

IS SURVIVAL
CANNIBALISM
MORALLY
PERMISSIBLE?

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“On their return to Montevideo, these men claimed that they had been able to survive for so long by keeping themselves regularly hydrated and by stretching out their meagre rations for as long as possible. After a few days however – and under pressure from mounting media speculation – they admitted the only way in which they had survived was by conquering one of man’s oldest taboos and forced themselves to eat the flesh of their dead colleagues.”

(Korn, Radice, & Hawes, 2001) p. 107

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INTRODUCTION

Cannibalism is weird. For many people it is strongly taboo to eat the flesh of another human being. It joins other strongly taboo subjects such as incest and intentional homicide. Two things that cannibalism has in common with these taboos is, firstly, that many believe its morality is not something that needs to be discussed (as it is considered to be uncontroversially immoral) and, secondly, even if discussion did take place, and it was found to be moral, it wouldn't be enough to conquer the repugnance associated with it. To give an example, it is arguable that one of the reasons why we find it so repugnant to engage in incest is because of the increased risk of genetic disorders in the resulting child. This repugnance can be explained using evolution. Now, if we are told that said risks can be avoided simply by using contraception we are *not* suddenly compelled to seek out relatives and have sex with them. This is because there is a divide between the rationality and repugnance of the act in question. To many people it would not matter that you can give a compelling moral argument for allowing people to engage in incest – to them it would still be uncontroversially repugnant and unappealing.

When he wrote about the supposed 'wisdom of repugnance' Leon Kass was suggesting that having strong negative intuitions towards the cloning of human beings is a compelling reason not to engage in it.¹ When we are deeply revulsed by something it does not matter that someone is able

¹ (Kass, 1997)

to articulate a rational argument for engaging in it, indeed quite to the contrary – we are suspicious of those who try to ‘rationalise away our horror’. In his discussion of human cloning Kass lists other words that people have used to describe human cloning, namely ‘offensive’, ‘grotesque’, ‘revolting’, ‘repugnant’ and ‘repulsive’, comparing it also to other taboos such as incest and murder. He also lays down the challenge that this essay is seeking to undertake. He writes, “Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is ... eating human flesh?”

Some taboos are seemingly here to stay and perhaps with good reason. For instance, a society where there is nonchalance towards murder seems like an undesirable place to live – some taboos seem like a good idea. However, cannibalism is arguably not one of them. Historically there have been things that were once taboo and are now more or less accepted by the majority of society, things like homosexuality and interracial marriage. Whilst there are pockets of resistance to these activities there are, however, no compelling moral reasons not to allow to them. In democratic, Western societies where individual freedoms are trumpeted, we are made to ask ourselves “what’s the harm?” This point was best articulated by John Stuart Mill who argued that in a liberal society the only reason we have for interfering with someone’s liberty against their will is to prevent harm to

others. Interference on the basis of their own physical or moral good is not sufficient reason. This is known as the Harm Principle.²

So, what we can say is that there is a good reason why people don't engage in cannibalism: because people simply don't want to. Most people are deeply revulsed by the idea. That's a good reason not to choose to do something, "I don't like turkey so I'll have cheese" etc. But what about when your life depends on it? This essay examines the morality of engaging in cannibalism when no other alternative remains. In truth, there is one other alternative: death – but would people seriously consider this? Is death a sufficient motivator to conquer one of humanity's oldest taboos? We can shed light on this moral problem by drawing parallels with other debates in bioethics. Before that happens, however, it is necessary to examine this so-called 'repugnance' and see if it is universal across all societies and if it is even present in Western ones. The essay starts by comparing Western social norms to those of other societies. There are numerous societies across the world that either embrace cannibalism as part of their funeral rituals or use it as a weapon against rival tribes. There are also suggestions that in Western society there is a nonchalance or acceptability towards some forms of cannibalism. For instance, works about vampires, who suck the blood of their victims, have been popular for over a hundred years, particularly in the past few years with the advent of the *Twilight* series. Furthermore, after the

² (Mill, 1974) p. 68

birth of a child some parents will hold 'placenta parties' where the afterbirth is cooked and eaten in celebration.

The essay then moves on to discuss the eating of people who are already dead, in particular for survival reasons. Here, there can be a serious debate surrounding the morality of cannibalism. The eating of human flesh for survival has obvious parallels with organ donation. In both situations parts of a human body must be removed and given to someone else so that they can use it to survive; it is just that in one situation organs must be surgically attached to those who need them and in the other flesh (or blood) must be consumed. The debate surrounding presumed consent is included because of its relevance to survival situations.

Finally, the essay considers whether it can ever be morally permissible to kill someone with the intention of eating them. Again the focus is on survival rather than, say, psychopathic killers. After all, murder is murder – instead we can look at comparisons with stem cell research on embryos where it is argued that there can be good justifications for cannibalising some humans for the sake of others. This means that in survival situations, where there is starvation and no food, it could be moral to intentionally kill an innocent person for the good of others.

CHAPTER I

CANNIBALISM AND SOCIAL NORMS

The debate starts with examining the basis of Kass's claim about the 'wisdom of repugnance'. This chapter specifically looks at how different societies view cannibalism. What we discover is that numerous non-Western cultures embrace it and do not feel revulsed by it. Others, knowing that their enemies are revulsed by it, engage in it if only as a psychological weapon against them. There is also evidence that there are signs of cannibalism in Western culture too and this is included in this essay to illustrate that perhaps the resistance to it isn't as widespread or deeply entrenched as we might think.

Tribal Cannibalism

Perhaps when one thinks of cannibalistic societies one invariably thinks of tribal peoples in the Amazon, Papua New Guinea or some other people in a stereotypically remote location. As Cătălin Avramescu muses, cannibalistic societies historically have gotten a bad reputation from historians and anthropologists, detailing them as savages and often posing the question "are cannibals human beings?", frequently wondering if only monsters could wilfully engage in a culture of cannibalism.³ Indeed, it is true that there are various peoples spread across the Earth who did or do engage in cannibalism, whether out of ritual, hunger or simply because they do not

³ (Avramescu, 2009) p. 85

distinguish between the flesh of humans and that of non-human animals. In these societies there may be revulsion from having to eat human flesh because no other food is available or there may not be, simply because such an activity is the norm. For tribes there are two main sources of human flesh: exocannibalism and endocannibalism, which separates out the eating of humans into those outside the 'tribe' (e.g. victims of warfare from a rival tribe) and those inside it (e.g. relatives and members of the community). Examining these concepts is an important step towards understanding the reasons behind cannibalism.

