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ANIMAL PEOPLE:
FREAKS, ELITISTS, FANATICS, AND HATERS
IN U.S. DISCOURSES ABOUT VEGANISM (1995-2019)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

Samantha Skinazi

June 2019

The Dissertation of Samantha Skinazi
is approved:

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Professor Sean Keilen, Chair

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Professor Carla Freccero

____
Professor Wlad Godzich

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Lori Kletzer
Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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2019

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Abstract

Samantha Skinazi

Animal People: Freaks, Elitists, Fanatics, and Haters in U.S. Discourses about Veganism (1995-2019)

This dissertation emerged out of my efforts to understand what keeps animal lovers or animal people from identifying as vegans. *Animal People* traces anti-vegan discourses, alongside problematic white vegan discourses, in the U.S. over the last quarter century in journalistic, film, social media, legal, and literary texts to tell the story of how an eating and living practice that seeks to reduce harm has become a subject of cultural ridicule. If one-third of Americans think that other animals should be protected from exploitation, then why are only three to six percent of Americans vegan? (Gallup 2015). *Animal People* explores this aporetic discrepancy by analyzing discourses that negatively construct vegans and veganism(s) as sentimental, militant, elitist, anti-American, fanatical, sanctimonious, and misanthropic. Each chapter also addresses problems in mainstream veganism as a counter-discourse, such as white privilege, single-issue optics, consumerism, and perfectionism. *Animal People* looks at the way many vegans and vegan organizations fail to address issues of race and class in access to non-animal based foods and in animal rights more generally.

Eating choices are complicated and contingent: they straddle the borders between the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. These choices, or lack thereof, are distributed unevenly along racial and class lines. Vast differences exist across communities and regions in

terms of what foods are accessible. Advertising by the government-subsidized animal-abusing industries and the artificially low prices of many foods made from and by animal bodies compound the confusion. The fact that other animals exist both as sentient beings *and* as food makes it uniquely difficult to discuss, let alone legislate, justice for them. Veganism should be a bridge to critical re-evaluations of our exploitative relations and the way these relations negatively affect the wellbeing of others and the planet—and not an obstacle to such re-evaluations, which are increasingly urgent, according to every recent major scientific study about the effects of animal-abusing industries on climate change. A*nimal People* tries to clear some of these obstructions to reveal ideological biases, larger philosophical, epistemological issues, and the way vegans sometimes perpetuate the stigmas.

Animal People proposes that these stigmas do a great disservice to other animals; the animal liberation movement; marginalized communities that have disproportionate numbers of animal-based fast food restaurants and lack access to fresh fruits and vegetables and bear the brunt of the environmental degradation caused by factory farms and slaughterhouses; and the planet at large, by keeping a large number of non-vegan animal people from taking animals off of their plates. People are far less likely to go against social norms in ways that threaten their social relationships to adopt an undesirable and derided identity position.

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For what it's worth, this work is dedicated to the nameless and countless animals who have been killed and continue to suffer mostly hidden from sight. May your stories see the light of day and may you soon be free from human exploitation.

Introduction: Loving Species

The idea of other animals as kin may be as old and as fundamental to human identities as the idea of certain other animals as food. However, the very boundaries of kin and kind seem to be drawn, not at the species line, but rather at the perimeter of our dinner plates. We do not eat our kin; those animals we eat are not our kind. In truth though, our lived relations with other animals contradict this precept. The same person who loves the taste of bacon also loves the latest Instagram video of a rescued baby pig getting a warm bath in a sink. A Gallup study in 2015 discovered the heartening fact that one-third of Americans think that individuals of other species ought to have the same rights as their human counterparts to be free from harm and exploitation.[1] The Gallup survey reveals the mystifying nature of our affective connections with other animals when considered alongside the following statistics: In the U.S. alone, almost 10 billion land-dwelling animals and 47 billion water-dwelling animals are killed for food every year, and depending on the particular study, only three to six percent of people living in the United States currently identify as vegan.[2]

This book emerged out of my efforts to understand what keeps people who identify as animal lovers or animal people from also identifying as vegans. If one-third of Americans think that other animals should be protected from harm and exploitation, then why are only three to six percent of Americans vegan? *Animal People* explores this aporetic discrepancy through a sustained engagement with contemporary discourses in the U.S. that negatively construct vegans and veganism(s) as sentimental, militant, irrational, elitist, anti-American, fanatical, sanctimonious,

and misanthropic. *Animal People* also addresses problems in mainstream veganism as a counter-discourse, such as white privilege, single-issue optics, consumerism, and perfectionism. Following the work of A. Breeze Harper, lauren Ornerlas, and Aph and Syl Ko, *Animal People* looks at the way many vegans and vegan organizations fail to address issues of race and class in access to non-animal based foods and in animal rights more generally. *Animal People* traces anti-vegan discourses, alongside some problematic vegan discourses, in the U.S. over the last quarter of a century in an eclectic body of mostly contemporary journalistic, film, online and social media, legal, and literary texts to tell readers the curious story of how an eating and living practice that seeks to reudce harm has become a subject of cultural ridicule.

How does one characterize a vegan? Sensitive, sentimental, maudlin, zealous, hostile, militant or just plain crazy? As far ranging as these descriptors may be, popular representations of vegan identities seem to agree on one thing: One is always vegan in the wrong way. A recent study that compared groups targeted by prejudice found "that only drug addicts were evaluated more negatively than vegetarians and vegans" (MacInnis and Hodson 726).[3] Vegans are often characterized as being overly sentimental and naive about the violent nature of the world; they are also characterized as being too violent or hostile in their defense of other animals. Vegans who are too consistent in their practice of veganism are seen as dogmatic, while those who are too lax are considered hypocritical, sometimes even by other vegans. Consumer-based veganism is criticized for being elitist, while activist-based

veganism is criticized for being militant. This wide range of characterizations suggests that there is something unstable about popular perceptions of vegans.[4]

While veganism seeks to protect animals from all of the many ways humans continue to exploit them, I have decided to focus on anti-vegan discourse that relates to the use of animals for food. This decision is informed first by the sheer number of animals killed for food. Beyond the scale of harm, my research leads me to think that the complex nature of food—as sustenance, tradition, psychological attachment, social bonding and celebration, normative cultural practice, unequally distributed commodity, government-regulated and profit-driven corporate industry—obscures the relationships and lived experiences created and sustained by what we eat. There is a disconnect between how many people feel about other animals and how they relate to them through their eating choices. The fact that other animals exist both as sentient beings *and* as food makes it uniquely difficult even to discuss, let alone legislate, justice for them.

Eating choices are complicated and contingent: they straddle the borders between the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. These choices, or lack thereof, are distributed unevenly along both racial and class lines. Vast differences exist across communities and regions in terms of what foods are accessible, affordable, or available.[5] Advertising by government-subsidized agribusiness and the artificially low prices of many foods made from and by animal bodies compound the confusion. Through all of these conjoined forces, myths about "meat" and veganism erase the lived experiences of

other animals, including humans, but especially those whose bodies are most exploited in and by the animal-abusing industries. Animal rights theory, like the work of Peter Singer and Tom Regan, has understandably focused the debate on the suffering of other sentient animals and human responsibility to prevent this suffering, while spending less time considering the particular nature of eating—meat eating and veganism—as psychological, emotional, and profoundly social phenomena, as do ecofeminists in the animal care tradition, such as Carol Adams and Greta Gaard.

We love other animals and (many of us) still eat them. Given this pervasive cognitive dissonance, it is not so surprising how hard American culture—funded by the meat, dairy, and other animal-abusing lobbies—works to disassociate "meat" from living animals. What may be more surprising is how readily popular discourse succeeds at disassociating animals from veganism, largely by focusing on vegans themselves (Cole and Morgan, "Vegaphobia"). The stories my dissertation will tell all suggest that one way our culture elides veganism's core concern with the wellbeing of animals is by stigmatizing vegan identity. *Animal People* proposes that these stigmas do a great disservice to other animals; the animal liberation movement; marginalized and racialized communities that have disproportionate numbers of animal-based fast food restaurants and lack access to fresh fruits and vegetables and bear the brunt of the environmental degradation caused by factory farms and slaughterhouses; and the planet at large, by keeping a large number of non-vegan animal people from taking animals off of their plates. People are far less likely to go against social norms in

ways that threaten their social relationships to adopt an undesirable and derided identity position.

In popular culture and casual conversation, the shape-shifting vegan haunts discourse and dinner tables with questions that destabilize some of our most fundamental assumptions—namely that other animals, particularly those whom we like to eat, exist to serve us. While this assumption may be far from anyone's conscious mind when sitting down to eat a hamburger, it is perhaps the reddest thread holding together the fabric of history. What the overly sensitive, sentimental, zealous, militant vegan brings to the table isn't so much bad manners as an alternate worldview that makes visible, or audible, the fact that meat eating is also an ideology. Melanie Joy, a social psychologist who writes about the psychology of eating meat, suggests that while veganism is framed as a choice people make, the decision not to be vegan is framed as a decision to be "normal." According to Joy, eating meat in the U.S. isn't really seen as a decision at all. Rather, it is seen as being "natural, normal, and necessary" (*Why We Love* 96). In *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* Joy explains:

> We don't see meat eating as we do vegetarianism—as a choice, based on a set of assumptions about animals, our world, and our selves. Rather, we see it as a given, the "'natural" thing to do, the way things have always been and the way things will always be. We eat animals without thinking about what we are doing and why because the belief system that underlies this behavior is invisible. This invisible belief system is what I call *carnism*. (29)

Joy's own story shows that the act of eating meat itself makes it hard to see or hear what might be wrong with meat eating and almost impossible to challenge the ideological notion that domestic animals should serve humans. Joy wasn't able to

consider the ethics of eating animals until she had already stopped eating them; initially she adopted a vegetarian diet for health reasons. It wasn't until a nasty food-borne illness from a hamburger landed her in the hospital that she decided to stop eating meat ("Melanie Joy"). Once eating meat ceased to be "natural, normal, and necessary" for her, she found that, for the first time, she was able to hear the ethical arguments for veganism in a way that made sense.

What if Joy's experience is a kind of microcosm for the relationship between meat eating and veganism writ large? The idea that certain animals exist to serve humans permeates our cultural waters to the point that the idea itself has become invisible. Seeing alternate perspectives requires us to come up to the surface of the water, but because meat eating is one of the central ways we embody speciesism, (literally incorporating it with every bite), each time we ingest meat we find ourselves back down in the sea—where vegan voices sound muffled, distorted, and kind of crazy.[6] This might help explain why despite the recent, and growing, mainstream commercial successes of vegan products and vegan lifestyles—plant-based Beyond Meat's impressive IPO in May 2019 and Carl Jr.'s widespread promotion of its new Beyond Meat burger, the projection of plant-based milk market to exceed 34 billion USD by 2024, the panoply of celebrities embracing veganism and partial vegan diets for health, like Beyoncé and Jay Z, and *The Economist* dubbing 2019 "The Year of the Vegan"—veganism and vegan identity continue to function as readymade jokes for almost any occasion ("Vegan Friendly, Celeb-Backed"; "Dairy Alternatives").

Consider for instance a joke from an episode of the left-leaning *Daily Show with Trevor Noah* from April 2019: Trevor Noah and Roy Wood Jr. are doing a bit about people who enjoy giving away the ending of popular movies and series, when Noah jokingly chastises Wood for being a spoiler and ruining social media (29 April 2019). Wood quips back "Social media was built on assholes like me. What do you expect from social media anyway? It's like the Wild West. You've got nazis, woke people, fake Russians, vegans. You think they're gonna all come together like: 'Hey, we all have our differences but let's not spoil Ms. Mazel for Trevor?'" Saving vegans for last on the list indicates that in one way or another they serve as the joke's punchline. The list suggests that aside from being "assholes" on the internet, what all of these groups might have in common is that they are culturally coded as political fringe groups who have gained what may be an outsized voice online compared to their numbers "in real life." Interestingly, the joke seems to tacitly acknowledge the political underpinnings of veganism, while simultaneously dismissing them in asking the viewer to laugh at the inclusion of vegans on this list.

All of this attention, both negative and positive, might have surprised the dozen or so members of England's Vegetarian Society who in November of 1944 formed the Non-Dairy Produce Group, which would become the first Vegan Society ("History"). It seems that the term vegan was first conjured to name a group that was itself an outlier: There had been many years of debates and discussion within the Vegetarian Society about whether or not vegetarians should consume dairy, largely due to concerns "about growing trends in dairy farming such as the removal of calves

prematurely from their mothers to be slaughtered as veal and the growth of TB in dairy herds" (Kean 203).[7] The non-dairy members had originally requested to form a group within the Vegetarian Society, but the Vegetarian Society suggested that the non-dairy proponents form their own outside group, taking what might be called the single-issue position that "the Society must devote all its energies in the direction of the abolition of flesh eating" (Davis, "The Origin of Vegans" 5). The original framing of flesh eating and eating what was then called animal produce (dairy and eggs) as separate causes reflects an originary division within the animal people movement, one seeming consequence of which is the continued misconception of veganism as an extreme form of vegetarianism. Donald Watson—one of the founding members of the Vegan Society, along with his sister Eva Watson, Elsie Shrigley and Florence and George Henderson—has explained that the term vegan is composed of the first three and the final two letters of veg(etari)an, suggesting that veganism takes vegetarianism from its roots to its logical conclusion. It is also critical to mention that veganism—as it was understood by its founding members—updates vegetarianism to address the historical and material conditions of animals living and being killed in the middle of the twentieth century.

Popular discourse often de-politicizes and de-historicizes veganism as a personal lifestyle decision, distancing it from the lived experiences of the nonhuman victims of the meat, fish, dairy, and egg industries. Another consequence of this de-politicization is that veganism is rarely situated within its historical coordinates as an interspecies pacifist movement rooted in the unprecedented violence of World War II.

However, animal rights historian Hilda Kean suggests that, for Watson: "World peace and veganism—the total opposition to killing of animals or use of their produce—were . . . inextricably linked" (203). For these early vegans, veganism was never a lifestyle or a consumer-based choice, it was the expression of the conviction that "animals should have justice on equal terms with humans, to protect both animals and humanity itself" (203). Watson framed it as a "reformed relationship between animals," arguing that: "The higher animals have feelings like ours, therefore they should have justice on equal terms with ourselves, or not be bred into the world" (203). In 1951, Leslie Cross, vice president of the Vegan Society at the time, wrote: "The object of the Society shall be to end the exploitation of animals by man . . . the use of animals by man for food, commodities, work, hunting, vivisection and all other uses involving exploitation of animal life by man." It is a fascinating and under-theorized phenomenon that an eating practice that aims at a relation of non-violence with all creatures should rise from the ashes of the same historical soil that had been saturated by the blood of 50 to 85 million humans. Equally under-theorized is the tragic possibility that such violence could have fertilized our cultural soil for a government- and industry-sponsored charge in the opposite direction: instead of re-forming our relations with other animals, the production and consumption of other animals intensified and accelerated in the wake of the war.

When this project began, its objective was to politicize and historicize our exploitative relationships with domesticated species to argue that academic inquiry, especially in the humanities, should devote critical attention to ethical and equitable

relationships with other animals as a social justice issue. My QE materials had pointed me toward a book that gathered analyses of postwar speculative fiction and animal rights theory to illuminate the interlocking nature of oppression against certain human and non-human animal bodies. The goal was to light a path toward more compassionate and ethical ways of living guided by our shared vulnerability and informed by the animal care tradition of ecofeminism. However, I began to realize the potential limitations of routing my argument through literary utopias. More than that, I felt limited by the defensive nature of my underlying motivations. During my time in the humanities I had noticed that questions of ethics regarding our commerce with other animals were largely relegated to the sidelines. Certainly there were designated niches, like posthumanism, critical animal studies, and ethics where academics were taking these questions very seriously, but outside of these niches veganism and meat eating remained what they are in popular culture: either a "personal choice" and therefore not a social justice practice, or (for meat eating) a mere fact of human life in no need of questioning, critical attention, or ethical re-consideration.

Whereas earlier versions of the project focused on stigmatizing meat eating or at least performing the kinds of analyses and close readings that would try to understand why and how meat eating and meat eaters resist stigmatization, I decided instead to analyze the stigmatization of veganism in U.S. media and culture. Having brought into focus the defensive nature of my own rhetoric, I realized perhaps that I had constructed myself as the stereotypical vegan the culture wanted me to be, in spite of my best efforts to do the opposite. I decided to re-frame my doctoral project

as a kind of typology of vegan stereotypes, influenced, in my approach, by the methodologies of cultural studies and discourse analysis. Michel Foucault's formulation of discourse as language and practice that defines and regulates the boundaries of what can—and cannot—be said about particular topics helped clarify for me why it was so challenging to write about veganism and meat eating without sentimentality, hostility, or sanctimony (1969; 1971).

As a counter-discourse, veganism is still on shaky ground precisely because it has constructed itself in opposition to a profoundly powerful and dominant meat-eating discourse. One of the motivating questions behind this project is: What does veganism say and sound like in and on its own terms, when it is not reacting to the dominant discourse? Moving away from argument and persuasion toward the project of mapping popular discourses about vegans and veganism reflects my desire to intervene in, while sidestepping, what is normally a polemical argument for or against eating animals. By attempting to suspend polemics, I hope to create a more neutral terrain where readers and author can meet cordially to consider the way that discourse about vegans both distorts and reveals what's really at stake in the seemingly banal decisions we make every day about what we put on our plates and in our mouths and the way many of those decisions are always already circumscribed by race, class, and gender.

It is important to take a moment to situate anti-vegan discourses along the fault line of the human/animal divide. My analysis of the way these discourses so easily neutralize the radical content of veganism has everything to do with the way

that animal existence is de-valued by the dominant culture; veganism is only laughable to the extent that it ascribes moral value and meaning to the lives of otherwise abjected creatures. The human/animal divide is the critical terrain at the foundation of anti-vegan discourse, debates within the animal rights/vegan movement, debates between vegans and meat-eaters, and human rights issues and violations. The term "animal" is a deeply ideological term that masquerades as both a scientific and an ontological category. Aph Ko, co-author with Syl Ko of the 2016 *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*, writes that "'Animal' is a category that we shove certain bodies into when we want to justify violence against them, which is why animal liberation should concern all who are minoritized, because at any moment you can become an 'animal' and be considered disposable" (131).

In *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, given originally as a talk in 1996 and credited by many as one of the texts that gave academic legitimacy to critical thinking about other animals, Jacques Derrida critiques the Cartesian lineage of western philosophy for its foundational assumption of an insuperable line between allegedly autonomous humans capable of response, on one side, and allegedly automaton-like animals incapable of anything but instinctual reaction on the other. What Derrida called "the question of the animal" invites a re-evaluation not only of the mal-treatment of nonhuman animals in western philosophy and practice, but also a reconsideration of whether or not "the human" actually possesses those attributes—like autonomy and response—that Cartesian philosophy has denied to the so-called

"animal." Ko and Ko redirect this inquiry toward what might be called "the question of the human." They theorize the implicit violence of the human/animal divide, but contextualize its particular use by European colonialism as a tool of domination. Their analysis of the human/animal dichotomy as a political and racial phenomenon stresses that human beings are also in need of liberation from this harmful divide.

In "Notes from the Border of the Human-Animal Divide: Thinking and Talking about Animal Oppression When You're Not Quite Human Yourself," Syl Ko writes: "Nonhumans, subhumans, not-quite-humans (fill in your favorite inferior label)—however you refer to us: we are all props of a narrative about 'the human,' a small group of people that are not just homo sapiens but an ideal *type* of homo sapiens" (73). It is not only the term "animal" that does violence, but also "the crushing weight of the figure 'the human'": "the human" is the central character in a colonial narrative that only grants full human status to those who are white, male, heterosexual, and "able"-bodied homo sapiens (Syl Ko 75). This idea of "the human" is not only as reductive as the idea of "the animal," it also generates the figure of "the animal" as everything, and everyone, this "human" is not. While some animal rights activists resist incorporating the question of race into discussions of animal liberation because they want to focus solely on the animals, any discussion of animal rights or liberation is also a discussion of race and all of the not-quite-humans that fall short of being granted full human status. This is why it is particularly important for vegan discourses and philosophies, which are still predominantly white, to pay more than lip service to anti-racist and decolonial theory by critically attending to the fact that

animal rights/liberation and veganism mean differently to those humans who are still not treated as fully human themselves.

The title of this dissertation, *Animal People,* from the expression "animal person," reinforces the positive valuation of "animal" as an adjective that modifies the noun "person," not in order to reverse the terms of the human-animal divide by placing the animal side on top, but to change the nature of the relationship between the terms. For Derrida, the word "animal" bears traces of a reductive violence perpetrated against the broad and infinitely diverse spectrum of the living; he finds a certain "evil" or *mal* in the second syllable of the French *animal* and prefers the neologism *animot,* both because it sounds like the plural *animaux* and because, when written, it foregrounds the importance of the *mot* or word itself. *Animot* emphasizes that *animal* is a word humans use to separate themselves from the rest of creation and to justify differential treatment based on this separation (Derrida 41-51). *Animal People* dispenses altogether with singular and static nouns—animal as adjective admits at the outset all the ways that animals have acted as modifiers and descriptors for human ideas, imagination, and practices, all the ways human worlds have been enriched by the existence of other animals; animal as adjective charts a course away from, while acknowledging, all the violence done to other animals and in the name of the "animal" to all of those humans who have been—and still are—considered and treated as more animal than human, moving the word closer to its Latin root *anima*—or breath, that animating and life-giving commonality that reminds us of our shared vulnerability and mutual dependency.

With Ko and Ko's idea of "the crushing weight of the figure 'the human'" in mind, *Animal People* deploys the adjective animal in all of its shape-shifting resiliency to transform into pluralities any singular determination of personhood or "the human"—people stands apart from person, they have different roots and different headings. Person is from the Latin *persona* for an actor's mask, though it now denotes legal status; people is rooted in the Latin *populus* which, according to the *OED,* denotes "a human community, nation, animals, the populace, the body of citizens exercising legislative power." A noun that can be either plural or singular, people always implies the relation of many bodies, human and otherwise; as persons we each wear our masks, but it is in relation to one another and to all others that persons become people—and the kind of people we become is determined by how we understand and practice the descriptive, shape-shifting possibilities of animal as adjective. *Animal People* also gathers with it all of the many things one means when one says "I am an animal person," especially the notion of defining one's person by one's love for other animals; it calls us to reintroduce love into conversations about justice and animals.

Animal People is a hybrid form that will be difficult to classify in the taxonomy of traditional literary scholarship. In the selection of its texts, *Animal People* resembles works in cultural studies: it has no canon and, for the most part, does not analyze literary works. It is, rather, informed by post-structuralist notions of what constitutes a text. Aiming to demonstrate and analyze distinct patterns in popular discourses of anti-veganism, *Animal People* weaves together a diverse

network of texts, mostly from popular culture. Using discourse analysis to examine social media posts and comments, popular film, television, and advertising campaigns, cookbooks and food writing, presidential campaigns and speeches, congressional proceedings, and Genesis, the project finds through-lines that articulate the way vegans and veganism are discursively constructed in ways that invalidate and delegitimize their goals. In its style and desired audience, *Animal People* resembles creative non-fiction more than scholarship; it seeks to be conversational in tone, often relegating larger theoretical issues to the endnotes for readers who are interested.

Animal People will have a difficult time finding a singular academic home, but is probably most recognizable as a work in the interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies, though it is also in conversation with critical race theory, ecofeminist theory, and food studies. Critical animal studies is an activist-oriented engagement with relationships of power between humans and other animals. *Defining Critical Animal Studies* explains the field as follows: "CAS is a radical, interdisciplinary field dedicated to establishing a holistic total liberation of humans, nonhuman animals, and the Earth" (Nocella et al. xxvi). CAS, then defines itself as revolutionary and practice-oriented; it makes the personal political by asking its scholars, and potentially its readers, to bring their personal ethics and practices into line with the scholarly, critical work they do. CAS positions animal liberation as a social justice issue and urges intersectional approaches and solidarity with other social justice struggles, seeing sexism, racism, able-ism, and homophobia as growing from the same roots as speciesism.

Because *Animal People* focuses on discourses of anti-veganism, humans are its main actors; regrettably I have omitted any kind of sustained analysis of the affective lives of individual nonhuman animals. CAS works to give agency back to other animals and analyze other animals in their individuality as particular species, and as individual animal people. My work then might better take up residence in the emerging field of vegan studies, which is certainly a close friend of CAS. Laura Wright's *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror* (2015) theorizes a field that could be called vegan studies by analyzing the "culturally loaded term—'vegan'" in popular and academic discourse (1). In the same year Renan Larue, professor of French at UC Santa Barbara, established a course called Vegan Studies. He explains vegan studies "as an emerging field of research, which is about understanding the vegan phenomenon, from its first manifestations until the present time, and explores what is at stake with it theologically, morally, anthropologically, socially, or psychologically" ("Vegan Studies"). He suggests that in addition to intersecting with critical animal studies in its focus on the way that humans exploit other animals, it also "encompasses other fields, namely environmental studies and nutrition, which play an important role in the way veganism has been perceived, promoted, or criticized in the last few decades and today" ("Vegan Studies").

The idea for *Animal People* emerged most directly from a groundbreaking article published in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 2011, "Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers." In it, Matthew Cole and Karen Morgan looked at every

occurrence of the words “vegan” and “veganism” in UK journalism in 2007; they found that 74% were negative, 5.5% positive, and the remainder neutral (138). The article analyzes the main categories of vegan stereotypes across all of the texts, discovering that the dominant meat-eating discourse portrays vegans in derogatory and discrediting ways. Cole and Morgan identify the following anti-vegan discourses: ridiculing veganism, equating it with asceticism, describing it as difficult to sustain, calling it a fad, and calling vegans oversensitive or hostile. They argue that this is an example of vegaphobia: it simply mimics speciesism by transferring the prejudice to the humans who fight against it. At present, there is no full-length study of the way discourse in the U.S. negatively shapes our perceptions of veganism.

Veganism should be a bridge to critical re-evaluations of our exploitative relations with other animals and the way these relations negatively affect the wellbeing of other animals, other humans, and the planet—and not an obstacle to such re-evaluations, which are increasingly urgent, according to every recent major scientific study about the effects of animal agriculture on climate change. *Animal People* tries to clear some of these obstructions by tracing the historical and literary provenance of what my research identifies as the most prevalent and damaging anti-vegan stigmas in the U.S.: vegans as elitists, vegans as freaks, and vegans as fanatics, to reveal ideological biases, larger philosophical and epistemological issues, and the way vegans themselves sometimes reinforce and perpetuate the stigmas. *Animal People* begins in the psychological and emotional realm with "Freaks," examining the way that gendered stereotypes about vegans as irrational work to justify violence

against them, while the stigma of veganism as utopic works to justify continued violence against other animals. It then moves to the political and socio-economic realm with "Elitists," exploring the way that veganism and food access are racialized and looking at the larger political implications of veganism-as-elitism and meat-eating-as-populism. Finally, "Fanatics" considers veganism in relation to the spiritual and existential, trying to disarticulate the vegan diet from its historical associations with religious practice and discourse, while re-articulating vegan philosophy with longstanding spiritual ideas about kinship among living creatures and *ahimsa*-based practices of non-harm. *Animal People* concludes with a brief afterword, "Haters," reflecting on the idea of vegans as misanthropes and the strange notion that loving other animals comes at the expense of loving humans.

In May 2019, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), a UN committee, released a landmark report warning that "[n]ature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history," and that "transformative changes" are "needed to restore and protect nature" (Brondizio et al.). The production of food from the bodies of other animals produces, by conservative estimates, 18% of greenhouse gas emissions, uses one-third of the planet's land and almost as much of its fresh water, contributing significantly not only to climate change but also relatedly to the acceleration of species extinction—the IPBES report finds one million species of animals and plants currently under threat of extinction because of human activities (Brondízio et al.; Steinfeld). When the dust settles and either millennia down the line due to evolution and natural selection, or

perhaps much sooner due to a slow-cooking apocalypse fueled by our collective and individual choices *not* to make the "transformative changes" necessary to offset the effects of global warming and species extinction, how will *homo sapiens* be remembered, if we are to be remembered at all? Will anyone remember "us" as a loving species? Ag-gag laws may be somewhat successful in limiting public view of slaughterhouses and what are still euphemistically called either "factory farms" or CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations), but should any image of these "houses," "farms," or "operations" survive us, we might be remembered as the least loving species to swim, crawl, slither, climb, scurry, or walk upon this earth. Whether or not you've ever met (or been) a member of the vegan police, a vegan who won't stop talking about being vegan, an angry vegan, a self-righteous and holier-than-thou vegan, or an elitist vegan, practices of ethical veganism are part of those movements on planet Earth that have sought and are still seeking more equitable—and though the word is seldom used, loving—relations for as many earthlings as possible. At the very least, veganism can be an occasion to dwell on how we relate to other species and to members of our own. Figured more ambitiously, veganism might be an opportunity to dwell in a less violent, more just and loving world. I hope that bringing awareness to the deep psychological, racial, economic, and historical structures of our thinking about vegans and veganism brings that world one step closer into step with this one.

Notes

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[1] For a breakdown of the poll see Rifkin*,* "In U.S., More Say Animals Should Have Same Rights as People," *Gallup*, 18 May 2015, news.gallup.com/poll/183275/say-animals-rights-people.aspx.

[2] The number of aquatic animals killed every year in the U.S. does not include "bycatch," or all of the creatures who are caught unintentionally only to be released dead or dying; that would increase the number by 23 billion, nor does it include the 68 billion small fish that are killed to feed fish raised for human consumption. See "Annual U.S. Animal Deaths," *Animal Clock*, 2019, animalclock.org and "How Many Animals Does a Vegetarian Save," *Counting Animals*, 16 March 2015, www.countinganimals.com/how-many-animals-does-a-vegetarian-save/ for numbers and explanations of how the numbers are determined.

For surveys on number of vegans in the U.S., see Reinhart, "Snapshot: Few American Vegetarians or Vegans," *Gallup*, Aug. 2018, news.gallup.com/poll/238328/snapshot-few-americans-vegetarian-vegan.aspx; Šimčikas, "Is the Percentage of Vegetarians and Vegans in the U.S. Increasing?", *Animal Charity Evaluators*, Aug. 2018, animalcharityevaluators.org/blog/is-the-percentage-of-vegetarians-and-vegans-in-the-u-s-increasing/.

[3] This part of the study found that while vegetarians and vegans were evaluated more negatively than most other groups, including African Americans, LGBT community, and immigrants, they were less frequently the subjects of hiring and renting discrimination.

[4] Many writers caution against efforts to homogenize vegans, pointing to salient differences in socioeconomic positions, culture, and reasons for becoming vegan. For a discussion of the intersection of vegan identity and race see Harper 2010. For a discussion of vegan as both an identity category and a practice, see Wright 2015. Also, Robert Jones 2016, for his idea on "veganisms."

[5] Harper 2010; Harris et al. 2019; Williams-Forson and Counihan 2012.

[6] In *Animal Liberation,* Peter Singer defines speciesism as "a prejudice or attitude of bias in favor of the interests of members of one's own species and against those of members of another species" (7).

[7] For more on the formation of the Vegan Society see John Davis, "The Origins of the Vegans, 1944-1946.

FREAKS

In popular culture, vegans make good punchlines. A 2019 Hyundai Super Bowl commercial makes vegan dinner parties the butt of its joke that shopping for any car other than a Hyundai is like taking an elevator all the way down through levels of cultural hell: root canal; jury duty; middle seats on planes; talks with parents about sex. "Vegan dinner party" is the fifth floor down, just above typical car shopping. As the full elevator opens onto the empty vegan dinner party, the elevator operator asks: Are vegan dinner parties "even a thing?" ("The Elevator"). The commercial codes vegans and veganism as unpleasant and ridiculous, but also as subjects we enjoy laughing at. Stereotypes of vegans as freaks offer a kind of cultural permission to deny the content of veganism by making a mockery of its form. Vegans are made fun of for being overly-sentimental and idealistic. They are also stigmatized for being hostile and militant. In both cases, vegans are cast as ridiculous for thinking it is possible to minimize violence in the world, particularly against other animals. Imagining vegans as overly emotional freaks is part of a larger narrative that claims that veganism is unrealistic because violence is natural and necessary. This chapter traces the narrative of veganism as both a ridiculous utopia and an illogical dystopia from standup comedy, memes, blogs, Michael Pollan and Donna Haraway, and food writing all the way to the 2006 Animal Enterprise Terrorist Act.

It seems fitting to begin with a utopian proposition: Imagine that it's 2076 and there are no more vegans. Slaughterhouses have been turned into museums where people speechlessly honor and witness what used to happen to animals. The

remaining survivors of the meat, dairy, and egg industries have been sent to recovery centers where they can live out their lives in peace. There are no more vegans because eating meat has come to be seen as shameful, not to mention illegal after the passage of the Animal Rights Bill in 2035. Veganism is now so pervasive that it has become almost invisible, and what stands out as abnormal is the carnism of the past.

Set in England in the last quarter of this millennium, Simon Amstall's mockumentary *Carnage: Swallowing the Past* (2017) humorously and sincerely imagines such a scenario where: "Empathy, climate change, and the improvements in nut cheese could no longer be ignored," while referring to the meat-eating past as "a time before empathy." Amstall's decision to attribute this widespread political shift primarily to empathy for other species turns the stereotype of vegans as overly-sentimental and empathetic on its head. Instead of seeing this trait as a liability, psychological weakness, or worldly naiveté, Amstall takes the stereotype to its logical conclusion imagining a world where at least one country has decided to be ruled by its empathy for other species. *Carnage* opens by playfully unfurling a related stigma about veganism—that it is too idealistic and ultimately too utopic in its scope. In the opening frame, a group of gender-fluid teens lounges together in a circle laughing and chatting on a grassy sun-drenched hill, feeding each other with chopsticks. By deploying stereotypes about veganism as a sentimental utopia in the opening frame, Amstall allows viewers to laugh at how ridiculous a vegan world might seem to them. He also simultaneously invites viewers to question what exactly we find funny about empathy and utopia. The narrator declares: "Though we rarely think about it, Britain

is now raising the most happy and peaceful humans, ever. Violence has been defeated by compassion. . . ." If this idea sounds ridiculous, we may need to deeply question how we've arrived at such cynicism and whether or not cynicism is really the place from which we want to envision our futures on this planet together.

