of affective and cognitive processes in triggering moralisation. Feinberg et al (2019) found evidence of both processes playing a role in fostering moralisation, rather than one over the other, hence:

*Hypothesis 2 ($H_2$): Both moral emotions and moral piggybacking are associated with moralisation*

To test the relationship between a predictor value and the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression analysis should be used. It is predicted that the more a moral emotion (predictor value) or moral piggybacking (predictor value) is felt, the more a person will undergo moralisation, which is taken as the average score of the questions under the

'moralisation of eating meat' dimension in this study (dependent variable). In other words, both predictors will be significantly associated with moralisation.

Next, this study will need to analyse the difference in moralisation between vegetarian participants. Firstly, we need to identify two populations, namely health and moral vegetarians and compare how their scores differ when it comes to undergoing moral emotions and moral cognitions. Feinberg et al (2019) found evidence that moral vegetarians moralise the issue of eating meat more, hence:

*Hypothesis 3 (H₃): On average, moral vegetarians will score higher on the moralisation predictors than health vegetarians.*

Firstly, the two populations must be established. Dimensions such as 'personal motivation' are associated with health vegetarians whereas dimensions such as 'moral motivation' are associated with moral vegetarians. However, when identifying the two groups, it is important to note that it is possible for someone to score highly on both the 'personal motivation' and 'moralisation of eating meat' dimensions. Hence, the 'personal motivation' dimension will be reverse coded. This ensures that when the raw data averages of the results for 'moral motivation', 'moralisation of eating meat' and the reverse coded 'personal motivation' are added together, the top half of the scores will represent the moral vegetarians group and the bottom half of the scores are assigned to the group consisting of health vegetarians. Two t-tests will be used to compare the means of the two populations. One test will analyse the average scores of the two groups for experiencing moral emotions, and the other will compare the average scores of the two groups for experiencing moral cognitions.

Lastly, this study will take the two populations established to test H₃, namely health and moral vegetarians, and will further analyse the difference in moralisation between the vegetarian participants. Because moral vegetarians include concern for the welfare of others in their reasons for cutting out meat (Ruby, 2012), it has been argued that they stick to their vegetarian diet more strictly than health vegetarians (Rosenfeld, 2018). Furthermore, because they moralise the issue of eating meat more, their views become more deeply ingrained and concrete so are less open to change (Feinberg et al, 2019). Hence:

*Hypothesis 4 (H₄): On average, moral vegetarians will be less likely to change their views about their diet than health vegetarians.*

The means of the two vegetarian populations will need to be tested to study differences in the likelihood of changing their diet. If one can assume that the data is normally distributed, then an independent t-test can be used to analyse whether there is a significant difference between the two means. Otherwise, a Mann-Whitney test is needed to complete this analysis.

*Practical Considerations and Future Research*

This study focuses on the relations between cognitive and affective mechanisms and their role in the process of moralisation. However, there are more than two push-pull mechanisms which if investigated, could benefit further research. Therefore, an interesting approach to future research would be to identify and address other push mechanisms and pull mechanisms which prevent people from moralising. These pull mechanisms would most likely relate to hedonism (i.e. satisfaction from eating meat) or cognitively rationalising behaviour (i.e. justification of eating meat), but discovering these mechanisms is not within the scope of this study. One other limitation of this study is that the DIQ only explores 8 dimensions. There are further dimensions not included from the original UMVI which could have been included to better understand dietarian identity.

This research could provide a basis for further research into a moralisation threshold. However, to define a threshold value, a future study would require testing overtime as an analysis of how moralisation changes over time would be necessary. Hence, a participant group which could be retested would be fundamental for the success of a study investigating the distinct existence of a moralisation threshold. This is trickier to guarantee when recruiting a participant group online so a further in-depth study would benefit from finding more reachable and contactable participants.