There is support for Kass's suggestion that there is a deep repugnance to cannibalism when we examine exocannibalism. Whilst some humans may eat their enemies because they are hungry there is a more sinister reason why some engage in such activities. As Daniel Korn et al write, societies that engage in exocannibalism often do so because it is seen as the ultimate revenge against their enemies. What could be more terrifying, more demoralising than the thought that not only is your enemy going to kill you but he will also cook you, consume you and then, ultimately, defecate out your remains? The Maoris are perhaps the most prolific tribe to have done this.⁴ However, for Kass this merely reaffirms the strength of the repugnance. Indeed, for the Maoris this repugnance is in fact good reason to engage in cannibalism as, after all, it can be used as a weapon against their enemies. Psychological warfare is as old as warfare itself and in Maori

⁴ (Korn, Radice, & Hawes, 2001) p. 13

society engaging in cannibalism is more than acceptable – it is a way of ensuring society's safety from other tribes. In fact, therefore, the repugnance actually provides a *good* reason for engaging in cannibalism.

Some tribes eat the members of their tribe as part of the ritual of death and mourning and for them this is as much a part of life and death as anything else. For them, there is no taboo or revulsion. Like most societies when a member of one's kith and kin dies, it is a time of mourning. Out of reverence, those in Western society usually make funeral arrangements. There are rituals in other cultures too. Yet, whilst it is common for Westerners to burn and bury, for others it is common to consume the dead. Such an act is not savagery but a sign of great reverence for that person. As one Mayoruna cannibal remarked to a European visitor, "when you die would you not rather be eaten by your own kinsmen than by maggots?"⁵ Like a Catholic might see communion as a highly spiritual ritual, some tribes see eating the dead as a great spiritual act, for instance as a way of imbuing themselves with the qualities of that person. Certainly there are sides to this that Westerners may find repugnant. For instance, even children are not immune from endocannibalism – the Yanomami Indians of Central Amazonia will consume the body of a child so thoroughly "... even pulverizing the bones and drinking them down in a plantain soup, [so] that there is nothing left."⁶ To many this may seem weird, to say the least, but one cannot find a reason

⁵ (Tannahill, 1975) p. 7

⁶ Quote from Dr Timothy Taylor in (Korn, Radice, & Hawes, 2001) p. 14

to say that such acts are immoral.⁷ Ultimately, the comparison is not one of morality – for both societies believe what they are doing is right – but a normative one, i.e. what is considered appropriate in each society.

Et tu, Western Society?

Cannibalism is clearly far from being acceptable practice in Western societies but there are, however, signs of it. One must wonder if cannibalism is so repugnant, so inherently immoral, why aren't there laws against it? In the UK, US, Germany and other countries no law explicitly makes cannibalism illegal. Furthermore, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (the DSM – the 'holy text' of mental health professionals) does not consider it a mental disorder.

Culturally speaking, ever since Stoker wowed readers with the story of *Dracula* in 1897, vampires have formed a part of our literature and cultural imagination. Now, over a hundred years later we are experiencing a massive boom in 'gothic literature', movies, television shows etc, with the most recent example, the first movie in the *Twilight* series (based on the novel of the same name), grossed nearly \$400m worldwide during its release in cinemas.⁸ Ostensibly, vampires are a great fascination for Westerners and their most famous trait, the sucking of blood from the neck, is considered by some as highly erotic. Whilst it is not 'anthropophagy', a form of cannibalism specifically relating to the eating of human *flesh*, some people certainly do

⁷ We may argue that is immoral to kill a child but it is highly dubious that the age of the victim matters when it comes to actually consuming the body.

⁸ (Box Office Mojo)

not have a problem with the sucking of human blood. This is evidence that there is at least a basis for the acceptability of some forms of 'auto-cannibalism', where one consumes part of oneself. There seems nothing morally objectionable to a person draining their own blood and then consuming it. By extension, one would also think that a mutually reciprocal relationship with someone where each person drinks the other's blood is also not morally objectionable. We may think it's weird but on what moral basis could we object to such a practice? If both are consenting adults, well aware that there are risks involved (for instance with blood-borne diseases), then what morally objectionable behaviour has occurred? Do we object when someone cuts their finger and their first instinct is to put their finger in their mouth? Also worthy of note is 'placentophagia' – the eating of the placenta after the birth of a child. It has been documented that it is common for numerous species of animal – even herbivores – to consume the placenta after the birth of their young.⁹ Placentas are highly nutritious and people still eat them despite a lack of evidence to show it provides any specific health benefits. There are even websites written by new mothers encouraging others to do it, offering recipes and advice on how to plan a 'placenta party'.¹⁰

Both vampires and placentophagia provide interesting examples of cannibalism in Western society. However, vampires are, after all, fictional and new mothers eating their child's placenta are hardly what Westerners

⁹ (Kristal, 1980)

¹⁰ See (momlogic, 2009), for instance.

consider to be cannibals. What Western society really thinks of when you mention 'cannibalism' is the psychopathic killer – a murderous human being who engages in horrible acts because he is mentally ill or, simply, because he is an 'evil monster'. Cannibalism is thus tarnished by the same brush used to paint these people as disturbed serial killers (remember all those words that Kass used to describe human cloning that could be equally applied to cannibalism and murder). The act of cannibalism is perceived to be one of irrational obsessions – a perverse pleasure of the delirious psychopath.¹¹ 'If he is a cannibal then he must surely also be a criminal.' Such associations do not speak to the morality of cannibalism. Whilst murder is certainly to be considered immoral, cannibalism should not be guilty by association of also being immoral without proper analysis saying so. In possible survival situations, this association is perhaps why it is so difficult to reconcile having to eat a dead person or even having to kill and eat someone.

What happens to a body after one's death is something that one can express a wish about whilst alive. For instance, some people want a funeral service where their body is put in a coffin and then into the ground. Others want to have their body burnt and their ashes scattered somewhere of sentimental value. These are wishes that we respect. With the advent of organ transplantation, some opt to allow for some of their organs to be removed and given to people who need them to carry on living or to improve their quality of life. Again, this is a wish we respect (even encourage). We

¹¹ (Avramescu, 2009) p. 94

even allow people to 'donate their bodies to science', which means that they give permission for scientists to conduct experiments on their bodies or to use them for training purposes. Again – this is fine. The simple fact is that there are disposal methods of common in Western culture, and there are others that form part of other cultures – one of which is cannibalism.

And yet, cannibalism, as a means of body disposal is seemingly rejected. When someone dies in Western Society we duly treat the body with reverence though no doubt many would shrink at the suggestion that the body be eaten by the family to which the person belonged. Yet, historically in non-Western cultures such a practice existed in numerous places. Endocannibalism is as much about having reverence for the dead as any other mortuary arrangements. It is up to the family to decide what constitutes a proper way to dispose of the body of their loved ones. In Western culture we tend to burn or bury, in others there is a feast. What is and isn't moral about this cannot be decided by appealing to the current culture – this would be an act of cultural imperialism. Those who shrink at the prospect of feasting on the dead may claim that such a practice is immoral but they have no basis for this claim when so many other forms of cannibalism are sensationalised in their own culture. Revulsion is not a moral argument, it is just a feeling.