By positioning this vegan future as a specifically utopian one, *Carnage* identifies a common thread shared by some vegan and anti-vegan discourse. Some vegan enthusiasts and vegan theorists situate their veganism inside of a utopian framework. The idea that being vegan makes the world a better place has become a common trope in vegan discourse. Many celebrities explain their decision to become vegan in relationship to a desire to change the world for the better: "When you think about a better tomorrow, you think about veganism in the world"; "I realized veganism is the only diet that can change the world"; "To become a vegan is by far the best way we have at this time in history to contribute to peace on Earth"; "with that one action of becoming vegan you are quite effectively making the world a better place" (RZA qtd. in "Wu-Tang Clan's"; Silverstone; Gannon 22-23; Moby). These descriptions of "a better tomorrow," "chang[ing] the world," "peace on Earth," and "making the world a better place" all readily fold the popular language of utopia into an understanding of what veganism means.

Some vegan theory and writers also situate veganism as a utopian project.[1] In "Veganism Contra Speciesism: Beyond Debate," Cole and Morgan write that despite the many "compelling reasons for veganism . . . we are still a long way from inhabiting a vegan world.[2] A peacable vegan future, in which nonhuman exploitation

is ended is therefore a utopian challenge to the prevailing order of things" (144). They delineate the utopian nature of this "peacable vegan future" as revolutionary in the kind of change it seeks: "While 'utopia' is often used as a pejorative in everyday speech, we use the term in the spirit of Karl Manheim's revolutionary view of utopia as being concerned with bursting the bonds of the prevailing social order, in this case the speciesist social order" (144). In the introduction of the *Thinking Veganism in Literature and Culture* (2018), Emilia Quinn and Benjamin Westwood look back to the UK Vegan Society's founding definition of veganism to articulate what they see as "two opposing poles" of veganism: "utopianism and insufficiency" (15).[3] The UK Vegan Society defines veganism as:

> a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—*so far as is possible and practicable—all forms* of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals and the environment. (*The Vegan Society*)

According to Quinn and Westwood, the ambitious and altruistic project of abolishing "all forms of exploitation" speaks to the idealizing, utopian impulses of veganism, while the pragmatic caveat "so far as is possible and practicable" gives voice to a realization that the ideal will never be realized fully enough. In their view though, veganism actually "derives its ethical force from th[is] confluence of utopian impulses and the acknowledgement of their inevitable insufficiency, or inconsistency" (15).

Interestingly, from food writing to academic texts to social media posts and online comments, veganism is also described as a utopic way of thinking and feeling

about the world in order to discredit its validity. Such discourse enacts a contestation not only for the possible meanings of veganism, but also for the possible meanings of utopia. In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), "The Vegan Utopia" is the sardonic title Michael Pollan gives to the penultimate section of his chapter critiquing veganism for being an unrealistic solution to the ethical predicament of being a human who eats other animals. In response to an op-ed by a pig farmer on *abc.net* from 8 May 2015 entitled "How to Deal with Vegan 'Abolitionists,'" someone who goes by the avatar "Politically Incorrect" writes: "If they want a vegan utopia, why don't they start convincing carnivores (including dogs and cats) to stop eating human flesh?" A January 2018 article in *The Telegraph* touts "Vegans Mean Well, But Their Utopian Vision Could Turn Our Fertile Lands into Desert." In the last line, the author, providing no scientific evidence to support his claims and instead relying on the trope of utopia as castles built in the air, admonishes us all: "Neglect its [the soil's] health, and like all utopias it will crumble into dust" (Walling).

All of these examples seem to mean more or less the same thing: veganism is unrealistic and it will never replace meat eating as the dominant ideology about food and inter-species relations. It may be a nice idea, but it is poorly conceived and overlooks the harsh necessities of life which must be at least in part brutal and violent. It is important to notice that these examples route their criticism of veganism through a wider critique and rejection of utopia, where utopia has come to be equated with fantasy and failure. Rejecting veganism on the grounds that it's too utopic entails

an implicit rejection of the value of imagining, longing, and striving for utopia—a foundational idea and practice in both U.S. history and the U.S imaginary.[4]

In "Some Thoughts on the Utopian" (2004), Avery Gordon contemplates some of the theoretical history of the utopian, drawing on writing about utopia by Engels and Marx, Marcuse, Wallerstein, and Jameson. Putting their thoughts and words in conversation with her own, Gordon develops "a vocabulary . . . for how people comprehend in a practical and embodied way the otherwise and elsewhere" (117). Sweeping Marcuse and Raymond Williams together, Gordon pictures utopia as "a place or structure of feeling where the instinct of freedom resides" (131). This place is neither in the past nor in the future, but in the right now, "in those scandalous moments when the present wavers, when it is not quite what we thought it was" (131). In her efforts to resuscitate utopia as not only an idea worth thinking, but a way of thinking in and of itself, Gordon also figures utopia as a "haunting" that is "disruptive and unsettling" and even "frightening" (129). Though she does not have veganism or animal rights in mind, the following thought articulates quite well both the interface between veganism and carnism and utopian thinking and capitalism: "The haunting presence of subversive forces and alternative values striving to become social facts is very frightening because it is a testament to the reality of living better and otherwise than we're expected to do. That indeed can make the present waver, make it not quite what we thought it was" (129). As "alternative values," veganism and utopia share this "disruptive and unsettling" quality, making both ripe for cultural ridicule.

Ridicule: That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore

> But the vegans were still ridiculous, and nobody wanted to put them on television.
>
> –*Carnage: Swallowing the Past* (2017)

In an appearance on Conan O'Brien in 2012, comedian Myq Kaplan did something vegans are often criticized for not being able to do: he made fun of himself as a vegan. Beating the usual jokes to the punch, he quipped: "Vegans live up to 15 years longer 'cause we're not invited to anything fun or dangerous. So we sit at home crying and drinking, being careful not to cry into the drink, because tears are a product of animal suffering" ("Kaplan Standup," 15 Februaty 2012). It may be important for vegans to develop thicker skins and more nuanced senses of humor about how incongruous vegan practices and values may appear to the dominant meat-eating culture. Here, Kaplan brings his experience as a vegan to bear on some of the usual ways vegan behaviors can be held up as beneficial and healthy at the very same moment that they are put down as also being limiting and ridiculous.[5] Kaplan begins with one cultural meaning of veganism: plant-based eating is healthy and can increase longevity, but then shows how quickly this positive meaning is undercut by pejorative ones.[6] Vegans may be healthy, but that comes at the price of being joyless recluses who are so overly sensitive that even our own tears present us with an ethical conundrum.

Kaplan's comedy seems like a successful vegan strategy because it is able to transcend poking fun at individuals (vegan or non-vegan) to create space for laughter about the stereotypes themselves. Stereotypes such as the miserable and tearful but

long-living vegan "[draw] on a presumed status of veganism as self-evidently ridiculous" ("Vegaphobia," Cole and Morgan 140). In Matthew Cole and Karen Morgan's 2011 study of veganism in UK journalism, "Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism," they found "ridiculing veganism" to be the most prevalent derogatory discourse.[7] Such representations frame vegans and veganism as subjects of ridicule par excellence, and range in gravity from jokes that present veganism as an "inoffensive eccentricity" akin to the belief in UFOs to homophobic jabs that mock veganism for being too effeminate (140).[8] A post on *Runt of the Web* called "28 Jokes about Vegans That At Least the Omnivores Will Find Funny," sums up the trend of ridiculing vegans quite well: "As a society, we have a few things that are always acceptable to make fun of: the Dallas Cowboys, the state of West Virginia, and of course, vegans."

Jokes that take vegans and veganism as a kind of straw-person for everything that is silly in the world quickly turn into jokes that suggest that violence against vegans is not only funny but possibly desirable. In this way, the discourse of ridiculing vegans seems to sanction the related discourse of threatening violence against vegans. Online you can purchase a bumper sticker that reads: Save a cow, eat a vegetarian.[9] While marginally clever in its activation of the linguistic proximity between vegetable and vegetarian, the snarky bumper-sticker quip also activates a more sinister proximity—that between the animals meat eaters choose to consume and those humans who choose not to.[10] Here the meat eater humorously suggests that the violence against other animals the vegetarian opposes should be visited upon the

vegetarian. Stuck in traffic behind a car bearing this bit of backcountry wisdom, vegans and vegetarians might do well to change lanes given the implicit threat contained in these words. While perhaps tongue-in-cheek, the call to metonymy here is frightening: we are told to eat (read: kill) a vegetarian in place of a cow. The vegetarian's sympathy for the violence experienced by cows is ridiculed and swallowed whole, as the meat eater doubles down on his or her own blitheness in eating cows: You think it's bad to eat (kill) cows, how about I eat (kill) you for dinner instead? The bumper sticker also makes clear a consistent tenet of these jokes: vegans and vegetarians are ridiculed *because* they over-sympathize with animals that others want to eat, implying that those animals are unfit somehow for our sympathy and rendering our sympathy ridiculous. Strangely, the bumper sticker also inadvertently draws the very kind of unsettling connection that elicits cross-species sympathy from many humans in the first place: cows, vegetarians, and meat eaters are all made of edible flesh, and are all in some sense in danger of being eaten.

Memes, the bumper stickers of the twenty-first century, proliferate similar suggestions of violence against vegans, but because of their reliance on visual cues over verbal ones they take the suggestions of violence a little further. Consider this recent meme bearing the heading "When you see a Vegan choking on something": Line drawings walk you through three frames detailing what to do when a vegan is choking.[11] The first two frames feature the recognizable choreography of the gold-standard in good Samaritan party tricks, the Heimlich maneuver. In frame one, the figure in the foreground is slightly hunched over pressing one hand to the nape of his

neck, while the figure in the background raises one of his hands to pat the choking vegan on the back. Frame two features the background figure wrapping both arms around the vegan's waist, while the vegan in the foreground slouches farther forward. The third frame delivers the joke in the form of a surprising twist: good Samaritan no more, the would-be superhero has turned into an acrobatic villain wresting the choking vegan over his shoulders as he hinges at the knees into a backbend that would impress Pina Bausch, lowering himself and the lifeless vegan down to the ground. No need to worry though, he's still a hero because he's only killed a vegan. That seems to be the general way in which the joke operates, suggesting somehow that vegans don't deserve to be saved or that one provides more of a service to society by letting a vegan choke than by saving him, or at the very least that the idea of pretending to save a vegan then killing him instead is funny.

Another meme suggests a "Fun prank to play on a passed out vegan," with a close-up photo of a young woman asleep on white sheets with her lips slightly parted, two brown paper takeout boxes right next to her (@trendingcurrentevents1).[12] One of her hands is tucked in cozily under her chin, while it seems a "prankster" (not pictured) has placed a half-eaten hamburger in her other hand. Based on the image and heading, one imagines that she will wake up horrified to see a meat sandwich in her hand. There are two kinds of violation at work in this meme, one visible and one metaphorical: a woman's choice not to eat dead animals has been violated while she is unconscious. Although it's unclear if any meat has been placed in her mouth, it seems clear that placing the hamburger into her hand while she is sleeping violates the

sanctity of her decision not to eat animals. The metaphorical violation is a kind of a rape "joke," which underscores the level of violence implicit in this "fun prank." Someone puts a piece of meat into an unconscious woman's hand. Even without taking into account that "meat" is commonly used as slang for penis, the insertion of a foreign piece of flesh into a woman's person or body while she is unconscious is suggestive of rape.[13] In this meme, violating someone's vegan convictions becomes a socially palatable way to joke about violating a woman's body. Once again, someone's decision to sympathize with animals is ridiculed to the point that it becomes socially acceptable to threaten this person with violence simply by virtue of her decision to be vegan.

A recent stand-up routine by non-vegan comedian Monrok brings the discussion of ridiculing vegans that began with Myq Kaplan full-circle ("Monrok Doesn't Know," 19 April 2018). In April of 2018, also on an episode of Conan O'Brien, a very pregnant Monrok did jokes about the burden of dealing with vegans, or as she says "veee-gans," just before launching into a lament about living in the time of #MeToo having never been sexually harassed. She begins: "Veganism, that's another thing now." Using a particularly nasal and impotent voice, she moves to imitating a vegan, saying haltingly: "I can't, I can't—I can't eat cheese. I'm sorry—I'm a, I'm a veee-gan." She seems to stumble over each word in apparent emphasis of its assumed ridiculousness. In speaking for a stereotypical vegan here, Monrok's ventriloquism mocks the idea of refusing to eat cheese as something that is inherently ridiculous. The pronouncement of vegan identity here follows on the heels of three

pronouncements of willful deprivation or refusal and an apology. For Monrok, vegan identity is something one has to apologize for, and moreover it seems that what's funny in her (and the audience's) estimation is that saying "I'm vegan" is tantamount to saying "I can't."[14] A recent survey (2017) came to a similar conclusion finding that people prefer the term "plant-based" to the term "vegan," because vegan has acquired the meaning "no, no, no" (Watson).[15] Monrok quips back wryly to the imaginary vegan whose subjectivity she has just momentarily inhabited: "We have a term for that in the third world; it's called poverty." Relying in part on the discourse of veganism as a kind of white elitism, Monrok's joke playfully chastises vegans for worrying about the wrong kinds of things and squandering the luxuries of living in the "first-world." She implies that simply making the decision not to eat cheese is itself a luxury and that "veee-gans" just don't understand the way the world works. In Monrok's logic it seems to work like this: if you can afford to eat cheese, then you'd be a fool not to!

The ironies here illustrate how systemic and invisible speciesism has become. Monrok ridicules vegans for misunderstanding the issue of world hunger. This anti-vegan trope frames veganism as an elite diet, while ignoring the grave impact that the dairy and meat industries have on the planet. A 2006 study led by Henning Steinfeld for the U.N.'s Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) *Livestock's Long Shadow* found that not only is the meat and dairy sector responsible for producing 18% of greenhouse gas emissions, it is also responsible for significant land and water degradation. Steinfeld, the report's senior author and the Chief of FAO's Livestock

Information and Policy Branch has stated: "Livestock are one of the most significant contributors to today's most serious environmental problems. Urgent action is required to remedy the situation" (qtd. in "Livestock Major Threat").

The other level of irony is that, a pregnant woman, who one imagines will soon be nursing her new-born with her own milk, sees no reasons other than poverty to just say no to cheese. Just a few facts from the story of your average dairy cow and calf illustrate why Monrok might easily sympathize with them instead of ridiculing vegans for doing so. Like, humans, of course dairy cows only produce milk for their babies. A dairy cow is usually forced to stand on metal floors with little room to move. She is forcibly impregnated by a human fist that injects bull semen into her, often while she is immobilized by a "rape-rack" (a term used in the dairy industry). When she gives birth, her calf is forcibly taken from her almost immediately, often amidst wailing and crying by both mother and calf—if the calf is female then she will either be killed immediately for soft leather or be raised as a dairy cow; if the calf is male then he will likely be confined in a veal crate for thirty days till he's killed. The mother cow will continue to lactate in the absence of her calf, up to one hundred pounds of milk a day, ten times a healthy level due to genetic manipulation (Regan, *Empty Cages* 98). Once she stops producing milk, she is impregnated again and subjected to this same process. After about five years of this, a dairy cow is considered to be "spent" and is taken to the slaughterhouse to be killed for hamburger meat.[16]

The vegan at the imaginary cheese party opts for hummus or nut-based cheese because she thinks that a cow's milk is for a calf and doesn't want to help fund this process—not because the vegan is oblivious to world hunger. Soon-to-be mom Monrok is able to overlook what might be a point of identification between herself and a dairy cow in part because the discourse of ridiculing vegans has more cultural resonance—and is more familiar—than the discourse of cross-species sympathy, which, at least in the case of humans empathizing with cows, and at least for now, still sounds ridiculous.[17] Far from deciding that her own pregnancy might be a reason to start joking about our addiction to cheese despite its ethically onerous provenance instead of joking about vegans, Monrok decides the real problem is neither human poverty nor the suffering of cows. The real problem is the existence of vegans. She arrives at the punchline, just after her comment about third-world terminology, by declaring out of the blue: "I think we should just take all the vegans and then throw them out in the wild so that they get eaten by the animals they spent their lives trying to save. Screw 'em!" Within less than a minute, ridiculing vegans becomes license to joke about rounding up "all the vegans" so that they get eaten, or killed.

Here the underlying logic operating in the earlier examples of the bumper sticker about eating vegetarians and the memes about the choking vegan and the unconscious vegan is made plain: Because vegans object to violence against other animals, it is funny to think about subjecting them to that violence. Because they empathize with the experience of other animals, it is humorous to some to imagine putting vegans through similar experiences. From the dominant meat-eating

perspective, vegans make the mistake of putting other animals on a level that should be reserved for humans. This transgression is treated with a temporary loss of human status, at least at the level of discourse. The jokes seem to stake human identity on the act of eating meat—those who choose not to eat meat aren't fully human and so it becomes socially acceptable to laugh at the idea of treating them like the very animals they want to protect, revealing a deep anxiety about widening our circle of compassion or ethics. Laughing at vegans because their eating practices go against social norms is one thing, but what animates this strain of violence in comedy about veganism?

Do jokes about killing vegans belie some widespread cultural discomfort with the killing of other animals that vegans oppose? The logic might go something like this: It's too painful to take seriously vegan claims against the daily massacre of other animals and it would be too uncouth to mock the suffering of other animals, so instead the culture mocks those who sympathize with that suffering. In this way, the jokes make the claim that the suffering itself is not subject to ridicule, but the act of sympathizing with it is ridiculous—therefore we don't really need to think about the suffering. "The Psychology of Eating Animals", a study into the social psychology of eating meat found that in order to alleviate the "meat paradox," or the predicament of eating meat and also caring about animals, people who choose to continue eating meat tend to attribute less intelligence or mindedness to "food" animals as well as less capacity to suffer (Loughnan et al.). Perhaps the same principle applies to popular perceptions of vegans. The 2014 study, conducted by Steve Loughnan, Brock

Bastian, and Nick Haslam, suggests that "an animal's perceived mind and its perceived similarity to humans are key factors influencing people's willingness to eat it" (105). A 2012 publication by the same researchers, "Don't Mind Meat? The Denial of Mind to Animals Used for Human Consumption," also found that there is relative flexibility in the way people perceive animals' minds and their similarities to humans depending on whether the animal is considered a "food" animal and whether or not the person is about to eat or has just eaten meat (Bastian et al.). The researchers argue "that meat eaters go to great lengths to overcome these inconsistencies between their beliefs and behaviors" (247). Perhaps vegans appear more ridiculous and more subject to ridicule depending on similar variables.

Interestingly, in all of the examples of ridicule, the vegan and anti-vegan begin with almost the same premise: human and non-humans suffer in remarkably similar ways. The jokes we've looked at take the ethical point and use it to downgrade vegans to animal status, trying to imply that it's dangerous, or at least ridiculous, to show too much empathy based on this similarity and helping to resolve the "meat paradox." The violent strain in this comedy bears a subtext: You have made the mistake of assuming that human and nonhuman life are equivalent, so I will punish you by acting as if that were true. The humor in all of these jokes seems to warn that there is something onerous about thinking ethically about other animals. The quick switch from dark humor to violence in the jokes also intimates a kind of "what's next" anxiety, somewhat akin to anxious quips from the far right that bestiality follows on the heels of gay marriage. If we stop eating animals or their milk just because we

recognize that they, like us, have an interest in surviving and in not suffering, what will we have to give up next?[18]

However, when it comes to our relationships and commerce with other animals fears about "what's next" are actually quite well-founded. One might accurately describe becoming vegan as an ongoing series of responses to the question "What's next?" that arise from the realization that eating animals is unethical. In truth, the majority of vegans begin as vegetarians who slowly come to see that milk and eggs are not only part and parcel of the meat industry, but also direct causes of animal abuse and exploitation, and many vegetarians begin as animal lovers who might start their journey with speciesism by deciding not to buy cosmetics and household products that are tested on animals.[19] So it would be right to say that what's next after one decides to stop abusing animals is to stop eating animals, and what's next after that is usually and eventually to stop consuming dairy and eggs. It certainly doesn't stop there; recognizing speciesism has far-reaching consequences in everyday life and conversation, precisely because everyday life in our consumer culture is built on speciesist products, practices, and language. People are often surprised to discover that there are animal byproducts in the strangest places—brightly colored eye shadow, white sugar, some beers and wines, plastic bags, to name a few. Zoos become problematic as do all forms of entertainment involving other animals; Thanksgiving dinner and meals in general become dilemmas to vegans living in a world that normalizes so many forms of animal exploitation—meat eating just being the most ubiquitous.

Such anxieties might be partially allayed by more fluid definitions of veganism, like the one given by Vine Sanctuary's pattrice jones: "For us, veganism is an aspiration rather than an achievement, and we see ourselves in a constant process of 'going vegan' by mindfully reducing the harms for which we are personally responsible (24). Similarly Carol Adams has said on her blog that: "The goal of feminist-veganism" is to position ourselves "as always struggling with the question of how we do the least harm" ("Another Feminist"). It's also possible that jokes about vegans take this violent turn at least in part because vegans have a hard time laughing at themselves. One of the primary functions of comedy may be to push those who won't laugh at themselves to admit that they too are laughable and must in fact be willing to acknowledge as much in order to be absorbed into the social order. However, understanding the clash of discourses that is often at work in these kinds of jokes helps bring into focus why many vegans fail to find them funny. According to Cole and Morgan:

> When vegans are researched specifically, animal rights clearly emerges as the primary motivation. It is therefore plausible to assert on the basis of existing evidence, that veganism is understood by most vegans (though not necessarily in these terms) as an aspect of anti-speciesist practice. ("Vegaphobia" 135)

If many vegans view their practice as part of an ethical social justice movement, it becomes more complicated to have a good sense of humor about jokes that frame it as a silly and unnecessary dietary restriction.[20] Cole and Morgan suggest that the focus on dietary restriction "tends to perpetuate a veganism-as-deviance model." In their analysis, "social dispositions against veganism" in the media "represent a key site for contestation of the meaning of veganism" (136).

In this contest over the meaning(s) of veganism in, Cole and Morgan suggest that one purpose and effect of ridicule is to empty veganism of its radical content, or to distance veganism from the plight of suffering animals. However, the idea of saving animals is linked directly to vegan and vegetarian identity in three of the four examples of contemporary U.S. discourse considered so far. The bumper sticker ("Save a cow, eat a vegetarian"), the meme about the choking vegan (or choking a vegan), and Monrok's punchline about leaving vegans in the wild to get eaten by the animals they've spent their lives trying to save all directly invoke the term "save" and the notion that vegans save, or think they are saving, animals. In all three of those examples it seems that saving animals or the desire to save animals is in large part the butt of the joke that allows the humor to frame veganism as a set of frivolous dietary restrictions. It is certainly fascinating that the main aspect of vegan ethics that this comedy identifies as ludicrous is the desire to save animals from human violence. This may reveal a deep cynicism underlying contemporary normative ideas about what it means to be human. These jokes seem to say that saving other animals is a utopian and ludicrous idea because we live in an inherently violent world. Ridiculing veganism also suggests that if you try to save animals from being the victims of the world's violence, you (and your bleeding heart) may very well stand in (or be made to stand in) as the ersatz victim(s) of its literal and metaphorical violence.

Empathy and Shame: Omnivore Dilemmas in the Vegan Utopia

> The objection to the killing of animals is equated with sentimentality, childish emotions, or "Bambi-morality."
>
> –Carol Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990)

> When truth cannot be realized within the established social order, it will always appear to the latter as mere utopia. This transcendence speaks not against, but for its truth. The utopian element was long the only progressive element in philosophy, as in the constructions of the best state and the highest pleasure, of perfect happiness and perpetual peace.
>
> –Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory" (1968)

Veganism is a haunting utopian presence lurking in the shadows and looming large in one of the later chapters of Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, which has become a must-read tome in the culinary world. It has also had a profound impact on the popular discourse of food and on popular perceptions of veganism. Published in 2006, not only was it a *New York Times* bestseller, but it was also given a slot in *Time* magazine's list of the 100 best and most influential pieces of nonfiction writing in English since 1923. After reading Pollan's account of what he calls "our national eating disorder" (not veganism, but the standard American diet with its industrial modes of production), Chef Alice Waters went so far as to say "I was Pollanized—and I am not alone." *The Omnivore's Dilemma* has likewise "pollanized" much of the contemporary discourse about, and especially against, veganism. Pollan has helped to articulate and popularize the stigma of veganism as a utopia, as well as the related ideas that vegans are naive, sentimental, and unrealistic while (human) "omnivores" are knowing, experienced, and realistic. The familiar "pollanized" story goes that vegans are (mis)guided by sentimental emotion, while "omnivores" are guided by practical rationality.

Like Amstall in his film *Carnage*, Pollan invokes utopian tropes to discuss vegans. Pollan invokes utopia though to foreclose a consideration of vegan philosophy and practice and his "reluctant...temporary" stint as a (steakhouse) vegetarian (313, 304-307). "The Vegan Utopia" is the penultimate section of his chapter on "The Ethics of Eating Animals," and is followed by his own quasi-utopia––"The Clean Kill." After sitting down to a steak dinner while grappling with Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation,* Pollan decides that based on the merits of Singer's arguments he will have to stop eating animals in order to properly ponder "The Vegetarian's Dilemma." He writes: "Like any self-respecting vegetarian (and we are nothing if not self-respecting) I will now burden you with my obligatory compromises and ethical distinctions" (Pollan 313). Much like the comedian Monrok, Pollan's momentary inhabitation of vegetarian subjectivity sounds decidedly ironic.

What Pollan discovers as a reluctant vegetarian is that eating animals is not only part of what he calls "our inheritance," but also an integral part of human identity: "the human desire to eat meat is not, as the animal rightists would have it, a trivial matter, a mere gastronomic preference...Rather, our meat eating is something very deep indeed" (314). As a vegetarian, Pollan says he feels alienated from family and cultural traditions that involve eating animals. Pollan wants "the animal rightists" to at least acknowledge what is "lost" when "giving up meat": "the sacrifice or sublimation of part of our identity—of our own animality" (314-315). While he acknowledges that "raping and pillaging" are also part of our identity and inheritance, animality to Pollan means being part of "the brutal, amoral world of eater and eaten"–

–and while sacrificing it might not be "necessarily regrettable," he figures it nonetheless as a loss and a sacrifice (314). Here, one might inquire of Pollan whether or not herbivores, like for instance the majority of land animals consumed by meat eaters, have also relinquished their animality—since it is really the experience of the eater that defines Pollan's identification with animality. In other words, there are many animals whose experiences and behaviors ought to be folded into our definitions of animality who cannot and do not consume other animals. Pollan's animality (a decidedly human concept to begin with) seems over-focused on the experience of the carnivore and predator.[21] His identification with the predator and not the prey, the eater and not the eaten, is in line with Marjorie Spiegel's theory that humans desire to identify with the victimizer and not the victim. For Spiegel this desire and identification are at the root of oppressive structures that underlie the exploitation of all species. One might also question the notion that humans—vegetarians, meat eaters, and vegans alike—could ever give up our animality, however one defines it, even if we desperately wanted to.[22]

Humans have long admired top predators like lions as kings of the animal world–-there is something about their majestic strength and grace, something about their ability to kill with apparent ease that fascinates and terrifies us, garners our admiration and even our envy. The tragedy of Cecil the Lion alone should remind us that the very prowess and prestige of the predator as the embodiment of a certain kind of thinking about animality has also made them preferred targets and victims of high stakes hunting enthusiasts. Much of the vegaphobic discourse that positions vegans as

weak, meat eaters as virile, and that insists on the centrality of eating meat to our identity as humans and as animals is saturated by a fixation on a very specific fantasy of what it means to be animal. Adams has written and spoken extensively on what she calls *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), the problematic and political way that meat-eating symbolizes manliness and power while plant-eating symbolizes femininity and weakness, and the way that patriarchy feminizes animals and animalizes women, particularly in the context of meat eating. In response to Pollan's notion of animality and specifically to the wild boar hunt he details just after he resolves his ethical dilemma about eating meat, Adams has this to say: "Even Michael Pollan...falls prey to the idea that men must fell prey" ("Five Myths"). She quotes Pollan: "Walking with a loaded rifle in an unfamiliar forest bristling with the signs of your prey is thrilling," and she quips: "For vegans, this cartoonish hunter porn is ridiculous. What Pollan sees as a dilemma, we welcome as a decision" ("Five Myths").

Singer is certainly a good dinner companion with whom to consider why the interests of other animals matter. However, Pollan's decision to base his entire consideration of "animal rightists" on Singer is technically misguided because Singer does not invoke the concept of "rights, " the philosopher Tom Regan does. Singer is a utilitarian philosopher who is concerned with the consequences of actions and argues that there is no logical reason *not* to include the interests of other animals into ethical considerations of those consequences. More importantly perhaps, Pollan's decision ignores work by other animal people that would have offered him an empathetic and relational approach to the problem. Had he perhaps also looked to ecofeminists like

Adams or Lori Gruen, he might have incorporated a fuller notion of animality into his thinking about what we lose (or gain) when we "give up" eating animals.[23] For many ecofeminists, animality means embodiment and though embodiment might sometimes mean power and strength, it always means vulnerability—even for someone as powerfully embodied as Cecil.

Feminists began to articulate the values and practice now associated with ecofeminism in the 1970s, at the same time that the current wave of the animal rights movement was coming into being. In 1975, the same year that Singer published *Animal Liberation*, Adams conducted over forty interviews with feminist vegetarians (or vegetarian feminists) to learn about how they understood the connection between being feminist and being vegetarian. (*Ecofeminism*, Adams and Gruen 10). One woman she interviewed said: "Animals and the earth and women have all been objectified and treated in the same way." Another made the connection to the sexual politics of meat and milk more explicitly: "Feminists realize what it's like to be exploited. Women as sex objects, animals as food. Women turned into patriarchal mothers, cows turned into milk machines. It's the same thing" (Adams and Gruen 11). More recently, Adams and Gruen have explained ecofeminist theory like this: "[It] helps us to imagine healthier relationships; stresses the need to attend to context over universal judgments; and argues for importance of care as well as justice, emotion as well as rationality, in working to undo the logic of domination and its material and practical implications" (1). According to ecofeminist theory, the logic of domination comes from:

> dualistic thinking (that creates inferior others and upholds certain forms of privilege as in the human/animal, man/woman, [white/black], culture/nature, mind/body dualism) as one of the factors that undergirds oppression and distorts our relationships with the earth and other animals. (Adams and Gruen 3)

In deciding on Peter Singer as his sole dinner and thinking companion about eating and animals, Pollan gives us only part of the animal people's story, one that allows Pollan to gloss over the importance of care, emotion, and connection.

What is called the feminist care tradition of animal ethics developed alongside the more mainstream version of animal ethics (fathered by both Singer and Regan). By telling the animal rights story according to its fathers while ignoring its mothers, Pollan winds up constructing an argument and a discourse that suffers from the very kind of dualistic thinking that ecofeminism and the feminist care of animal ethics have been working to broaden. The feminist care tradition places the ethic of care at the center of its analysis of our relationships with other animals, right alongside the idea of justice, which is at the center of the type of rights-based analysis Pollan pigeonholes here. As Adams and Gruen explain: "The feminist care tradition focuses on affective connections, including compassion and empathy, and shows how these connections have a cognitive or rational component" (3). This is not to deny the importance and influence of either Singer's or Regan's work in the struggle for animal liberation. Instead it illustrates that much of Pollan's criticism of animal rights emerges from his narrow selection of texts, and not from Singer's inability to provide a more holistic philosophical view.

Guided also by Adams or Gruen, Pollan might have felt less alienated in his nascent vegetarianism. Because ecofeminism is concerned with relationships, many ecofeminists write and speak about just the kind of alienation Pollan mentions, that can happen between vegans and meat-eaters.[24] One of the feminist care tradition's critiques of the traditional animal rights approach is that "[i]t sidesteps the complex social and political structures and ideologies that are always in play. It sets aside our particular concerns, our relationships, and the other things that make life worth living. It thus can seem rather alienating . . . " (Gruen 13). As much though as Pollan critiques Singer, at times directly for his abstract approach to ethics, Pollan winds up reproducing Singer's own privileging of rationality over emotion and abstract principles over compassion and empathy.

The idea that veganism is itself an overly sensitive and emotional response to what should ultimately be seen as a "natural" phenomenon (the alleged human need to eat animal-based meat) is itself a product of a gendered (read: sexist) way of understanding our relationships with other animals, both human and otherwise.[25] Being sensitive to the needs and perspectives of other animals is a behavior and affect that is largely associated with women and children, both historically and culturally.[26] Moreover, people who identify as female always make up the majority in all demographic surveys about vegans and vegetarians: A 2014 Humane Research Council study of former and current vegetarians and vegans found that 74% of current vegetarians and vegans are female; similarly a CDC health survey compiled between 2007-2010 found that 68% of self-identifying vegetarians are female (Asher

et al. 3; Juan et al. 8).[27] So it seems important to read stigmas like the naive, innocent, and idealistic vegan who is out of touch with reality and the predatory side of animality as part and parcel of a patriarchal narrative about eating animals and also about women.

What ecofeminists call empathy based on an understanding of shared vulnerability, Pollan characterizes as sentimentality that is out of touch with reality. In their research into derogatory discourses about veganism, Cole and Morgan found that:

> The image of the oversensitive vegan plays to stereotypes of the sentimental "animal lover" unable to cope with the harsh realities of nature red-in-tooth-and-claw. The typical form for this discourse is weak jokes at the expense of the vegans. These jokes usually implicitly or explicitly associate meat-eating with toughness and realism in comparison. ("Vegaphobia" 145)[28]

This passage from Pollan provides an example of how the discourse operates. Pollan writes:

> Having killed a pig and looked at myself in that picture and now looking forward (if that's the word) to eating that pig, I have to say there is a part of me that envies the moral clarity of the vegetarian, the blamelessness of the tofu eater. Yet part of me pities him, too. Dreams of innocence are just that; they usually depend on a denial of reality that can be its own form of hubris. (326)

Here, Pollan positions himself as self-knowing and worldly, a tough man with his feet on the ground who accepts the reality of killing even if it bothers him a little bit. He positions "the tofu eater" as deluded in his or her imagined innocence, and prideful in his or her preference for a moral fantasy that can only come at the price of denying reality.

Another related example of anti-vegan discourse that devalues sentimentality while privileging "real-world" toughness can be seen in a March 2018 blog post by Republican Congressman Steve King (Iowa) on his website *steveking.house.gov*. King "is proud to announce" that his record on animal welfare issues has earned him "a score of ZERO on the Humane Society's (HSUS) latest Congressional scorecard." The post features a picture of King and his adult son sitting on the steps of a wooden porch, their dog Alice sitting in between them and their rifles propped up prominently in between each of their legs. At their feet lie six dead pheasants. At the end of his blog post, King shares his favorite pheasant soup recipe and invites constituents to try it out and share their own in return:

> There is little I enjoy more than hunting these glorious birds and preparing them in accordance with family tradition to provide my loved ones with a delicious meal...We carnivores won't be intimidated by anyone in the 'Vegan Lobby' who can be chased out of the room with a raw pork chop.

