The citizen, the market and the law

edited by:
Helena Röcklinsberg
Per Sandin

The ethics of consumption

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Per Sandin

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Preface

In bringing about the 11th Congress of the European Society for Agricultural and Food Ethics and the present volume, several things have been consumed: Food and drink, paper, jet fuel, numerous services, electricity, ink, and a host of other things. This has consequences of moral importance.

The theme for the congress and this volume is 'The ethics of consumption'. We are all consumers in the sense that we need to consume food, water and other nutrients that we ingest to keep our bodies functioning. But we are also consumers in a slightly different sense: we *buy* things with money – not only food and agricultural products, but a host of other items as well.

While arguably remarkably efficient, the present system for agriculture and food production involves a number of detrimental consequences for human health, the environment, and animal welfare. Great challenges lie ahead as we are facing population growth and climate change and reduced availability of fossil fuels. In the future, how we manage agriculture, agricultural land and biobased goods and services, including biofuels, as well as water resources, can be expected to become even more important than today. Arguably, agriculture and forestry contain some of the sources of these challenges as well as some of the most promising ways of meeting them. In addition, organic products and other products marketed with reference to ethical concerns have increased their market share, and for instance, some beef, pig, poultry and egg producers strive to make animal welfare a competitive advantage.

It is frequently argued that one key to meeting those challenges is changing consumption patterns among individual as well as institutions, for instance through reducing meat consumption, switching to organic or fair trade products, boycotting or 'buycotting' certain products, or consuming less overall. There is considerable disagreement regarding how to bring this about, whose responsibility it is, and even whether it is desirable. Is it a question of political initiatives, retailers and producers or the virtues and vices of individual consumers in the developed world, or something else?

Many of these issues pose profound intellectual challenges at the intersection of ethics, political philosophy, economics, sociology and several other fields. They touch upon problems of liberty and paternalism, distributive justice and fairness, responsibility and care, knowledge and uncertainty, the gap between knowing and acting as well as calling for definitions of key concepts like harm, welfare, integrity, value and worth – to mention but a few.

This is reflected in the contributions to this volume. EurSafe congresses have a tradition of being multidisciplinary meeting points, and to acknowledge also the disciplinary breadth – this year explicit in the sub title of the congress: 'the citizen, the market, and the law'. Hence, the 11th EurSafe Congress follows this tradition, and we hope this volume can be an inspiration for continued discussions among academics, practitioners and the general public.

Helena Röcklinsberg and Per Sandin

Keynote contributions

Economization of animals: the case of marketization of halal foods

M. Miele
School of Planning and Geography, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3WA, Wales, United Kingdom; mielem@cardiff.ac.uk

Abstract

Over the last 15 years the demand of halal meat has increased significantly worldwide and dedicated markets for halal certified meat have emerged in a number of European countries. While ethnic stores still constitute the major retail outlet for halal meat in most countries, 'halal' labelled meat and meat products are increasingly available in supermarkets and fast food restaurants. Market expansion has also facilitated the rise of new certification bodies, each with their own marketing strategies and interpretations of what constitutes authentic 'halal', who question the reliability of certification policies that allow the practice of stunning before slaughter. This paper, based on research carried out during the EU funded Dialrel project, I have attempted to investigate which activities, behaviours and fields are established as being economic while dealing with nonhuman animals, in other words, I have addressed the economization of animals via marketization of halal meat.

Keywords: Halal meat, religious slaughter, economization and marketization

Introduction to economization of animals via marketization

In a two part article in *Economy and Society* Caliskan and Callon (2009, 2010) have argued that the development of economic activities, their organization and their change-producing forces cannot be analysed and understood without taking into account the work of economists, in the most comprehensive use of the term. This argument is at the core of what is now called the performativity programme (Callon, 1998). In the last ten years an interesting line of research has been developed looking at the formative relationship between economic sciences and markets and it has helped to advancing the understanding of economic phenomena (e.g. Callon *et al*., 2007, Mackenzie *et al*., 2007, among others). Studies such as these have focused attention on a number of new and important issues, one of which has been named 'economization' by Callon (1998). This word is used to indicate the series of actions that form the behaviours, organizations, institutions and, generally, the objects in a particular society which are defined as 'economic' by experts and ordinary people, even though there might be controversies around these qualifications. As Caliskan and Callon specify 'the construction of action(-ization) into the word implies that the economy is an achievement rather than a starting point or a pre-existing reality that can simply be revealed and acted upon'. Economization is a multifaceted process and the study of economization involves 'investigating the processes through which activities, behaviours and spheres or fields are established as being economic 'whether or not there is consensus about the content of such qualifications' (Caliskan and Callon, 2009: 370).