This section has looked at the so-called 'wisdom of repugnance' – the suggestion that because cannibalism is so repugnant we ought to simply continue ignoring it on the basis that it is weird and that nobody in their right

mind would engage in it. However, this 'wisdom' is not universal across all cultures. Indeed, it has been documented that tribal cannibalism exists around the world and that in numerous cultures the eating of dead humans, whether they are friend or foe, is accepted custom. In Western societies, cannibalism is castigated despite evidence that in other 'lesser' forms it is a part of our culture partly in the shape of gothic fiction and the eating of placentas. Moral arguments, supposedly, don't touch upon these areas and those who believe that cannibalism should remain taboo may argue that moral arguments don't affect our feelings towards cannibalism. We should, however, challenge this assumption. After all, this is what philosophy does. If cannibalism cannot stand up to philosophical scrutiny then we can drop the discussion and admit that we shouldn't eat human flesh. If, however, philosophical debate renders cannibalism morally permissible, even if only certain circumstances, then we have good reason to challenge one of humanity's strongest taboos.

CHAPTER II

IS IT EVER PERMISSIBLE TO EAT HUMAN FLESH?

The previous chapter sought to challenge the basic assumption of why we don't engage in cannibalism. By showing that numerous societies throughout the world have engaged in different types of cannibalism, including those that eat human flesh as if it were just like any other meat, it can be argued that there is no repugnance towards cannibalism universal to all humans. Furthermore, there is evidence from Western culture that shows that perhaps there is even a sense of acceptability about it, at least in only very specific forms. In other words, there are cracks forming in the suggestion that no moral argument could ever challenge the assumed impermissibility of cannibalism. It is on this basis that the challenge then moves from normative comparisons to discussions in moral philosophy. It continues with the question of whether it is ever morally permissible to eat human flesh.

Eating the Dead: Necro-Cannibalism and Organ Donation

On 12 October 1972, a chartered plane took flight from Montevideo, Uruguay, and headed for Santiago, Chile. The plane contained an amateur rugby team of boys from an affluent Catholic school, as well as some of their friends and family, and, along with the crew, the total number of people on board totalled forty-five. Landing shortly after takeoff in Argentina owing to

bad weather, they resumed their flight the next day. Unfortunately, at some time shortly after 3:30pm the Santiago control tower lost contact with the flight and its whereabouts was unknown. They had, in fact, crashed into the Andes. Attempts to locate the downed aircraft by officials from Chile, Argentina and Uruguay lasted eight days but unfortunately all failed and, assuming that no one would survive in such harsh and wintery conditions (let alone the impact), they gave up the search declaring the passengers missing, presumed dead.¹² Some had, in fact, survived the impact. They had plenty of drinkable water and some light provisions, such as chocolate bars and some cheese. However, the conditions in the Andes were very bitter. Carlos Paez, one of the twenty-seven to survive the initial impact, said, “Even in the first ten days we lost a lot of weight. That was a real thing. I lost about seventeen kilos.”¹³ It was after these ten days, faced with the realisation that all they had left was a small amount of chocolate, that they finally decided to do what they must – eat the dead.

In this scenario, no one living was killed in order for their flesh to be harvested. Instead, they ate the bodies of the already dead. This is known as ‘necro-cannibalism’. Understandably, many were reluctant. However, such was the dire situation and extreme circumstances that a decision had to be made. Themselves Catholics they wrestled with their own perspective on things: they were faced with the apparent sacrilege of eating human flesh on the one hand, and the apparent mortal sin of committing suicide by *not*

¹² (Korn, Radice, & Hawes, 2001) p. 105

¹³ Ibid p. 110

eating it.¹⁴ In these situations, when one is faced with committing an egregious and seemingly reprehensible act *or death* – the answer becomes clear: do the act.

For the non-religious there are arguments to be made with regard to organ donation. Although there is not enough space to consider the debate fully, there are two questions that can be asked within organ donation that are useful for the debate on cannibalism. The first is whether it is morally permissible to remove a decedent's organs whose consent cannot be ascertained, i.e. the decedent has not made explicit wishes whether to donate or withhold their organs, and the second is whether it is morally permissible to remove a decedent's organs who has explicitly stated that they do not wish for their organs to be removed. They will be considered in turn.

When Consent isn't Possible

Many people nowadays consider organ donation to be an uncontroversial process – one person dies and no longer has use of their organs and so, as long as they consented, their organs are given to people who need them in order to carry on living. Such an act is one of charity as, after all, in the UK and many other countries, there is a presumption of non-consent and people who want to have their organs donated must 'opt-in' to do so. However, the truth is that the debate is a fraught one, one that has, in fact, been raging for

¹⁴ Ibid p. 111 – Presumably, the fact there is something to eat but choosing not to eat it and then dying would constitute suicide.

decades. The controversy arises when we are faced with the problem of scores of people dying every day waiting for organ donations. There is a massive deficit and one of the simplest solutions is to implement a policy of presuming that all people want to give their organs unless they explicitly opt-out. The main problem with the opt-out policy is that it would result in people having their organs removed when they did not want to and that it is morally unacceptable because it would violate their autonomy. This discussion is important to the debate on cannibalism because it allows us to draw parallels – if it is permissible to presume that people would prefer to have their organs transplanted in order to save the lives of the dying then it should also be permissible for the starving to eat their bodies too.

Michael Gill argues that whilst removing the organs of those who did not want them removed is unfortunate it is morally no worse than not removing the organs from people who did want them removed.¹⁵ Michael Gill cites Carl Cohen who makes the argument that 70% of Americans would prefer to donate their organs after their death but less than 70% of suitable organs are transplanted after death. This is mainly because a lot of people do not give clear enough indications of their wish to donate to surpass the system's level of presumed consent, thus they are buried with all their organs still intact. Now, this violates their wishes – after all, it was their wish to donate but they never filled out the necessary forms in order to make this so. Since 70% of Americans wish for their organs to be transplanted a system

¹⁵ (Gill, 2004)

of presumed consent with a well-publicised opt-out policy would therefore respect the wishes of Americans 70% of the time, which would constitute an increase in the current number of decedents whose wishes are respected.¹⁶

Assuming the statistics are correct¹⁷ then there is an analogy that can be made with regards to cannibalism. Just as someone could be dying because they have a failing heart or liver someone could also be dying from starvation. They can, however, be saved by using the body of a recent decedent. The only difference between the two situations is that in one certain organs from the decedent must be harvested and surgically transplanted into the person who needs them and in the other the flesh of the decedent must be harvested and ingested. Consequentially there are no morally significant differences between the two. In both someone is already dead, another is needy; the needy person requires part of the decedent to live or they will certainly die; there is no way to ascertain the decedent's wishes surrounding donation (assuming they're not carrying a donor card). It's just that in one the 'donation' must be eaten and in the other it must be surgically attached to someone's body. Presuming consent when consent cannot be ascertained in these situations saves lives and it is not farfetched to suggest that if most people consent to having their organs used to save lives then a similar number would also consent to other parts of their body be used for the same purposes. If people do not consent to having their bodies cannibalised for organs or flesh then we should ask if such an act is

¹⁶ Ibid p. 39

¹⁷ They are numbers from a poll conducted in 1993, so opinion might have changed.

immoral. After all, it should also be pointed out that in the rare case that human bodies must be used for food it may also be the case that even left alone the bodies of the deceased would eventually decay anyway. For instance, if survivors are stranded far from civilisation then it is unlikely that the body will survive long enough to be repatriated. So, if the body is going to waste away anyway – why not use it to save lives?