King invalidates the perspective of the mostly apocryphal "Vegan Lobby" by painting a cartoonish picture of the overly sentimental vegan who isn't even tough enough to stand up to a pork chop. King identifies himself and his supporters as proud "carnivores" who prove their toughness by standing up to dead animals and by shooting live ones out of the sky. According to King, vegans should not be taken seriously precisely because they are sensitive to the suffering of other animals, symbolized by the raw pork chop. King is so thoroughly steeped in the "nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw" discourse that he can only frame the interaction with the "Vegan Lobby" as a kind of a chase or hunt based on power and intimidation.[29] King's

carnivores need not worry, with rifles, the dominant discourse, and the meat lobby on their side they still have the pheasants and the vegans under control.

Ironically, both Pollan and King invoke a nostalgic sentimentality for the tradition of killing animals (hunting, family recipes) in their critiques of vegan sentimentality toward other animals. Pollan, in particular, winds up sounding very sentimental and even wistful about meat eating and about a time when humans had a less complicated relationship with eating animals. He laments the loss of our inheritance and the sacrifice of our identity. He proposes that the rising interest in veganism and vegetarianism might be attributed to a break down of "cultural norms and rituals that used to allow people to eat meat without agonizing about it" (306). He muses that: "Perhaps as the sway of tradition in our eating decisions weakens habits we once took for granted are thrown up in the air, where they're more easily buffeted by the force of a strong idea or the breeze of fashion" (Pollan 306). It seems Pollan would like to go back to a simpler time when tradition held sway over eating decisions and when deeply entrenched cultural norms and rituals allowed people to eat meat without thinking too much about it. However, it is unclear whether or not this time ever existed; Renan Larue's recent *Végétarisme et ses ennemis: 25 siècles de débats* that surveys the long history of our misgivings about eating meat certainly indicates otherwise. What remains clear though is that Pollan would like to have his meat be ethically uncomplicated and eat it too.

Pollan's narrative about "The Vegan Utopia" has become quite pervasive. According to this story, veganism, or "the blamelessness of the tofu eater" is a "denial

of reality" based on "sentimental conceit[s]" and "dreams of innocence" (326, 319, 326). Pollan chides: "[T]he animal rightists betray a deep ignorance about the working of nature" (320). He makes the claim that there is no "good life" out there for domesticated animals—it "simply doesn't exist, cannot be achieved apart from humans—apart from our farms and our meat eating" (320). Sunaura Taylor, a vegan, disability rights activist, artist and writer, has called this the "if we didn't eat them, they wouldn't exist" argument (119). From a disability perspective this statement is all the more troubling because of the assumptions it makes about who gets to exist and why. One need look no further than *Loving Animals, Toward a New Animal Advocacy* (2011) written by Kathy Rudy, a professor of ethics and women's studies, to see how pervasive this "pollanized" discourse has become. Explaining the background of *Loving Animals* on the University of Minnesota Press's blog, Rudy, who tried being vegan for a year, writes:

> The idea that our life's meaning is only contained in our fleshly bodies is dangerous and untrue. If I were a pig or cow or chicken, I would rather be raised on a small farm and keep my kinfolk alive in this world than be banished from the earth altogether (as the vegan agenda advocates.) Making animal advocacy dependent on veganism is asking for species extinction, and is the opposite of what animals really need. ("With Veganism")[30]

Adams posted a lengthy response to Rudy's ideas on her own blog:

> But let me ask, why do you assume all domesticated animals disappear if we don't eat them? You presume an equation between their current ontological status as edible and their existence. We don't eat dogs or cats in the United States but there are plenty of them. There are many ways to be in relationships with animals. ("Another Feminist")

A strikingly similar variant of the "if we didn't eat them, they wouldn't exist" argument also appears in the work of Donna Haraway. In *When Species Meet* (2008), published just two years after *The Omnivore's Dilemma,* Haraway theorizes her notion of companion species. For Haraway, co-domestication has brought us, all of us (humans, other animals, bacteria), into what she calls "serious relationships among significant others" as companion species "*cum panis,* messmates at table together, breaking bread" (208). This is an important move on Haraway's part because with it she ascribes a kind of agency to domesticated animals that is usually reserved for humans. All companion species are partners in this mess. For Haraway, the answer to the intricate problems of being companion species is definitely not veganism, nor is it exactly Pollan's brand of thoughtful omnivorism. Though Haraway's thinking about the agency of human and non-human companion species differs clearly from Pollan's in theory, it's not clear exactly how it differs in practice. She sees our relationships with companion species as part of complex histories that we must learn to inherit more fluidly in an effort to "become...with them [domesticate animals] in a potentially less violent future" (105). For Haraway veganism is not part of this future: "Living in response to these histories is not about guilt and its resultant exterminationist solutions, such as shutting down all stock ranching, encouraging only vegan diets, and working against the deliberate breeding of herding, pet, and show dogs" (105). She is concerned with what she calls "multispecies co-flourishing" where:

> Try as we might to distance ourselves, there is no way of living that is not also a way of someone, not just something, else dying differently. Vegans come as close as anyone and their work to avoid eating or wearing any animal products would consign most domestic animals to the status of curated heritage collections or to just plain extermination as kinds and as individuals. (80)

The fact that Haraway's discourse makes both the grammatical and philosophical space for domestic animals to be "someone[s], not just something" distinguishes it markedly from Pollan's. However, it still bears resemblances to Pollan's language in the way that it frames vegans and in its "pollanized" presentation of certain domestic species as either edible or extinct. On the previous page Haraway warns against efforts "to pretend to live outside of killing," though she's careful to add: "This is not to say that nature is red in tooth and claw and so anything goes" (79). In trying to find a middle ground between this naturalistic fallacy and transcendental humanism (the idea that because of our big brains human interests automatically trump those of other creatures), Haraway starts to sound a lot like Pollan. Not only are vegans trying to "distance" themselves from the cycle of life and death, but these efforts are misguided because they would "consign most domestic animals to...curated heritage collections or...extermination." This is much like Pollan's "if we didn't eat them, they wouldn't exist" argument and likewise suggests that in their efforts to distance themselves from killing, vegans "betray a deep sense of ignorance about the working of nature," though she would call it natureculture.

For Haraway, companion species reside in a cosmopolitical world where nature and culture have become-with one another past the point of being pulled apart.[31] Pollan, on the other hand, rejects out of hand vegan attempts to frame our

relationship with other animals culturally and politically (320).[32] In essence what he is rejecting here is the idea of speciesism that he learned from reading Singer in the steakhouse.[33] He insists instead that our relationships with other animals—whether they take place in the highly industrialized slaughterhouse or factory farm, in urban restaurants and supermarkets, on the farm, or on the savannah—can only be understood as biological relationships that happen in "Nature"—whereever that is. Pollan concludes: "To think of domestication as a form of slavery or even exploitation is to misconstrue that whole relationship–-to project a human idea of power onto what is in fact an example of mutualism or symbiosis between species (320). While Pollan is correct in noting that slavery and exploitation are human ideas about power, it does not follow that we cannot enter into those kinds of relations with other animals who are in our power.

Brutality and amorality are the legislative bodies of Pollan's notion of "Nature," therefore whatever happens in nature stays in nature—far from the political realm where human ideas like power, exploitation, and ethics inhere. Vegan theorists, like Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, try to disambiguate such binary thinking when it comes to our relations with other species. In *Zoopolis* they spend over 300 pages practically theorizing what Pollan calls the vegan utopia and re-articulating nature and politics. They argue that just because some animals have come willingly into their interactions with humans does not give humans license to treat them any way we please; they also argue that breeding those animals out of existence is not a fair solution to the problem. In their eyes: "[d]omesticated animals are part of a

shared community with us, a mixed community which has existed over time, generating collective and intergenerational obligations" (Donaldson and Kymlicka 94). They ask—and it would be interesting to hear Pollan reply—: "Why should concepts such as community, sociality, friendship, and love be hedged by species?" (98). Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest that not only do we owe domesticated animals membership in our societies, but also that we need to include their interests "in our conception of the common good and of the community" (98).[34]

Taylor suggests that when it comes to human domestication of other animals, power is more than an idea. Pollan frames domestication as a mutually beneficial evolutionary bargain that has until now turned out quite well for the "[c]ows, pigs, dogs, cats, and chickens [who] have thrived, while their wild ancestors have languished" (320). Taylor reminds us though that this bargain was made "between powerful human beings and more vulnerable animals" (119). She continues: "When we argue that animals are dependent on their own slaughter for their very survival, we need to remember that it is we human beings who are choosing each and every time to slaughter them" (119). Taylor looks at Pollan's argument through a disability studies perspective by focusing on the way it limits what might be a more capacious and ethical understanding of interdependence: "The interdependence that is discussed within this framework may be one of mutual advantage and support in some ways, but it also simultaneously devalues and takes advantage of those who are deemed weaker and more vulnerable" (Taylor 120). By keeping domesticated animals locked in the cage of biology and nature, Pollan forecloses, or tries to foreclose, the

possibility of exploitation altogether. He also overlooks the one-sidedness and self-interest of humans in the domestication of other animals for food.

Pollan's discourse constructs the vegan as foolish for blurring the boundaries of this allegedly insuperable line between nature and human culture, without ever taking the time to explain how he imagines this line to have remained intact despite what many contemporary scholars have dubbed the Anthropocene, or "the proposed name for a geologic epoch in which humans have become the major force determining the continued livability of the Earth" (Brubandt et al. 1). Ignoring this entanglement, even as he draws attention to it in other parts of the book that focus on connecting food in the supermarket back to its sources, Pollan positions "the vegan" as naive and unknowing–-and even "anthropocentric" for unwittingly projecting human ideas onto nature. (323). Pollan though does not seem to give consideration to the fact that creatures like "American laying hen[s]," who he admits have it worse than any other animal in the industrial food system, actually live in bodies that *are* human ideas projected onto so-called nature (317). As longtime animal advocate and activist Karen Davis argues, the sick animals on factory farms are victims of anthropomorphism—their bodies have been morphed to suit human desires for cheap meat.[35]

As Pollan finally sets foot in "The Vegan Utopia," he's been walking toward, he reveals that this utopia, true to the word's etymology "no place," can never, and should never, come into being: "To contemplate such questions [about the morality of eating animals] from the vantage of a farm, or even a garden, is to appreciate just how

parochial, and *urban*, an ideology animal rights really is. It could only thrive in a world where people have lost contact with the natural world . . . " (325, my italics). Out of touch with the natural world, Pollan's vegan is small-minded and city-dwelling. Pollan supports this characterization by pointing out that "Killing animals is probably unavoidable no matter what we choose to eat" (326). He details: "The grain that the vegan eats is harvested with a combine that shreds field mice, while the farmer's tractor wheel crushes woodchucks in their burrows and his pesticides drop songbirds from the sky; after harvest whatever animals that would eat our crops we exterminate" (326). Pollan brings attention here, as others have before him, to the deaths of animals in industrial (and even non-industrial) agriculture; this is certainly an important issue and fact to consider.[36] Pollan doesn't linger on these deaths long though, and seems really only to mention the mice, the woodchucks, and the songbirds who are killed in the harvesting of grain in order to paint a vulgar picture of an urban vegan sans green thumb and, more importantly to Pollan, sans moral high ground.

Pollan's discourse constructs veganism as parochial and out-of-step with what it takes to grow food on the basis that eating will always mean killing—whether or not you eat animals. What Pollan seems to want here is to say "gotcha!" to "animal rightists," you too have blood on your hands. This sort of "gotcha!" loophole finding has become a fundamental part of derogatory discourses about veganism: it tends to put not only the burden of proof onto veganism but the burden of proposing an immediate global solution for a full-stop to animal exploitation. The implication is

that in the absence of such a solution, veganism makes no sense. The demand though is itself almost as unreasonable as the idea that we should do nothing to stop the purposeful killing for food of 59 billion land animals and 1 to 2.8 trillion fish and other sea life worldwide every year, because millions of animals are also killed in the production of grain and produce.[37]

Adams addresses this in her blog response to Rudy: "Your discussion of all the hidden animal ingredients that make it impossible to actually be a vegan mischaracterizes the vegan community and the ways we have addressed these issues for many years" ("Another Feminist"). In her post, Adams cites Bruce Freidrich's foreword to *Animal Ingredients A-Z* where he cautions: "don't think you can eliminate everything." Pollan though continues to characterize the vegan as naive and utopian, in contrast to the realistic and resourceful omnivore. It bears mentioning that in the end the progression of Pollan's argument is decidedly utopic, in the pejorative sense: It moves from facts to fantasy; from details about animal suffering on factory farms—the origin of 99%—to details of animal happiness on smaller, local farms—the origin of the remaining 1%.[38] In the end, Pollan simply exchanges one utopia for another. Once he refutes the possibility of "The Vegan Utopia" for its "deep ignorance about the working of nature," he presents his own utopia in realist clothing, "The Clean Kill."

Pollan opens his reflection on the "The Clean Kill" by reflecting on the fate of the cow he calls Steer 534. Steer 534 is the cow whom Pollan has purchased so that he can trace the life of a cow in the industrial animal complex from birth to the kill

floor, eat 534's meat, and then write about the whole experience. Donna Haraway seems to have Pollan and these reflections squarely in mind in her discussion of what she calls "killability." After dismissing the encouragement of only vegan diets as one of several "exterminationist nonsolutions" born out of guilt, she concedes: "I believe that ethical veganism, for example, enacts a necessary truth, as well as bears crucial witness to the extremity of brutality in our 'normal' relations with other animals" (Haraway 105). Interestingly, Haraway squeezes Adams and Pollan into a single endnote appended to this statement. She refers the reader to Adams' *The Pornography of Meat* (2003) for a "compelling case for veganism in the context of a sophisticated intersectional critique of the meat industry's brutality toward animals and toward people, especially women and even more especially women of color" (Haraway 346, note 15). Then after explaining that for Adams meat eating means direct violence against animals and "oppressed classes of people," she invites Pollan into the discussion (346). With no introduction or explanation, Haraway writes: "To track what becomes food for technocultural people and some of the needed response, see Michael Pollan, *Omnivore's Dilemma*" (346). It is not clear how Haraway wants her readers to understand this pairing: Is Pollan's brand of omnivorism an antidote to Adam's political and intersectional feminist veganism? Is she merely suggesting a conversation be had between the two, or in her uncharacteristic reticence to make a clear connection, is she pointing to an aporia in her own thinking and leaving readers to bridge the gap on their own? However one interprets this, it seems clear that Pollan plays a prominent role in Haraway's thoughts about food and killing.

Haraway's *When Species Meet* and *The Companion Species Manifesto* have had a profound impact on academic discourse and thinking about eating and animals, much in the same way that Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* has had a profound impact on the popular discourse. Taken together, their writing has helped to define mainstream discussions about both food and food ethics from lecture halls to Michelin star restaurants. Haraway positions veganism as too extreme and absolute a response to our entangled history with other species. She takes the focus off of our practice of eating and instead places it on the philosophy of killing. Her solution to the problem of killing other species is that we reframe the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," and not that we widen the circle of its beneficiaries. Haraway explains: "There is no category that makes killing innocent; there is no category or strategy that removes one from killing" (106). As in Pollan's discourse, the vegan is lurking in the shadows here dreaming "of innocence" and denying the "reality" of killing" (Pollan 326).

Haraway's ethical re-framing is that we accept the necessity of killing and do so responsibly by deciding that the problem isn't the act of killing but the act of making someone, and for Haraway this includes the animals some people eat, killable: "Thou shalt not make killable" (105). The vegan here is framed as over-simplifying the problem with an absolutism that is impossible, and even dangerous, to achieve. Haraway doesn't explain though how killing more animals by eating them gets us out of the problem of killability. She suggests that in this scenario "no one gets to be Man;" in other words no one is on top of the so-called food chain here.

(82). While this theoretically gives value to the lives of other animals and philosophically levels the playing field among companion species, by insisting that other animals are still edible for humans, even if not killable, Haraway does still reserve a special place at the table for "Man."

In his reflections about what happens to Steer 534 on the kill floor—a process of killing hermetically sealed from view by U.S. law—Pollan acknowledges that killing is a problem for him (328). Moreover, he acknowledges that "Taking a life is momentous, and people have been working to justify the slaughter of animals to themselves for thousands of years, struggling to come to terms with the *shame* they feel even when killing is necessary to their survival" (331, my italics). While he can't or won't wrap his head or heart around veganism, he admits that he also can't support the horrors of industrial animal slaughter where as he says "Mistakes are inevitable [referring to cows who are not properly stunned before being skinned and having their throats cut] on an assembly line that is slaughtering four hundred heads of cattle every hour" (330).[39] In lieu of animal rights, Pollan proposes the right to look, "a law requiring all the sheet-metal walls of all the CAFOs, and even the concrete walls of the slaughterhouses, to be replaced with glass" (332). In his version of utopia, the standard practices that ten billion animals fall prey to in the U.S. every year like "[t]ail docking and sow crates and beak clipping would disappear overnight, and the days of slaughtering four hundred heads of cattle would promptly come to an end—for" as Pollan says "who could stand the sight?" (333). Animal-based meat would become more expensive and people would eat less of it in Pollan's utopia of "the

clean kill," but when they did eat animals, they'd "eat them with the consciousness, ceremony, and respect . . . [animals] deserve" (333).

While it is notable that Pollan mentions only one emotion, besides alienation, in his entire chapter on the ethics of eating animals, it is not altogether surprising that the emotion that rises to the surface of his sometimes too logical arguments should be shame. Empathy is largely absent from Pollan's ideas about ethics and eating animals, but shame can't help but make an appearance. Back in Amstall's *Carnage*, shame lurks at the center of the vegan utopia. In one scene of the mockumentary, the character Dr. Yasmin Vondenburgen, a world-renowned psychotherapist, fictional author of *The Guilt of Eating Your Brother*, sits in her home surrounded by plants explaining the new psychological sickness that afflicts those who were born before the passage of the Animal Rights Bill. As the camera moves in for a close up of her face, she grimaces, slowly coaxing the words from her mouth: "It's still difficult to say out loud: I ate animals. I ate fish. I drank the milk from cows." She shakes her head in disbelief and repeats: "From cows."

In this vegan utopia, Vondenburgen holds weekly support groups for former animal eaters at the local church where they "can discuss the shame of carnism." At one point, they stand in a circle tossing around a beanbag. Whoever holds the beanbag has to name a cheese they used to eat and enjoy. With their heads bowed and voices hushed, they pass the beanbag, confessing: "Camembert. Parmesan. Edam;" one member runs out crying. The film's narrator explains that it's not easy to name the

cheeses out loud and that it has taken the group months to get to this point of intimacy, "but by naming the cheeses in a safe space, the shame can be lifted." The scene is certainly funny, as much so for the way it presents a familiar context like the support group in a surprising way, as for the nuanced and clever way it takes the stereotype of the overly-sensitive vegan to a new level of ridiculousness, and also to a new level of relatability. We may not all be able to relate to feeling ashamed of loving camembert, but most of us can probably relate to the feeling of shame that comes from indulging in a pleasurable behavior that is ethically compromising or that we later discover to be harmful to others.

If like Pollan says: "Taking a life is momentous, and people have been working to justify the slaughter of animals to themselves for thousands of years, struggling to come to terms with the *shame* they feel even when killing is necessary to their survival," how much greater does that struggle become when killing is not necessary for survival? (331, my italics). When Pollan writes about meat eating as part of our human inheritance, he forgets to name the emotional dimension of that inheritance—shame, though it surfaces at the end of his ethical quandary anyway. Maybe Pollan avoids, and even stigmatizes, the emotional side of the animal people's story because he knows that his empathy would lead him toward shame, and not a boar hunt—for who could stand the sight?

Pollan's idea of the vegan as a decidedly unknowing, deluded fantasist committed to an overly idealistic sense of the world may be misguided in its insistence on the sense of the word utopia as "no place." Adams' idea of the vegan "as

always struggling with the question of how we do the least harm" might lead us to the other sense of the word, "eutopia," or excellent place. What if Pollan had brought a book by Adams or Taylor to dinner along with Singer? Where would a sustained reflection on the nature of shame and the emotions of eating animals have led him? Though it may be hard to imagine that even a purely logic-based ethics allows Pollan to get away with a statement like: "If our concern is for the health of nature—rather than, say the internal consistency of our moral code or the condition of our souls—then eating animals may sometimes be the most ethical thing to do," it is harder still to imagine him uttering that "eating animals may sometimes be the most...[empathetic] thing to do" (327).

Terrors: How Do You Know If Someone's Vegan?

> Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are.
>
> –Jean Anthelme Brillat-Severin, *The Physiology of Taste* (1825)

> As they lurch between acts of insanity and acts of humanity, vegans seem no better or worse than any of our domestic terrorists, the ones I do my best to ignore.
>
> –Alan Richman, *Fork It Over* (2004)

What concerns us more than food? Eating is both a necessity and a pleasure (though when things go awry or when food is not available, it can also cause considerable pain). The increasing popularity of food writing, the rise of the celebrity chef, and the spread of Food Studies programs at universities across the country all reflect our incessant desire to talk about, read about, and learn about what we eat. MRI studies reveal that more of the human brain lights up when we think about food than when we actually ingest it (Spence and Piqueras-Fiszman 12). This incredible

fact means that when it comes to food we have at least two kinds of appetites, and thinking and talking about food may whet, or weaken, the larger one. Just a few moments scrolling through Instagram posts will prove that we are hungry for words and images depicting food.

Sometimes though, eating words turn into fighting words. That seems to be the popular representation of what it's like for meat eaters to dine with or even just to deal with vegans. One of the most prevalent memes about vegans says as much: "How do you know if someone's vegan? Don't worry they'll fucking tell you."[40] Some variants of the meme superimpose the words onto close ups of broccoli; some forms of the meme add the words: "again and again." The meme though has made its way offline and circulates regularly in casual conversation and as part of everyday stereotypes about vegans. Like the bumper sticker and memes from earlier in the chapter, this meme is also a form of ridicule. Here, vegans are ridiculed, somewhat aggressively, for talking or telling too much about veganism. The meme constructs the vegan as a tiresome figure who doesn't know when to shut up and who burdens others by saying that he or she is vegan. This creates an impossible situation for the vegan looking to defy negative stereotypes: the only way out of the stereotype is to be quiet—not to talk about what animals go through and not to talk about what may be a core part of one's identity. The meme effectively silences vegans by suggesting that the only good vegan is a quiet one.

Some vegans may talk a lot about being vegan, while others may actually try not to mention it in order to avoid uncomfortable conversations or even the kind of ridicule expressed by the "How do you know?" meme. What the meme identifies as irritating about vegans is the fact that they (supposedly) always talk about being vegan. The meme also zeroes in on a kind of anxiety or worry: part of the subtext is that there is some need to differentiate between vegans and non-vegans. This particular form of ridicule understands veganism as a kind of identity, albeit one that it would prefer to efface. Interestingly, the meme ignores how often meat eaters talk about the meat they eat, despite the fact that they may not, and probably do not, identify as "meat eaters." Any vegan can tell you that talk about eating meat is as ubiquitous as talk about the weather. What the meme tells us is that in the dominant culture talking about eating meat is acceptable, while talking about not eating meat is a nuisance. *Don't worry, they'll fucking tell you*. *Again and again.*

Food writer and journalist, Alan Richman, writes about the bane of listening to vegans talk in "My Beef with Vegans" from *Fork It Over*: *The Intrepid Adventures of a Professional Eater* (2004). In this section of his book he reviews food and vegans by dining at three of New York's top vegan restaurants and by going on a date with a vegan whose single ad he found in *Veggie Single News*. While his date with the vegan temporarily sweetens his otherwise acerbic assessment of the vegan ilk, earlier in his discussion he writes: "What appalls me about them is that they are not content to exorcise pleasure from their own dinner tables. They insist that everybody who enjoys eating join them in their odd brand of masochism" (243-244). Elaborating, he

continues: "What infuriates me about them is their self-righteousness, their insistence that we miscreants give up our enjoyment of food and eat what they eat" (247). Richman brings to the surface the root of the irritation with vegan talk: Eating should be pleasurable, and according to this way of thinking, being and talking vegan "exorcise pleasure from" the table by asking us "to give up our enjoyment of food." Problematically and symptomatically Richman conflates eating meat with eating in general and not eating meat with self-harm. What bothers or "appalls" him about vegans talking is that what they say interrupts not just the pleasure of eating, but the pleasure of eating meat.

This clash between ethics and aesthetics is neither new nor particular to vegans and non-vegans; it is part of a longstanding philosophical debate dating as least as far back as Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment.*[41] Richman, however, makes little effort to frame it as such; instead he creates a polemic between vegans and everyone else who just wants to enjoy a good meal. According to Richman, talking about ethics at the dinner table is unpalatable because it interferes with the purpose of the meal—which he says is enjoyment. He brings this issue into clearer focus when he explains that his "beef" is not with those who simply "decline meat." He explains: "Macrobiotics, who share the vegan affinity for food colored unattractive shades of brown, are kindly souls who believe in the Zen principle of not irritating everybody with whom they come into contact" (244). For Richman and for the "How do you know?" meme, the problem is not the way of eating (even if the discourse of ridiculing vegans extends to ridiculing vegan food), but the principles

behind it. The problem is turning something that brings pleasure to many people into a political issue, or rather bringing attention to the politics and ethics of what is otherwise seen as a source of pleasure—this seems to be the fundamental clash between meat eaters and vegans who dine together. Anthony Bourdain crystallizes this thought into a pithy invective: "Vegetarians are the enemy of everything good and decent in the human spirit, an affront to all I stand for, the pure enjoyment of food" (70).

It's important to remember that tensions at the table extend both ways: Many vegans find it very uncomfortable to dine with meat eaters; some vegans outright refuse to eat with someone who is eating meat.[42] While meat eaters, like Richman, feel that vegans ruin the pleasure of the meal, meat at the table ruins the pleasure of the meal for many vegans. Meat eaters may feel that vegans are trying to force their way of eating onto others.[43] However, vegans may actually feel, quite similarly, that meat eaters and a meat-eating society force their views and ways of eating onto vegans, with advertisements for and images of meat, countless restaurants serving meat, and everyday conversation that refer to animals' bodies as so many pieces of meat.

James Stanescu articulates this tension when he describes "the strange, parallel world" that "[t]hose who value the lives of other animals...[inhabit]...Every day we are reminded of the fact that we care for the existence of beings whom other people manage to ignore, to unsee and unhear as if the only trace of the beings' lives are the parts of their bodies rendered into food: flesh transformed into meat" (568).

When vegans and meat eaters talk to each other about animals and about meat, they are talking as if across "strange, parallel worlds." When they look at "flesh transformed into meat," they are seeing the same thing differently. Stanescu continues: "To tear up, or to have trouble functioning, to feel that moment of utter suffocation of being in the hall of death [the meat counter of the grocery store] is something rendered completely socially unintelligible" (568). The "How do you know?" meme and Alan Richman's "beef" with vegans are part of the cultural residue of that unintelligibility, hence the meme's implicit request for vegans to stop talking and telling about veganism.

As veganism becomes more socially intelligible, descriptions of vegans will likely shift. In the future, popular discourse may very well call vegans passionate, dedicated, committed. For now, a much more negative constellation of words commonly surrounds the term vegan, like: hard-core, fierce, extreme, radical, hostile, angry, and militant. Richman refers to "hard-core veganism" and a "fierce vegan" in his brief discussion. He also describes vegans as "the radical arm of the vegetarian movement, ill-tempered all the time" (243). There is a Facebook group called "Omnivores Against Militant Vegans" a 2018 headline in *The Washington Post* reads "France's Butchers Fear the Wrath of Militant Vegans," and the vegan police are joked and groaned about inside and outside of vegan circles (Tan; Patrick-Goudreau).

Animal rights activism is probably the best place to look for at least a partial origin story of the "militant" stigma that has been appended to veganism. The Animal Liberation Front is militant in their methods and mission because in their view other

animals are the victims of an unrelenting war: "The goal of ALF is not simply to liberate individual animals here and there; it is to free all animals from every form of slavery that binds them to human oppressors" (Best and Nocella 12). Ronnie Lee, one of the founding members of ALF has explicitly described our engagements with other animals as a war:

> We have been at war with the other creatures of this earth ever since the first human hunter set forth with spear into the primeval forest. Human imperialism has everywhere enslaved, oppressed, murdered, and mutilated animal peoples...We slaughter animals for our food, force them to perform silly tricks for our delectation, gun them down and stick hooks in them in the name of sports. We have torn up the wild places where they once made their homes. (Qtd. in Patterson 1)

In an article on "Internal Feuding" within the animal rights movement, Lee writes:

> We would do far better to consider it as a war. In a war the people fighting on one side become united and are prepared to sink their differences for the common good. By "war" I am not necessarily advocating violence. A war can be defined as "a strong effort to combat evil" and so a person who spends their time giving out leaflets can consider themselves just as much a warrior as one who engages in direct action. It is an attitude of mind.

By framing human history with other animals as a history war and imperialism, Lee suggests that we might think of the majority of human behavior toward other animals as militant and the animal rights movement as a "strong effort to combat" the relentlessness of the war against other animals.

John E. Lewis, the Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI, testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2004 "to discuss the threat posed by animal rights extremists and eco-terrorists in this country." In this testimony he estimated that "that the ALF/ELF [Environmental Liberation Front] and related groups have committed

more than 1,100 criminal acts in the United States since 1976, resulting in damages conservatively estimated at approximately $110 million." Lewis continues:

> The ALF, established in Great Britain in the mid-1970s, is a loosely organized extremist movement committed to ending the abuse and exploitation of animals. The American branch of the ALF began its operations in the late 1970s. Individuals become members of the ALF not by filing paperwork or paying dues, but simply by engaging in "direct action" against companies or individuals who, in their view, utilize animals for research or economic gain, or do some manner of business with those companies or individuals.

Many people, including some vegans and proponents of animal rights object to ALF's destruction of physical property and breaking of the law. ALF's understanding of animal exploitation as a war and their commitment to "to ending the abuse and exploitation of animals" informs this militant strategy. One question raised by ALF's tactics is: Are other animals in fact property as held under current U.S. law or are they individual sentient beings wrongfully imprisoned and abused?[44] ALF is willing to break the law in part because it understands other animals as beings who are prisoners of a longstanding war.

In 2012, at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Human and Nonhuman Consciousness in Cambridge, "a prominent international group of neuroscientists" signed the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, stating:

> Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates. (Low)

Despite this consensus and images and videos depicting the extreme violence that takes place in slaughterhouses and factory farms across the country, neither the slaughterhouses, nor the people who run, staff, and support them by purchasing their products have acquired the stigma of being hard-core, fierce, extreme, radical, militant, or even violent in their commitment to continuing to kill animals, who have been scientifically deemed to have "the neurological substrates that generate consciousness." In fact, to prevent such a stigma and protect profits, over the past seven years 25 states have tried, (five have succeeded), to pass ag-gag bills to criminalize the recording and distribution of footage of what animals go through in slaughterhouses and factory farms ("Detailed Discussion").

Interestingly, the general stigma of the militant and radical vegan tends to apply as much to everyday vegans as it does to vegans, like members of the Animal Liberation Front, who are willing to break the law to save animals. Veganism is seen by many as the extreme form of vegetarianism. In *Kitchen Confidential* (2000) Anthony Bourdain writes, "Vegetarians, and their Hezbollah-like splinter faction, the vegans, are a persistent irritant to any chef worth a damn" (70). Here, far from being framed as the logical resolution of vegetarian ideals or a more complete resistance against speciesism, veganism, or more specifically vegans, are framed as a fringe terrorist group. Bourdain is clearly not concerned with ALF, but with vegan diners whose "Hezbollah-like" eating practices terrorize chefs across the world. Focusing on veganism as an allegedly extreme dietary preference presents a "veganism-as-deviance model" in flagging it as a non-normative and undesirable behavior (Cole

and Morgan, "Vegaphobia" 136). This not only stigmatizes vegans as a clear outgroup, but also helps to further conceal the extreme violence against other animals that motivates many vegans in the first place. Not entirely unlike the ag-gag laws that do everything possible to conceal the extreme violence of killing animals from public view, comments like Richman's and Bourdain's do a lot to conceal that violence from public discourse. Concealing the extreme and constant violence committed against other animals from discourse about food and vegans upholds the cultural coding of vegans and animal rights activists as unnecessarily militant, even making it plausible to understand their behavior as a kind of terrorism.

In 2006, the U.S. House and Senate passed a bipartisan bill to amend the The Animal Enterprise Protection Act (AETA) from 1992, giving the U.S. Department of Justice greater power to penalize animal rights activists and even to prosecute them as terrorists, as well as broadening the definition of the "animal enterprises" under protection to include both academic and commercial "enterprises" that make use of or sell animals or even animal products (U.S. Congressional Record 590-592). AETA was passed so easily by both houses of Congress that both used expedited voting procedures reserved for bills free from controversy. In fact, only one single member of the House of Representatives gave a dissenting statement: Dennis Kucinich, the first and only self-identifying vegan, until Cory Booker, to run for President. Kucinich expressed concern "about painting everyone with the broad brush of terrorism who might have a legitimate objection to a type of research or treatment of animals that is not humane." He then dissented on the grounds that the "bill is written

in such a way as to have a chilling effect on the exercise of peoples' first amendment rights." (U.S. Congressional Record 593).

The Humane Society of the United States, known for being a more conservative animal welfare group, country miles apart from the Animal Liberation Front, issued a fact sheet opposing the AETA on the grounds that it "threatens legitimate advocacy;" it "is a solution in search of a problem;" it "could protect unlawful animal enterprises such as animal fighting" and it "reflects misplaced priorities in Congress" (*The Humane Society*). In 2013, The American Bar Association, not usually a champion of animal rights, issued a resolution to urge Congress to repeal the bill altogether and the Department of Justice to forbear from prosecuting anyone under it. The fifteen-page report warns:

> The law under 18 USC §43 (The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act) purports to address domestic terrorism; however, it misapplies the term to cover a host of otherwise constitutionally protected activity. The law raises serious constitutional concerns because by targeting conduct that also causes only economic harm, such as lost profits, it reaches protected First Amendment activity including leafleting, protesting and picketing. (Wemiel and Dunne)

It is worth asking why and how Congress was able to easily pass a law opposed by the American Bar Association on the grounds that it "raises serious constitutional concerns . . . [about] First Amendment activity."

What does it say about dominant attitudes toward other animals that in both popular and legal discourse vegans can be called "terrorists"? It seems noteworthy that both Bourdain and Richman wrote about vegans as terrorists before the passage of the Animal Enterprise Terrorist Act, indicating that there was already a kind of cultural readiness to metaphorically link veganism and terrorism. Domestic terrorism

is a controversial subject; the grounds on which we decide what is and is not terrorism are highly politicized terrain. The October 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas was not considered terrorism because it was not politically motivated; the 2015 Charleston church shooting by a White supremacist that left nine Black churchgoers dead was not considered terrorism despite being racially motivated. Similarly, the 2018 murder of a protestor at a White supremacist rally was not deemed domestic terrorism even though it was politically motivated.[45]

If designating someone a terrorist transforms a regular criminal into an enemy of the state, this means that like the ALF, the U.S. government may very well conceive of human relations with other animals as a kind of a war. At the very least, the designation of illegal—and potentially legal—activism on behalf of exploited animals as domestic terrorism strongly suggests that the use of other animals for alleged human benefit is seen as part of our way of life and part of our values, even as patriotic nationalism.[46] The AETA is attempting to legislate that the right to kill other animals for food, experimentation, clothing, sport, and profit remain fundamental to who we are as a nation and as individuals.