In economics both formalism and substantivism suggest questions about the mechanisms by which either values and methods of valuations or institutional arrangements can contribute to processes of economization (Caliskan and Callon, 2009: 378). Marketization, with its monetary values and techniques of valuations, is one (even though not the only one) of the modalities for achieving economization.

The quality of life of animals, especially farm animals, is one of the most widely shared concern among European citizens (see Evans and Miele, 2007a,b). These concerns, however, are often associated to

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anxieties for the safety and quality of the food that is generated by these animals (Miele *et al.*, 2005). In this paper I want to propose to investigate this ambivalent relation to animals and which activities, behaviours and fields are established as being economic while dealing with nonhuman animals, in other words, I want to address the economization of animals. More specifically I will look at the processes and devices through which nonhuman animals become economic objects (e.g. foods) via *marketization*. I will argue that the economization of animals entails processes of market creation and market maintenance[1] with processes of consumers' *qualculations* (Cochy, 2008) and objects' qualification for example via food standards (e.g. halal). I will argue that animal food standards are powerful devices in the economization of animals. These standards are based on negotiations between different actors who speak of 'care for animals' (NGOs, animal scientists, members of the EU public....) or 'religious rules' (religious authorities), but are also affected by the meat industry and other actors in the meat supply chains who speak of 'efficiency' and 'efficacy', as well as new technologies in slaughterhouses and new intermediaries (Meyer, 2010), such as the accredited certifying bodies and their marketing devices. I will make this point empirically by addressing how the process of economization of animals is articulated in the case of marketization of production of halal meat.

The growing market for halal meat and other animal products provides a particularly good example of the complexities of the process of marketization of animals (Lever and Miele, 2012). It also exemplifies the multi-dimensional character of both 'halal' and 'animal welfare' definitions and the controversies that the qualification of 'halal' might generate when religious interpretations of animal welfare (e.g. 'animal welfare' already ensured by applying the rules written in sacred texts') are contrasted with the improvements of slaughter practices in terms of reducing pain, proposed by the scientific authorities (e.g. stunning).

This paper is based on research carried out in the European research project Dialrel, which started in October 2006 and ended in June 2010[2]. The project aimed at establishing a dialogue between the religious authorities and other stakeholders (NGOs, scientists, representatives of the meat industry, policy makers, consumers....) around the welfare of animals slaughtered for production of halal and kosher meat in order to promote best practices of religious slaughter and to benchmark the practices proposed by current halal and kosher standards (Miele *et al.*, 2010). Current practices of religious slaughter are increasingly a source of concerns among animals' advocates and part of the European citizens, especially for the growth of the demand of *non-stunned* halal meat, presented by some certifying bodies as more authentic 'halal', both in Europe and worldwide. The project researched the cultural and socio-economic questions characterising the growth of this particular market, as well as the ethico-political problems involved in addressing the welfare of animals at time of killing while respecting religious freedom. The initiative not only involved academic research but also the development of practical procedures, such as consumer forums and ways of gathering concerned parties – religious authorities, animal welfare scientists, consumers, commercial players.

In this paper I will present some of the project's findings from the double perspective of its contribution to the dialogic articulation between different positions as well as an intervention in the material (re) configuration of the 'object' itself (i.e. halal labelled meat). Here the 'product' is inseparable from the process and the agencies of the actors involved. I will address these issues in conversation with two processual theoretical frameworks, Callon, Meadel and Rabeharisoa (2002) approach to the

[1] As Callon has pointed out: 'The belief used to be that markets were quasi-natural realities, and theoreticians were content to identify the conditions of their viability ... We now realize that they have to be sometimes created from scratch, and that they are in reality fragile and complicated socio-technical artefacts. It is therefore necessary to reconsider the following basic questions: what are markets made of?' (Callon, 2009: 539).

[2] For a project description see www.dialrel.eu.