Withholding Consent

The question, then, is whether it is morally permissible to interfere with the explicit wishes of the now deceased when the cost of not doing so is loss of life. In the beginning we looked at the Harm Principle which argued that interfering in other people's autonomy is only justified if it prevents harm to other people. In cases of presumed consent we are balancing the harm of not respecting the wishes of the dead with the harm of not respecting the wishes of the living. However, the wishes of the living are certainly of more importance in this case – the dead cannot be harmed in the sense that they cannot suffer: they cannot suffer pain, loss or even die if their wishes aren't respected whereas the living face pain and certain death if their wishes are not respected. Saving human lives is a paramount value common in many, if not all, societies. Certainly then an argument could be made that withholding consent to donate organs is unreasonable as a greater harm will occur if we do not interfere – the infringement on personal autonomy is minor in comparison.

Indeed, what we have here is what some philosophers call ‘a duty to donate’. Peter Singer has argued that any moral theory ought to accept the principle that when we can prevent something bad from happening (in this case death) without sacrificing something more important than we should do so.¹⁸ Such a principle was recently adopted by Ben Saunders, who used it, combined with David Estlund’s idea of ‘normative consent’, to argue in favour of an opt-out policy in regards to organ donation. Stated briefly, the idea is that in a democratic society “actual consent is often taken to be necessary but not sufficient to justify whatever is consented to, as for example it may be coerced or uninformed. In these cases the usual force of the consent is nullified.” This too could also be applied to a *lack* of consent – in other words, the refusal to consent is void. So if, for instance, your roommate always refuses to let you play your radio then they are being unreasonable and you are allowed to play it sometimes.¹⁹ In other words, we may ask for consent to do something but such an asking is a mere formality or act of politeness as the consent isn’t enough to justify doing something.

There is, however, a problem with his view. Saunders argues that people should be allowed to opt-out of the duty and that there are morally justifiable reasons for doing so. For instance, he suggests religion as a plausible exception. If one’s religion states that giving one’s organs or body parts to another human being is an offence likely to cause their eternal

¹⁸ (Singer, *Famine, Affluence and Morality*, 1972)

¹⁹ (Saunders, 2010) p. 85

damnation then they have good reason not to donate their organs. If, however, they simply object because the idea of putting one's organs inside another human being makes them squeamish then their opting-out is not morally justifiable. He compares such an act to refusing to save a drowning child simply because one does not want to get one's clothes wet. However, he argues that even though such an act is immoral we wouldn't be morally justified to refuse to respect their wishes. This is somewhat confusing. Imagine that you are stranded in the Andes, starving, and one of the other survivors is dying. Before he dies you ask him, explicitly, if he consents to you eating his body after he dies but he refuses stating that he simply doesn't want to be eaten. According to Saunders, his position is morally unjustifiable but so is ignoring it and eating him anyway. Both views' positions are morally reprehensible. Certainly then, Saunders's view is inconsistent.

But Saunders's view is a useful illustration of the problem in the transplant debate. On the one hand we have a status quo where people must opt-in to give but not to receive thus creating a deficit where hundreds of people die every year waiting for organs; and on the other hand we envision some sort of nefarious government system literally out for an arm and a leg. The problem we have with forcing people to donate²⁰ is the infringement to personal liberty present in our liberal, Western democracies. Michael Potts et al state that in order for there to be consistency within

²⁰ If you can call forcing someone to give 'donating'.

normative consent we would have to mandate that all organs are taken from decedents whether they consent or not. However, such a view would create a 'conscription' model where society assumes ownership of all bodily organs after death in order to achieve a high 100% organ donation rate. Thus, this is effectively totalitarianism, where the government enforces an ideology 'for the good of the people' with strict authority over the individual. This itself is inconsistent with democratic ideals.²¹

By analogy with the organ transplant debate the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, if one agrees with the idea of organ donation, i.e. giving a part or all of one's body after one has died so that others may use it to survive, then one must, in principle, agree with cannibalism. After all, if the above description of organ donation is accurate then it is also accurate of cannibalism. Organ donation is a form of cannibalisation and it is arguable that the initial reluctance we have over having our friends and family 'cut up for spare parts' is the same feeling we might experience when faced with having them 'cut up for meat'. Many people, for instance, show great reluctance towards eating meat when they have been introduced to the animal before it is to be killed. Such reluctance would likely also exist if one is faced with the situation of starving to death unless one eats the family pet. In all cases it comes down to a value judgement over whether life is worth preserving at the expense of cutting up the body of the recently deceased. Most people, one presumes, are willing

²¹ (Potts, Verheijde, Rady, & Evans, 2010) p. 499.

to be used in such a way as, after all, it could be them or a family member who needs a donor and a system where nobody gives surely restricts the supply of organs.

The second conclusion that can be drawn is that in cases where consent cannot be explicitly ascertained one way or the other there is a case that it is morally permissible to cannibalise the recently deceased if doing so saves human life. The case isn't solid, however. We can make the argument that since most people, presumably, agree with organ donation an opt-out policy is better suited as it means that more lives are saved and more wishes are likely to be respected. However, it could be argued that whilst saving lives is important, respecting each person's autonomy also means respecting someone's wishes for how they want their body to be treated after they die. If one believes that giving or receiving human body parts is a mortal sin, for instance, then being forced to have one's organs removed seems unjust. In a moderate system, though, where people must opt-out (rather than opt-in) and are encouraged to carry a card or paraphernalia indicating their wishes, this situation can be avoided. In sum, if it cannot be ascertained which side a decedent's wishes fall but we know that most people agree in organ donation, then there is some moral justification for removing their organs, if it is done to save a life. But, to do so walks a tightrope as there is still the possibility that the decedent did not want their organs removed and we are thus committing a grave infringement. On balance it seems the least worst of the two options is the cannibalisation of the deceased.