Conclusion: From Tears to Terrorism

> I'm not vegan for the animals.
>
> –Overheard conversation outside of The Butcher's Vegan Son (Berkeley, CA.)[47]

> On average, Americans eat the equivalent of 21,000 entire animals in a lifetime.
>
> –Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals* (2009)

Each of the anti-vegan attitudes we've looked at in this chapter implicates the vegan in a particular relationship to violence while minimizing the scope of violence involved in raising and killing animals for food. In the examples of ridicule we considered, vegans try to make the real violence that is visited on other animals visible and meat-eating culture responds by making jokes that threaten to visit that violence onto vegans. The stereotype of the overly-sentimental vegan criticizes vegans for being naive and idealistic in failing to understand that violence is a necessary and inescapable part of nature. On the other hand, the equally prevalent stereotype of the overly-aggressive vegan criticizes vegans for being too violent in their attempts to liberate other animals from suffering. This underlying focus on violence that characterizes much of the anti-vegan discourse makes sense according to Cole and Morgan's study: "The overall effect is to defuse the most unsettling aspect of veganism—the calling to account of omnivorism for its complicity in violence towards nonhuman animals" ("Vegaphobia" 147). The wider culture's staunch resistance to seriously reexamining the inherent violence of its interactions with other animals is ultimately what distorts our vision of vegans. Instead of reconsidering the extremity of our violent relations with other animals or reconsidering how the

interests and wellbeing of other animals might supersede our own self-interest, this narrative frames veganism as an impossible utopia and violence against other animals as natural, normal, and necessary, even if sometimes lamentable.

These seemingly disparate notes of freakishness—naiveté, over-sensitivity, over-excitability, militancy, and even terror—all play to the same tune and (stereo)type: veganism and vegans are irrational and even dangerous. This range of stigmas reveals a coherent cultural animus that says: Vegans are misguided by their emotions; just like the nonhumans they care about, they are not "rational animals." These stigmas admonish and shame people for caring, thinking, or talking too much about the lives of other animals, effectively saying that it is not reasonable to feel, talk, or act as though the lives of those animals who have traditionally been turned into food are meaningful. The statement "I'm not vegan for the animals" is a symptom of the way popular discourse delegitimizes the orientation of one's ethics and politics around empathy for other animals. One may certainly be vegan for other reasons, for multiple and even contradictory reasons, but why specifically "not for the animals"? Why this need to distinguish, to distance, to disavow oneself from the vast bestiary of ideas that breathes life and death into the word "animals" and from those sentient beings who have to live and labor under that sign?[48]

The vegan utopia may not be such a bad thing if like Gordon we understand utopia to mean a set of "alternative values striving to become social facts . . . a testament to the reality of living better and otherwise than we're expected to do" (129). We find out toward the end of Amstall's *Carnage* that the straw that breaks the

back of animal oppression is made of words: During what the film dubs "The Era of Confusion," 75% of the British public has become vegan, but there is still reluctance to criminalize the killing and exploitation of animals—until—thought translation technology makes it possible for humans to finally hear—in words—what many have suspected all along, that animals don't want to be used for their flesh, for their milk, for anything. Perhaps though we don't need to wait for animals to say these words to us in our own language in order to imagine and promote "veganism being used as an opportunity to open up debates about our relationships" instead of as another "reason not to care, or even think, about these issues" ("Vegaphobia" 149).

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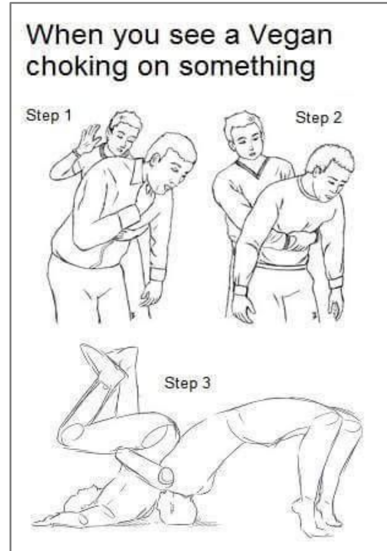

Figure 1.3

Figure 1.4

Notes

[1] See also Berlant and Stein 2015 for a dialogue about how the two writers understand their veganism in relation to their theoretical commitments and vice versa. Berlant mentions the idea of her early vegan eating as part of a "concrete utopian" way of life she undertook at Twin Oaks Commune when she was 15 (19, 21). Berlant stipulates that she is not trying to make the world a better place or be virtuous with her veganism, but rather that she is engaged in "small gestures of deterritorialization," "self-undoing" and "active disinheritance" (21, 22).

[2] Cole and Morgan's revolutionary vegan utopia has historical antecedents in the pre-Civil War U.S. vegetarian movement that was part of a broader intersectional reform movement and revolutionary perspective, including abolitionism, pacifism, economic equality, and women's suffrage (Shprintzen). See Schprintzen 2013 *The Vegetarian Crusade* for a detailed history of vegetarianism as part of the U.S. reform movement.

[3] Quinn and Westwood arrive at these poles through an analysis of the work of Carol Adams and Jacques Derrida as together paving the way for the emergence of animal studies and now vegan studies as academic disciplines in the humanities over the past few decades. While Adams (utopian) tells the "patriarchal story of meat" that has oppressed women and nonhuman animals, Derrida (insufficiency) coins the terms "carnophallogocentriism" to explain the way masculinity, meat-eating, and logos have dominated Western philosophy's and society's idea of (exclusively) human subjectivity to the point of infiltrating ideas of resistance, like vegetarianism and veganism. See also Simonsen 2016 for an anti-utopian queering of veganism as a subversive and denaturalizing practice, and a means of disrupting the idea that there is a natural link between masculinity and meat-eating. His queer veganism divorces itself from notions of utopia or building happy futures: "The veganism that I present in the following is not concerned with imagining a utopic future without meat—where veganism itself would become a moot concept."

[4] See Jennings 2016 for a recent history and analysis of the U.S.'s fascination with utopias, and the marked absence of utopia from the contemporary social imaginary, where we are more likely to look to the past than to the future for flickers of the golden age.

[5] See Shapiro 2015 for a discussion of the value and validity of phenomenological approaches to studying veganism. Shapiro adapts methods from phenomenological psychology in his analysis of vegetarianism/veganism as a way of experiencing the world. He argues for the usefulness of individual reflection from vegetarians/vegans to gain a sense of the lived experience of people for whom vegetarianism/veganism is a way of of being in the world.

[6] See Adams, Breitman, and Messina 2017 for an in depth discussion of how the mythology of the healthy vegan can lead to vegan shaming even within the vegan community, with unrealistic expectations of perfect health mapped onto ideas of what it means to be a successful vegan.

[7] See my introduction "Loving Species" for a full description of Cole and Morgan's study, 15-16.

[8] For a treasure trove of other examples, see @shawnbaker1967, *Instagram.*

[9] See Figure 1-1, "Freaks" 79.

[10] In the *Sexual Politics of Meat* 2010, Adams points out that "vegetable" has taken on connotations of passivity and dullness. Much as meat is associated with masculinity, vegetable is a food word associated with women. According to Adams, "vegetable" circulates as a term of disdain that men try to distance themselves from (60). The bumper sticker accentuates the cultural slippage and semantic relay between the terms "vegetable" and "vegetarian."

[11] See Figure 1-2, "Freaks" 79.

[12] See Figure 1-3, "Freaks" 79.

[13] See Adams 2015 *The Pornography of Meat.*

[14] See Leenart 2018, *veganstrategist.org*, for a vegan writer's perspective on the value of "apology" over a "hardline" approach when communicating with non-vegans about animal rights.

[15] A national online survey conducted by Mattson in the summer of 2017 found that when given the choice between "vegan" and "100% plant-based" respondents overwhelmingly chose "plant-based," in response to questions about which is more flexible, which tastes better, which is healthier, where does the future lie. See Watson, "'Plant-Based' Plays Way Better Than 'Vegan' with Most Consumers, Says Mattson," *Foodnavigatorusa.com*, 19 Apr 2018.

[16] See Desaulniers 2015 on the suffering of cows in the dairy industry and on the powerful dairy lobby's successful efforts to mythologize milk as wholesome and necessary for human health.

[17] See Gaard 2013 for an example of scholarship based on cross-species identification.

[18] According to Cole and Morgan descriptions of veganism as difficult or impossible to practice "reassure omnivorous readers that veganism is doomed to failure, and that they are not to feel guilty for not attempting it" ("Vegaphobia" 143).

[19] There is still a need for more research into how and why people become vegan. See McDonald 2000 for a phenomenological approach based on interviews with people who have been vegan for at least one year, and on the incorporation of her own perspective as a vegan. Her analysis of the interviews suggests an overall process of becoming vegan that involves a "catalytic experience," introducing the reality of unknown animal abuse into the non-vegan's life and resulting either in repression or a series of steps toward becoming vegan and adopting a new worldview.

[20] Harper points out that animal advocacy and empathy for other animals is also a racial and class issue. She argues that often in the discussion of animal rights and veganism the socioeconomic factors that allow for the consideration of animals as ethical subjects get ignored. See Harper 2010.

[21] Many other writers and thinkers critique this way of framing animality as amoral qualities that lurk in every human, or as the drive to eat or be eaten. Derrida sees "the animal" as an occasion to rethink all of those attributes—response, autonomy, even language—that Western philosophy has accorded to humans. Far from concluding that "the animal" is lacking any of these attributes, Derrida instead argues that what is in question is that the human ever possesses any of them entirely or for a lifetime. See Derrida 2006. Wolfe has pointed to the way animality gets used to naturalize and ground racist discourse. In Wolfe's analysis, "the unquestioned availability of animality" in the service of animalizing other humans depends on the extent to which the human/nonhuman binary is understood as being equivalent to that between subject and object (167). Animality then for Wolfe is a means of justifying what we do to other animals, including humans. See Wolfe 2003, 122-168. Some have argued that we have moved, and need to move, beyond the concept of animality altogether; alongside the idea and moment of the posthuman, Clark, Freccero, and Senior propose the postanimal and postanimality: "The traditional concept of the animal, like that of the human, is obsolete, ideological, and oppressive" (8). See Clark, Freccero, and Senior 2015.

[22] See the last chapter of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* 2009, "Storytelling" for a discussion of what it could be mean to be more conscious at every meal (245-267). Foer suggests another approach to identity—not one that is based on dominance or tradition, but one based on decision. Foer wonders what kind of a world would be brought into being if eating were a deliberate act practiced each and every time with both compassion and reason. Foer asks: "What kind of a world would we create if three times a day we activated our compassion and reason as we sat down to eat, if we

had the moral imagination and the pragmatic will to change our most fundamental act of consumption?" (257-258).

[23] Animal rights theory, like that of Peter Singer and Tom Regan focuses on abstract ethical reasoning to argue that either as fellow bearers of interests (Peter Singer) or as fellow "subjects-of-a-life" (Tom Regan), members of other species are deserving of respect and at the very minimum negative rights. More recent work in the field points out that as a counter-discourse animal rights falls into the trap of working within, even if against, the framework and underlying structuring theoretical principles of the dominant meat-eating and patriarchal discourse. In *Entangled Empathy,* Lori Gruen points out that abstract ethical arguments for animal rights tend to reduce complexity in search of universal solutions, divorcing relations among species from historical and political contexts, relegating emotion to the backseat of ethical decision-making, and making arguments from the perspective of allegedly autonomous, independent, logical subjects. See Gruen 2015.

[24] Some examples are: Adams, Breitman, and Messina 2017; jones 2014; Joy 2018.

[25] Pollan 2006 uses the word "sentimental" to describe vegetarianism and veganism twice:"The disappearance of animals from our lives has opened a space in which there's no reality check on the sentiment or the brutality; it is a space in which the Peter Singers and the Frank Purdues [founder of Purdue Chicken] would fare equally well" (306); "To many animal people even Polyface Farm is a "death camp"—a way station for doomed creatures awaiting their date with the executioner. But to look at the lives of these animals is to see the holocaust analogy for the sentimental conceit it really is" (319). In the last chapter "The Perfect Meal," where Pollan kills a pig and collects mushrooms in the Berkeley Hills for the final meal of the book, he makes a toast just before sharing the meal with the people who have guided him, inadvertently articulating his perspective on sentiment more broadly: "And lastly I talked about all the many things I'd learned from Angelo—things about mushrooms and pigs, about nature and the arts of cooking and eating well, and so much else besides. Then, worried I was in danger of melting down into sentiment, I raised my glass again and urged everyone to start" (407).

[26] For more on children-animal relationships, see Cole and Stewart 2014. Cole and Stewart suggest that while many children self-identify "as benevolent protectors of other animals, rather than their vicarious gaolers and killers," they are immersed in an "affective representational mileu populated by animals" (12) (in cartoons and storybooks, as dolls, etc), at the same time that they are taught to normalize the consumption and hidden exploitation of some of those same animals in daily cultural practices. They call this systematic deception about the widespread violence of human relations with other animals "a moral tragedy."

[27] Note that Juan et al. find that 48% of people who self-identify as vegetarian also report still eating animal-based meats on a semi-regular basis (89); among other things, this illustrates the difficulty of finding accurate statistics about the vegetarian and vegan population since people's individual definitions of both vary considerably: "Caution is needed in interpreting the term 'vegetarian' from self-reports" (86).

[28] This devaluing of sentiment can also be read as a symptom of the larger privileging of rationality over irrationality and the mind over the body. See Cole and Stewart 2014 for an analysis of the ecofeminist critique of Max Weber's typologies of social action and the way the it "privileges rationality, while it undermines the value of affect" (32). In regards to relationships between humans and other animals, they conclude that "what Weber alerts us to is the trivialization of affective action (typically as sentimentality) is a social fact of modernity. An important outcome of the socialization process is to associate affective action toward other animals with human infancy" (32).

[29] The idea that the "Vegan Lobby" is any threat for the meat, poultry, and dairy lobby is itself a fiction King invents here. The first and only Plant-Based Foods Association just formed recently in 2016, partly in response to a California Health Department ruling that Miyoko's Kitchen was no longer allowed to call its nut-based products "cheeses," but instead had to use the term "cultured nut product." Michele Simon, the association's executive director, realized companies like Miyoko's needed a trade group to lobby for their interests. See "How 2 Women Are Planning to Take On the Powerful Meat Industry" 2016 *Fortune.com*. For discussion of the power of the meat, dairy, and egg industries, for the disproportionate financial power of the meat, dairy, and egg industries see also: Desaulniers 2015 and Simon 2013.

[30] Like Pollan, Rudy also starts from the premise that industrial farming is the ethical problem and that we should work to go back to small-scale farms. The "vegan agenda" Rudy refers to here is taken from Gary Francione and his particular vision of abolitionist veganism. Francione argues that humans should not continue to breed domestic animals. He contends that because domestic animals, including cats and dogs, are dependent on humans the relationships will always be exploitative. See Francione 2000. Many other vegan theorists and activists, like Adams, Donaldson and Kymlicka, Gruen, and, Taylor have expressed contrary views and visions and spoken out directly against this idea. For opposing views, see Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011; Gruen 2015; Taylor 2014.

[31] Perhaps it is Haraway's commitment to Isabelle Stenger's notion of cosmopolitics that strengthens her misgivings about veganism, at least in the way that she frames veganism as a quest for an ideal and fixed solution to a messy problem: "Stengers insists we cannot denounce the world in the name of an ideal world" (Haraway, 83). "Forbidding both the dream (and nightmare) of a final solution and also the fantasy of

transparent and innocent communication, cosmopolitics is a practice for going on, for remaining exposed to consequences, for entangling materially with as many of the messy players as possible" (Haraway, 106). Veganism as a kind of dogma may be what ultimately turns Haraway away from it. It seems to me though that in all of her descriptions of veganism and vegans she too is working with many of derogatory discourses highlighted in this chapter. If she were to think instead of veganism more along the lines of Adams' formulation as "always struggling with the question of how we do the least harm" she might be able to find more, or at least some, room for it in her otherwise capacious cosmopolitics.

[32] In *Sapiens* 2015 historian Yuval Harari challenges such interpretations of domestication. He points out that "Domesticated chickens and cattle may well be an evolutionary success story; but they are among the most miserable creatures that ever lived" (93). Harari argues "from the viewpoint of the herd, rather from that of the shepherd, it's hard to avoid the impression that for the vast majority of domesticated animals, the Agricultural Revolution was a terrible catastrophe. Their evolutionary 'success' is meaningless" (96-97). Though he does not directly call domestication slavery, he does offer a direct comparison: "Shepherds and farmers throughout history showed affection for their animals and have taken great care of them, just as many slaveholders felt affection and concern for their slaves" (96).

[33] Vegans aren't the only ones who reject this de-politicizing or naturalizing of nature. Bruno Latour 1999 tries to theorize a way out of a politics determined by fixed ontology, and one instead, following Stengers, that is always in flux and always open to new members. To do this, he invokes the language first of "things," then begins invoking "nonhumans," "entities," and "propositions" to refer to all of those who have not yet been admitted into politics, be they " a black hole, an elephant, an equation, or a jet engine" (83). Interestingly, Latour describes this grouping as all of those "for which it [the current political arrangement] has refused to take responsibility—let us remember that these entities can be humans, but also animal species, research programs, concepts, any of the rejected propositions that are at one time consigned to the *dumping ground* of a given collective" (124).

[34] Moving toward something that sounds a lot like a cosmopolitics that Haraway could get behind, Donaldson and Kymlicka muse that: "The results are difficult to predict, but they are almost certainly going to be different from the sort of life animals would have led in the wild, or from what is entailed by a static species norm" (100). They build on recent disability theories of citizenship to construct a theory of citizenship for domesticated species. See Donaldson and Kymlicka, "Domesticated Animal Citizens," (101-155).

[35] See Karen Davis 2005, 59-69.

[36] Pollan is not the first to grapple with the deaths of animals in industrial agriculture, nor is he the first to leverage these deaths as part of an argument against the very possibility, or logic, of veganism. Steven Davis published a paper in 2003, "The Least Harm Principle May Require that Humans Consume a Diet Containing Large Herbivores, Not a Vegan Diet," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, vol. 16, 2003, 387-394.

[37] Exact numbers of animals who die in the meat, dairy, egg, and fishing industries are very hard to come by as of course those industries don't have a vested interest in counting. These are estimates and don't include the many animals who die from sickness and stress caused by conditions of both CAFOs and aqaufarms. See "Fish Count Estimates," on *fishcount.ork.uk* for detailed estimates of wild and farmed fish yearly deaths globally and by country and "Food" on *animalequality* for estimates of farmed land animals.

[38] In *Eating Animals* Foer states that "99.9% of chickens raised for meat, 97% of laying hens, 99% of turkeys, 95% of pigs, and 78% of cattle" are raised on factory farms (57). Foer points out that chickesn comprise 99.9% of land animals raised for food.

[39] For more on how commonplace such mistakes are in slaughterhouses, see also Eisnetz 1997; Pachirat 2011; Warwick, "They Die Piece by Piece," *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2001.

[40] See Figure 1-4, "Freaks" 79. The meme also appears as "How Can You Tell If Someone's Vegan?"

[41] See David Foster Wallace 2006, "Consider the Lobster," 235-254, for a discussion about his own animal-related encounter with ethics and aesthetics.

[42] The international animal activist group, Direct Action Everywhere promotes "The Liberation Pledge." People who take the pledge make a commitment not to eat at tables where meat is being eaten. The group explains the pledge as a way to stop normalizing the consumption of animals' bodies. For more, see "The Liberation Pledge," *www.liberationpledge.com*.

[43] Some vegan celebrities choose not to perform at venues that will serve meat or not to serve meat to employees. Such choices have often resulted in popular criticism that the public's choices are being constrained. See for examples: Walls, "McCartney Issues a No-Meat Decree," *Today,* 12 Sept. 2018; McDonough, "Morrissey 'Forces Madison Square Garden to Ban' Meat and Go Vegan ahead of his Concert, *DailyMail.com*, 1 May 2015.

[44] While in the U.S. animals remain legal property, both the European Union and New Zealand have legally recognized animals as sentient beings. In 2009, the EU included the legal recognition of animals, including farmed animals and fish, as sentient beings as a core Article in the Treaty of Lisbon. See "Animal Welfare," *European Commission*. Similarly, in a 2015 amendment to an animal welfare bill, New Zealand legally recognized animals as sentient beings. The amendment includes a ban on cosmetic testing and added regulation of other forms of testing, though it does not include any stipulations about eating animals. See Guy 2015.

[45] In *The Vegan Studies Project*, Wright attributes changes in discourse about veganism over the last twenty years to the post-9/11 American war on terror, which she calls a "rhetoric of permanent war and fear" (36). In this "us" and "them" rhetoric, veganism becomes unpatriotic, associated with "the terrorists" and anti-American ways of being and eating. See Wright 2015.

[46] See Lauren Gazzola's reflections on her own incarceration under AETA for possible First Amendment violation. Gazzola now works at the Center for Constitutional Rights. Gazzola 2012 *otherwords.org.*

[47] I overheard this conversation between two women in Berkeley who seemed to know each other, but were each surprised to see the other at a vegan restaurant. One exclaimed: "I didn't know you were vegan." The other responded "Yeah. It's been like a year. I'm not perfect about it, but it's been a trip. I'm not vegan for the animals. It's for health and sustainability . . . " (16 July 2018).

[48] Derrida has argued that the word "animal" itself is an act of reductive violence against the diversity of other living beings. He goes as far as to say that every time a philosopher or anyone else utters this word as a way of marking off all of the living from the human, he/she/they utter a "*bêtise"* (translated by David Clarke as "assaninity"). In its place he prefers the plural "*animaux*" and a homophone he coins "*animot*," a lexical gathering of animals and the French term "word." For Derrida, *animot* emphasizes that *animal* is a word humans have given themselves to separate themselves from the rest of creation and to justify differential treatment based on this separation. See Derrida (2006) 41-51.

ELITISTS

The stereotype of vegan elitism—that is, veganism as an elite, white, pretentious, faddish, out-of-touch, lifestyle that aims to take away our freedom and right to eat what we choose—helps mask and perpetuate an elitist food system that targets marginalized communities with cheap and unhealthy animals' products, restricts access to healthier non-animal based foods, like fresh fruits and vegetables, exploits and kills billions of nonhumans, and relies on exploitative and dangerous labor strategies that tend to target immigrants. This chapter is the story of why it's important to untangle the seemingly disconnected threads of the stigma of vegan elitism—from veganism as a wellness and celebrity lifestyle and veganism as a practice of white privilege, and even as a form of racism, to veganism as an anti-democratic form of elitism that aims to rob Americans of their dietary freedom—so that we can follow them back to their dangerous source, one that does simultaneous and serious harm to the majority of humans and other animals: the truly elite government-supported meat and dairy industries. It is also the story of why connecting these threads requires mainstream white vegan organizations and individual vegans to foreground the racialized issue of food access, acknowledge the ways that many humans are still not considered fully human and that to be fully human is still synonymous with being white, and to incorporate anti-racism into their activism on behalf of nonhumans.[1]

Civil rights activist and comedian Dick Gregory was someone who connected these threads. He spent many decades talking about health, specifically a vegan diet,

as an important way to fight institutionalized racism, which according to the 101st president of the National Medical Association Dr. Rodney G. Hood has meant that "since 1980 African Americans have experienced the highest death rates in 14 of 16 leading causes of death. Blacks suffer one of the highest infant mortality rates in the U.S. and...[that] Black men have the shortest life expectancy rates" (Hood 1). Ruth Wilson Gilmore has defined racism as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (28). Marked health disparities and relatedly marked disparities in access to healthy and unhealthy foods are part of the system that produces this "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" among African Americans. While Dick Gregory would come to fight against what might be called food racism, he first became vegetarian not for his health or as a way to fight for the health of his community, but rather out of his commitment to Martin Luther King's teaching of non-violence in the 1960s. Gregory tells the story of why he stopped eating animals in his memoir *Callus on My Soul*:

> I had stopped eating meat in 1964 when Lil and I were marching in Alabama. She had been pregnant with the twins at the time and I guess she wasn't walking fast enough, so a White sheriff kicked her. I did nothing for two reasons. First the sheriff who kicked Lil was six-foot, five-inches tall with a gun, so, yes, I was scared as hell. Second we were supposed to be non-violent so how could I justify hitting that sheriff even if he was four feet tall? When I thought about what nonviolence really meant, I decided if I would not hit a man that kicked my pregnant wife, then I could no longer participate in the destruction of any animal who never harmed me. (111)

Writing in 2017 just after Gregory's passing, Tracye McQuirter, public health nutritionist, activist, and author of *By Any Greens Necessary: A Revolutionary Guide*

for Black Women Who Want to Eat Great, Get Healthy, Lose Weight, and Look Phat, credits Gregory with inspiring her to become vegetarian and then vegan, and eventually to devote her life to helping people, specifically people of color, transition to a vegan diet.[2] McQuirter recalls that during her sophomore year in college in 1986, when Gregory was invited to speak, she didn't yet know that he'd been a vegetarian since 1965: "Our Black Student Union brought Dick Gregory to campus to talk about the state of black America, but instead, he decided to talk about the plate of black America. About the health, politics, economics, and culture of what we ate and why we should become vegetarians. (They call it intersectionality today)" ("Dick Gregory"). Practicing intersectionality before it had a name, Gregory was a food justice advocate, seeing the connections between access to healthy food and quality of life. As McQuirter explains: "what really grabbed me was that he traced the path of a hamburger from a cow on a factory farm, to the slaughterhouse, to a hamburger, to a clogged artery, to a heart attack. And it completely rocked my world" ("Dick Gregory"). Before Gregory saw that intersection he saw the one between different forms of killing. McQuirter quotes at length from *Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' with Mother Nature*:

> Under the leadership of Dr. King, I became convinced that nonviolence meant opposition to killing in any form. I felt the commandment "Thou Shalt Not Kill" applied to human beings not only in their dealings with each other—war, lynching, assassination, murder and the like—but in their practice of killing animals for food and sport. Animals and humans suffer and die alike. Violence causes the same pain, the same spilling of blood, the same stench of death, the same arrogant, cruel, and brutal taking of life. (15-16)

Positionality matters when making comparisons between kinds of suffering. When Dick Gregory includes lynching in his list of forms of human-on-human violence that are linked for him to the human-on-animal violence of killing for food and sport, that is likely to be received differently by Black Americans than say, when PETA or vegan groups or individuals make comparisons between slavery in the U.S. and factory farms. Having long been compared to other animals as a means of justifying their enslavement and oppression in this country, many Black Americans rightly find it offensive to have their suffering invoked as a point of comparison for the suffering of animals—even if they empathize with that suffering.[3] Positionality also matters when discussing diet; food access varies widely based on geography, race, and class. This is an important consideration for all vegan outreach efforts, personal and collective.

PETA's website has a "How to Go Vegan" page that focuses on the ease of aquiring vegan foods with no mention of differences in food access across different neighborhoods and cities.[4] The page reads: 1) What to Buy 2) What to Make 3) Where to Eat, and bears the slogan "even easier—as easy as 1, 2, 3." Given that presenting veganism as difficult or impossible to maintain is one of the most prevalent negative discourses about veganism, it certainly makes sense that PETA and other animal rights groups would try to counter this stereotype. In the "What to Buy" section on the site PETA advises: "Overhaul your shopping list by adding a few mock meats and nondairy delights. Here are some of the products that make our mouths water the most! Best of all, many of these can be found at grocery stores in

your neighborhood." The reassuring statement about how easy these products are to find begs the question: "Whose neighborhood"? Given that many neighborhoods across the country don't even have grocery stores, and that the availability and quality of fresh produce varies significantly depending on your zip code, let alone the availability of "mock meats and nondairy delights" (despite their increasing popularity and wider distribution), PETA's assertion of this universal place called "your neighborhood" excludes many neighbors across the U.S. from its community. Even The Vegan Society uses similar language on their website. On a page also called "How to Go Vegan" they feature the following text right next to a picture of decadent-looking little vegan cakes in front of the brand name "Lujuria Vegana" out of Barcelona: "It's time we let you in on a little secret, going vegan is actually a piece of cake."[5]

The association of veganism and vegans with whiteness is the part of the elitism stereotype that needs to be addressed among all vegans and animal rights and vegan outreach organizations.[6] Decolonial, Black feminist vegan theorist A. Breeze Harper has pointed out that there is a marked absence of race-consciousness in mainstream vegan literature, as the above seemingly innocuous examples from both PETA's and The Vegan Society's websites illustrate. In fact, veganism is often presented as being race-neutral and even if veganism itself is a counter discourse, its epistemology too often normalizes whiteness and an uncritically "post-racial" perspective" (Harper, "Going Beyond Normative White" 155-156). This has everything to do with the different ways places and space are racialized: "collectively,

low-income Black Americans in the USA *know* that a holistic plant-based diet is most often nearly impossible to achieve; simultaneously, the collectivity of white middle-class urban people *know* that a holistic plant-based diet generally is easy to achieve" ("Going Beyond" 155). Food deserts and environmental racism produce some of the material conditions of this knowledge. The USDA defines a food desert as an area that lacks access to either a grocery store or healthy foods within a mile or more in the city, or ten miles in rural areas. In the place of grocery and health food stores, food deserts have a disproportionate number of liquor stores and fast food chains—making unhealthy foods easy to access (*Food Access Research Atlas*). Food justice activist Karen Washington has suggested that the term "food apartheid" is more descriptive of and transparent about the systemic racism that creates such disparities in food access. In May 2018 interview with *The Guardian,* Washington points out that "food desert" is "an outsider term" and also that the term: "makes us think of an empty, absolutely desolate place. But when we're talking about these places, there is so much life and vibrancy and potential. Using that word runs the risk of preventing us from seeing all of those things." Food desert also suggests that such conditions are merely part of the natural topography of things, like the Mojave or the Sahara.

Food deserts and food apartheid are just one facet of environmental racism, which also includes "lack of access to public transportation to get to healthier food options." ("Going Beyond" 155). According to lauren Ornelas, the founder of vegan food justice group the Food Empowerment Project, environmental racism is the product of "policies and law [that] allow a disproportionate number of high-pollution

industries (i.e. trash incinerator projects, refineries, factory farms, etc.) to locate in low-income communities and communities of color" (Ornelas 158).[7] Pig farms located in rural North Carolina illustrate this point. Because of the horrific images of stranded and drowned pigs that appeared all over the Internet after the flooding from Hurricane Florence in 2018, many people are now aware that North Carolina is "home" to millions of pigs who are sent to industrial slaughter. What many people may not be aware of is that, as lauren Ornelas explains, "in North Carolina you have predominantly Black communities living around pig farms where they are suffering from nosebleeds and headaches and nausea. They can't open their windows because [of] the flies and the stench. Their property values go down because who wants to live near pig farms" (qtd. in *The Invisible Vegan*). Laura Pulido has argued that environmental racism is a form of state-sanctioned violence and a part of what Cedric Robinson calls racial capitalism. Robinson theorizes racial capitalism in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* to point out that racism is one of the structuring logics of capitalism (Pulido 526). Environmental racism is a part of that structure that is invisible to people living outside of the affected areas and communities. Ornelas adds: "that's why stopping eating animal products, by not drinking milk, by not eating any animal products you are not participating in a system that also causes harm to communities living in these areas which are predominantly communities of color." (qtd. in *Invisible Vegan*). The exploitation of pigs in North Carolina is part of the same system that exploits the human residents of rural North Carolina. This kind of systemic view encourages what Claire Jean Kim calls "multi-

optic vision, a way of seeing that takes disparate justice claims seriously without privileging any one presumptively" (19).

Practicing veganism from this perspective, or rather range of perspectives, can hardly be said to be elitist; rather than participating in a rarefied dietary practice or lifestyle, a more race- and class- conscious practice of veganism is an intersectional practice of food justice. Vernellia Randall defines institutional racism as "more subtle but no less destructive" than individual racism; it includes "policies, practices and procedures of institutions that have a disproportionately negative effect on racial minorities' access to and quality of goods, services, and opportunities" (qtd. in "Going Beyond" 158). Ignoring the effects of institutional racism and acting as though advocating against those effects takes away from a focus on the suffering of nonhuman animals only weakens the revolutionary possibilities of the animal rights movement.[8] Without advocating for and bringing attention to racial and class disparities in food access and health due to environmental racism, or in promoting veganism solely from a race- and class-neutral—or middle-class white—perspective with slogans like "anyone can go vegan—it's easy," veganism can be reduced all too easily to just the kind of exclusionary practice that elite agribusiness interests would like to frame it as.

While individual vegans can perpetuate the elitist stereotype, it is ultimately an elite food system that profits from both environmental racism and the bodies of nonhuman animals—a system that the U.S. government subsidizes by 38 billion dollars of meat and dairy subsidies, and only 17 million dollars in fruit and vegetable

subsidies (Simon xv).[9] Over the last century, the consumption of meat has nearly doubled in the United States. While many might believe that this is a market-driven phenomenon responding to consumer demand—encapsulated in both advertising and jingoistic notions like real Americans love hamburgers—others argue that this anomalous phenomenon is actually supply-driven.[10] Anomalous because Americans not only eat nearly twice as much animal-based meat now as one hundred years ago, but collectively we also eat more animal-based meat than people in any other place on Earth at any time in recorded history.[11] It is estimated that every person in the U.S. eats a yearly total of 200 pounds of animal-based meat and 620 pounds of animal-based dairy, which means that as a nation the U.S consumes 250 billion pounds of animal-based products (Simon 123). Of course, ethics and a multi-optic perspective would ask us to consider the lives of nonhumans not in pounds of their flesh, but as individuals: in so far as that is possible, estimates indicate that the average American eats about 28 individual land animals and 175 aquatic animals in one year (Višak and Garner 2). Due to the global influence of U.S. patterns of consumption and production, animal-based meat-eating is on the rise in countries like China—and even in India, a country known for its long history of vegetarianism based on the principle of non-violence, or ahimsa, and also on a reverence for the sanctity of cows (*Meat Atlas* 10-13).[12] U.S. patterns of meat and cow's milk production and consumption have had, and continue to have, a grave impact on not only shaping, but also deciding—or colonizing—non-Western diets.