'qualification' of goods and Stengers' notion of Cosmopolitics (2005). From these perspectives I hope to reveal the ethico-political maze of concerns that are composing contemporary discussions around the certification of halal meat in Europe and to trace the process of economization of animals via marketization of halal meat.

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The virtue of simplicity[3]

P. Cafaro and J. Gambrel
Philosophy Department, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, USA; philip.cafaro@colostate.edu

Abstract

This essay describes and defends material simplicity as a virtue disposing us to act appropriately within the sphere of our consumer decisions. Simplicity is a conscientious and restrained attitude toward material goods that typically includes: (1) decreased consumption; and (2) a more conscious consumption; hence (3) greater deliberation regarding our consumer decisions; (4) a more focused life in general; and (5) a greater and a more nuanced appreciation for other things besides material goods. It is to be distinguished from simple-mindedness, a return to nature, or poverty. These ideas are illustrated through a consideration of food consumption. Simplicity is a virtue because it furthers human flourishing, both individual and social, and sustains nature's ecological flourishing. Cultivating simplicity can make important contributions to basic individual and societal flourishing, to individual freedom and autonomy, to living meaningfully and to securing the flourishing of nonhuman beings. The proven failure of materialism to further human happiness strongly argues that individuals try voluntary simplicity, in food consumption and within other areas of their lives. It also supports efforts to redirect politics in developed societies away from the pursuit of increased material wealth and toward the higher goals.

Keywords: temperance, flourishing, wisdom, necessities, luxuries

In her seminal article 'Non-relative virtues: an Aristotelian approach,' Martha Nussbaum provides a useful way to define and distinguish the virtues. 'Isolate a sphere of human experience that figures in more or less any human life, and in which more or less any human being will have to make *some* choices rather than others, and act in *some* way rather than some other,' she suggests. Crucially, to require the specification of a virtue or a range of virtuous behavior in this area, these choices must be important to people's well-being or flourishing. 'The 'thin account' of each virtue is that it is whatever being stably disposed to act appropriately in that sphere consists in' (Nussbaum, 1993: 245). The 'full or 'thick' description' of the specifies the characteristic thought processes, habituation and emotional development, ways of looking at the world, and other aspects of human character and training that help us choose well in that particular sphere. Those who reject ethical anthropocentrism, such as Louke van Wensveen (2000) and Ronald Sandler (2007), amend Nussbaum's definition to include a virtue's contribution to the flourishing of both human and nonhuman life.

Following Nussbaum's schema thus amended, we define simplicity as the virtue disposing us to act appropriately within the sphere of our consumer decisions, from food and drink to stereo and housing purchases to cars and airplane travel. As we understand it, simplicity is a conscientious and restrained attitude toward material goods. It typically includes: (1) decreased consumption; and (2) a more conscious consumption; hence (3) greater deliberation regarding our consumer decisions; (4) a more focused life in general; and (5) a greater and more nuanced appreciation for other things besides material goods; and also for (6) material goods themselves.

As Aristotle noted long ago, people may be much more likely to err in one direction rather than another in particular spheres of human choice, either due to human nature or to the pathologies of their particular societies (*Nicomachean ethics*, Book II, Chapter 8). In Athens in Aristotle's day, men were apparently

[3] This is a revised and condensed version of Joshua Gambrel and Philip Cafaro, 'The Virtue of Simplicity.' Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics 23 (2010): 85-108.

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more likely to err on the side of irascibility than 'inirascibility'; hence Aristotle named the virtue with regard to anger 'mildness' (Book IV, Chapter 5). In wealthy western democracies today, people are more likely to err on the side of overconsumption than underconsumption. Hence the term 'simplicity' is arguably a good one for this virtue (as long as we remember that underconsumption can also be a problem).

Simplicity overlaps with such traditional virtues as temperance (moderation in food and drink), frugality (the responsible and restrained use of wealth), prudence and self-control. Within the philosophical tradition, writers once routinely claimed that temperance, frugality and simplicity were keys to living justly and wisely. They were right. We see it as a glaring weakness of contemporary discussions of justice and wisdom that they rarely make this connection.