The last conclusion is that there is a massive moral quagmire surrounding cannibalising someone after their death when they have explicitly stated that they do not wish to, whether for organs or flesh. On the one hand we have the argument made by Saunders that to refuse such a request is morally irrelevant as even though we do ask for consent, we do so as a formality. It is morally irrelevant because as members of society or humanity we have a duty towards each other which extends to cover the ownership of our organs. When we no longer have use for our organs, and they are in such a condition as to be useful to other people, we must give them up if there is a chance that they may save the lives of other people. Saunders, however, proposed that people be allowed to opt-out of such a duty, which was shown to undermine the argument. After all, if such a duty exists then it must do so without compromise. If it is morally unjust to opt-out without a 'good reason' but also morally unjust to remove such a person's organs then we do not have a rigorous moral system. If we do forcibly remove such a person's organs then we have some sort of totalitarian system where the government takes our organs 'for our own good'. Put simply, there seems to be no morally clear way of justifying the cannibalisation of a dead body in a democratic and liberal society if the decedent's wishes explicitly state not to. From a social policy point of view one could make the argument that it is like inheritance tax, a debt payable only when a person dies. Morally it can only really be argued that a great good comes of it – so good, in fact, that it justifies the infringement upon

liberty. Certainly, then, in terms of the Harm Principle, it can be argued that not interfering with the wishes of a decedent is morally unjust as loss of life will occur if we do not. Those who disagree can argue that no duty to give really exists and that if there was one it would undermine the ideals of liberty and democracy.

The central conclusion of this section is that an absolute prohibition on cannibalism is unfounded. What the survivors of the Andes plane crash realised was that whilst it is deeply repugnant to eat human flesh, *not* doing so would result in something worse – more death and that, to them, was a worse consequence than cannibalising the dead. Furthermore, if we are compelled by organ donation then we should be equally compelled by necro-cannibalism. The argument can be made that whilst interfering with the dead is perhaps rather repugnant we do so because it means that some lives can be saved. By analogy, the consequences of anthropophagy in survival situations and organ donation are the same – some people have died but their bodies can be used to save the lives of others. When people consent to organ donation we consider their actions morally praiseworthy and we accept their donation. Such an act of donation is submitting to cannibalisation, albeit in a form less repugnant than anthropophagy. However, there seems to be no morally relevant differences between that act of cannibalism and survival anthropophagy. Some find the idea of organ donation to be repugnant but we do it because it saves lives. This is also true

of anthropophagy and if there is a chance that doing so could save lives then we are equally compelled to do it.

The next chapter delves deeper into the issue of consent as we approach our second major moral question of the paper – namely, ‘is it morally permissible to kill and eat someone?’ Here, again, we will see that there are compelling moral arguments from other areas of philosophy and bioethics that suggest that there are circumstances where killing someone – or something – for the purposes of cannibalism can be morally justified.

CHAPTER III

HOMICIDAL CANNIBALISM FOR SURVIVAL

It has been established that moral arguments can be made for eating the flesh of the recently deceased and this undermines the suggestion that there is a universally innate prohibition against cannibalism. However, are there any arguments regarding the permissibility of killing someone with the intention of eating them afterwards? The previous chapter made parallels with organ donation, highlighting issues about consent and this chapter will delve deeper into these issues.

The Case of the Mignonette

Four crew members: Dudley (the captain), Stephens, Brooks and Parker (a deckhand who was 17 years old) set sail on the Mignonette for Sydney from Southampton on 19 May 1884. On 5 July they ran into a gale and soon faced structural difficulties and were forced to abandon ship using the lifeboat. Being able to save only some navigational equipment and two tins of turnips (no drinking water) they were adrift, 700 miles away from the nearest land. After consuming the turnips and a turtle that they managed to catch, all food had run out. For days they had consistently been unable to catch rainwater and by 13 July, they began to drink their own urine as no other source of fluid remained. After two weeks adrift, discussions surrounding the drawing of lots to nominate a sacrificial victim had begun and soon intensified, Parker and Brooks were strongly against the idea and so no resolution was found.

Around 23 July, Parker had become very weak and Dudley told the others that it *would be better* if one person died so that the others survived. The debate surrounding the drawing of lots restarted but Brooks refused. That night, Dudley pointed out to Stephens that Parker was probably dying and that the two of them both had wives and families. If they didn't kill him before he died then they wouldn't be able to preserve the blood, which was required for their own rehydration. In the morning, with no rescue in sight, Dudley and Stephens signalled each other and set upon Parker. Dudley said a prayer for Parker and, with Stephens standing by to hold the youth's legs, pushed his penknife into Parker's jugular vein, killing him.²² They were rescued a few days later and, shortly after arriving back in England, Dudley and Stephens were tried and convicted of murder, establishing the famous precedent in case law that 'necessity is no defence for murder'.²³ Killing someone to eat them is known as 'homicidal cannibalism'.

What is interesting about this scenario is how similar it is to an earlier case in the early seventeenth century, dubbed the Saint Christopher case. The facts are generally the same, except that the ship was fine and they had simply run out of food. In this instance, however, the crew *did* decide to draw lots to nominate a person who should be eaten.²⁴ The body sustained the remaining crew for the rest of their voyage from Saint Christopher to Saint Martin. They were tried for murder but the judge pardoned them,

²² (Simpson, 1986)

²³ (R v Dudley and Stephens [1884]14 QBD 273 DC)

²⁴ Ironically, the man who proposed the scheme was himself the one who drew the shortest straw.

stating that their crime was being “washed away” by “inevitable necessity.”²⁵ Though these cases are far apart in both geography and time, the principle difference, that one crew decided to draw lots and the other didn’t, intuitively correlates with the verdict given in court. In the case of the *Mignonette*, Parker did not consent to being killed and eaten and, in fact, Dudley and Stephens decided amongst themselves to ‘set upon’ Parker. They were found guilty of murder. In the *Saint Christopher* case, the crew decided and agreed that the best option was to draw lots (lots were also drawn to decide who should be the executioner). Each person stood an equal chance of being chosen and thus killed and eaten, and, well aware of these risks (and potential benefits), made the informed decision to consent to such a practice. They were not found guilty of murder.