What is perhaps most misleading about the stereotype of veganism as elitist is that it is real corporate elites who have the most to gain in maintaining the meat-eating status quo by using vegans as one of many smokescreens to help distract from the wide-reaching economic and ethical costs they offload onto other animals, taxpayers, people's health, and the environment—all with the help of the USDA, government subsidies, influence on seemingly-neutral nutritional organizations, and a very powerful government lobby (Simon 123). In 2014 alone, the meat and livestock industries contributed $10.8 million dollars to U.S. political campaigns and spent $6.9 million dollars on direct lobbying efforts to the federal government (Center for Responsive Politics). While the North American Meat Institute estimates that killing animals for food contributes $894 billion dollars to the U.S economy, others estimate that the industry externalizes over $400 billion dollars of their costs onto taxpayers in the form of subsidies that keep meat prices down (the majority of which go to large corporations which put small farmers out of business), onto the environment, and onto human health care costs (for related risks and diseases like diabetes, cancer, heart disease, antibiotic resistance, salmonella and e. coli poisoning) (Simon 213; Tegtmeier and Duffy 14-16). This is not to mention the incredible suffering endured by the endless stream of nonhuman victims (10 billion terrestrial animals and an estimated 46.9 billion aquatic animals every year in the U.S. alone) of the meat and livestock industries, whose lives and pain cannot really be measured or monetized.[13] Ag-gag laws protect the meat, dairy, and egg industries by making it a crime to photograph inside of factory farms and slaughterhouses. CFEs or customary farming

exemptions put "farmers," but really corporations, in charge of deciding what counts as animal cruelty. Given all of this, standing up for the human and nonhuman victims of such a powerful and insidious industry with such close ties to the government is not at all an elitist concern.[14] It is in fact a democratic and egalitarian one.

Beef. It's What's for Dinner. Milk. It Does a Body Good. Pork. The Other White Meat. The Incredible, Edible Egg. These familiar slogans command the attention of consumers in the U.S. by combining advertising panache with the objective authority of the dictionary and the apparent wisdom of nutritional experts. They are, however, the work of government checkoff programs: instead of individual corporations promoting their own products, Congress assesses a small tax-like charge on a commodity like beef or milk, and then trade groups for that commodity, such as the Cattleman's Beef Promotion and Research Board and the National Pork Board, direct those funds toward marketing and research to increase their sales (Simon 3-15). According to the USDA's website, "the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service oversees the research and promotion programs, which are led by boards of small and large producers, importers and other commodity stakeholders" ("Industry Insight"). The website also explains that members of the trade board are "nominated by the industry and appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture." The result for producers of animal-based commodities is a yearly advertising budget of 557 million dollars—and for everyone else the strange entanglement of "government speech" with advertisements for animal-based commodities (Simon 5). In *Johanns v Livestock Marketing Association*, a 2005 case in which members of the beef industry claimed

that being required to fund a message they disagreed with violated their free speech, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Livestock Marketing Association on the grounds that the message was "government speech": "The message set out in the beef promotions is from beginning to end established by the Federal Government. . . ." (qtd. in Simon 6).

It bears significant reflection that the U.S. Supreme Court does not regard these familiar slogans that have been used to sell the bodies of other animals to Americans for decades as free speech, but rather as government speech, speech that has been established *from beginning to end* by the Federal Government. It is worth questioning the widespread belief that as Americans we are free to eat whatever we choose: perhaps it is the government and the meat and dairy industries trying—quite successfully it seems—to control our food choices and freedoms, and not vegans. These government-mandated industry slogans that promote the sales and consumption of animals' bodies are just one part of the nexus of elite interests that cohere in seemingly cheap meat, egg, and dairy prices. Marx's theory of the commodity may be nowhere more applicable than in the case of meat, eggs, and dairy where the relationships between the connected lives and labor of humans and nonhumans disappear into the commodity form, along with elite corporate and government interests, totally obscuring the widely disparate values accorded different lives, depending on their race and species.

Lifestyle Veganism: Goop and the White Wellness Vegan Brand

> This is not a diet. This is a way of life. A way to enjoy food. A way to feel healthy, clean, energized, and pure. It's time to reclaim your mind and body. It's time to strut your skinny ass down the street like you're in an episode of *Charlie's Angels* with some really cool song playing in the background. It's time to prance around in a thong like you rule the world. It's time to get skinny.
>
> –Rory Freedman and Kim Barnouin, *Skinny Bitch* (2005)

As if they were fed on the same hormones and antibiotics we force onto other animals who become meat, the stigmatization of veganism and "healthy" lifestyles as elitist on one hand, and the democratization of meat and ill-health on the other, have mutated into something quite monstrous. This strange cultural coding obscures the material conditions that uphold it. The same racial capitalist system that targets Black and Latino kids with advertisements for largely animal-based junk food, and not with ads for things like water and nuts, advertises healthier lifestyles—like vegan food and self-care—to white consumers (Harris et al.). The commodification of veganism as a wellness trend and an elite celebrity lifestyle places these systemic issues under erasure at the same time that it also erases the animal suffering that motivates many ethical vegans. The locus of what is a political and an ethical problem in the food system—i.e. encouraging Americans to eat unhealthy animal-based foods with large subsidies that keep prices artificially low and discouraging Americans from eating healthier plant-based fresh foods by not subsidizing them to the same degree, combined with food deserts/apartheid and environmental racism that create class- and race- based disparities in access, and the rampant exploitation of other animals—gets framed instead as an ideological one. Taking care of your health and eating well gets

coded as an elitist luxury that signals the degree to which one is out of touch with the lives and concerns of everyday Americans with real problems—instead of as a radical act that combines care-of-self with care-of-others.

Lifestyle is a word that often appears in conjunction with vegan and veganism. As it is commonly understood, evidenced by its usage in popular culture, "the vegan lifestyle" is something largely set apart from animal rights. In fact, neither the surging amounts of capital being invested in plant-based meats and dairy startups, nor the increasing number of rich and famous vegan faces and bodies in Hollywood or on Instagram have led anyone to coin the term or concept of an "animal rights or liberation lifestyle." The disconnect between the vegan lifestyle, which is consumer-based, and what could be called the animal rights one, which is activism- and ethics-based, does not really stop the two from being conflated in ways that tend to carry over negative meanings generated by the vegan lifestyle to the many already-negative meanings associated with animal rights. The vegan lifestyle is a double-edged (non-violent) sword in the fight for animal rights because it simultaneously increases the appeal of veganism while decreasing the visibility of both human and non-human suffering caused by speciesism. It might even be said to increase the appeal of veganism to the degree that it decreases the visibility of suffering and the need for activism in its marketing of veganism as an exciting and transformative—and often luxurious and rarified—lifestyle. The veganism as lifestyle brand sells the idea that consumer choices alone will do all that is necessary to liberate other species from

human-caused suffering, while also liberating followers of the brand from the ill-health and un-wellness of imbalanced lives.[15]

While many animal advocates continue to argue that veganism is an ethical philosophy, a quest for social justice, or a step in the movement toward achieving animal liberation, in the twenty-first century it is most commonly marketed as a lifestyle. The vegan lifestyle is largely a product of consumer capitalism and celebrity culture. The so-called vegan lifestyle has seen a surge in trendiness with the boom of the wellness industry in the U.S. over the last ten years.[16] If you've seen Instagram posts of skinny, predominantly white women with glowing skin sharing recipes for matcha and chia pudding with raspberries haphazardly but perfectly layered in glistening mason jars, then you are familiar with images of veganism as a lifestyle. An article in *The Independent* from April 2018 actually attributed some of veganism's rising popularity to the bounty of beautiful images of sumptuous vegan food and pretty vegan people living exciting lives on *Instagram.* According to the article, "The Surprising Reason Veganism Is Now Mainstream,": "Instagram is [largely] responsible for veganism's PR overhaul, in which it has transformed from kooky diet to an aesthetically-pleasing cacophony of 'earth bowls' and 'green goddess' smoothies" (Petter). Kooky here probably signals animal rights. Part of the PR overhaul the writer describes may have to do with replacing photos of ethical reasons to become vegan with aesthetic ones. The article replaces images of chickens crammed together in dark and dirty warehouses with images of beautiful and colorful (blood-free) foods. *The Independent* suggests that being a "visual-first platform"

makes Instagram "the easiest one in which to share aspirational lifestyles," and that a critical "part of what makes vegan content so stimulating is the growing community of social media influencers advocating the lifestyle as part of their brand" (Petter). As part of a larger "brand," *Instagram*'s veganism-as-lifestyle has come to acquire a certain overall look replete with specific visual tropes of longstanding feminine, white beauty norms that mark the lifestyle as privileged, racialized, leisure-based, and wellness-oriented.

Neoreach, an online platform that curates social media influencers for businesses looking to hire them to promote their products and brands, featured a list of the "Top 10 Vegan Influencers on Instagram" in October 2018. Before listing ten Instagram accounts that look remarkably similar, the *Neoreach* article notes "Veganism is a growing trend. While all of us get overwhelmed thinking of how hard it must be to eat a plant-based diet, there are tons of vegan influencers who equip us with easy and inspiring recipes. The vibrant food and positive energy compel even the most committed carnivores to switch to veganism." Though there are certainly some exceptions, the lifestyle brand of veganism tends to omit animal rights or animal suffering from its brand, and totally omits issues of food access. The trendy brand replaces the more controversial subject of animal ethics and differential food access with "vibrant food," "easy and inspiring recipes," and "positive energy." Sifting through this top-ten list is a lot like flipping through a food or style magazine. Despite the fact that the ten influencers are individuals, they all seem to conform to a very similar and identifiable brand: all ten are female; eight of them appear to be white.

The recipes range from brightly-colored bowls of mixed grains and veggies to decadent cakes and desserts. The plating is creative, playful, and colorful, often featuring unique cutlery and artisan ceramics and showing off the influencers' posh kitchens. The majority of the women also post images of their lives that feature several consistent tropes: pictures of their thin bodies in bikinis at the beach, pictures of them doing yoga, pictures of them on hikes and on vacations to beautiful places, pictures laughing with significant others or family.

There are consistent verbal tropes as well: most of the influencers talk about wellness, self-care, and positive energy and invite their followers to aspire to similar values. In a long post adjacent to an image of Instagram influencer and cookbook author Ella Mills smiling in an oversized cardigan holding her dog Austin underneath a cherry tree in full blossom, @deliciouslyella, who has 1.5 million followers, asks "How do you turn adversity into an opportunity and a positive into a negative?" Before plugging the latest episode of her podcast with another wellness influencer @selfcarecompany, she writes: "This morning we took a minute for self-care after a super busy week launching the app, with coffees and matchas in bed, an hours walk with Austin through the park with this gorgeous blossom, pancakes at the deli and now to the office." In these aspirational posts, the veganism-as-lifestyle brand sells the perfect trifecta of a balanced life, equal parts productivity, relaxation, and indulgence. Veganism as an Instagram lifestyle brand tends to conflate the dietary aspects of ethical veganism with an overall self-care and wellness platform. On these accounts, whether the influencer is an ethical vegan or not, their veganism is

promoted as one way of taking care of the self and being well. This Instagram wellness brand is one example of how the commodifcation of veganism "downplays an animal-rights focus in order to appeal to a broader audience" (Wright 153), making veganism a hot trend while simultanesouly constructing its audience as affluent and white.

Lifestyle veganism is often associated with expensive foods and products, "clean" eating, alternative health, faddishness, celebrity, and elitism. There has come to be a strangely automatic cultural relay between veganism and faddishness, part of which is certainly bound up in the trendiness of celebrity veganism. Laura Wright's 2015 *The Vegan Studies Project* devotes an entire chapter, "The Celebrity Vegan Project," to the impact of celebrity vegan culture on popular discourses about veganism. The focus of Wright's analysis is not on the erasures that take place in the spotlight of elite celebrity veganism, but she does begin to gesture in that direction. Wright suggests that:

> [i]n the case of celebrities who are publicly vegan, their veganism functions as a manifestation of individual (noncelebrity) potential to embody veganism and also as a publicly scrutinized and debated identity category alternately lauded as healthful and derided as elitist and illegitimate, depending on . . . [their] reasons for . . . [choosing] to be vegan. (131)

As with the vegan Instagram influencer, who is after all a more democratized version of the celebrity figure or perhaps the celebrity figure distilled down to their potential to embody—and sell—particular lifestyles and products, the publicly vegan celebrity embodies a kind of aspirational lifestyle that others can emulate if they want to live like—and perhaps *be* like—that celebrity. As Wright details, celebrity veganism

becomes another site of contestation for the legitimacy of vegan identity that then either adds or subtracts legitimacy from an already-fraught identity position (131, 146-153). Wright's analysis illuminates that while the healthful side of celebrity veganism is praised and admired, its elitist and faddish aspects are criticized. The rest of this section will look at the way that the practice of veganism-as-healthful actually gets collapsed into the practice of veganism-as-elitism. The pairing of health with elitism deserves careful attention as a form of systemic racism, which will be taken up later in the chapter.

Discussions of veganism-as-elitism revolve around commodities and commodity trends—the consumable food products and fads that wind up in stores and on tables. Focusing on the faddishness of vegan products emphasizes the wealth of food choices, placing under erasure those people who do not have those choices and often the plight of other animals as well. According to Cole and Morgan's 2011 study of negative discourses about veganism in the UK, labeling veganism as a fad helps to neutralize, or even erase, the seriousness of the plight of other animals as well as to undermine the efficacy and viability of veganism as a mode of addressing that plight. Their study found that describing veganism as a fad was one of the frequently occurring vegaphobic discourses, and that this discourse was often tied to celebrities who experiment with veganism for a little while, only to soon abandon it or to practice it erratically or unfaithfully. According to Cole and Morgan, this discourse uses examples of errant celebrity vegans to "dismiss veganism as a fad, and thereby to taint all vegans by association with faddism" ("Vegaphobia" 143).

The stigma of faddism or faddishness is also tied to that of elitism, most prominently in the figure of the celebrity. The celebrity figure joins these two stereotypes together in one body that can simultaneously be admired and scrutinized. In the beginning of Wright's exploration of celebrity veganism, she connects the phenomenon of the celebrity figure to consumer (racial) capitalism, arguing that they really cannot be separated:

> Because our current construction of celebrity is completely produced and sustained by consumer capitalism, celebrities, by their very natures, are perpetual salespeople who establish and maintain their positions by presenting the public with an endless variety of products aimed at allowing for greater access to an ever-evolving interpretation of the "American Dream." (130)

Veganism has become a choice-based product and lifestyle brand marketed by celebrities; the attributes associated with the celebrity get mapped onto the lifestyle. This is partly because, as Wright suggests, "in the hands of celebrity vegans [and popular media], veganism circulates within the democratic capitalist matrix in ways that complicate both its ethical and its health-based imperatives . . . " (130-131). Representations of Gwyneth Paltrow and her lifestyle brand Goop mark the apotheosis of the vegan celebrity figure into an ultimate elite lifestyle brand. In this pop-cultural apotheosis health-based imperatives of veganism morph into something almost dangerous as they get folded under the aegis of celebrity vegan elitism.[17]

Cole and Morgan suggest that Paltrow is not only one of the most vilified vegans but also "the celebrity vegan faddist *par excellence*" ("Vegaphobia" 143). They cite the following example from an English food magazine in 2007 before Paltrow left the acting world to found her lifestyle brand Goop in September of 2008:

"Gwyneth Paltrow is so green she's practically salad. Charged by macrobiotic whole grain fuel and wielding a child called Apple, she and Chris Martin are Britain's first family of meatless food" (qtd. in "Vegaphobia" 143). In this example, being vegan or meatless means being "so green" one "practically" becomes "salad," even giving birth to children named after the original forbidden fruit. The article uses words like "charged" and "wielding" to make the point that the first lady of veganism (more on the status of Paltrow's veganism to follow) performs her rarified diet and lifestyle as a kind of royal pageantry, with veganism in tow as a ceremonial weapon. Fast forward to a 17 June 2017 article in *The Guardian* called "Gwyneth Paltrow Is Making Us Feel Worse Not Better," that catalogs the ascension of Gwyneth as (Hollywood's most hated) elitist-vegan-goddess extraordinaire. The Op-Ed begins with the author confessing her own ill-health, which she attributes to her vegetarianism. Invoking an array of anti-vegan stereotypes in just one sentence she writes: "Flirting briefly with chlorophyll–it turned out that I wasn't photo-synthesizing–I embarked on a course of vegan protein milkshakes that tasted like the kind of liquefied almond-scented pus that might be used in a hipster-themed waterboarding session" (Ellen). Here, veganism is aligned with bogus and extreme alternative health cures. "Flirting briefly" and "hipster-themed" refer to the faddishness of this brand of health-veganism. After a few paragraphs of detailing the dilettantism of various hot-button health cures of the moment, like coconut oil, spirulina, and chlorophyll, the writer cuts to the chase: "This is about an ongoing, out of control, global Worried Well-Hell bore-a-thon, where those devoted to 'clean living' drone worthily on about their needs,

health, Zen and those very special indeed tummies. At the zenith of all this is the High Priestess of Hamptons-Wellness, Gwyneth Paltrow . . ." (Ellen). As "High Priestess of Hamptons-Wellness," and retired-before-40 Hollywood royalty, Paltrow may certainly be said to occupy an elite and even elitist position. The co-option of veganism as both celebrity fad and wellness and "clean living" lifestyle has done a lot to contribute to and reinforce the stigma of veganism as an elitist vanity project.

It is unclear whether or not Paltrow has ever explicitly claimed to be vegan; like so many vegan stereotypes, this association is based on half-truths. She did follow a strict macrobiotic diet at one point, but despite the fact that she regularly talks about eating fish and other sea life, her name and her wellness brand have become indelibly linked to veganism. This underscores the divorce between animal rights and vegan diet in the veganism lifestyle brand. *VegNews'* 2019 April Fool's Day joke drives home both the precariousness of this association with a spoof article by Jasmin Singer called "Gwyneth Paltrow: 'I Invented Veganism.'" Singer jokes:

> Famed actress and self-proclaimed "inventor of yoga" Gwyneth Paltrow has revealed to *VegNews* that she has also invented veganism. Paltrow—creator of the popular lifestyle brand Goop, who recently made headlines when the entrepreneur announced that she single-handedly popularized the ancient Indian practice of yoga—sent *VegNews* editors a direct message on Instagram...stating that "veganism would be nothing without me," and that thanks to her 2016 edible vegan beauty line Juice Beauty, plant-based living has skyrocketed.

The point, perhaps, that Singer makes here, aside from chuckling at the fact that in a December 2018 interview with *The Wall Street Journal,* Paltrow suggested having had a critical role in popularizing yoga in the U.S., is that like yoga, veganism has a long and multicultural history that tends to get erased in its commodification; and

also, like yoga, veganism has been repackaged in twenty-first century as a part of an affluent lifestyle of conspicuously practiced—and consumed—wellness.[18]

Joking aside, a 26 June 2017 article from *New York Magazine* that tries to diagnose "The Wellness Epidemic" also provides a good example of how veganism became discursively articulated with the wellness craze. Describing the evolution of Goop from curated lists of where to get the best espresso in Rome or bikini wax in Paris to a multi-million-dollar empire of alternative health cures and top-dollar self-care, Amy Larocca explains that it:

> became less about revealing the trappings of the good life and more about the notion that the really good life is internal. Rich and beautiful people don't just go to nicer places, their organs work better. They even know how to breathe better, with more oxygen per ounce. They're not afraid to try fecal transplants, with really top-notch, vegan-only feces.

Larocca's satirical (and funny) analysis helps demonstrate how veganism becomes part of the parody of wellness-mania and wellness-myths at the same moment that it also becomes part of an elitist notion of what it means to be healthy or to be "well." This article recognizes, even if ironically, that the brand vegan has become part of the onerous and insidious idea that trying to be healthy or to take care of yourself is something reserved for the elite.

So-called wellness has become a status symbol: with it veganism has become one marker of the larger wellness brand, one way of conspicuously performing the consumption and production of wellness. A July 2016 article from *The Cut* called "Why Wellness Is the New Way to Look, Feel, and Act Rich," gives a list of "things you can buy these days in the name of wellness." Besides an $800 per hour-and-a-half

appointment with functional medicine doctor to the stars (including Paltrow), Dr. Frank Lipman, the list includes: "gluten-free, vegan meal delivery from Sakara Life for around $100/day, $195 mesh leggings from Michi, a session of reiki for $175" (Meltzer). Wellness should not be an idea reserved for the rich and famous; nor should veganism. The commercialization of veganism as part of a wellness lifestyle brand for the rich and famous tends not only to strip veganism of its radical content only to repackage it as another celebrity fad, it also winds up stripping self-care of its revolutionary possibility, further distancing the privileges of the elite from the rights of the people. Larocca's satirical critique of the evolution of Goop's "notion that the really good life is internal," that "[r]ich and beautiful people don't just go to nicer places, their organs work better," helps bring into focus the way that the commodification of wellness can be a form of biopolitical class warfare. Turning wellness into a brand that only wealthy people deserve or can afford naturalizes the material conditions that distribute medical care and food unequally along racial and class lines.

Audre Lorde theorizes self-care as an intersectional practice. She is often quoted for her words about self-care which became a social justice rallying cry for women of color to care for their own minds and bodies in spite of a world that told them not to. In her 1988 essay "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer," Lorde brings together her journal entries to reflect on her struggles as a Black, lesbian with liver cancer, after having recovered from breast cancer six years prior. She writes: “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political

warfare" (131). If the body is the place where trauma, both personal and historical, registers, where pain, both individual and collective, takes up residence, then colonizing self-care and the possibility of healing internal landscapes of trauma and pain for the new elite, mostly-white empire of wellness is yet another way that racism and classism are being institutionalized at the most personal and intimate level. It is hard to look at GOOP-style veganism or Instagram lifestyle veganism and not see it as an elitist diet. Ultimately though what this does is further obfuscate how eating and being healthy became associated with elitism in the first place, while cheap unhealthy fast food became associated with low-income communities and communities of color. The successful commodification of veganism as part of the elite wellness brand helps not only to popularize these stereotyped ways of eating, but also to further drive up the cost of the so-called wellness lifestyle so that it becomes even more unaffordable––and elite.

Blindspotting Veganism: Race, Gentrification, and Green Juice

> From medical mismanagement to the lack of adequate health care and on, many people of color suffer needlessly. When you combine this reality with the fact that the majority of neighborhoods of color promote junk foods—from triple-layer cheeseburgers to forty ounces of malt liquor to the latest sugary cereal–-and that these locations are wholly deficient in offering grocery stores that provide fresh and affordable produce, then living healthier is not simply about choice. It is also about choices that get made to grant and deny access to a better way of life. Consequently, a lifestyle of health is also about inherent race and class discrimination.
>
> –Dr. Psyche Williams-Forson, Preface, *Sistah Vegan* (2009)

> Going vegan is easier than ever before, but we are here to make it even easier—as easy as 1, 2, 3!
>
> –PETA

The 2018 film *Blindspotting*, is a story about increasing racial tensions in an increasingly gentrified, and white, Oakland, that also takes up some of the inherent race and class issues in both the food system and lifestyles of health and veganism. *Blindspotting* follows Collin (Daveed Diggs), an introspective and mostly soft-spoken Black man on his last three days of a one-year probation for a violent crime and his extroverted, raucous, hot-headed white best friend and co-worker Miles (Rafael Casal), also from Oakland, who the film reveals much later was equally involved in the fight that led to Miles' incarceration, but served no jail time for it. It might be surprising that vegan food, and particularly vegan fast food, figures into the first ten minutes of this film. The film opens with a split screen that juxtaposes images of old Oakland with the newer and increasingly gentrified one: an image of lush ripe tomatoes at a farmer's market next to one of a shipyard; new buildings going up next to old ones being razed to the ground; more construction next to homeless encampments (that are constantly being set up, then cleared out by the police, only to be set up again down the street); San Pablo Market (a liquor store) next to an image of the Whole Foods near Lake Merritt that opened in 2007; two Black guys giving the camera the finger next to an image of one white guy with Apple earbuds and a goofy smile taking a selfie in front of Lake Merritt and flashing a peace sign. The montage increases in speed and intensity just after a split screen between an image of two women who get in a brawl on the Bart and a police search helicopter patrolling an otherwise empty night sky. The final images show Oakland night life, people gathered out on the streets having fun, doing sideshows, hanging out of cars—all with

continued police presence and surveillance. The implication of the opening montage seems to be that as gentrification spreads across Oakland, disparity widens as members of a traditionally Black community and neighborhood rich in Black culture and history get pushed out of their own housing market, and violence increases as systemic racism continues to put Black lives at more risk and danger than white lives. The film also reveals that food is another facet of systemic racism, a part of institutionalized violence that consistently does more harm to people and communities of color. A study published in 2019 by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity and the Council on Black Health confirms this insight, finding that:

> In the United States, food companies almost exclusively target Black and Hispanic consumers with marketing for nutritionally poor products, including fast food, candy, sugary drinks, and snacks . . . In 2017 as in 2013, food-related marketing continues to disproportionately target youth of color with harmful products and contributes to health disparities affecting their communities . . . However, no water, fruit, or nut brands targeted either Hispanic or Black consumers. (Harris et al.)

Amid the seriousness of these contemporary stakes, *Blindspotting* deploys veganism in a comic, and sometimes volatile, way as the epitome of gentrification. Though there are many other markers of Oakland's gentrification in the film, none is so conspicuous and consistent as vegan food and "healthy" products like green juice.[19] The film opens with a close up of Collin's face, as he is being talked at by the probation judge. It then cuts to the night of his third-to-last day of probation: He is in the backseat of a friend's car eating potato wedges from the newly reopened old fast food joint, Kwikway. Miles is in the passenger seat taking a slow bite of his burger. As he spits it out, the music quiets; Miles renders his judgment: "That does not taste

the same." As we hear Miles say "That is not a fry," the camera focuses on Collin holding a potato wedge in one hand and the bag of fries in the other. This particular fruit of "new" Oakland tastes good to Collin; nodding approvingly, he says: "They have potato wedges now. I'm into that." The scene quickly becomes more serious, and consequential, as in the middle of the funny banter about the merits of the old and new Kwikway—perhaps a cipher for the old and new Oakland—Miles finds a gun wedged in the seat and uncovers many more, all for sale by their friend, whose car it is, who is also as it turns out, an Uber driver. After Collin's protests fail to stop Miles from buying the gun, which will wind up almost costing Collin his freedom from prison later in the film, the two best friends hop out of the car and join the crowd of people and cars at the grand reopening. Miles throws his burger to the ground as he rejects new Oakland full-stop, announcing "You're no Kwikway!" The dejected burger lies against the pavement as the camera reveals a white sticker on the wrapper: vegan. "Oh you got the vegan burger," Collin says. What they soon discover from the nasally-voiced white drive-thru employee walking up to the cars is that "if you want a meat patty, you have to specify." At the new Kwikway, it turns out that the default patty is a vegan one; meat has to be requested, and not vice versa. Miles quips, "Why would I have to specify meat?" as Collin pulls him away.

That this mostly comical scene not only opens *Blindspotting*, but leads into the most impactful event of the film—after dropping Miles off in the company moving truck, trying to get home before his 11pm curfew, Collin finds himself stopped at a long red light eating his vegan burger when he witnesses a white police

officer shoot an unarmed Black man in the back four times right next to his open window—puts the veganism-as-gentrification narrative in an at least tangential relationship to the life-and-death racial tensions the film explores. Throughout the film, Miles bristles at every vegan product in his neighborhood in the same way he bristles at all of the white hipsters and tech people, while Collin embraces the vegan products (not the hipsters) in attempts, in Collin's words: to "better myself." The morning after Collin witnesses the traumatic shooting, he and Miles stop at the liquor store on Miles' corner before heading to work in the moving truck. News of the shooting plays on the television above the counter, as Miles goes to the counter to buy a single cigarette and notices a new mini-fridge packed full of sleek bottles of green juice. Incredulous, he asks the clerk "What the fuck is this green juice shit doing up in here?" The film continues to expand the narrative that vegan options mean gentrification to include the possibility that vegan options might also mean self-care and access to healthier food, as the clerk replies dryly: "It's good for you," only to inform them that it costs ten bucks. Just after the best friends reply in unison: "What?!", Collin opens his wallet to get one.

It becomes clear when Collin and Miles arrive at work, that there's an additional dimension of the vegan food/self-care narrative: Collin's ex-girlfriend, Val, the receptionist at the moving company, lives a "healthy" lifestyle; she's in college studying psychology, does yoga and soul-cycle, and according to a crude joke Miles makes in the company locker-room, she's also vegan. As he sets the juice down prominently in front of her, she says "Collin, is that a green juice?" In reply to his

humorous boasts about his healthy "regimen these days," she says: "I'm just glad you're taking care of yourself." Later that day, Collin and Miles stop by Collin's mom's house. She's also noticed the improved quality of the food in the neighborhood.[20] Interestingly Collin's mom mentions this in a conversation that also recognizes the increased cost of living in Oakland. In response to Miles' suggestion that she just sell her house, she says: "I'll be damned if I move out of this neighborhood now that they've got good food and shit."[21] When Collin buys the green juice again the next day, while Miles is still buying his single cigarette, Miles hassles him, joking that soon he'll be a hipster wearing suspenders and riding his Vespa to Whole Foods, to which Collin replies with seriousness: "They actually have great produce."

One question the film raises is: Why does it take the gentrification of a neighborhood to "grant access" to vegan options at the local fast food restaurant, green juice at the corner store, or "great produce" at Whole Foods? While initially, *Blindspotting* uses vegan options as a sign of a phony lifestyle associated with white gentrification, by the end of the film vegan options are also recognizable as offering access to self-care, perhaps more as Audre Lorde imagined it than as Goop does, and, in Psyche Williams-Forson's words, to "a better way of life." By the time the film ends, many things have changed: Miles has had a bit of an awakening to the way that his identity crisis as a white Oakland native who now looks a lot like the hipsters of new Oakland is categorically different from Collin's identity crisis as a Black convicted felon from Oakland who just wants to get his life off to a new start and be

left alone by the cops; and Collin confronts his anger at a racist system that always puts Black bodies at increased risk in an emotionally explosive "shoot-out" with no gunshots fired, only a spoken-word litany aimed at the very white police officer who shot the unarmed man at the beginning of the film.

The final scene of the film puts Collin and Miles back in the moving truck driving to the next job, doing what they do best, talking to each other; the green juice makes one final appearance. Only this time it's Miles taking a swig. In an effort to make Collin laugh after his encounter with the white police officer, Miles jokingly threatens to drink the juice, asking if that'll make Collin feel better. After almost gagging on the smell of it, Miles takes a sip, only to surprise himself and say: "Son of a bitch, that shit ain't bad." Just before the film closes and their conversation turns to the disloyal Oakland Raiders, Miles repeats just after Collin: "It's so green." With that, the stoplight also turns green and they ride off into the distance. Ending the film in this way, fusing the green light to the green juice, aligns the green juice with the promise of moving forward into the promise of their unknown futures. It also plays with the denigrating stereotype that people in the "hood" don't want or like green juice, "great produce," or vegan options. The film foregrounds the issue of food access as a form of racism at the same time that it challenges the stereotypes that eating vegan and/or healthy is a white thing, while eating unhealthy is a Black thing––stereotypes, the film points out, that arise largely from the role institutionalized racism plays in distributing access to healthy foods unequally. While fully demonstrating the negative effects of gentrification on longtime Oakland residents,

Blindspotting complicates the veganism-as-gentrification narrative to point out just as Williams-Forson does in the preface to *Sistah Vegan*, that "living healthier is not simply about choice. It is also about choices that get made to grant and deny access to a better way of life. Consequently, a lifestyle of health is also about inherent race and class discrimination" (x).

While *Blindspotting* uses stereotypes about vegan food to open up a conversation about gentrification and systemic racism, showing, for instance, that it takes white people moving into a neighborhood to get "great produce" and "good food" in communities of color, *Thug Kitchen*, now a blog, cookbook, and podcast, uses racial, and racist, stereotypes about the way "thugs" speak and eat to market veganism—engaging in cultural blackface and ignoring longstanding traditions of vegetarian and vegan food in African and Black Southern diets, not to mention the systemic racism and elitist food system that might even make the idea of a so-called "thug" eating an arugula salad laughable or incongruous in the first place.[22] *Thug Kitchen* began as an anonymous profanity-laden blog in 2012 with captions like: "Calm your bitch ass down like a boss," and "Don't fuck around with some sorry-ass ten-dollar takeout" (qtd. in Terry). Unlike most blogs, which have an "About Me" section, *Thug Kitchen* seemed to leave its authorship to its readership's imaginations and, well, cultural stereotyping. On 29 September 2014, just a week before the official cookbook was published by Rodale, *Epicurious* posted an article with the big reveal: "Thug Life: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Masterminds of Thug Kitchen." Underneath the title, as if to say they had been hiding their identities all along (though

they would later deny this), there is a photo of two white people holding up a copy of *Thug Kitchen* with their hands, so that the book completely obscures (blacks out?) both of their faces.[23] The article introduces them as Michelle Davis and Matt Holloway and a picture that does reveal their faces also shows them dressed like an advertisement for the Gap, in other words they look nothing like Miles from *Blindspotting*, nor Collin.

For the story of how *Thug Kitchen* became popular, look no further than Paltrow and Goop. According to an October 2015 article by Penelope Green in the *New York Times*: "Thug Kitchen didn't get much attention until the spring of 2013, when Paltrow plugged it on her own blog." The Goop plug featured two screenshots of meme-like posts from *Thug Kitchen* and, lo and behold, the ubiquitous green juice makes an appearance in one of them. A close-up of two stem-less wine glasses half-filled with very thick green juice sits next to a row of sliced cucumbers with these words from *Thug Kitchen*: "We all know your punk ass doesn't eat enough greens. Drink one of these nutritious sons of bitches. You can easily make this shit at home on the cheap. Seven dollar smoothies? Fuck you Jamba Juice" (*Goop*). After G.P shared the memes from *Thug Kitchen*'s Tumblr blog with the words, "This might be my favorite thing ever," and then mentioned it on *The Rachel Ray Show*, declaring: "It's like gangster vegan chef . . . [i]t's amazing," the site received so much traffic, its Google Analytics crashed (Green). However, according to the *New York Times,* millions of readers and a book deal later, the *Epicurious* article with the big reveal

"created another sort of Internet frenzy. Ms. Davis and Mr. Holloway, who are white, were accused of cultural blackface" (Green).