It is often helpful to consider simplicity as a virtuous mean between vicious extremes. However, like other complex virtues, simplicity appears to be a mean along several axes. Some of its associated vices have obvious names, others do not, perhaps owing to their rarity:

Vice	Virtue	Vice
	Simplicity	
underconsumption (poverty?)		overconsumption (gluttony)
unthinking consumption (carelessness)		overthinking consumption (obsession)
none; or crude consumption (asceticism, 'monkish virtue')		luxurious consumption
inefficient or pointless consumption (wastefulness)		hyper-efficient consumption (penny-pinching)
immoral consumption (callous, disproportional)		none; or, moral finickiness ('moral foppery')

Obviously, there is more than one way to go wrong in our stance toward consumption.

Treating simplicity as a virtue presupposes that through reflection, we can discover our deeper, more significant needs and goals; recognize some goals as ignoble, foolish, or trivial, and replace them with better ones; and pursue our goals more efficiently, with less waste and harm to others. By way of illustration, consider some steps a person might take to practice voluntary simplicity in relation to food consumption, as these relate to the six aspects of simplicity noted above.

Americans consume on average 25% more calories than necessary, on a conservative estimate (Putnam *et al.*, 2002). Today, three out of five Americans are overweight and one out of five is obese. This excessive consumption of food harms our health and quality of life (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Food overconsumption also causes direct and indirect environmental degradation, through habitat loss and increased pollution from agricultural fertilizers and pesticides (Cafaro *et al.*, 2006). Approximately 20% of American greenhouse gas emissions come from growing and transporting our food (Pollan, 2007). So here simplicity clearly demands decreased consumption (aspect 1).

However, whether we are talking about personal health, healthy communities, or healthy land, consuming less is not enough. We also need to consume *differently*. We may buy and prepare more healthy foods for ourselves; buy organic foods and local foods and eat less meat, all of which decrease environmental

harms; purchase more food directly from farmers at farmers' markets or as part of community-supported agriculture co-ops, to support small farmers and keep local agriculture vibrant. Such changes demand attention: a more conscious consumption, involving greater deliberation about our consumer decisions (aspects 2 and 3).

Many food simplifiers combine more conscious consumption with greater participation in food *production*: gardening, raising chickens or keeping bees, joining CSA cooperatives. Research shows that food produced in these ways is more environmentally sustainable and often more nutritious than conventionally-grown food (Felice, 2007). These activities are also often enjoyable and interesting, and connect people to their neighbors and to the earth. Similarly, taking time to prepare our own food and eating meals together offer important opportunities to connect to loved ones. Consciously taking such steps leads to a more focused life (aspect 4). It can further gratitude toward the many other species that sustain us; tune us in to nature's rhythms and details; and enrich our relationships with other people. In these ways, food simplifiers explore and sustain a wide range of nonmaterial goods (aspect 5) and come to better understand and appreciate the material realities of food production and consumption (aspect 6).

The example should begin to suggest how simplicity can contribute to human and nonhuman flourishing in important ways. It also illustrates several important points about simplicity as a virtue.

First, living simply is not necessarily simple. It requires deliberation: thinking through our choices and acting on our best judgment, rather than following the herd, or the blandishments of advertisers, or doing what we have always done, or what comes easiest. Thinking about our food consumption and improving it typically involve research and planning, and some of what we learn about how our food is grown will probably be discouraging or disgusting. Still, it is better to know the ugly facts and act in full consciousness of what we are a part of, rather than in ignorance. Simplicity is better than simple-mindedness, the default setting of many food consumers (an ignorance that the food industry spends many millions of dollars a year cultivating).

Second, though, simplicity *is* often simple: it often involves working our way back to simpler, less convoluted ways of doing things. When we plant and tend a garden, ride a bicycle and fix it ourselves, or sing songs with our children on family outings, these are relatively simple ways of satisfying some of our food, transportation and entertainment needs. The simplicity of such activities makes them less likely to stray from their goals and more likely to involve thoughtful activity rather than passive consumption. Their simplicity may make them particularly appropriate vessels for finding meaning, or expressing happiness and gratitude.

Third, simplicity is not a call to 'return to nature' in any romantic or primitivist sense. Old ways can be wasteful, or harmful; new ways can be an improvement. Similarly, simplicity is not opposed to technology, or to new technologies. It just asks that we consciously develop and appropriately incorporate technologies into our lives with reference to our real purposes and to their full effects on the world around us. Hydroponics has a role to play, along with sharing heirloom tomato seeds with the neighbors.