Alfred Simpson writes that the story of the *Saint Christopher* case “emphasises the fairness of the proceedings and thus general acceptability” of this form of cannibalism. However, he also notes that in the cases of drawing lots there is a caveat: it is often very difficult to corroborate the accuracy of the story.²⁶ If someone is killed and the body is eaten and any remains cast overboard, all the remaining crew merely need to do is get their story straight amongst themselves as all the evidence would have been destroyed or cast overboard. In 1765, in the case of the *Peggy*, the crew had run out of food and had exhausted all other means of sustenance. The crew burst into the Captain’s office, demanding that lots be drawn. The Captain

²⁵ (Simpson, 1986) p. 122-123

²⁶ *Ibid*

attempted to buy time and the crew left, only to return shortly afterwards to say that lots *had* been drawn and the shortest lot “had fallen on the negro who was part of the cargo.”²⁷ At a time when black people are considered to be mere property, it is highly suspicious that the lot had fallen upon him and that he should be the one killed and eaten. However, if the story is true, and he consented to being included in the draw, it is simply a necessary outcome that *someone* should get the shortest straw and that it just happens to have been him. Corroborating the story is impossible, but this does not mean that drawing lots is immoral – it just means that there are legal difficulties. Supposedly, the crew of the *Peggy* mocked a legitimate system for use in a corrupt and unjust way. Like a dictator who holds sham elections to make it look like he was democratically re-elected, the crew of the *Peggy* used the drawing of lots to mask the fact that something nefarious happened – the setting upon of a black man because of his skin colour. It is necessary to explain why the drawing of lots is considered to be the most legitimate way of deciding who to kill and *why* it justifies killing someone for the good of others.

The Survival Lottery

In the debate surrounding necro-cannibalism it was established that explicit consent may not be required so long as it can be established that it was more likely that the person would consent if they had been given the choice. The situation changes, however, when we are faced with the problem of having

²⁷ Ibid p. 124

to kill someone in order to eat them. Firstly, we will consider why it is wrong to simply set upon someone as Dudley and Stephens did. This will involve examining the utilitarian reasons they gave and comparing it to a thought experiment proposed by John Harris called The Survival Lottery. Then we will dismiss utilitarianism by using further discussions by Harris and also by considering theories of distributive justice as proposed by John Rawls on the basis that it does not show adequate respect for individual persons. Finally, the killing of an individual for cannibalistic reasons is justified and a system, based on the work of Julian Savulescu, is proposed.

Dudley and Stephens were convinced that they were acting for the greater good by killing Parker. They had families, he did not; they were healthy, he was not. When they considered how many people would be affected by the death of each crew member they concluded that the least bad outcome was to kill and eat Parker. Certainly, then, we can term their actions as being utilitarian. There is a similarity with their views and those presented in a thought experiment by John Harris. In *The Survival Lottery* Harris suggests a novel way to decrease the deficit in organ donations. Through no fault of their own two people need organs but there are none available and so face certain death. They point out that if just one healthy person could be killed and their organs harvested then their lives could be saved. Based on the three assumptions that, (1) organ transplantation has been perfected, (2) there is no difference between killing and letting die, and (3) each life is considered equal, the obvious conclusion is that we should

allow the killing of the man whose organs are required as this would, on balance, reduce the overall number of deaths.²⁸

Intuitively, however, this does not seem correct. It seems that if it is necessary for survival that someone must be killed for the benefit of the group then deciding how to choose the 'donor' is incredibly important and one that should be handled democratically. In a Survival Lottery people are killed for the benefit of people who have failing organs, such as elderly people with chronic illnesses. The donor and the recipient are in two separate groups – the donor does not stand to benefit because he is the 'healthy group' and recipient is in the 'unhealthy group'.²⁹ In the case of the Mignonette, it was Parker who was chosen (against his will) because of his sickly state and lack of dependents. In the Saint Christopher case it was unanimously agreed that everyone should stand an equal chance of either being donor or recipient. The principle difference seems to be the role of consent. In the former it was entirely absent, Parker explicitly stated that he did not want to be killed and eaten. In the latter, the survivors unanimously consented to the lottery well aware of the risks involved. Arguably, the best explanation for these intuitions is in the Kantian notion of acting towards humanity as if each person is an end in itself rather than a means to

²⁸ (Harris, *The Survival Lottery*, 1975)

²⁹ It could be argued that all people could potentially be in the 'unhealthy group' at some point in their lives and so this system is fair. However, many people go through life never needing an organ transplant and live perfectly healthy lives. This potential benefit, therefore, does not merge the two groups.

something else.³⁰ In other words, Parker was perceived to be a piece of meat, something to be killed and eaten to stave off hunger – he was not treated as a person; whereas the Saint Christopher survivors treated each other as individual persons – all equally deserving of a chance to live. The Survival Lottery views healthy people as ‘spare parts’ who do not stand to gain from the arrangement.

The Separateness of Persons

“Respect for persons is widely regarded as the fundamental basis of any ethics involving human beings,” writes John Harris in a separate piece. If there is an inevitability in the death of an individual due to a decision then that decision is ethical if only and if the individual has consented. Respect for persons has two requirements, the first is respect for autonomy and the second is concern for welfare.³¹ As persons we are self-directing and we enjoy that freedom – it is, after all, how we set about making our lives our own. Our autonomy is one of the most important parts of our lives and is incredibly valuable to each individual person. Welfare here is broadly defined as being able to exercise our autonomy, e.g. living in an environment free from harms and pains, having shelter, good health etc. This individuality, this ‘separateness of persons’, is reflected in numerous theories of distributive justice and is considered to be an attack of utilitarianism.³² Theories of distributive justice are concerned with the distribution of

³⁰ See (Kant, 1998)

³¹ (Harris, Consent and End of Life Decisions, 2003) p. 10

³² (Brink, 1993) p. 256

benefits and burdens upon members of a society. In times of starvation, food is a scarce resource and its allocation must be socially just if it is to be ethical. When that food can only be obtained from the body of a human being and someone must be killed for his body it follows that the selection of that must be done in an ethical way. For it to be ethical, each person must be respected and treated as an individual. Forcing that decision upon someone is disrespectful. (Nozick, 1974) writes that to do so would not fully take into account the fact that one is a separate person and that considering this is the only life that one has there is no 'overbalancing good from his sacrifice' and that no one can force him to make such a sacrifice.³³ In other words, whilst some may say that it was in the common good that Parker was killed, this is, in fact, not true as it completely undermines the value of the separateness of persons. (Rawls, 1971) agrees with this sentiment, stating that each person has an inviolability conferred upon them by justice, which others cannot override – justice cannot allow the loss of freedom (or, in this case, life) for some 'greater good' to be shared by others.³⁴

According to Rawls, the morality of a certain issue can be determined by imagining that the people involved in a certain issue have their roles completely re-fashioned and redistributed and do not know which role they will be assigned. Thus we approach ethical problems in a society without knowledge of our place in it behind a 'veil of ignorance'.³⁵ So, in cases of

³³ (Nozick, 1974) p. 32-3

³⁴ (Rawls, 1971) p. 28

³⁵ (Rawls, 1971)

starvation all survivors must imagine that they do not know who is sick or healthy, old or young etc and that it is possible that even they may end up as the sick one, or the old one. Once these factors have been eliminated as it were *then* you may ask the question “who should be killed?” thus allowing a decision to be made from the perspective of all members of the group. If people do not operate under a veil of ignorance then there is a threat that they will attempt to ‘rig the rules’ in their favour. For instance, one may simply say “whoever has the knife decides” or “whoever is sick should die” knowing full well that they have the knife or that they are not sick. ‘Might is right’ is no moral system. What Rawlsian theory tells us is that in situations like these, all interested parties must make decisions that are considered to be fair and equal to all of those involved. Each person must ask themselves “on what criteria should we decide who should be killed and who should do the killing?” behind this veil of ignorance. This idea is somewhat akin to the Golden Rule – people should ask themselves, “What is fair from their perspective?” It is on this basis that in so many situations where a decision cannot be reached satisfactorily that flipping of a coin, the drawing of straws, running of a lottery or some other randomised way of deciding is adopted. The reasons for this are simple – it is egalitarian: so long as it is done fairly then each interested party has the same chance of reaping the rewards or risks as everybody else.