In October 2014 soon after the Internet frenzy, Bryant Terry wrote an opinion piece for CNN detailing "The Problem with 'Thug' Cuisine," introducing himself as an "African-American activist and author working to excite people to eat more healthfully." Terry, who is the executive chef for MOAD in San Francisco, as well as the author of the best-selling cookbook *Afro-Vegan* and *Soul Food Kitchen*, points out that while "[c]ertainly, swearing isn't exclusive to African-Americans . . . many of the site's captions . . . rely heavily on phrases from black rap lyrics, stand-up routines and films, which eventually went mainstream." In the op-ed, Terry makes clear that the "'thugs' that the wider culture imagines when that word is used . . . [are] young black men living in low-income urban neighborhoods." He argues that despite claims by many, including Davis and Holloway, that there was nothing "specifically racist, or even racial, about the swearing and slang . . . [i]t's no coincidence that *Thug Kitchen*'s admirers often imagined the 'voice' of the site to be that of shrill, vulgar and often uproariously funny black men like actor Samuel L. Jackson or rapper Ghostface Killah, and not that of actor Robert De Niro or Hells Angels founder Sonny Barger." Terry explains the racial underpinnings of *Thug Kitchen*'s central conceit like this:

> The contrast drawn between the consciously progressive dishes shown and the imagined vulgar, ignorant thug only works if the thug is the kind of grimy person of color depicted in the news and in popular media as hustling drugs on a dystopian block, under the colorful glow of various burger stands, bulletproof take-out spots or bodega signs. "Those kind of people," the visual gag suggests, "intimidating you into... preparing arugula or tempeh? How absurd, how shocking, how hilarious!

Terry hones in on what he calls the "pernicious" stereotypes beneath the unacknowledged cultural appropriation. The popularity of the blog, articulated perfectly by Paltrow's simile: "It's like gangster vegan chef," is only really "amazing" because people think there is something funny, and moreover incongruous, about a "gangster" being a vegan, no less a chef who bullies others into eating delicious, vegan food. Not only is the "joke" racist, it also fails to acknowledge either the material histories or the deep, institutionalized forces that have created these "pernicious thug stereotypes."

According to Terry, *Thug Kitchen* also fails to recognize food history. In fact, Terry suggests that "[t]he worst offense here is the misrepresentation" of traditional African and African-American foodways. He quotes food historian Jessica Harris who points out that "the traditional [West and Central] African diet and African-American diet are essentially . . . a majority vegetarian" one, and he adds that, "[c]oncepts like farm-to-table, eating seasonally and eating locally, while increasingly popular in the mainstream, were not news to a community who was enslaved and brought to America generations ago to help develop the agrarian South." Dr. Milton Mills, Associate Director of Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine echoes this often overlooked food history in the 2019 documentary *The Invisible Vegan*, explaining that:

> When you look at traditional West African diets, they are diets that are plant-based, low in fat, and also contain very little meat. West Africans, who were used to eating this traditional . . . diet were essentially dragged form their homes, shipped across the oceans and then confined to plantations where they were literally fed the garbage of the plantation.

That is part of the history of soul food. Wiliams-Forson underscores that one of the cultural legacies of slavery is the effect of the soul food tradition on the African American relationship with food: "Every culture has a relationship with food and African Americans are no different. What we have however is a very vexed relationship with food. I think because we've been told we ate low on the hog, if you will. We have been chastised and talked about with regard to what is called soul food . . ." (qtd in *Invisible Vegan*). Terry explains another level of cultural amnesia embedded in Davis and Holloway's *Thug Kitchen*, pointing out:

> African-American cuisine may suffer from the stigma and stereotype of being based in fatty pork-based dishes and butter-heavy comfort foods, but in truth, that kind of meat-heavy, indulgent decadence was scarce for millions struggling under the oppression of segregation before the industrialization of our food system. When we peel away the negative stereotypes and reductive portrayals of African-American food, we see a diverse and complex culinary tradition with nutrient-rich foods like collards, mustards, turnips, butter beans, black-eyed peas, green beans, sugar snap peas and the like at the cuisine's core.

Whether intentional or not, by invoking the controversial and racially charged term "thug" and ventriloquizing their recipes through their parody of that voice, without ever disclosing that they did so from a position of whiteness, Davis and Holloway put on a minstrel cooking show, playing with—and profiting financially from—stereotypes about how Black people are expected to eat and even to talk, all the while promoting a kind of cultural and historical amnesia when it comes to the racialized politics of food. In "'Thug Life' in a White Kitchen: Exploring Race Work in the Language of Cookbooks," Meaghan Elliott, who in an effort to clearly disclose her own positionality in this debate, identifies herself as a white academic, analyzes

responses to the cookbook and blog. She also identifies vegan cuisine as a "culture of food already grounded in a location of 'whiteness'" (Elliott 22). This is an important move because it acknowledges the other stereotype at work in the "surprising" nature of *Thug Kitchen*: vegan cuisine is widely coded as affluent and white—in short, elite. Elliott references Julie Guthman in an article that looks at colorblindness and universalism, not in veganism, but in farmer's markets and community supported agriculture:

> many of the discourses of alternative food hail a white subject and thereby code the practices and spaces of alternative food as white. Insofar as this coding has a chilling effect on people of color, it not only works as an exclusionary practice, it also colors the character of food politics more broadly and may thus work against a more transformative politics. (Guthman 266)

Reading *Thug Kitchen* from this perspective, particularly its authors' decision to remain anonymous for more than two years, and even still after the controversy to choose not to include their picture in their second cookbook published in 2016, reveals as much a sense of privilege, and a lack of cultural and historical sensitivity, as it also reveals the way those things become forms of racism. Elliott writes: "That *Thug Kitchen* is specifically geared toward a vegan audience is not insignificant. Picture a vegan in your mind right now. You aren't picturing a person of color, are you? Chances are, you see a white person" (22). Even as its authors claim to want to change people's ideas that vegan food is a luxury reserved for the elite, *Thug Kitchen* works to perpetuate veganism as a space of whiteness, and quite dangerously conflates that with a space of racism.

Jazmine Leyva's 2019 documentary, *The Invisible Vegan: A Movement toward a New Consciousness* challenges the idea that veganism is a "white thing," while acknowledging that it is too often presented in ways that specifically alienate Black communities. Christopher Sebastian McJetters, one of the interview subjects in Leyva's film, is a vegan and social justice advocate who also lectures part time at Columbia University. In the film, he explains his own experience of alienation when he first became vegan:

> When I first embarked on my own vegan journey, I felt very alone. I felt disconnected from the mainstream vegan community and I didn't see myself represented and that's a common theme that I've heard [from] other . . . people of color every time I've had conversations with them about veganism. It's immediately off-putting to them because the way that veganism is offered to us, it seems like this almost elitist thing that is only available for certain segments of the population.

The film also draws attention to the fact that many Black vegans and other vegans of color not only feel disconnected from mainstream veganism, as McJetters explains, but also from family members and friends who have come to see veganism much as it is initially presented in *Blindspotting*, as something associated with gentrification and whiteness, or worse, as it is presented in *Thug Kitchen*, as a discourse that feigns colorblindness only to wind up being racist. Several of the film's interviewees also point out that the focus on animal rights and some of the prevalent animal rights and vegan discourse can be alienating. Harper cautions people doing vegan and animal rights outreach to be aware of differences in access and lived experience: "When you approach someone and say that you should focus only on saving animals, it makes invisible the material struggles that most of the people in the United States, if not the

world, have in just trying to survive as humans themselves" (qtd. in *Invisible Vegan*). Also interviewed in the film, Dr. Mills suggests that "[i]f you are living in the inner city where you're dodging bullets just to get home or you are struggling just to put food on the table from day to day, those are your primary concerns and you have less time, less energy, less mental space to devote [to something] seemingly as esoteric as animal rights." Mills is careful here to say "seemingly as esoteric" because of his own convictions that the targeting of low-income and communities of color with unhealthy and largely animal-based foods is "an egregious form of institutional racism."

In an essay explaining how she came to see a relationship between her antiracist, antisexist, and anti-classist activism and animal rights and plant-based eating, Harper explains that the animal rights message did not address her as a Black teenager from a blue-collar, and almost all-white, rural town; instead she saw it as the pasttime of bored, white, people with no struggle of their own. She said that this in part due to "the *tone and delivery* of the message—via the white, class-privileged perspective, that has been offensive to the majority of people of color and working-class people" ("Social Justice Beliefs" 20). Compare, for instance, the type of language and approach used by PETA and The Vegan Society to that of the Food Empowerment Project's (F.E.P.) website. There is no "1, 2 ,3" section on this site, nor any language that indicates how easy it is for anyone to go vegan, instead the site's homepage features five clickable rectangles lined up horizontally: "Donate; Veganism; Farm Workers; Chocolate [child labor]; Access."[24] In fact, the only

mention of the word easy appears on the "Access" page, and even then the word is used cautiously in the form "easier" and with an important parenthetical reminder.

> As an organization dedicated to looking at food justice from a local and global perspective, we also consider the impact that racism has had on equal access to healthy foods in the US. Knowing the importance that fresh fruits and vegetables have on one's health and that communities of color and low-income communities lack access to them, we have added this to our work. We only go into communities when invited, and our work is to ensure the voices of the community are heard. Also, it is *easier* for people to go vegan when they have access to fresh fruits and vegetables (**they can't if they don't**).

Here F.E.P. makes clear first that access to fresh fruits and vegetables in "your neighborhood" absolutely depends on what neighborhood you live in and that communities of color and low-income communities lack equal access to healthy food because of systemic racism.

Invoking the language of some of the mainstream animal rights' organizations with the words "easy," "and "go vegan," F.E.P. edits the traditional script using the qualifier "easier" to stipulate that the material conditions of racism and classism make it so that for many people it is never simply "easy" to go vegan because there is often limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, not to mention limited time for cooking and limited access to healthier restaurants. F.E.P. seems to want to set the record straight here by adding that without such access it is not possible to be vegan. For just this reason many ecofeminists support "contextual moral veganism" based on a term coined by Deane Curtin in 1991. much like F.E.P.'s framing, this practice of veganism "recognizes both the moral centrality of a vegan diet and contextual exigencies that impede one's ability to live without directly killing or using other animals" (Gruen, *Ecofeminism* 130).[25]

While many animal rights organizations ignore the important and widely unequal issues of food access and food security, these issues are at the center of the work done by lauren Ornelas' Food Empowerment Project. It is critical for animal rights and liberation organizations and groups to stop ignoring differential access to fresh produce and even grocery stores and to stop addressing everyone in the U.S. as living in one universal neighborhood. In other words, if vegans and animal rights activists really want to counter charges of elitism, then it's time to start talking explicitly about our elitist food system and talking about food justice as the pandemic, interspecies issue that it is. Mainstream animal rights and vegan outreach organizations can take cues from F.E.P's language in reframing veganism as an intersectional problem. Across all of its pages F.E.P.'s website describes its goals like this:

> to raise awareness about how our food choices can change the world. By making informed, ethical food choices, we can make a difference and take a stand against abuses. F.E.P. encourages people to use their individual choices to eat with their ethics and use their collective voices to help bring about positive change. . . . (*F.E.P.,* "Our Work")

F.E.P makes a decision to focus on "food" as the larger crossroads at which the struggles and potentials for justice of many groups, human and nonhuman, not only intersect but meet. If "food' is a crossroads where these struggles and potentials can be realized as mutual instead of as competing or separated by single-optic vision, then eating becomes a site of empowerment instead of one of discrimination, guilt, or just another form of racial capitalism.

On their "Veganism" page, they explain: "One of the core values of F.E.P. is to lessen the suffering of all beings, and for those who have access to healthy foods, to encourage them to go vegan, which we define as not participating in the exploitation or causing the suffering of non-human animals." This page also links to their sister site Veganmexicanfood.com, "available in English and Spanish . . . [with] delicious recipes, not only for vegans of Mexican descent but for anyone who enjoys Mexican food." In this way, F.E.P. makes clear that its commitment to acknowledging particular, and not universal, neighborhoods. In F.E.P.'s address of veganism as an intersectional food justice issue and of its local community, farm workers' rights occupy a central place in its mission, activism, and outreach. F.E.P. draws attention to the conditions of farm workers as "a huge injustice taking place in how food is produced here in the US. And being an organization with a goal of lessening the suffering of non-human animals while encouraging people to go vegan—and therefore eat more produce—means it is important that we advocate for the rights of those who pick our food" (*F.E.P.,* "Farm Workers Rights"). They do this "by supporting corporate, legislative, and regulatory changes," and also by offering support to local farm workers and their families with an annual school supply and food drive. F.E.P. is one of the only vegan groups to draw attention to child labor in global chocolate production: "Although chocolate can be void of animal products, it cannot be truly cruelty-free if it involves the worst forms of child labor, including slavery" (*F.E.P.,* "Chocolate"). Their website underscores that ethical veganism is not "just" about farmed animals: "We encourage people to 'eat with their ethics,' as this

has effects on both human and non-human animals. F.E.P. is working to inform consumers around the globe about the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, that take place for chocolate" ("Chocolate").

Much in the same way that many people do not recognize veganism as intersectional food justice, many vegans do not recognize intersectional food justice as veganism. Although in 2018, lauren Ornelas was the first woman of color to receive the Animal Rights Hall of Fame award at the Animal Rights National Conference, F.E.P. does not receive the same kind of funding as more mainstream vegan organizations. In a 2018 interview with *The Thrillest*, Ornelas said: "We are entering our 11th year, but we still don’t get the big bucks" (qtd. in Shah). She goes on to explain that many vegan donors don't really even see F.E.P. as a vegan organization: "They look at our work and they say this isn't really just focused on veganism." (qtd. in Shah). Single-issue understandings of veganism and animal rights as focusing only on the suffering and liberation of other animals, like the decision not to fund a vegan food justice organization or even PETA's claim that going vegan is "as easy as 1,2,3!" no matter "your neighborhood," overlook the food deserts/apartheid and environmental racism that hurt humans and other animals at the same time and are part of the same elitist food system. Given this type of approach, it should not be surprising that anyone who lives in a neighborhood where for example, liquor stores are more prevalent than grocery stores might feel alienated from "mainstream" veganism. Vegan organizations, philanthropists, and donors should take cues from F.E.P. and do everything possible to help remove systemic barriers in

the food system that block people's access to healthier foods—including simply acknowledging these critical differences in access—otherwise they risk inadvertently—which is not at all to say blamelessly—working on the side of elitist and speciesist corporations that, with the help of the U.S. government, do everything possible to conceal the terrible things done to humans and other animals in the name of food.

Democratic Veganism: Of Burgers and Presidents

> And when Americans become truly concerned with the purity of the food that enters their own personal systems, when they learn to eat properly, we can expect to see profound changes effected in the social and political system of this nation. The two systems are inseparable.
>
> –Dick Gregory, *Political Primer* (1972)

> Real American men, women and children eat steak because it is red with blood, blood that pumps flavor, iron, vitality and sex into flaccid bodies. For women, steak is better than spinach. For men, it's better than Viagra. With steak, it's easy to get carried away.
>
> –Betty Fussel, *Raising Steaks* (2008)

> They want to take your pick-up truck! They want to rebuild your home! They want to take away your hamburgers! This is what Stalin dreamt about but never achieved.
>
> –Sebastian Gorka (February 18, 2019)

Both Goop's brand of elitist veganism and *Thug Kitchen*'s racist veganism place longer-standing cultures, traditions, and ethics of veganism under erasure only to sell veganism as racialized conspicuous consumption. They also both place the larger food system, and the politics of food and meat, under erasure: Goop and *Thug Kitchen* are more than happy to trade in stereotypes; they realize how lucrative they are. However, they refuse to acknowledge the larger system that upholds, and like them, profits from these stereotypes. Nobody's interests and pockets are better served

by the stereotype of veganism-as-elitism than those of the meat and dairy industries and their partner in crimes, the U.S. government. Meat, and moreover cheap meat, has been marketed as not merely the privilege, but the right of every American, despite its harrowing toll on our health and environment, while fresh fruits and vegetables and "healthy foods" have come to be luxuries that are subject to unequal access based on race and class.[26] Meat has become an American tradition and somehow even a kind of American value.[27] We may not all have equal access to education, healthcare, or fresh fruits and vegetables, but we all have access to cheap meat—in fact this access has acquired the status of a democratizing gesture, despite, as mentioned earlier, the fact that fast food chains and advertisements disproportionately target people of color and low-income communities.[28] If meat eating is framed as a part of our democratic values, then veganism has come to be understood as an elite and anti-democratic disruption of these values. Animal-based meat is mandated as a fundamental part of U.S. democracy in such a way as to automatically stigmatize veganism—or even just vegetables—as anti-democratic and elitist. The positioning of burgers and hot dogs, and other cheap, processed, unhealthy meats as quintessentially American works not only to ideologically discourage vegan diets and ethics on a national level, but also to further conceal the separate and unequal distribution of cheap meats and healthier plant-based foods as a nationally subsidized form of institutional racism.

It is expected that, whether or not they actually believe in any god, presidential hopefuls and presidents alike still conform to the ritual of ending

speeches with "God bless the United States of America." It is also expected that whatever their eating preferences may be, presidents must claim to eat, and heartily enjoy eating, meat, particularly meat from cows. In 1984 "Where's the beef?" rolled into a single question the advertising ambitions of fast food corporation Wendy's to shame the big buns and small beef patties of their competitors and the presidential ambitions of Walter Mondale to shame the big promises and small ideas of his democratic primary opponent, then-Senator Gary Hart. First airing in January of 1984 during the Super Bowl and spiking Wendy's sales by 31% in just a year, the popularity of the catchphrase was seized on by Mondale during a democratic primary debate in the Spring of 1984 as he aimed it at his opponent: "When I hear your new ideas, I'm reminded of that ad, 'Where's the beef?'" (qtd. in Cunningham).[29] This odd relay seems an especially apt way of crystallizing the connection not only between meat and democracy, but also among meat, consumerism, and democracy. In fact, consumerism is just what allows for the persistent association between meat and democracy: How else could we continue so casually to link the abject unfreedom of other animals with values like liberty and equality, were it not for the total disappearance of those animals under the signs of the commodities into which we render them?

Fast food and the presidency have kept close company for at least the last thirty years. In *Burger* (2018), Carol Adams begins by telling the story of what she calls "Citizen Burger":

> Campaigning for President in 1992, William Jefferson Clinton proved himself to be the citizen's candidate by his penchant for hamburgers. *Burgher*: citizen

> of the city. There he would be, according to the press, stopping in for hamburgers at local diners, Bill Clinton, not just the citizen's candidate, he was the *citizen* candidate; he likes the average Joe's kind of food...The burger is the citizen's economic food choice, the everyman's lowest common denominator. (1)

Adams goes on to explain the fast food hamburger "as both idea and food item . . . a democratic, inclusive food" (3). There is a restaurant in North Carolina called Citizen Burger Bar that "proclaims 'A DELICIOUS BURGER IS YOUR RIGHT" (*Burger* 3). Adams also cites John Lee Hancock's 2016 biopic *The Founder* about Ray Kroc for the way it picks up these nationalist themes in its telling of the story of how one man in the 1950s capitalized on a new small family business run by the McDonald brothers to undercut them and create a new national phenomenon. The film has Kroc say to the brothers: "Franchise the damn thing from sea to shining sea. Do it for your country. Do it for America," promising them that McDonald's will be the place where "Americans come together to break bread" and even "the new American church" (qtd. in *Burger* 3). Adams argues that while the U.S. was already "the animal-flesh eating democracy of the nineteenth century . . . [, it was the] development of the hamburger in the twentieth century [that] consolidated the association between democratic rights and animal-flesh eating" (4).

While Clinton now follows a mostly plant-based diet for health reasons, his newly veggie-leaning eating habits began irking influential representatives of the meat industry as early as 1994 (Adams 2-3). Adams explains that after the White House bought 4,000 Boca Burgers in just six weeks, a "spokesperson for the American Meat Institute (AMI) stated, 'Nothing will replace the American

hamburger. The AMI is confident that President Clinton is still eating plenty of real hamburger too" (2).[30] Note here the AMI's designation of the hamburger as not only American, but irreplaceable as an emblematic American food item. Underscoring their anxiety, the AMI insists they are "confident" that the president still eats "plenty of real hamburger too." Their insistence on "plenty" and "real" deserves special mention: it is not enough for the president to eat a few hamburgers, it is incumbent upon him and his fellow Americans to eat "plenty" of burgers, articulating once again the link among meat, consumerism, and democracy. The AMI belies its stated confidence in its need to clearly demarcate the boundaries of the burger: real hamburgers, they claim, are made of dead animals, while vegan or vegetarian ones are imposters or fakes. If a burger must be made of animal flesh to earn its American citizenship, then non-flesh burgers are denied membership in the union: they are anti- or at least un-American, according at least to the American Meat Institute.

Clinton's Republican successor in the White House, George W. Bush, may have been from the opposing party but as a Texan he also identified as a meat eater, specifically a "beef man." In a 2003 interview in Japan, an interviewer asked Bush whether or not he would try sushi on his visit with the Prime Minister. Though Bush affirms both his willingness to be a good guest and his confidence in the menu, he begins by asserting: "Well, I'm a beef man. You know I like good beef. Japan's got some of the greatest beef in the world . . ." (qtd. in Nyboer). He doesn't mention it, but it wasn't until the late nineteenth century that a 1200-year ban on the consumption of four-legged animals in Japan was lifted. As part of the Meiji Restoration, after the

resignation of the last Shogun, the new government instituted a program of modernization: one branch of the program was modernization of diet. The Japanese government decided that in order to modernize and to be more like Americans, the Japanese should start to eat more like Americans, which meant eating cows. The first McDonalds did not appear in Japan until 1971, but this nationalist idea of eating like Americans in order to become more modern and powerful (and, more troublingly, more white) had remained with Den Fuijta, one of the founders of McDonalds Japan, who said: "If we eat hamburgers for a thousand years we will become blond. And when we become blond, we can conquer the world" (qtd. in LaFeber 365). The "American hamburger" has become an international idea that has had dramatic effects on the way other countries eat and "produce" animal-based meats. Though part of the veganism-as-elitism stereotype is to accuse veganism of trying to colonize non-Western diets, it seems closer to the historical truth to say that it is the American hamburger and the American methods of industrial dairy and meat production and animal slaughter that have in fact colonized the world's diets.

Presidential hopefuls pay a price when they stray too far, or even it seems just a little bit, from the idea of the American burger and meat-eating as democratic rights. Consider the difference between the first President Bush's aversion to broccoli and President Obama's preference for arugula. On 3 December 2018, a few days after Bush's passing last year, *Today* published an article online called "President H.W. Bush Never Liked Broccoli—And People Still Love Him for It." The article points out that in the wake of his death, many fans are still "praising him" for hating broccoli

so passionately, so firmly, and for so long (Wida). Bush originally made the proclamation in 1990 in response to a reporter's question about a broccoli-ban aboard Air Force One. According to the original 23 March 1990 *New York Times* article by Maureen Dowd, the President replied with a Dr. Seuss-like proclamation that could not have been made about the hamburger: "I do not like broccoli. And I haven't liked it since I was a little kid and my mother made me eat it. And I'm President of the United States, and I'm not going to eat any more broccoli!" Dowd goes onto assure the reader that the President is not only a broccoli-basher but more to the point an "aficionado of fast food. The sort of food the President loves can be procured at baseball games, fast-food joints or 7-Elevens: beef jerky, nachos, tacos, guacamole, chile, refried beans, hamburgers, hot dogs, barbecued ribs, candy, popcorn, ice cream and cake."

All-American presidents must eat all-American diets or else they risk being labeled as elitists. Then presidential-hopeful Barack Obama's 2007 arugula imbroglio in Iowa probably cannot be separated from the larger network of racist attacks on his citizenship and his subject-position as the first Black president in U.S. history. Treating it for just the moment apart from that context, Obama's imperfectly executed attempt to sympathize with Iowans about increasing supermarket prices and decreasing earnings for farmers earned him the epithet of "out-of-touch elitist" (Zegerlie). What came to be known as Arugula-gate helps to illustrate the symbolic potency of foodstuffs to either create solidarity (usually when animal-based) or cause alienation (usually when plant-based). If the hamburger is the quintessentially

American "idea and food item . . . a democratic inclusive food," then arugula seems to be its opposite. On 27 July 2008, "Down on the Farm" from *The New York Times'* political blog *The Caucus* reported that for the most part Obama was able to relate to the crowd of farmers in Adel, Iowa by using humor to point out that he does not come from a farming background, but nonetheless sympathizes with and wants to understand the plight of U.S. farmers, but "when Mr. Obama sympathetically noted that farmers have not seen an increase in prices for their crops, despite a rise in prices at the supermarket" by referring to Whole Food's prices for arugula, he seemed to misjudge his audience who fell mostly silent. Obama asked: "Anybody gone into Whole Foods lately and see what they charge for arugula? I mean, they're charging a lot of money for this stuff" (Zeleny).

Far from the long-lasting affection a lot of the public maintained for President Bush's hatred for broccoli, the mere mention of arugula prices and Whole Foods put Obama at the center of charges of elitism: "Arugula-gate, as it inevitably came to be called, was immediately deemed a gaffe—a sign that Obama was an out-of-touch elitist" (Zegerlie). In a 17 August 2007 blog post called "Out of Touch: Barack Hussein Obama's 'Arugula Moment," one blogger accused "Harvard grad Obama" of using "upscale snooty references" and having "worn silk stockings and rode in limos far too long" (Schlussel). In a 25 April 2008 opinion piece for *The New York Times,* "Wilting over Waffles," about the latter days of the Obama and Hillary primary, Maureen Dowd writes:

> In the final days in Pennsylvania, he dutifully logged time at diners and force-fed himself waffles, pancakes, sausage, and a Philly cheese steak. He split the

> pancakes with Michelle, left some of the waffle and sausage behind, and gave away the French fries that came with the cheese steak. But this is clearly a man who can't wait to get back to his organic scrambled egg whites.

Dowd adds that Obama simply "can't keep carbo-loading to relate to the common people." Eating fast food and particularly animal-based fast food is framed here as a strategy for earning the vote of the "common people." Apparently though it is not enough for a presidential hopeful to eat the food, they must eat the food with gusto in order to successfully convince the public and reporters that they are "down on the farm" Americans. Liking arugula, or even knowing what it is, somehow marked Obama as an elitist foodie. As one commentator points out, after Arugula-gate "[a]nd throughout the rest of the campaign, the candidate's taste in food would often be used as a class-signifying cudgel against him" (Zegerlie). The latent racial politics here suggest that there is something going on beyond produce signifying elitism, which begs the question: What is particular about the optic of a Black presidential candidate, who would become the first and as of yet only Black president in U.S. history, merely mentioning arugula to a group of produce farmers? There is an argument to be made that, as a Black man, President Obama is stepping outside of the racist *Thug Kitchen*-stereotypes about how Black men in the U.S. should eat. His predecessor, George W. Bush, was always seen as down-to-earth, despite the fact that he ran in more elite circles than Obama, while Obama's Harvard-education and alleged failure to prove himself as a presidential meat-eater marked him as an elitist.

After being elected to his second term, President Obama went further astray from presidential (and racial) eating protocol, and stood perhaps in direct opposition

to Bush's anti-broccoli stance by declaring the much-maligned green cruciferous vegetable to be his favorite food during a surprise visit to First Lady Michelle Obama's second Kids' State Dinner in July 2013. Whatever President Obama's actual favorite food might be, it seems reasonable and even presidential to model healthy eating habits for children. There is nothing outrageous about preferring broccoli to a burger, but there does seem to be something undeniably political about the way Americans think about vegetables and other plant-based foods as compared to the way many of us still think about animal-based meats. Ari Flesicher's tweet response to Obama's decision to champion broccoli to children illustrates this deep bias: "What kind of POTUS says his fav food is Broccoli? Same one who in 2008 complained about arugula prices at Whole Foods" (qtd. in Marcotte). Of course like all modern presidents, Obama too has been pictured eating plenty of meat and has affirmed his predilection for meat-based foods like barbecue and ribs, what is of more interest here is how the U.S. presidency seems almost to require this constant allegiance to cheap animal-based meats, while weaponizing vegetables and vegan food as signs of elitism.

Trump may be unpresidential in every other respect, but in his steadfast allegiance to eating meat, particularly from fast food chains, he may be the most American president of all. Trump's penchant for posing for pictures with burgers and continually affirming his love for cheap fast food is probably the best place to start trying to untangle the stranglehold the American meat and dairy industries have on the race- and class-based American food system. In this system, charges of elitism

against any politician who wants to eat a vegetable obfuscate the way that artificially cheap meats make profits for the real elites and disproportionately target low-income communities with cheap and unhealthy food. Meanwhile, billions of dollars in advertising spending—remember the Federal Government's checkoff programs here––continue to mythologize those cheap meats as the quintessentially American food of the common people. Though Trump's brand of steaks failed as a business, it's important to remember that Trump Steaks were anything but cheap: they were available in four packages that ranged in price from $199.00 to $999.00 (Geiling). Here the optic is luxury, as one is reminded that meat is not for everyone; seemingly the entire point of selling thousand-dollar assortments of meat labeled with the name of a billionaire is to sell a sense of luxury and elitism. Why then as President do we see Trump pictured with Big Macs instead of filet mignons? Surely, this is part of his re-branding campaign. Trump sells his dangerous brand of democratic populism every time he tweets a picture of himself keeping company with fast food meats. On the other hand, veganism is being sold as leftist elitism; that is the political framing of animal-based and plant-based meats in the new millennium. The former is a symbol of populism and the latter is a symbol of elitism.

Senator Cory Booker's bid for the 2020 democratic presidential nomination and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's and Senator Ed Markey's Green New Deal may test the tenacity of the kinship between democratic values and cheap meat**.** Cory Booker is the first, and as of 2018 the only, self-identifying vegan to be elected to the U.S. Senate. There have been two vegans elected to the House of Representatives: Dennis

Kucinich and current California Congressman Adam Schiff. While Kucinich ran for the democratic primary twice (2004 and 2008), he was never really a viable enough candidate to incite much serious resistance. Booker, on the other hand, is being taken more seriously as a candidate and so too is his veganism. If a recent episode of Fox's *The Five* is any indication of the way the Right will try to play Booker's veganism against him, then we are about to witness at least a partial shift in the signification of veganism as an avatar for being pretentious and snooty to an emblem of political elitism or leftist attempts to tighten governmental control of industry and the free market and to centralize power into the hands of a select few. On the 12 February 2019 episode of *The Five* on Fox*,* five pundits sit around a table in front of a screen that places Booker's face and torso at the far left, with the rest of the space occupied by a barbecue grill packed with pieces of different cuts of mostly raw animal-based meat; the words "Booker's Beef" appear at the top of the screen.[31] To make sure meat is fully present and at the center of this discussion of Booker's veganism, there are plates of cooked animal meats in the middle of the table and some of the commentators are comically, or disgustingly depending on your point of view, stuffing their mouths with meat throughout the conversation.

The news segment, called "No Justice, No Meat," begins with a quote by Booker from an interview he did with *VegNews* after announcing his candidacy:

> You see the planet earth moving towards what is the Standard American Diet. We've seen this massive increase in consumption of meat produced by the industrial animal agriculture industry. The tragic reality is this planet simply can't sustain billions of people consuming industrially produced animal agriculture because of environmental impact.

The commentators quickly move from Booker's comment about the need to take individual and collective action to mitigate the serious effects of "animal agriculture" on global climate change to stoking fears that Booker is trying to take meat away from Americans. The majority of the pundits (all but one) sidestep the seriousness of the environmental claim by focusing instead on the trope of meat as an all-American food and on veganism as "meat-rationing" and a violation of our freedom. Jesse Watters articulates these ideas in his staging of Trump's "takedown" of Booker "the 2020 vegan presidential candidate":

> Trump is blessed with the best enemies of all time...He's the McDonald's president and he's running against a vegan...This guy runs on a vegan campaign, Trump is going to say "He's going to take away your hamburgers. He wants to take away your steak. Booker wants to take away your hot dog on the Fourth of July." This guy is going to be obliterated and it is going to be amazing watching the takedown.

This is an astute framing of the optics of a Trump v. Booker election: What does it mean for the McDonald's (billionaire) president to run against a vegan? According to Watters, Trump will rely on the tried and true association between democracy and animal-based meat, especially cheap meats. In Watters' analysis Trump will also rely on another well-tested strategy: fear and the rise of populism. Notice the refrain Watters keeps coming back to: "take away." "He's going to take away your hamburgers . . . take away your steak . . . take away your hot dog on the Fourth of July." Here, veganism is presented as one arm of a meddling-government that "wants to take away" the food of the people; hamburgers, steak, and hot dogs on the Fourth of July are "your" rights as an American and veganism is an elite conspiracy to "take away" "your" right to eat meat.

A 03 July 2018 *New Republic* article by Emily Atkin, "Why Do Carrot Hot Dogs Make You So Mad?", details a controversy over a recipe for a carrot dog in *The Washington Post* just before Memorial Day. The controversy illustrates just how bound up the average American's ideas about patriotism are with animal-based foods like hot dogs. According to Atkin, an NFL blogger responded to the recipe with this threat: "If you show up to my cookout with carrots, I will set you on fire"; a writer for a liberal comedy show tweeted: "If you put a carrot inside a hot dog bun and call it a vegan hot dog, I will cut you." Atkin interviewed the author of the recipe Joe Yonan who said he was "very surprised by the vehemence of the anger," noting that "[p]eople felt personally assaulted by these carrot dogs. . . ." Referencing culinary historian and hot dog culture expert Bruce Kraig, the article postulates that the somewhat irrational anger people seem to feel at the mention of a plant-based hot dog has "to do with the hot dog's longstanding place in American culture." Echoing Carol Adams' history of the hamburger, Kraig has argued that "America's hot dog patriotism . . . [started] with an early national desire to distinguish America as a meat-eating (and therefore) prosperous country. It then spread like wildfire due to savvy advertisers who sought to capitalize on that desire (qtd. in Atkins, "Why Do Carrots").

However, few people are probably aware of the historical, not to mention the economic, reasons they may cling to the idea that being American means having "your hamburger . . . your steak . . . your hot dog on the Fourth of July." Culinary traditions certainly influence a sense of self and a sense of community, but are we

really less American if these traditional foods are plant-based instead of animal-based? Is the Fourth of July less celebratory if the hot dogs don't involve violence so extreme that it must be hidden from sight to continue? Interestingly, and perhaps in part a sign of the times, one of the commentators on Fox's *The Five*, Juan Williams, also the only person of color at the table, raises questions about some of these assumptions. One of the pundits asks Williams: "You are not partaking in the meat festivities . . . Are you supporting vegan presidential candidates?" As in the earlier examples about presidential candidates and meat, being seen eating or not eating meat has overt political meanings. Williams answers: "I don't mind supporting, I think it's ten percent of Americans are either vegans and vegetarians, so there are a lot of us." He mentions that he has had prostate cancer so no longer eats much meat and remarks that "Ben Carson's a vegetarian." Watters quickly retorts: "Juan, Don't try to normalize veganism. . . . " Then talking over Williams, Watters says: "It's funny: He wants to get rid of meat . . . in America!" Again the idea here is clear: You can't get rid of eating meat in the U.S. because being an American somehow means eating meat.