One of the ethical issues which arise from carrying out this study is making participants aware of the content which some may find sensitive or distressing within the questionnaire, for instance, the mentioning of animals suffering. Therefore, an informed consent form will be included at the beginning of the survey and will require the participants to select a box which claims they are aware that there is a chance that taking part in the survey may elicit emotional discomfort. Furthermore, keeping the responses anonymous may make participants feel more relaxed at taking part in the survey so it is necessary to make participants aware that their answers cannot be traced back to them. Keeping the data stored safely is also an important element of any research study so using software such as Qualtrics, which can be used in connection with a University or an institution, to gather results is a good option for collecting data. Using an online survey also has its risks for the researcher in that they must have faith that a participant will complete the survey fully. This is a particular risk for this study because the survey is fairly long. Therefore, it is important to encourage participants to complete the questionnaire by highlighting that there is a benefit for them by filling out the survey. To do this, a small monetary reward could be in place to act as an incentive to take part in the study. For instance, participants could have a chance at winning a 50€ gift card if they were to take part in the study.

## Conclusion

Overall, the 'meat paradox' is a very current internal conflict which arises within many individuals. The view that animals suffer due to their consumption causes a mental discomfort for those who eat meat but are also concerned with animal welfare (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). Evidence has made clear that the moralisation of meat-eating can be

triggered by both cognitive and affective processes (Feinberg et al, 2019; Fessler et al, 2003; Greene & Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2003; Haidt, 2007; Huebner et al, 2009; Hussar & Harris, 2010; Skitka et al, 2005). Therefore, after coming into contact with evocative stimuli, moral emotions, such as disgust, as well as moral piggybacking, which occurs when a person links meat-eating with their moral principles (Feinberg et al, 2019), both play a role in the fostering of moralisation.

It is clear that those with different dietarian identities moralise the issue of eating meat in different ways. For omnivores, the moralisation of eating meat products may not take place due to the power of cognitive processes influencing the behaviour of the individual. Cognitive dissonance, for instance, implies that when a mental discomfort is felt, the individual aims to reduce the discomfort by justifying their behaviour through changing their beliefs (Feinberg et al, 2019). Simply employing rationalising strategies to reduce the dissonance is enough to discourage an individual from engaging in moral behaviour. Examples of these strategies are denying the animal cognitive capacity to justify inflicting harm upon it (Blidaru & Opre, 2015). Unlike omnivores, for moral vegetarians, the discomfort which arises from the 'meat paradox' is responded to in a behavioural change. It is more difficult for a vegetarian to justify eating animals through rationalising cognitive processes because they show greater empathy towards non-human animals than omnivores do (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). Therefore, they hold a stronger association between meat and animals than omnivores do. Saying this, a difference between the moralisation of meat-eating has also been identified between moral and health vegetarians. Evidence suggests that moral vegetarians maintain their restricted diet over time (Rosenfeld, 2018) in comparison to health vegetarians. This is because self-serving reasons, such as tastiness of meat, can provide a ground for adding meat into one's diet again.

Hence, from analysing previous studies and the evidence which they present, this thesis has argued that those who experience greater moral emotions and moral cognitions and ultimately assign greater moralisation to their dietary pattern, that is moral vegetarians, are less likely to change their diet than health vegetarians, and so are likely to have surpassed a moralisation threshold. This is because they will have internalised the moral conviction so that the issue of eating meat has become deeply ingrained within. This, in turn, means that there is very little room to foster a debate around one's views on their diet practices, so their opinions on consuming or restricting meat become more extreme and concrete (Feinberg et al, 2019). Not only can a study like this offer further insight into the roles of both cognitive and affective processes in triggering moralisation, but it also serves as a basis for future research studying the moralisation threshold which may be associated with people becoming set in their ways when it comes to eating or restricting meat products. Furthermore, due to the nature of eating meat being seen in the same light as other moral transgressions, this study would also help to further knowledge more generally about other moral issues, moralisation and moral behaviours, both on the individual and societal level. Therefore, looking further in-depth at the process of moralisation in the case of meat-eating is a relevant area of moral psychology which deserves further attention.

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