The Embryonic Stem Cell Lottery Parallel

This argument is very similar to the one offered by Julian Savulescu in defence of embryonic stem (ES) cell research. Whilst ES cell research requires what its detractors call the ‘cannibalizing of embryos for their spare parts while still alive’³⁶ (i.e. the embryo’s destruction) it is based on the claim that ‘it is impermissible to kill one innocent person for the purpose of reducing the risk of death in a population or class, of which that person is a member’.³⁷ Savulescu argues against this. The fundamental flaw in their argument, he argues, is that everyone who risks being cannibalised also stands to benefit from this cannibalisation, unlike in the Survival Lottery where an individual who would not otherwise die is killed to treat sick people. Only individuals who stand to gain face the risk.

So, let us say that a group of ten survivors on a lifeboat has gone twenty days without any food or water. They have managed thus far to survive on drinking their urine and catching a little rain water but these sources are sporadic and inadequate to keep the survivors hydrated. The chances of surviving for longer than a few more days are very low and if someone were to die (without being killed) their flesh would be edible but their blood would not.³⁸ Thus, for all ten survivors to survive they must be rescued within the next few days. However, if they are to kill someone they

³⁶ (Savulescu, 2002) p. 510

³⁷ Ibid p. 520

³⁸ The blood could not be harvested as the viscosity of blood is maintained by being properly hydrated and that if a human body is not properly hydrated the blood turns to sludge. Getting water is far more important than food as the effects of dehydration are more severe and onset quicker.

should do it now as it would preserve the blood. Should they kill someone? For the survivors, the situation is similar to that of the embryos. Unless something is done it is highly likely that all the survivors will die (the only other alternative is wait and hope that rescue comes). However, by proposing that one person be killed and eaten each individual's chances of survival dramatically increase. For instance, immediately after they enter the lifeboat their chances of survival are immediately quite high (if they are rescued within a couple of days, it is unlikely any of them will die). After all, they are fed and watered and face no immediate danger. At this point it would not make sense to kill and eat someone – no one is starving. Once those chances diminish and dehydration becomes a real problem then it is worth considering. The chance of dying in a ten person lottery is 10% but there is a 90% chance of benefitting from it (i.e. not being killed and getting a share of the blood). One's chances of survival without engaging in the lottery are far lower than 90%. Certainly, in such a scenario it is very difficult to gauge one's chances of survival. Critics may ask "how can you be sure it is far lower than 90%?" That is a legitimate criticism. However, human bodies generally cannot survive very long without water. For the sake of argument I have supposed that they have been able to collect some rain water and reuse urine etc, however generally speaking the average human being cannot last longer than three to five days without water. Thus, if they have

survived to the twentieth day it seems that even in very favourable conditions the possibility of death is quite high, certainly higher than 10%.³⁹

The justification for cannibalism in this case is now apparent: it gives the greatest chance of preserving human lives. Certainly, if one is an absolutist against killing then they will find no joy in this justification. However, if one is seeking to preserve life and one agrees that saving some is better than none then this will be satisfactory. The ES Cell Lottery is an improvement over the Survival Lottery because in this 'we are not used solely or unfairly to [the] benefit of others' and that 'provided we stand an equal or fair chance of benefitting from cannibalization practises, we have an interest in some worlds in which cannibalization occurs.'⁴⁰ In the Survival Lottery human beings are sacrificed purely for the benefit of those who need them whereas the in the ES Cell Lottery everyone who stands to benefit also stands to lose.

In his paper, Savulescu acknowledges that ES Cell Lottery would be conducted without the consent of embryos.⁴¹ Indeed, much of the revulsion we may feel about Harris's Survival Lottery is that people would have no say in it – one day there would be a knock at the door and that would be it. Of course, embryos are incapable of consenting and because of that Savulescu argues that their consent is irrelevant⁴²; whilst this holds for embryos it is

³⁹ (Bryant) and (Stroud, 1998)

⁴⁰ (Savulescu, 2002) p. 523

⁴¹ Ibid p. 514

⁴² Ibid p. 524

obviously not true for conscious adults who are capable of consenting. The issue of consent has been broached earlier in this essay. In the debate on organ donation it was argued that it would contravene democratic notions to force someone to give up their organs, whereas it could also be argued that not doing so would violate the Harm Principle. In a situation like the one our ten survivors found themselves in, it is easy to see this same problem emulated. If nine agree to the lottery and one dissents, what do they do? They could just hold the lottery with only nine participants, but would the dissenter get to share in rewards? Should they include a lot for him anyway and kill him if his lot is drawn? Should no lottery be held?

The lottery should still be held albeit without him. If the participants do not decide to include a straw for the dissenter then it is morally permissible to exclude him from the benefits. If the cost wasn't so high (i.e. the loss of a human life) we might feel inclined to allow him to share the benefits but since we are dealing with life or death there doesn't seem to be any valid objection to disallowing such a 'free rider' from benefitting. What about including the dissenter anyway? Well, we rejected The Survival Lottery on the basis that it did not respect the separateness of persons. Prima facie it seems including him anyway would not disrespect his separateness in the sense that he would not be perceived merely as a means for others to survive – after all, he shares the same chance of risk and benefit as the other participants. However, we must remember the argument that Harris made. If someone dissents then we must respect their autonomy, this

was central to our admonishment of Dudley and Stephen's justification. As mentioned previously, if there is an inevitability in the death of an individual due to a decision then that decision is ethical if and only if the individual has consented.⁴³ If the dissenter's lot was drawn it does not follow that, simply because a randomised process deemed him to be the donor, it is ethical to kill him. He did not consent to such a process. He did not, in Kantian terms, align his ends with the ends of those who did agree to the lottery. If his lot was drawn, and he was killed and eaten against his will, then it certainly seems that he was considered merely a means and not an end.