What is less clear is how race figures into this discussion: though race is never mentioned, entitling the segment about a Black, vegan presidential candidate "No Justice, No Meat" clearly frames the discussion in a racialized context. The automatic association here is "No Justice, No Peace," words that in 2019 can't help but be situated in the context of protests against police shootings of unarmed Black men. The Right has long tried to characterize these words as menacing, so somehow we are

being asked to link Booker's candidacy as a Black vegan with allegedly menacing threats of Black protesters for justice. "No Justice, No Meat," seems to suggest that Booker, the Black vegan, has come to threaten our freedom and take away our meat. An anti-racist, vegan, materialist reading of this linkage reverses this ridiculous logic and offers the following counter-narrative: Cheap meat, like police violence, is a form of institutionalized racism or the " state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." In this context, Cory Booker's veganism makes perfect sense, and perhaps like Dick Gregory's can be read as an effort to promote intersectional justice, and to bring awareness to the grave impact food has on "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death," even if Booker is placing it in an environmental frame.

The Five's sensationalized discussion continues of course without any of this kind of contextualization. Williams, though, explicitly brings to the surface the other commentators' underlying strategy of making a joke out of veganism in order divert attention away from the mounting list of serious and well-founded reasons to move toward plant-based food: "The point here is oh this is supposed to be laughable, but a lot of people have serious questions about meat consumption. . . . " While the term "elitism" is not mentioned, the specter of political elitism keeps getting raised in response to Booker's veganism and in response to Juan Williams' tacit support for moving away from meat consumption. Comedian and commentator known monomously as Kennedy initially agrees that "there are legitimate reasons to be vegan." She continues in the direction of parody:

> As we evolve as a society, people are eating more of a plant-based diet, which is great. My problem is not with Cory Booker's taste and his vegan fancies, it's with the fact that he wants to be the most powerful person in the world and he wants to impose his meat rationing on the rest of us. It's his worldview and his sadism...Look at the very thinly-veiled subtext...they're demonizing cows, they want to get rid of cows so people aren't eating meat. There's a war on beef. I think we need to stand up for meat freedom.

Kenendy is certainly joking and inviting viewers to laugh. However, it is still noteworthy that the issue here is framed as one of choice and freedom. Within a few minutes the pundits move from Booker's fact-based assertions about the need to take personal and collective action to mitigate the effects of meat production and consumption on climate change to fear-based aspersions about "meat rationing," "meat freedom," and the alleged "sadism" of a world without meat. While the commentator asserts jokingly that the "thinly-veiled subtext" of Booker's veganism is "a war on beef," the thinly-veiled subtext of this news segment seems to be that Booker's veganism is a form of political elitism that opposes the fomenting populist spirit that got Donald Trump elected. Though Williams contests the idea that Booker is trying to circumscribe anyone's choices, arguing: "Booker says you have the right to choose. This is America, . . . " with mouthfuls of meat the other *Fox* commentators drive home the point that their outdated definition of being American means continuing to eat meat no matter what it costs animals or the future.

The move to position veganism as part of a campaign by the Left to put control of major industries and people's choices in the hands of an elite few becomes clearer when looking at responses to the Green New Deal outlined by House Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey on 7 February

2019. The original factsheet states: "The Green New Deal resolution [is] a 10-year plan to mobilize every aspect of American society at a scale not seen since World War 2 to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions and create economic prosperity for all" (Ocasio-Cortez). Many have claimed that the ensuing controversy over banning cows and hamburgers originated from a now redacted statement in a draft of a FAQ supplement to the factsheet that was not intended for release: "We set a goal to get to net-zero, rather than zero emissions, in 10 years because we aren't sure that we'll be able to fully get rid of farting cows and airplanes that fast . . . " (Ocasio-Cortez). Given the example of *Fox's The Five*, it seems likely that any mention of making changes to "animal agriculture" that might effect cheap meat would have resulted in controversy and hyperbole.

At a rally in El Paso, Texas on 11 February 2019, alluding to the Green New Deal, Trump said: "You're not allowed to own cows anymore" ("AP Fact Check"). On 27 February 2019, responding to the Green New Deal, Republican Representative Rob Bishop assumed quite a similar pose and tone as some of *The Five*'s pundits, giving a press conference on Capitol Hill with a hamburger in his hand. He began by playing the elitist card, claiming "This entire scheme was designed by a bunch of eastern urbanites that have absolutely no clue what it is like to live in the wide open spaces of the West or rural America or any place where the agriculture actually flourishes" ("Rep. Bishop Eats a Hamburger"). He then moved to the same line of defense *The Five's* commentator Jesse Watters suggested Trump would take in response to Booker: playing upon the close association between cheap meat and

democratic freedom. Bishop ignores fears about climate change and instead stokes fears about hamburgers becoming "an endangered species":

> Since they still in this Green New Deal want to control my life, let me go to President Obama's favorite place and realize [opening bag and pulling out hamburger wrapped in paper] that if this [the Green New Deal] goes through this [holding hamburger] will be outlawed. I can no longer eat this kind of thing. So before they *take it away from me* [takes a bite, someone in the background says "'Pass it around." Others laugh. Bishop turns to the other congressmen and asks "Can I get a shake too?"] Before it's illegal and an endangered species, I'm actually going to enjoy this a whole lot more than I would the Green New Deal. (my italics)

Bishop uses the hamburger as symbol and prop: it is essentially part of the "everyman" costume he dons here to set himself apart from the elitist "eastern urbanites" who allegedly know nothing about the rest of America. Also, like Watters, Bishop invokes the anti-consumerist language of forced deprivation: the long arm of the democratic party will "take it away from me." The focus on things being taken away seems like another way of framing access to cheap meat as a kind of democratic right, while framing any shift to what is an ethically and economically problematic food system as anti-democratic and anti-freedom.

Speaking on 28 February 2019, at the Conservative Political Action Committee, Sebastian Gorka, Trump's former deputy advisor on national security, echoed the "they want to take away" refrain while also raising the specter of communism when talking about the Green New Deal. He called it "a watermelon, green on the outside, deep deep red communist on the inside" ("AOC Wants to Take"). Moving from metaphor to litany, Gorka continued: "They want to take your pick-up truck! They want to rebuild your home! They want to take away your

hamburgers! This is what Stalin dreamt about but never achieved" ("AOC Wants to Take"). This is a prime example of the way a show like Fox's *The Five* breaks the ice on outrageous ideas; but while *The Five* invited viewers to laugh at these ideas, Gorka does not. In this example, Gorka conflates the Green New Deal's mere mention of reducing the consumption of meat and other proposed government efforts to combat climate change with anti-democratic efforts to change the United States into a communist country. Gorka's hyperbolic discourse makes clear that positioning veganism as anti-democratic and anti-freedom is part of a larger discourse and strategy that positions ethical, quality-of-life issues like clean air and water and proactive measures to prevent irreversible changes to global climate patterns, and elsewhere education and healthcare, as Stalinist oversteps by the government.

As mentioned earlier, the Green New Deal never stipulates banning meat or enforcing mandatory national veganism. In response to Republican attempts to stoke fears about a meat ban, Ocasio-Cortez said on the premiere of *Showtime*'s *Desus and Mero:*

> In the deal, what we talk about is, it’s true, is that we need to take a look at factory farming, period. It’s wild. And so, it’s not to say you get rid of agriculture. It’s not to say we’re going to force everybody to go vegan or anything crazy like that. But it’s to say, listen, we’ve got to address factory farming. Maybe we shouldn’t be eating a hamburger for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Like, let’s keep it real. (qtd. in "AOC Wants to Take")

Ocasio-Cortez distances the Green New Deal from "forc[ing] everybody to go vegan or anything crazy like that," and makes clear that for her it is an issue of scale and quantity, the need to "address factory farming" in part by reconsidering how much meat the average American consumes. In another *New Republic* article by Atkin,

called "The Potency of Republicans' Hamburger Lie," (4 March 2019) she looks at the maelstrom over the Green New Deal and the predicament in which environmentally progressive Democrats find themselves. Atkin suggests that despite attempts to quell fears of changes to consumption habits, tackling climate change will mean reducing the number of cows who are raised and killed for burgers and raising prices on cows' meat. Comparing the struggle to the fight for gun control, Atkin says that the problem for Democrats is that: "If there's anything that's more quintessentially American than guns, it's meat . . . Conservatives are appealing to this sentiment with their attacks on the Green New Deal: *Real Americans eat hamburgers*. Can the Democrats convince Americans otherwise?"

Implicit and explicit charges of elitism have been at the forefront of Republican strategies to reify the ideology that "*real Americans eat hamburgers,*" and to discredit the Green New Deal as a pie-in-the-sky measure that will do nothing but limit American freedom. Ocasio-Cortez intervened directly in this narrative in a House meeting on 26 March 2019 after the Senate blocked a measure to move the Green New Deal forward.[32] She responded directly to a statement by Republican Representative Sean Duffy claiming that the Green New Deal only makes sense for "rich liberals from New York or California," but also it would seem to the month-long mischaracterizations of the Green New Deal as elitist and anti-democratic.[33] In a larger conversation about homelessness and housing, Duffy attacked the Green New Deal as an "outrageous" measure that would harm poor Americans by allegedly increasing the costs of housing: “I think we should not focus on the rich, wealthy

elites who will look at this and go ‘I love it, 'cause I’ve got big money in the bank. Everyone should do this!' . . . But if you're a poor family just trying to make ends meet, it's a horrible idea.” Duffy continued to craft the environmentalism-as-elitism narrative: “It’s kind of like saying ‘I’ll sign onto the Green New Deal but I’ll take a private jet from DC to California . . . or I’ll take my Uber SUV, I won’t take the train, or I’ll go to Davos and fly my private jet. The hypocrisy!”

In response to Duffy's attempt to fashion "the concern for the environment as an elitist concern, . . . " Ocasio-Cortez offered this re-frame:

> This is not an elitist issue; this is a quality of life issue. You want to tell people that their concern and their desire for clean air and clean water is elitist? Tell that to the kids in the south Bronx who are suffering from the highest rates of childhood asthma in the country. Tell that to the families in Flint whose kids, their blood is ascending in lead levels, their brains are damaged for the rest of their lives. Call them elitist. . . .[34]

Here, Ocasio-Cortez unearths the shaky foundations of this elitist narrative: it is the poorer and marginalized neighborhoods, and the poorer and marginalized families and individuals in the U.S. who already suffer the most from the environmental effects of climate change. The same is true of the effects of cheap meat on obesity rates and type-2 diabetes in the U.S.: it is poorer Americans who suffer the most from the health effects of artificially cheap meat and disproportionately expensive fruits and vegetables. While the meat industry, and truthfully politicians on both sides of the aisle who receive large contributions from them, may continue to cling to the narrative that *real Americans eat hamburgers* and that cheap meat is a kind of democratic right, this corporate, national myth is most harmful to marginalized communities—runoff from "factory farms" seldom or never finds its way to richer

neighborhoods, just like fast food chains always find their way to poorer ones—and to people of color.

Conclusion: The Specter of National Mandatory Veganism

Ultimately the seemingly disparate threads of the veganism-as-elitism stereotype come together in advancing the narrative of national mandatory veganism: the idea that anyone who makes a claim against the tenability, ethics, or politics of meat eating is an elite who is trying to force everyone to be vegan by taking away meat. The specter of national mandatory veganism is a distorted mirror through which we are asked *not* to see the reality of U.S. food policy and practice. We live in a state of national mandatory meat eating. It is enforced at the ideological level through national dietary guidelines that make their way to children in K-12 education and to adults in the form of food pyramids and other USDA mappings of what we ought to eat, presidents who model allegedly patriotic ways of eating, corporate and government checkoff advertisements, as well as a range of stigmas and stereotypes about veganism, including veganism-as-elitism. It is enforced at the material level through subsidies that keep meat cheap and ubiquitous, through food deserts/apartheid, and through laws that protect factory farms and slaughterhouses, while putting slaughterhouse workers and the low-income surrounding communities at serious risk, and granting almost no protection at all to the animals who are hidden away in the belly of this beast. What would we call the opposite of "meat-rationing"? Meat-gorging? This practice may need to be named, because it seems a more accurate description of the U.S. food system. To speak of "meat rationing" or "meat freedom,"

or vegan elitism is indeed to continue to project the nightmares of the meat industry—and all the ways it force-feeds communities of humans, other animals, and the planet with destructive and harmful diets and ideas—onto the very potentially revolutionary practices that might be mobilized to put a stop to it.

In the twenty-first century, eating meat is the elite activity that we have learned—or been taught—to forget is elite.[35] The twentieth century industrial and government campaign to extend to everyone what was once an elite and infrequent privilege has been so successful as to have rendered itself unrecognizable. To recognize the grand ideological reversals that take place in the stigma of veganism-as-elitism, we have to learn to see differently. Toward the end of the film *Blindspotting*, we find out that the film's title is based on a term from Val's (Collin's ex-girlfriend) psychology textbook, that goes along with an image of Rubin's vase, a black-and-white image that people either recognize as a vase, or two human faces looking at one another: "The image is fundamentally ambiguous. People perceive a vase or two faces but not both at the same time" (*Blindspotting*). In an interview with *Vice News* (12 August 2018), Casal, who plays Miles and co-wrote the screenplay with Diggs, the actor who plays Collin, explains the title in this way: "The idea of blindspotting is that no matter what, everyone has a blindspot. You are always conditioned to see one thing before the other and you have to do the work to see the other side of the picture. You have to turn your head to see your blindspot" (Casal and Diggs). When we turn animals into food, it's hard to see them as animals anymore—just like when we realize animals are sentient beings, it's hard to remember that for the majority of

people they are still also food, and harder still to see the larger system in which that enmeshes them, and us. In the same way it's also hard to see our individual choices and lack of choices in the same frame as the larger system that constructs those choices and profits from them. When practiced as an intersectional and revolutionary movement for liberation and food justice, veganism asks that we work to find our particular blindspots, to see clearly what we've been conditioned to see—and what we've been conditioned *not* to see.

Notes

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[1] Harper 2010; Aph Ko and Syl Ko 2017; Polish in Castriciano and Simonson, eds., 373-391.

[2] This is of course a reference the civil rights struggle, specifically to Malcolm X's use of the phrase "By any means necessary" in a founding rally for the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964. It is interesting that McQuirter invokes Malcolm X's conviction that violence was justifiable in the fight for civil rights, while also claiming Gregory's commitment to Martin Luther King Jr.'s practice of non-violent resistance. Perhaps by replacing "means" with "greens" she suggests some kind of negotiation between the two positions, with non-violent foods like greens as an alternate site of resistance against white supremacy and systemic racism.

[3] See "The Birth of the Sistah Vegan Project" for A. Breeze Harper's discussion of a controversial 2005 PETA ad called "The Animal Liberation Project," that mostly uses images of slavery and Jim Crow segregation to compare human and nonhuman suffering under oppressive systems, and reactions to it on BlackPlanet.com by Black-identified people who "agreed that PETA was an organization filled with 'white racists' who think that Black-identified people are 'on the same level as animals'" (xiii) in *Sistah Vegan,* xiii-xix.

[4] See: *PETA,* features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/#where-to-eat.

[5] See: *The Vegan Society, www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/how-go-vegan.* It is worth mentioning that *The Vegan Society* was the mainstream animal rights site that shared Aph Ko's unexpectedly controversial list of 100 Black vegans (discussed below in note 7).

[6] There are a number of central critiques of mainstream veganism for post-racial or race-neutral framings of speciesism and animal liberation: many vegan outreach groups and individual vegans do not address the issue of race- and class- based differential access to plant-based foods, like food deserts, environmental racism, and poverty; some animal rights groups and animal rights activists routinely make blanket comparisons between the enslavement of Black Americans and the confinement of animals; often these comparisons are made without attention to the residual effects of slavery that many Black Americans continue to experience in the present day; many vegans insist that because animal rights is about the suffering of other animals, even bringing up race distracts from the goal of animal liberation. See Harper 2010 and 2012; Polish 2016; Ko and Ko 2017.

[7] Laura Pulido argues that environmental racism should be reframed among environmental justice activists as a fundamental part of racial capitalism. When

understood in this way working with the state to fix such problems becomes problematic, because environmental racism itself is a product of state sanctioned violence. See Pulido 524-533.

[8] Aph Ko's "#All Vegans Rock" 2017 (13-19) focalizes this problem in the animal rights movement through a discussion and exposition of comments that were posted when *The Vegan Society*'s website shared her article "#BlackVegansRock: 100 Black Vegans to Check Out." She wrote the article in response to discussions about "whiteness" in the animal rights movement; her goal was to show that there are already many vegan voices of color, but they were not made visible through the infrastructure of the mainstream animal rights movement, and also to show how normalized the diet already was in many Black communities. The responses from many white vegans were incredulous, insisting that race has nothing to with animals or animal rights.

[9] See also Simon, "10 Things I Wish All Americans Knew about the Meat and Dairy Industries," *Meatonomics,* 28 Sept. 2013*, meatonomics.com/tag/meat/.*

[10] For an in-depth argument about how the economics of the meat industry with the support of the U.S. government pushes Americans to consume more meat see Simon 2013. The dairy industry works in the same way: While data from the Department of Agriculture shows that milk production in the U.S. rose 13% between 2007 and 2013, data from the USDA shows that milk consumption fell by 14% during the same period. This explains, in part, why there is currently a 1.39 billion-pounds surplus of dairy stockpiled in U.S. government warehouses, an even larger than the 500 million-pound surplus in the early 80s that led Reagan to promote "government cheese." See: Blakemore, "How the U.S. Ended Up with Warehouses Full of 'Government Cheese,'" *History,* Aug. 31, 2018; Dewey, "America's Cheese Stockpile Just Hit an All Time High," *Washington Post* June 28, 2018; "A Mountain of Surplus Cheese Brought to You by the Federal Government," *Investor's Business Daily,* July 6 2018.

[11] In 2013 the global average meat consumption per person was 41.9kg, while in the U.S. the average meat consumption per person was 120.2 kg. See ChartsBin Statistics Collector Team 2013 and FAO 2013, *Current Worldwide Annual Meat Consumption per capita*.

[12] It is noteworthy that India is still currently home to the largest population of vegetarians: as of 2014, 375,000,000 as compared to only 15,000,000 in the U.S. See *Meat Atlas*, 56-57.

[13] The number of aquatic animals killed every year in the U.S. does not include "bycatch," or all of the creatures who are caught unintentionally only to be released dead or dying; that would increase the number by 23 billion, nor does it include the

68 billion small fish that are killed to feed fish raised for human consumption. See "Annual U.S. Animal Deaths," *Animal Clock*, 2019, animalclock.org and Harish, "How Many Animals Does a Vegetarian Save," *Counting Animals*, 16 March 2015, www.countinganimals.com/how-many-animals-does-a-vegetarian-save/ for numbers and explanations of how the numbers are determined.

The abhorrent conditions of industrial meat production have been well documented in literature, media, and scholarship for more than a century now, from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) to California's new ban on chicken cages just passed in 2018.

[14] For more information on Ag-gag laws and Customary Farming Exemptions see: Wolfson 1996, Foer 2008; Bittman 2011; Pachirat 2013; Simon 2013.

[15] In "Veganisms" in Castriano and Simonson 2016, 15-39, Robert Jones differentiates what he calls "revisionary political veganism" from other practices such as: "identity veganism," or lifestyle veganism, which for him does not mean the kind of lifestyle practice that will be described in this section. For Jones, lifestyle vegans are still grounded in ethics toward other animals, but they see consumption as the means of expressing this ethics and often stop here without considering effects of their "cruelty-free" consumption on other humans who might be adversely impacted or the environment. He also refers to "boycott veganism": for Jones, "boycott vegans" still see veganism as an individual lifestyle choice, but may be open to seeing the larger web of capitalist production implicated in their vegan consumer choices. Jones defines political veganism as: "Political veganism reappropriates the term "vegan" to include a moral and political commitment to active resistance against institutional and systemic violence, exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification directed against all sentient beings—human and nonhuman—as well as the natural environment that supports and sustains them" (29). The point I make still stands that such a practice is divorced from the new lifestyle marketing of veganism.

[16] In *New Mega Trends* 2012, Sarwant Singh maps out the rise in the wellness industry as part of a paradigm shift in how Americans think of health-care: "With governments unable to sustain the spending, technical innovations and growing social awareness, the whole concept of health care will shift from 'find and fix it' and 'health care' to an emphasis on 'wellness and well-being'" (112). Much has been reported in news media about the increasing interest in plant-based cooking and eating. Some recent examples include: Baum and Whiteman, International Food and Restaurant Consultants listed "Plant-Based Foods Go Mainstream" as the number one trend for 2018 on its yearly list of top trends in the food and restaurant industry. A 2017 "Top Trends in Prepared Foods" by market research firm Report Buyer found that 6% of U.S. consumers identify as vegan, up 600% from just 1% in 2014. See also Forgrieve, "The Growing Acceptance of Veganism" *Forbes*, 2 Nov. 2018.

[17] Citing McRobbie**,** 2000, Cole and Morgan point out that "It is significant that the vegans singled out for press vilification are women. Faddism is frequently associated with women's subculture as a trivialization strategy" (144). The differential treatment of male and female celebrity vegans is beyond the scope of my analysis here, but is part of the gendered and sexist nature of popular understandings and formulations of veganism and carnism. Cole and Morgan add that "Vilification of women's responses to nonhuman animal exploitation therefore combines sexism with a trivialization of a compassionate ethical response as 'sentiment'" (144). The trivialization of empathy for other animals as sentiment is explored in Chapter 1.

[18] For the original interview see Paltrow, "Gwyneth Paltrow Wants to Convert You," *The Wall Street Journal,* 4 Dec. 2018.

[19] For more of the intersections of race, food, identity, and gentrification analyzed from the perspective of local geographies see Jones 2019, 55-72; Chronopoulos 2016, 294-322.

[20] See Hilmers et al. 2012, 1644-1654 for research and statistics on the prevalence of fast food outlets and convenience stores in low-income communities. For example, they find: "At the national level, a comprehensive study of 21 976 US zip codes with 259 182 full-service restaurants and 69 219 fast-food restaurants found that these establishments were more highly concentrated in low- and middle-income neighborhoods than in high-income neighborhoods" (1649-1650). Many of the studies they analyzed found that these differences were racialized to more negatively impact Black communities, for instance: "A study of 448 block groups in New York found that African American block groups had fewer opportunities to obtain healthy foods and greater access to fast-food restaurants than did other ethnic block groups" (1650). They also found that race could be more significant than class in determining access: "In predominantly African American areas, exposure to fast food was similar in more and less affluent neighborhoods, suggesting that racial correlates of fast-food density were more significant than socio-economic correlates" (1650).

[21] Collin's mom's comment helps bring into focus the complexities of how gentrification impacts health-inequities in under-resourced and low-income communities. In *Today's Experiences, Tomorrow's Health: Gentrification and Preventable Mortality in Alameda County*, Melody Tullier looks at the way gentrification can actually increase disparities in health by negatively impacting housing stability, social networks and relationships, and community resources, at the same time that it can improve public services, infrastructure, and a sense of safety. See Tullier 2018.

[22] See Lott 1993 and Rogin 1996 for an analysis and history of blackface and minstrelsy in the U.S. and Europe.

[23] See Duckor, www.epicurious.com/archive/blogs/editor /2014/09/thug-kitchen-author-real-names-revealed.html, for the photo and article.

[24] F.E.P. works to raise awareness about the use of child labor, and sometimes slavery, on cacoa farms in Western Africa, which produces more than 70% of the world's chocolate.

[25] See also Curtin 1991, 60-74.

[26] See Poore and Nemecek 2018 for a study published in *Science*. Based on data from 40,000 farms in 119 countries that studied 40 different food products (both animal- and plant-based) representing 90% of all consumed foods, the study finds that meat and dairy production uses 83% of farmland while producing 60% of greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, 57% of water pollution, and 56% of air pollution (also from agricultural sector). See also the U.N.'s report: Steinfeld 2006, *Livestock's Long Shadow*.

See Battaglia et al. 2015, for a recent study on health risks associated with increased consumption of meat: the study "indicates that the long-term consumption of increasing amounts of red meat and particularly of processed meat is associated with an increased risk of total mortality, cardiovascular disease, colorectal cancer and type 2 diabetes in both men and women" (70).

[27] See Adams 2018 *Burger* for an analysis of meat, specifically the burger, as an American tradition and value from a critical animal studies and ecofeminist perspective.

[28] See Harris et al. 2019 for Rudd Report study: "Increasing Disparities in Unhealthy Food Advertising Targeted to Hispanic and Black Youth."

[29] See "Where's the Beef?" *The Washington Post,* n.d.; Spears, "On this date, Wendy’s first asked: Where’s the beef?" *Tampa Bay Times* 10 Jan 2018.

[30] Adams here is referencing Shurtleff and Aoyagi 2014, the AMI quote is from the *Western Livestock Journal*, June 27, 1994.

[31] "No Justice, No Meat" can be viewed at: archive.org/details/FOXNEWSW_ 20190212_220000_The_Five. It goes from the 2:47pm to the 2:51pm mark.

[32] See "03/26/2019–Full Committee Markup–Part 1," *YouTube*, Financial Services Committee, 26 March 2019 from 2:56:38 to 3:10:48 for the whole exchange between Cortez and Duffy.

[33] Duffy's comments can be found at www.youtube.com/watch? v=yj9QawZELD w&feature=youtu.be, from: 2:56:38–3:01:44.

[34] Cortez's comments can be found at www.youtube.com/watch? v=yj9QawZELD w&feature=youtu.be, from: 3:01:55-3:04:48.

[35] For historical accounts detailing the association of meat-eating with the elite in the West before industrialization, see Wilkins and Hill 2006; Warren 2018.

FANATICS

What is it about veganism that draws consistent and largely pejorative comparisons to asceticism, renunciation, dogmatism, zealousness, and even spirituality? Why are there such a wide range of anti-vegan tropes that touch on theology? Vegan practice is often described as strict, restrictive, difficult, or even impossible, while vegans are commonly described as preachy, self-righteous, or judgmental.[1] These stereotypes even extend to descriptions of vegan food as a form of self-sacrifice and pleasure-denial: vegan food still has the stigma of being rudimentary, bland, unenjoyable, and unsatisfying.[2]

More often than not, critics of veganism invoke religion to suggest that vegans are dogmatic and absolutist in their beliefs. Saying that veganism is like a religion can be a way of saying that practicing veganism is an ascetic ritual that deprives its "followers" of the basic pleasures of eating delicious foods. In popular discourse, comparisons of veganism to religion tend to deploy religion in a narrow and limiting way to suggest that vegans are fanatical in their views about other animals. This chapter does not support the equation of religion with fanaticism; quite the contrary the chapter wonders why positive connotations of religion, such as universal love, neighborliness, commitment, discipline, or spirituality do not tend to carry over to comparisons with veganism. The majority of the discourse surveyed in the chapter understands religion in a negative sense, but there are certainly other, less biased, reasons to connect the practice of veganism to the practice of many religions.[3] Functionally, there are many parts of veganism that look like some religious practice:

The most obvious similarity is that veganism involves dietary guidelines that look a lot like dietary taboos or restrictions common to the practice of religions like Orthodox Judaism or Islam. Like an orthodox Jew, who because of kashrut laws, will not eat from plates or with silverware that has been used to serve non-kosher food, some vegans prefer not to grill their plant-based meats and vegetables on a grill that has been used to cook animal flesh. Vegan decisions though about what to eat bear more of an affinity to the notion of ahimsa, or non-violence, that guides the eating practices of Jains, many Hindus, and some Buddhists.[4] Vegan eating is a commitment to not violating the bodies of other sentient creatures, not to historical dietary laws about cleanliness or to proscriptions against eating certain foods.

Like many religions, being vegan also involves daily commitment that is often visible to others. In the case of veganism, the level of commitment and conscious observance relates directly to the pervasiveness of animal exploitation in our society. Similarly, because killing animals for food is still the norm and eating their meat is still commonplace, being vegan means separating yourself from these norms. To people who consider the consumption of animals to be normal, natural, and necessary, the decision not to consume animals can appear to be a willful act of separation from friends, family, and tradition.[5] Through such a lens, veganism can look like a kind of pious separatist group or cult that rejects, and negatively judges, the pleasures others enjoy.[6]

Many vegans and vegetarians can remember the moment they realized that the cheeseburgers, scrambled eggs, fried chicken, and so many of the dishes they'd grown

up eating had a bloody history they'd never dreamed of. Though often, awakening from the normalization of violence against animals happens in stages, many vegans still describe their first moment of realization in the language of conversion.[7] This language of conversion speaks to the way that eating vegan is different from a diet or a set of dietary prohibitions. The decision to "convert" from one way of eating to another usually follows from a feeling of conversion from one way of thinking to another, or even one way of being to another. Although all ethical vegans cannot be spoken for here, often there is a strength of conviction that accompanies the decision to stop exploiting animals. This passion, dedication, and sense of certainty in the belief that other animals exist for their own purposes in the same way that other humans do can resemble the strength of conviction that accompanies belief in many religions.

Recently, judges have been called upon to evaluate just how closely belief in veganism resembles belief in religion. Are vegans similar enough to religious adherents in the strength of their beliefs that they should also be protected by religious discrimination laws in the workplace? In 1998 Jerold Friedman, a self-described "strict vegan" of nine years at the time, was offered a full-time position as a computer technician in a pharmaceutical warehouse by Southern California Permanente Medical Group (Kaiser), after having performed the same job for them as a contract worker for one year. Friedman accepted the job offer, which, like his previous temporary job for Kaiser, was not at a medical facility or hospital, but at a

warehouse in Downey where he would not come into contact with either doctors or patients (Friedman, par. 4).

When Kaiser notified Friedman that he would need to get a mumps vaccine before the job offer was complete, he immediately called the Center for Disease Control to check that the vaccine was free of animal products.[8] Friedman has stated that he "fervently believes that all living beings must be valued equally and that it is immoral and unethical for humans to kill and exploit animals, even for food, clothing and the testing of product safety for humans" (Friedman, par. 4). These convictions prevented Friedman from taking the vaccine after he discovered that it was grown inside of chicken embryos. Friedman explains that: "[e]gg-laying hens suffer greatly in chicken factory farms, and the use of unborn chickens to culture the mumps vaccine causes further unnecessary deaths" (Keating). Friedman informed Kaiser that "he was willing to take any other alternative, in line with his beliefs, to comply with the spirit of the vaccine requirement," but that he was unable to take the proposed vaccine (Friedman, par. 28). Despite his attempt to comply, his direct supervisor's attempt to retain his employment, and his having worked at the same facility in the same position for one year without having received this vaccine, Kaiser withdrew their employment offer "[when] plaintiff refused to be vaccinated," effectively firing Friedman because he chose not to violate his beliefs as an ethical vegan (California Court of Appeal, par. B).

Both Friedman's descriptions of the spiritual nature of his vegan convictions in his legal briefs and California appellate court Justice Paul Turner's ruling in the

appealed case illuminate points of connection and contention between veganism and religion. To bring into focus the importance of Friedman's veganism in his life, the original Complaint specifies that "[t]he Plaintiff's beliefs are spiritual in nature and set a course for his entire way of life; he would disregard elementary self-interest in preference to transgressing these tenets" (Friedman, par. 4). In Friedman's next legal brief appealing the California Superior Court's decision to throw out his case, he points out that diet is just one small part of ethical veganism, which he describes as a "relational 'lense' [sic] through which to view the world."[9] Ethical Vegans are not 'speciesist' and value the sanctity of all life, seeking to exclude from their life, as far as possible and practical, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose . . . " (qtd. in Page 391). Friedman's appellate brief continues:

> There is a common ethical principle shared by all Vegans which is a reverence for life and desire to live with, as opposed to depend upon the others [sic] species of the planet. Veganism is therefore not some bizarre trivial personal belief, but is a sincerely held set of moral and ethical values that rise to the level [sic] religious beliefs, and should be afforded religious protections as such. (qtd. in Page 391).

These statements seem to bring Friedman's veganism in line with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) definition of religion.[10] In cases where there is a question of "whether or not a practice or belief is religious . . . the [Equal Employment Opportunity] Commission will define religious practices to include moral or ethical beliefs as to what is right and wrong which are sincerely held with the strength of traditional religious views."[11] As Justice Turner notes in his

decision, in the past California's Fair Employment and Housing Association has relied on the EEOC's definition of "religious creed."

In Friedman's case, though, the Court of Appeals' decision not only upheld the lower court's decision, but also set a new standard for the definition of "religious creed" under California's Fair Employment and Housing Agency. Turner looked to a federal ruling in *Malnak v. Yogi,* by Third Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Arlin M. Adams from 1979 as a kind of definitional test based on three criteria: “First, a religion addresses fundamental and ultimate questions having to do with deep and imponderable matters. Second, a religion is comprehensive in nature; it consists of a belief-system as opposed to an isolated teaching. Third, a religion often can be recognized by the presence of certain formal and external signs” (California Court Appeals, par. II, 5a). For Turner, Friedman's veganism failed to meet these criteria:

> There is no allegation or judicially noticeable evidence plaintiff's belief system addresses fundamental or ultimate questions. There is no claim that veganism speaks to: the meaning of human existence; the purpose of life; theories of humankind's nature or its place in the universe; matters of human life and death; or the exercise of faith. There is no apparent spiritual or otherworldly component to plaintiff's beliefs. Rather, plaintiff alleges a moral and ethical creed limited to the single subject of highly valuing animal life and ordering one's life based on that perspective. While veganism compels plaintiff to live in accord with strict dictates of behavior, it reflects a moral and secular, rather than religious, philosophy. (California Court Appeals, par. II, 6)

Justice Turner raises many meaningful questions here not only about the nature of veganism, but about how we think about "human existence" and even "the purpose of life," and how veganism (and meat eating) may or may not be related to big picture thinking about existence. While this is in no way an argument for

veganism as a religion, it is interesting that Turner concludes that veganism does not address "fundamental or ultimate questions having to do with deep and imponderable matters." It is easy enough to conclude that veganism has no godhead, no "other worldly component," nor can it be "recognized by the presence of certain formal and external signs," such as places of worship, formal texts, or clergy. However, as a moral and secular philosophy it may very well address fundamental questions about existence. In what ways might vegans understand their practice to speak to "the meaning of human existence; the purpose of life; theories of humankind's nature or its place in the universe; matters of human life and death . . . "? In what ways might meat eaters understand their practice to speak to the same? Perhaps Turner's decision that veganism does not have "to do with deep and imponderable matters has a lot to do with the fact that in the U.S. concerned other animals are still considered "legal things" or property.[12] Turner's repetition of the word "human:" "the meaning of *human* existence; . . . theories of *humankind's* nature or its place in the universe; matters of *human* life and death" clearly signals the exclusionary nature of his decision about what might constitute "fundamental and ultimate questions."[13]

In many ways, being vegan is a response, or perhaps a series of responses, to questions that are often inflected by spiritual or religious concern: How shall I live? How shall I live in relation to others? How shall I live when in my life I am faced with the choice between taking or not taking the lives of others? It is also a response or a praxis-oriented way of thinking through the question: What is a life? Whom shall I not kill? Who counts as a neighbor worthy of my love?[14] All of these questions do

seem to address what Justice Turner, after Judge Adams, called "deep and imponderable matters." These questions seem as fundamental to our existence as any. That is to say that there may be good reason to leave open the possibility that there is something decidedly existential about decisions to be vegan, and that these decisions can bear a striking resemblance to traditional markers of the religious and the spiritual.[15]

While some aspects of veganism resemble aspects of religious practice and belief, stereotypes of vegans as ascetic, dogmatic, or self-righteous discourage people from becoming vegan by portraying vegans as religious fanatics. The stigma of vegan-as-fanatic delegitimizes vegan concern about the wellbeing of other animals, at the same time as it legitimizes eating meat as the sane and normal thing to do in a secular world.[16] The frequent association of veganism with a kind of religious dogma arouses a certain amount of suspicion, disdain, and ridicule. Interestingly, these secular critiques of vegans and veganism as too religious do not seem to make veganism any more palatable to the majority of religious adherents in the U.S. From academia to the appellate courts to the pulpit, and even to both sides of an otherwise divided Congress, animal people, both human and otherwise, remain for the most part personae non gratae. [17] While attempts at consistency are generally met with respect and accolades for those following weight-loss or health-related diets, attempts at consistency by vegans are dismissed as religious dogma. There are many permissable refusals in our hallowed dining halls—based on taste, allergy, diet, or religion. In the church of eating though, only the vegan is a heretic.[18] This chapter tries to understand

what accounts for this categorical difference in the reception and perception of decisions about what and how we eat.