Fourth, simplicity is not poverty. Poverty is a state defined by lack, where people find it difficult to obtain the means to satisfy even the essential human needs – food, water, shelter, basic physical safety – let alone higher needs for self-actualization or creative personal development. Poverty means living in deprivation, against one's will. Simplicity is consciously and freely chosen. It provides greater opportunities than conventional materialism to achieve human flourishing, while poverty limits those opportunities.

Fifth, simplicity is a process, not an endpoint. Although we are *arguing* here for simplicity, we should not forget Aristotle's reminders that habituation is more important than arguments in developing virtue

and that virtue demands *phronesis*: practical wisdom, applied to the details of life. Anyone who has tried to cultivate simplicity in their own life knows that Aristotle was right. Creating a character, a personal infrastructure, and daily habits that regularly result in less consumption and less dumb consumption are difficult and ongoing affairs. Hence it is a mistake to look for particular markers that indicate the presence of this virtue (although it is not a mistake, but good practice, to set down markers for ourselves and strive to achieve them).

Sixth, simplicity is not uniformity. There are as many ways to cultivate simplicity in our food or other consumption decisions as there are ways to complexify them. Different people will focus on different aspects of these problems, and our solutions should play to our individual interests and strengths (maybe you'd rather brew beer than raise tomatoes; perhaps you're the cook, not the gardener, in the family). Hence lives and lifestyles will legitimately differ. Simplicity need not limit diversity.

Seventh, simplicity, like all the virtues, needs to be cultivated by individuals and families, but also encouraged and sometimes mandated by society, if we hope to secure human and nonhuman flourishing. The very term *voluntary* simplicity emphasizes voluntarism, while most of the literature on material simplicity focuses on individual and small-group action. But this is arguably a failure of this literature (Claxton, 1994). Jerome Segal (1999) argues convincingly that creating less materialistic societies will demand fundamental political changes. Discussing the United States, Segal emphasizes changes in economic policy that would help safeguard basic physical and economic security, and thus make it easier for individuals to freely choose less materialistic paths. Because we often 'consume because others consume' (Lichtenberg, 1998) and because 'what counts as necessary [consumption] in a given society' depends in part on 'what the poorest members of society require for credible social standing' (Schudson, 1998), enacting simplicity has an important political component.

Eighth (and at the risk of sounding grandiose), this short discussion of food simplicity suggests that material simplicity does indeed further justice and wisdom, as philosophers have long maintained. Modern industrial agriculture is callous toward farmers and farm communities, and grossly unjust toward its animal 'production units.' These injustices are sustained in large part by the ignorance of consumers. Voluntary food simplicity can help reverse this process, as we learn about food and act on what we have learned, try to appreciate the processes involved in feeding us, and honor the various participants in those processes (Berry, 1990). To the extent we use resources, take life, or cause pain when we raise or eat food, simplicity enables us to do so consciously and honestly. This opens up a space within which we *may* act justly and wisely. Note that simplicity does not *guarantee* justice and wisdom in this important area of our lives: it makes them possible. Casual participants in the industrial food status quo, however, cannot act justly or wisely in their food consumption decisions. Those options are not on the menu.

Some might say that what are really needed are better rules for how farmers should be compensated, food animals treated, and so forth. Then we could follow the rules and eat whatever we wanted, with a clean conscience. We certainly agree on the need for better rules: they are essential to furthering material simplicity politically, and thus helping create more virtuous and just societies. But rules will only get us so far. The world is an unjust place and seems likely remain so for the foreseeable future; hence we cannot completely rely on 'the rules' to tell us how to behave. Further, the idea of purely economic spheres of life, where we can choose freely – that is, without the need to consult anything but our own desires and whims, perhaps restrained by a few basic moral rules – is deeply flawed; part of the economistic view of life that has given us modern industrial agriculture in the first place. Setting up such 'duty free zones' blinds us to both responsibilities and opportunities. We think we are increasing our options and our freedom of action; instead, we find we have lost the ability to distinguish right from wrong, or quantity from quality. But acting on such distinctions, in all areas of our lives, is the very definition of wisdom.

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