Having established that there are circumstances where cannibalism is justified, this chapter sought to argue that there are instances where the killing of human beings for cannibalistic purposes in times of starvation (or dehydration) can also be justified. It was argued that what was wrong with simply setting upon someone and killing them was that it disrespected that person – that person was not seen as an autonomous human being deserving of respect equal to others. In other words, that person was viewed as a means to an end and not an end in itself. Harris's Survival Lottery was rejected on similar grounds. It was argued that killing one person to save two lives was justified due to utilitarian reasoning. However, this was rejected because it viewed donors as merely 'spare parts'. It was also rejected because healthy people – the donors – did not stand to gain from the lottery. It was argued that for a cannibalisation system to be ethical

⁴³ See above and (Harris, Consent and End of Life Decisions, 2003) p. 10

it would have to put at risk all those who stand to benefit from it and that each person would have to consent to it. If we wish to save as many lives as possible and we want the fairest to decide how to do so then it is argued that a lottery system like Savulescu's ES Cell Lottery should be employed. The system challenges the fact that sometimes we have to kill people in order to save lives and the consensual aspect of it ensures that the person chosen to be killed is done fairly. When dealing with life and death situations, this is of utmost importance. Preserving human life is a good reason to engage in cannibalism.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This essay has focused on the morality of cannibalism, although its primary focus has been on cannibalism in survival situations. In these situations there is a *need* to eat human flesh (or drink human blood) because of the risk of death otherwise. This essay did not, however, cover the issue of cannibalism simply out of choice. The arguments presented in the first section, on culture, were presented as a way of softening up the debate on this as it was important to show that cannibalism isn't as universally repulsive as we might think. There, evidence was provided that other cultures eat human flesh simply because it is meat and it is available. Some societies do it out of veneration, some out of revenge. The same does not ring true in Western societies. Even though cannibalism in many Western nations is neither illegal nor a mental disorder we do not engage in it and, in fact, a strong taboo exists against it. The obvious reason for not doing so is simply because we don't want to. It is repugnant to so many people so why bother at all?

This essay hasn't tried to explain why people choose to engage in cannibalism, that is perhaps a job for psychologists and anthropologists; instead it has merely stated that there are legitimate reasons for engaging in cannibalism and that there are moral justifications for doing so. Life and death situations were the primary focus. The implication of this exploration,

however, is that the idea of cannibalism isn't such an outlandish and 'weird' idea after all. In 2006, global production of meat was 272m tonnes, up from 207m only ten years prior.⁴⁴ Millions of people died during this time, but yet none (or very few) of them were eaten. People like Peter Singer and Tom Regan have argued against eating non-human animals on the basis that we should show the same level of respect for non-human animals and their interests as we do for human beings.⁴⁵ Indeed, the thought that we are somehow allowed to eat and experiment on non-human animals simply on the basis of 'morally irrelevant' factors such as their supposed intelligence, inability to talk or the species they belong to is what has been termed 'speciesist', i.e. discriminating against some animals simply because they are not human. One of the things that they ask is "if we don't kill and eat humans who are incapable of speaking or showing intelligence then why should we be allowed to do it to animals?" However, Cora Diamond, a vegetarian, has criticised them for using this as a basis for their argument.⁴⁶ Would-be proponents of allowing people to engage in cannibalistic acts out of choice can indeed use Singer and Regan's arguments to their favour. After all, they can say "I don't discriminate; I'd happily eat human beings." Of course, there would still be issues surrounding raising non-human animals for food and raising humans for food (certainly the idea of 'human farms', where humans are raised and then slaughtered, is enough to send a chill

⁴⁴ (World Resources Institute, 2007)

⁴⁵ See (Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1995) and (Regan, 2004)

⁴⁶ (Diamond, 1978)

down anyone's spine) but the general permissibility is supported by Singer: if you're not against eating non-human animals then you shouldn't be against eating humans *on the basis that 'they are human'*.

The argument from organ transplantation has shown that there are great similarities between using someone's organs to save a life and using someone's flesh. If one is for organ transplantation then it follows that one should also be for necro-cannibalism, if it will save lives. Certainly, it would require conquering some repugnant feelings. If we value human life as much as we do then our feelings should not get in the way of that. As Simpson writes, it may be "disagreeable and distressing, [but] it is difficult to see any moral objection to this."⁴⁷ Indeed, the moral objections to organ transplantation can also be applied to necro-cannibalism. If one's religion, for instance, makes one an absolutist against organ transplantation then one would also be absolutely against necro-cannibalism. However, issues surrounding consent apply to both organ donation and necro-cannibalism. If one does not consent before one's death then there is a 'grey area' – on the one hand we wish to play it safe and not interfere with the decedent unless they specifically gave consent, and on the other we feel as if there is almost a 'duty' for that person to do so. Many feel that if the majority of people are in support of organ donation then in these 'grey' cases we are permitted to remove their organs in order to save lives. When it comes to explicitly withholding consent then we are faced with a situation where someone will

⁴⁷ (Simpson, 1986) p. 122

die, even though we have the means to save them but we are unable to use them. Here it was acknowledged that there is a conflict: either we respect the wishes of the dead or we forcefully remove them. The latter seems to undermine democratic ideals and thus coercion in this matter was rejected.

When it comes to killing people for food it was argued that this too can be morally justifiable. However, there are conditions to be met. Firstly, we must respect the individuality of each person. When we kill someone for the 'greater good' we violate the Kantian principle of treating each person not as a means to an end but as an end in itself. The dangers of this were presented in the form of the Survival Lottery where healthy people are viewed as 'spare parts' for the sick and elderly. The problem with this was that healthy people had nothing to gain from this arrangement – they were being made to face all the risk and not stand a chance of benefitting. This works well as an analogy for the case of the Mignonette. The solution to this problem was to hold a lottery *but* one where each person stood an equal chance of facing the risk and the benefit. Furthermore it was argued, using Savulescu's ES Cell Lottery, that even if it involves killing a human being such a lottery can actually be risk deductive – even though one person is certain to die, the chance of each individual dying is reduced. It was on these grounds that a system built on the ES Cell Lottery was accepted as morally permissible. It may, in fact, be argued that it is *more* ethical to run the lottery than to do nothing at all.

Finally, if one were to try to argue for the moral permissibility of engaging in cannibalism out of choice, without the constraints of starvation or dehydration, then there is a part in Douglas Adams's *Restaurant at the End of the Universe* which may be particularly insightful. Arthur Dent and his companions are at the Restaurant and are sitting down for a meal when the waiter recommends an Ameglian Major Cow, a ruminant not only bred with the desire to be eaten but also intellectually capable of clearly and distinctly expressing as much. The cow is brought in and is quite vocal about its desire to be eaten and proceeds to recommend parts of its body for consumption. Arthur makes his revulsion quite vocal, expressing his desire for a salad instead. Zaphod Beeblebrox, however, unfazed by the cow's offer, poignantly states, "Better than eating an animal that doesn't want to be eaten."⁴⁸ If a man wishes to be eaten, who are we to stop him? Could it even be *more* ethical to eat humans than other animals?

⁴⁸ (Adams, 1989) p. 228

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