Why Give Up Meat in the First Place?

> Ethics in eating, throughout history, have primarily been the purview of a fringe class, including vegans, vegetarians, the religious, and just about anyone else who feels that abstention and restraint constitute an ideal.
>
> –Alan Richman, "Eat No Evil" (2010)

Veganism is widely understood as an act of willful self-restraint or abstinence. One says, "I don't eat meat," or "I don't eat animal products." When it is not defined directly in the negative, it is framed as a kind of restrained or restrictive behavior. The first line of the *Wikipedia* entry for "veganism" reads: "Veganism is the practice of abstaining from the use of animal products, particularly in diet. . . ." *Wikipedia* defines "abstinence" as "a self-enforced restraint from indulging in bodily activities that are widely experienced as giving pleasure." The commonplace definition of veganism as abstinence or restraint accepts without question the experience of eating meat as a pleasurable one. If eating meat is a source of pleasure, then those who choose not to eat meat not only deny themselves that pleasure, but also disrupt the unrestrained satisfaction of that pleasure in social situations. Ben Westwood articulates this cultural phenomenon quite well: "Figured, variously, as a negation of pleasure, nature, sociability, responsibility, pragmatics, empirical science, or capitalism (the list could go on), vegans are cast as killjoys, ascetics, and masochists" (176).

According to Michele Simon, the Executive Director and Co-Founder of the recently formed Plant Based Foods Association, Washington's first plant-based lobby

group, "vegan telegraphs deprivation" (Stuckey). Cole and Morgan's study on the prevalence of speciesist discourse in UK media supports Simon's claim. They found that "characterizing veganism as asceticism," and "describing veganism as difficult or impossible to sustain" were the second and third most frequent negative discourses after "ridiculing veganism" ("Vegaphobia"139). The idea of veganism-as-asceticism is socially coded in everyday phrases like "giving up meat." "What You Need to Consider Before Giving Up Meat" is the title of a more-or-less neutral article that offers helpful tips to consider before trying out vegetarianism on the food preparation website *Morsel by Plated.* Similarly, a January 2018 article, "6 Things That Happen to Your Body When You Give Up Meat," on the lifestyle site *Simplemost,* touts the health benefits of eating vegan (Anas). An October 2017 article on a diet and health site tells one woman's story of "giving up" meat for 21 days: "If you asked me a year ago if I'd ever give up meat, I'd have had a crazed look in my eyes and given you a solid 'nah.' Meat and I have been in a loving, tight-knit relationship since I came out the womb" (Allen).

This deeply entrenched idea that one "gives up" meat speaks to the assumption that humans are entitled to meat in the first place; this language suggests that meat is part of our inheritance as humans and to decide not to kill and eat animals is to decide to give up that entitlement. "Giving up" meat also categorizes animal flesh among those pleasurable vices that some humans have historically tried to resist or abstain from: one also speaks of giving up sex or giving up alcohol. Alternate formulations indicate alternate viewpoints and understandings: for contrast, animal

protection organizations tend to focus instead on the idea of "going vegan." The Mercy for Animals website, mercyforanimals.org, never mentions the notion of "giving up" anything. Instead they talk about how to "make compassionate food choices," and how to "eat with compassion." Rather than helping people to "give up meat," Mercy for Animals "empower[s] people with the information and tools they need to create a kinder future for animals." They never frame the issue as one of entitlement or abstinence from pleasurable activities and privileges. Their stand-alone website devoted to helping consumers change the way they eat isn't called "Give Up Meat," but *ChooseVeg*. In terms of eating meat, they opt for language like: "switching" and "cutting out or cutting back on meat," and "how to eat more plant-based delicious foods." Rather than "telegraph[ing] deprivation" A tagline from the site inviting people to join their organization resounds with enthusiasm and affirmation: "Yes! I want to join millions of people who are starting to stand up for animals" (*Mercy for Animals*).

Part and parcel of the epistemology of the abstemious vegan is the notion that veganism is arduous and even impossible to maintain.[19] Common responses to finding out that someone is vegan include: "Wow, how do you do it?" or "That must be really difficult." According to Cole and Morgan, examples of lapsing vegans and vegetarians "reassure omnivorous readers that veganism is doomed to failure, and that they are not to feel guilty for not attempting it" ("Vegaphobia" 143). Stories of ex-vegans have become so prevalent that one vegan author compiled what he calls *The Ex-Vegan Encyclopedia* online and wrote a book called *Irreversibly Vegan: How to*

Go and Stay Vegan for Life. Benjamin McCormick calls his site *Vomad* and claims his encyclopedia to be the "The Internet's Largest Collection of 'Why I Quit Veganism' and 'I'm Not Vegan Anymore' Blog Posts, Articles, Interviews and Message Board Posts." McCormick finds that " [b]y far the main recurring theme is simply not being in it primarily for the animals, and instead, going vegan for personal issues . . . " and concludes that the ethical foundations for veganism are the strongest." The problem of lapsing vegans also has a lot to do with larger social structures and social relations.[20]

The larger truth may be closer to Lisa Simpson's revelation in the 1995 episode of *The Simpsons* "Lisa the Vegetarian." After a heart- and eye-opening encounter with a lamb at the petting zoo section of an otherwise lackluster children's amusement park, Lisa finds herself unwilling to eat the lamb('s) chops Marge has prepared for dinner that evening as the rest of her family devours the meat. Lisa faces the implications of her new realization and her family's incomprehension, as Homer asks incredulously: "Are you saying, you're never going eat any animal again?" and then lists off various cooked forms of pig, as though each were a different animal. What Lisa discovers in her days as a newbie vegetarian is a total lack of support for her decision to eat with compassion. Her family dances the conga through the living room singing "You don't make friends with sa-lad;" her teacher presses an "independent thought alarm" when Lisa announces that she'd prefer not to dissect a worm with the rest of the class; her school cafeteria offers only meat and when pressed for a vegetarian option offers her instead an empty hot dog bun (from which

the cafeteria worker has just squeezed out the hot dog); her principal forces her class to watch an "educational" video paid for by the Meat Council that, despite its honesty about the brutality of slaughterhouses, educates her classmates on how to dismiss vegetarians and continue eating meat; her preferred cartoons inundate her with allegedly humorous images of violence toward animals. Eating meat is indeed hard to give up on this episode, because all of Springfield seems so invested in the habit.[21]

Perhaps as a kind of rehearsing of the stereotype about the difficulty of quitting meat, the episode has Lisa decide to quit being vegetarian. Standing outside of the Kwik-E-Mart window, she stares in at the paucity of veggie options and gazes in horror at the hot dog case, yelling: "The whole world wants me to eat meat!" This pithy cartoon revelation might be a better way of deciphering both the prevalence in the media of the lapsing vegan trope and the phenomenon of why individual vegetarians and vegans lapse in the first place. Lisa does in the end choose to give into the pressures of eating meat because of the total lack of social support. She takes a reluctant bite out of a hot dog, when suddenly Apu, the Hindu owner of the convenience store, appears and says "I take it from your yelling that you like my tofu dogs." It seems noteworthy that even in this episode by vegetarian director Mark Kirkland, the only way to re-imagine the story of the lapsing vegetarian is to invoke a religious and spiritual narrative. Apu is seemingly Springfield's only other vegetarian, and it turns out vegan, in large part because of his Hindu faith. Spirituality is invoked more broadly as Apu and Lisa ascend to the idyllic, secret, rooftop garden—Apu's refuge from the meat-eating world, which happens to be longtime vegetarians-turned-

vegans Paul and Linda McCartney's favorite place to stop when they visit Springfield. They, of course, first met Apu years ago during their spiritual and vegetarian awakening when the Beatles studied Transcendental Meditation with the Maharishi in India. Religiosity and celebrity provide Lisa with the support network she needs, and 23 years later, her character has managed to remain vegetarian.[22]

The longtime cultural presence of Lisa Simpson has succeeded in bringing an "ethical mento[r] for vegetarianism and radical thinking" to primetime television (Grant and MacKenzie-Dale 324-325). *The Simpsons* performs a social critique of the stigmatization of vegetarians. Lisa's status as outsider and killjoy on the show confirms the social prejudice against vegetarians that stereotypes their ethical decisions as renunciation of culinary and social pleasures. Juawana Grant and Brittni MacKenzie-Dale point out in "Lisa Simpson and Darlene Conner: Television's Favorite Killjoys," that Lisa has a complicated role on the show: "The narrative simultaneously mocks and celebrates Lisa's vegetarianism" (314). Lisa offers another perspective on the status of other animals and acts as a voice for critical thought and rebellion, at the same time and for the same reasons that she provides other characters easy fodder for ridicule.[23] The vegan/vegetarian-as-killjoy is another layer of the vegan ascetic stereotype. As Lisa Simpson learns, the vegan is an ascetic and killjoy as much for allegedly refusing the pleasures of social bonding over meat as for refusing the alleged pleasures of meat itself. One of the primary ways this stereotype circulates in popular culture is through stigmas about vegan food. In popular culture, if meat is the pinnacle of pleasurable food, then tofu is the epitome of self-sacrifice.

Food writer Alan Richman gives us two good examples of this kind of discourse. Relying on the assumed shared cultural knowledge that vegan food equals taste deprivation, he jabs: "While sitting in Angelica Kitchen, an immensely popular restaurant that must gross more money than Lutèce, I said the three little words I never expected to say in a vegan restaurant. I turned to my friends and announced, 'This is delicious'" (*Fork It Over* 248). Despite his first-hand experience of delicious and satisfying vegan food, Richman pushes the stereotype of vegan-food-as-deprivation to its hyperbolic limit, veganism-as-starvation: "This is how vegans normally begin a meal, by reciting the details of their previous one, a side effect of a near starvation diet" (249). Here, vegan food has moved from euphemism for tastelessness to cipher for eating disorder.[24] Richman eschews empirical evidence for sensationalized stereotypes: Being vegan is more than just giving up meat; giving up meat is tantamount, in this widely-held cultural stigma, to giving up food itself.[25]

Stigmatizing vegan food contributes to the image of the ascetic vegan. Life without meat is just the first part of the story, appended to this first level of deprivation is the idea that vegan food itself can never be fulfilling. Cole and Morgan explain: "The 'difficulty' of veganism . . . typically boils down to the ridiculing of vegans' food as bland, unsatisfying, or impossible to obtain. This sometimes manifests as a pitying tone for the alleged paucity of vegans' diets and their exclusion from the supposed pleasure of eating nonhuman animals" ("Vegaphobia" 142). One need look no further than dustcovers of vegan cookbooks and online reviews for vegan restaurants to find examples of just what Cole and Morgan describe. The

discourse is so entrenched in cultural understandings of vegan food that it shows up even in praise for vegan cookbooks and restaurants. Writing about Jenné Claiborne's recently published *Sweet Potato Soul*, Rachel Ray raves: "Jenné makes a vegan lifestyle look *easy*—not to mention totally delicious."[26] Ray's praise for Claiborne's recipes begins with the assumptions that "a vegan lifestyle" is neither easy nor delicious. Also, "Jenné makes . . . [it] *look* easy . . . " suggests that Ray is not fully convinced that being vegan really is easy or delicious. Ray's carnist assumptions are actually built into the subtitle of Claiborne's cookbook: *100 Easy Vegan Recipes for the Southern Flavors of Smoke, Sugar, Spice, and Soul*; the vegan chef needs to reassure everyone that vegan food can be easy and as full of flavor as it is of soul. John Mackay, Co-Founder of Whole Foods, amplifies Ray's mistrust of vegan food from reservation to dissimulation: "Tasty, fresh, soulful—you won't even realize these brilliant recipes are vegan!"[27] Claiborne's recipes are so tasty, fresh, and soulful that prospective eaters won't even know what they're eating—or more to the point, won't even know that they're eating vegan (i.e. not eating meat).

This trend of praising vegan and vegetarian food by virtue of its ability not to reveal that it is in fact vegan or vegetarian is quite common. An online blurb about Cafe Flora in Seattle teases: "For a vegetarian meal that you might not even notice is vegetarian, head to Cafe Flora in the Madison Valley" ("Cafe Flora"). Noticing that a meal is vegetarian or vegan means noticing the absence of meat. A review of L.A.'s Sage Bistro begins with an interesting equation, vegan food equals food for rabbits: "Many think of a vegan diet as rabbit food. However, Sage Bistro proves that vegan

food can be full of flavor" ("Sage Bistro Delivers Fresh"). Vegan chefs and vegan food have to constantly prove their mettle, and more than that they have to counteract the stigma of perceived lack and deprivation that is still associated with the absence of meat. A vegan chef in Las Vegas, Mindy Poortinga, who provides meal service for clients describes this predicament in a July 2015 interview with the *Las Vegas Sun*: "The biggest obstacle is the stigma that vegan food is bland, only raw vegetables, and that vegans are a bunch of frail, hairy, tree-hugging hippies." Poortinga's insight also demonstrates the close relay between stereotypes about vegan food and stereotypes about vegan people.

Vegan brothers and chefs, Derek and Chad Sarno's, popular *The Wicked Healthy Cookbook* aims to upend both types of stereotypes at their root: the cover features a close up of Derek Sarno's torso, his white apron splattered with beet-juice, his tattooed arm holding a cleaver over a beet that lies sliced clean open on the cutting board in front of him. Chef Andy Ricker confesses: "Derek and Chad have pulled off something quite difficult: made a believer out of a confirmed omnivore. In *The Wicked Healthy Cookbook* both brothers show off their talent and creativity in the pursuit of making vegan food attractive--even craveable--to skeptics like me who have a hard time thinking about a diet sans meat."[28] Ricker's comments rely first on the idea of vegans as quasi-religious; he has been converted from "confirmed omnivore" to new "believer." Interestingly, he indicates that he has been seduced into this new state of belief. The Sarno brothers have succeeded in making "vegan food attractive—even craveable" to Ricker. Cleaver in hand, they "pull off" and "show off"

the pleasure of meat in the meal "sans meat." For well over a decade now, organizations like PETA, vegan chefs, vegan brands, and Instagram influencers have worked hard to combat stereotypes of vegan deprivation: in many ways "veganism has been revamped (in fact, remarketed and rewritten) as an appealing and chic 'lifestyle choice'" (Potts and Parry 56).The quest to make vegan foods and vegans read as sexy has been one strategy for disrupting the discourse of the ascetic vegan so that people will be more "attracted" to eating and becoming vegan.[29]

A 2007 internet backlash over the idea of "vegansexuals" illustrates the staying power of the ascetic vegan stigma, as well as some of the animosity and misogyny that lurk beneath it. The alleged pleasure of consuming animal flesh is tied to cultural associations between meat and male virility and power, just as the objectification and violation of animal bodies is tied to the objectification and violation of female human bodies. Carol Adams has curated countless examples of this connection, here is just one that also invokes the ascetic vegan stigma and its carnist corollary, the sexiness of meat: a *New York Times* review of a "pleasure palace" steakhouse in a Manhattan strip club by Frank Bruni, called "Where Only the Salad is Properly Dressed" (28 February 2007). While Bruni admits that he "failed to sample" any of the strippers, he reveals: "But the beef I devoured—breathlessly, ecstatically." He informs readers (who are simply assumed to be male and meat-eating), that "no matter what your appetite for the saucy spectacle accessorizing these steaks, you'll be turned on by the quality of the plated meat." While vegans aren't mentioned outright, the title provides a frame for the whole article. "Salad," which

codes for vegan food (or rabbit food, as in the earlier example) stands in prudish opposition to the various forms of "sexy" human and nonhuman meat in the club. According to the title, unlike everyone else inside, the salad has a sense of propriety. At some points in the review, it becomes difficult to decipher whether Bruni is referring to the women who work at the club or the meat that they serve there. This conflation happens at the level of cultural meaning as well: "the plated meat" and "the saucy spectacle" (i.e. the women) are both figured and understood as consumable sources of pleasure and satisfaction.[30]

It turns out that the stereotype of the ascetic vegan extends the idea of deprivation from the alleged pleasures of meat to alleged deprivation from the pleasures of sex. In 2006, the New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies (NZCHAS) conducted a nation-wide survey on a range of topics relating to the exploitation of other animals (Potts and Parry). While the survey and report touched on many issues, New Zealand and international media picked up on one minor finding of the study: six vegan women (a number that the international media frenzy quickly sensationalized as many vegan women) indicated that "that they preferred sexual intimacy, or primary relationships, only with others who did not consume meat or other animal products" (Potts and Parry 54). According to Annie Potts (one of the original authors of the study) and Jovian Parry in "Vegan Sexuality: Challenging Heteronormative Masculinity through Meat-Free Sex," within two days of the first story 21,000 new references to "vegansexuals" appeared on Google as stories and blogs spread across the globe, most of which were not only negative, but hostile (55).

In the flurry of international commentary, the decision of a handful of vegan women not to have sex with partners who consume animal products invited outrage at both the rejection of meat-eating men and the rejection of eating meat in the first place. One user on *Plime*, a now-archived Wiki community, pronounced: "Vegans are like Catholic priests. Everyone KNOWS priests get horny...it is biology. Everyone KNOWS vegans find themselves salivating despite themselves at the distant smell of hamburgers on the grill . . . it is once again . . . BIOLOGY" (qtd. in Potts and Parry 59). The user understands the decision to become vegan as a vow of celibacy from meat. Despite the vegan's pious renunciation of animal flesh, the user insists vegans still must "get horny" for the taste of meat. Here, the desire for meat is clearly likened to sexual desire, just as the drive for meat is likened to the biological drive to procreate. So close is the perceived link between indulging in meat and indulging in sex that "serious discussions were aired [on many online message boards] as to whether sex (especially oral sex) was even permissible to vegans" (59). One commenter on an American chef's blog inquires: "Is it okay for a vegan to have sex with a human at all? After all, humans are animals and sex involves the consumption of bodily fluids" (60). Confusion also turned to hostility: for some meat-eating men the failure to derive pleasure from consuming other animals renders vegans into available bodies for multiple kinds of predation:[31]

> . . . all this talk of veganism, meat eating and sex is making my mouth water, and if it's true that vegans are comparatively excellent in bed [a claim made by PETA during the controversy to counter the ascetic vegan stigma], then it's certainly a fact that they *taste* better, too. Like those corn-fed pigs that you can order at some fancy restaurants, vegans are sort of primed with the luscious fruits and vegetables on which they've stuffed themselves. Picking up a vegan,

> then, is the perfect recipe for a hot and tasty evening for two, and a delicious memory for one...a table set only for one; a 'bed' of roast vegetables in which a space has been cleared just for my 'guest'; a reach around to gently plant an apple in the mouth. (Marx)

This was printed on *The Sydney Morning Herald*'s Blog "The Daily Truth" on 6 August 2007, and written by then-staff writer, Australian journalist, Jack Marx, about two weeks before he was dismissed for a satirical piece about a former prime minister and Labor party leader—though, according to *Wikipedia,* in 2012 *Rolling Stone* nominated him "Male of the Year" "for his contribution to Australian literary culture" (Tomlin).

The vegansexual controversy illuminates how thoroughly patriarchal culture links meat to pleasure and indulgence, and likewise veganism to asceticism and abstinence.[32] Potts and Parry point out that "the rejection of or abstinence from meat (understood as 'real food') comes to be equated with the rejection of or abstinence from sex (that is, 'real sex', meaning heterosex with a meat-eating man)" (60). In their analysis:

> Vegans and vegansexuals alike are portrayed as joyless pleasure-deniers, many of whom secretly long to sate their carnal appetites by indulging in both meat-eating and sex with meat-eaters. In this way, the vegan's rejection of meat and the vegansexual's rejection of a sexual partner who eats meat are simultaneously undermined: they are only a superficial cultural veneer of misguided abstinence, beneath which powerful, "natural" carnal urges roil unabated. The fact that vegans and vegansexuals vocally denied they were in fact "abstaining" from anything worth having only fuelled the flames of many omnivores' ire. . . . Thus, the refusal of "vegansexual" women to engage sexually with men who eat meat is framed in less threatening terms: instead of rejection (of these men), it becomes a form of self-inflicted sexual sobriety on the part of vegan women. (60)

It is indeed ironic that the stigma of the abstemious vegan remains despite many accounts by vegans that they do not perceive themselves as "in fact ‘abstaining’ from anything worth having." In "Asceticism and Hedonism in Research Discourses of Veg*anism," Cole points out that: "An ascetic discourse of veg*anism could only be legitimated by evidence of experiential sacrifice of aesthetic pleasure among long-term veg*ans" (713).[33] Cole makes the critical point that "avoiding something that arouses disgust does not qualify as asceticism." (710). Cole draws attention to a fact ignored by these ascetic discourses: because often a shift of focus onto the experience of other animals is what inspires people to become vegan, "meat ceases to be a thinkable food item" for them (713). Meat elicits disgust for some vegans because, like Lisa Simpson, when they see or smell the lamb's chops they see or smell a dead lamb and think of the lamb who was killed.[34] The discourse of vegan asceticism undermines veganism's potential to pose ethical and existential questions. What does it mean to take pleasure in something that requires violence against sentient and defenseless beings? Framing veganism as deprivation from pleasure helps to foreclose such profoundly uncomfortable questions.

Somewhat in line with other efforts to recast vegans in a sexier light, Cole has argued in favor of moving toward a hedonistic discourse of veganism. On the basis of existing social research about vegans, Cole suggests that there is evidence that vegans not only eat a wider variety of foods than meat-eaters, but that they enjoy those foods and that variety. He concludes that a hedonistic discourse would be a better descriptive framework for veganism "based in its potential for affording aesthetic

pleasures such as an improved quality of life, culinary inventiveness and variety of taste experiences" ("Asceticism" 713). Refocusing the conversation on what vegans do eat, showing the pleasures of eating vegan, perhaps showing the sexier side of veganism, and adopting an overall more positive discourse may all help to de-stigmatize the outdated notion of veganism as self-deprivation. The majority of vegans after all do not have a problem with the concept or the pursuit of pleasure, they have a problem with the concept of pursuing pleasure derived from killing other animals. If vegans can indeed be said to renounce any pleasure, it is that kind which by and large they no longer experience as pleasurable anymore.

Must It Be All the Time?

> No vegan diet, no vegan powers!
>
> –*Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010)

> We are more likely to persuade others to share our attitude if we temper our ideals with common sense than if we strive for the kind of purity that is more appropriate to a religious dietary law than to an ethical and political movement.
>
> –Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (1975)

Veganism is often associated with purity, dogmatism, and absolutism. These associations and stigmas contribute to the view of veganism as a rigid set of quasi-religious dietary laws rather than an ethical and political movement. While other ethical and political movements may involve consumer boycotts or discourage support for particular businesses at particular times, veganism—one facet of a broader anti-speciesist stance—is anomalous in the way that it imbricates ethics into daily consumer behaviors, purchases, social interactions, and of course eating.[35] Challenging and changing the commodity-status of other animals can look a lot like

dogma in a culture where their commodification is so pervasive.[36] Challenging and changing the status of other animals can also become dogmatic when vegans focus too much on perfection and not enough on the end-goal of liberating animals from speciesism. Sensitivities can be heightened in part because vegan challenges to the status quo often take place in the context of sharing food, talking about food, and sitting down to meals. Vegans and non-vegans negotiate these challenges and dilemmas silently, respectfully, snidely, passionately, sometimes angrily across all kinds of tables, everyday.

The question of how to negotiate eating and being vegan in a speciesist world is riddled with caveats, concessions, and inconsistencies. From the non-vegan perspective, the vegan who comes to dinner but chooses not to eat all or some of the food, or the one who does not come at all, may seem unnecessarily fussy, foolishly consistent, ungracious, or annoyingly dogmatic. If there's a little animal-dairy or egg in a cake, why not just eat it?[37] If a waiter accidentally brings you salad with tuna on top, when you ordered the vegan cobb, why not eat around it, or just eat the tuna if it's going to go to waste anyway? What if you start eating a burrito that you think has jackfruit carnitas in it, only to realize it's actually pork? What if eating with friends and family who are eating animals makes you feel complicit in normalizing speciesism, should you refuse to share a table and the many bonds that come with it at all?[38] There is no official rule book, and individual vegans bring a spectrum of motivations and approaches to the way they practice veganism.[39] However, despite a

variety of approaches to navigating questions like these, vegans are routinely taken to task for trying too hard to be vegan, or for trying too hard to be *too* vegan.[40]

This discourse is well-attested on and offline. The English Libertarian magazine *Spiked* featured an article called "Veganism Isn't a Diet, It's an Ideology," (5 August 2016) that explains: "Whereas plain old plodding vegetarianism is based on down-to-earth experience – an aversion to the idea of killing animals – veganism is invariably an absolutist stance" (West). This example actually normalizes vegetarianism as "plain" and "down-to-earth," because it is based on an experience many people can relate to, "an aversion to the idea of killing animals." However, vegetarianism is normalized only to oppose it to veganism, which is criticized here for "invariably" being an "absolutist stance." The implication is that while an "aversion to killing animals" is sensible and even normal, an aversion to exploiting them for their milk and eggs (and then eventually killing them for their flesh) somehow goes too far: vegetarianism makes sense, but veganism is too absolute. Here, the aversion to the idea of absolutism overrides the aversion to the idea of (exploiting and) killing animals. An autobiographical piece from lifestyle magazine *Ecosalon* called the "Conscious Case against Veganism" (17 March 2011) articulates things more squarely in a religious framework:

> For nearly a decade, I was an evangelical vegan—a born-again, plant-powered fundamentalist, resplendent in my animal-rights halo and heavenly faux-fur robes. I fiercely guarded my inflexible morality, never daring to reexamine the orthodoxy's most illogical presuppositions. Over the past six months, I've come to believe that strict dogma is a drag. Conscientious consumption means eating and living ethically, not religiously. (Wick)

The writer casts herself as a former believer, simultaneously confessing and renouncing her own adherence to the church of veganism. Again, aversion to killing animals disappears from the conversation, and fundamentalism, haloes, robes, inflexible morality, orthodoxy, and strict dogma appear in its place. For this writer being vegan adds up to living religiously, and not conscientiously or ethically. A self-published book title combines this discourse of religious absolutism with that of addiction: *Vegan Recovery: How to Ditch the Dogma that Has Misled You and Free Yourself to Be Healthy and Happy*. All of these examples invalidate the content of veganism by associating it with religious dogma.

Instead of taking seriously attempts to bring more integrity and consistency to our relations with other animals, the discourse of the dogmatic vegan dismisses vegan attempts to decline the speciesism routinely served at mealtime as simple-minded adherence to rules, absolutism, or insincerity. The "Vegan Police" scene from the 2010 film *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* plays with this spectrum of stereotypes about vegan dogma. Adapted from a graphic novel and set in a Toronto suburb, the film melds realism with video-game fantasy to tell a quest tale, reminiscent of chivalric romances, about a young man in a garage-rock band who must battle with Ramona Flowers' seven evil ex-lovers to win her hand and heart. One of the evil-exes, Todd Ingram, is a buff, blonde, cocky and imperious rock-star with eyes and hair that glow thanks to the telekinetic powers bestowed upon him by his veganism. Scott only realizes that Todd is vegan when he finds himself choking and suspended in the air by the psychic energy emitted from Todd's luminescent eyes and hair. Suddenly

speaking in a religious register, Todd explains boastfully: "I partake not in the meat, nor the breastmilk, nor the ovum of any creature with a face." His current girlfriend and bandmate, Envy, (also Scott's ex-girlfriend) adds wryly: "Short answer: Being vegan just makes you better than most people."

Once Scott realizes that he can't beat Todd physically, he tries to beat him at his own mind-reading game. Falling into Scott's trap, Todd says: "Dude, I can see in your mind's eye, that you put half-and-half into one of those coffees in an attempt to make me break Vegan-edge. I'll take the one with soy." Scott sips on the cup with soy that Todd rejected, smiling with satisfaction as he watches Todd unwittingly take a swig of the coffee with half-and-half. Todd's hair deflates a little and his eyes lose their iridescence. He drops the offending cup realizing it's too late as the sirens blare and two police officers arrive on the scene through a hole they've blasted in the brick wall:

> **Vegan Police Officer #1**: Freeze! Vegan Police!
> **Vegan Police Officer #2**: Vegan Police!
> **Vegan Police Officer #1**: Todd Ingram, you're under arrest for Veganity Violation Code Number 827: Imbibement of half-and-half.
> **Todd**: Wh--? That's bullroar!
> **Vegan Police Officer #1**: No vegan diet, *no vegan powers!*
> **Todd**: But-but, I-- It's only my first offence. D-Don't I get three strikes? I mean--
> **Vegan Police Officer #1**: *[to Vegan Police Officer #2]* Take it.
> **Vegan Police Officer #2**: *[whips out notepad]* At 12:27 am, on February 1st, you knowingly ingested gelato.
> *[Scott Pilgrim smugly smiles]*
> **Todd**: Gelato isn't vegan?
> **Vegan Police Officer #1**: It's milk and eggs, bitch.
> **Vegan Police Officer #2**: *[still reading]* On April 4th, 7:30 pm, you partook in a plate of chicken parmesan.
> *[Envy* [Scott's ex-girlfriend] *gasps in shock, then glares at Todd]*
> **Todd**: *[feeble] Chicken* isn't vegan?

Vegan Police Officer #1: The De-Veganizing Ray. Hit him!!

Once Todd is "de-veganized," Scott defeats him easily with a single head-butt that makes him burst into a cloud of coins, adding 3,000 points to Scott's leaderboard and the "vegan police" to the internet's arsenal of jokes about vegans.[41]

The scene is decidedly funny and does an excellent job of decoding common perceptions of veganism as a set of dietary laws and vegans as both hypocritical and dogmatic. Here veganism is literally a code of laws with at least 827 possible violations. In this comic universe those who uphold veganism's restrictive code are rewarded with superpowers. In a sense, the scene is an ironic way of answering the consistency question: what happens if vegans ingest animal meat, dairy or eggs, either accidentally or on purpose? "No vegan diet, *no vegan powers*!" positions vegan choices around food in the realm of the mystical. It routes vegan decisions to challenge the commodity status of other animals through superstition and mysticism instead of through politics or social justice: here vegans maintain their diets to maintain their superpowers, which conspicuously set them apart from everyone else. The scene is a way of saying that veganism mystifies carno-normative ideas about eating and animals, so that the only way to make sense of it is to relegate it to the realm of something that defies good sense.[42] While the enforcers here are figured as police and not clergy, their powers are godlike in their omniscience. The idea that vegans cannot hide their transgressions is redolent of religious notions of an all-seeing godhead. The "vegan powers" here are also mystical in that their exact origins remain obscured. It seems like the vegan police are the ones who arbitrate the powers,

but Todd's eyes lose their luster before the police arrive, as soon as the taboo half-and-half touches his lips. The scene asks playfully: Do vegan powers derive from remaining "absolutely" vegan, or from gaining the approval of other vegans by performing your vegan rites well? It also asks: Can veganism (or other vegans) admit intentional lapses?

The scene might be read as a cautionary tale about how vegans should not behave if they want to help promote a more positive perception of veganism. The vegan police here are funny in part because there are vegans who can act in this way: rigorously policing the boundaries of veganism and acting like self-appointed authorities over the vegan label. Together, the vegan police and Todd Ingram represent a spectrum of stereotypes about vegan dogmatism: at one end are the policing vegans who create and enforce dogmatic purity codes for other vegans and at the other end are insincere and hypocritical vegans who do one thing and say another. At all points on the spectrum, the stereotype of veganism-as-dogma disqualifies commitments to veganism as either too lax, or too diligent. If vegans err they are hypocritical, if they don't, they are absolutist. Though in this caricature, the vegan police turn out not to be so absolute after all, as they've generously allowed Todd two willful "violations" of vegan code. Concern for animals is notably absent from both caricatures; the vegan police only seem interested in enforcing their rules and Todd only seems interested in maintaining his vegan status and powers. The film drives home the absoluteness of Todd's insincerity and hypocrisy when he whimpers: "*Chicken's* not vegan?". With the laughter produced by Todd's rhetorical and

ridiculous question, the scene confirms that even if many things about veganism seem obscure, there's at least one thing we all understand: eating chickens is not vegan. One of the ways the discourse of the dogmatic vegan operates is to mystify veganism by pushing the abject tragedies of other animals at our hands out of the conversation and off of the table. Indeed, vegan behavior makes very little sense, and may even seem (or become) silly, if one ignores the motivating concern for other animals or the core conviction that animals are not commodities to be consumed or exchanged.

Given the variety of attitudes and motivations that vegans bring to veganism, there are certainly times when vegans become the stereotype. When vegans act the part of the dogmatic vegan police, these instances come to be seen as the rule, in part, because they fit neatly into a pre-existing discourse. It seems important to ask why some vegans become dogmatic and perhaps even more important to ask if this stance furthers the cause of animal liberation. A 2013 *Tumblr* controversy involving Canadian singer/songwriter Grimes, a pint of Ben & Jerry's (animal-dairy) ice cream, and an angry vegan *Tumblr* user parallels the Todd Ingram, half-and-half, vegan police scene from *Scott Pilgrim* and helps to illustrate the problematic ways the veganism-as-dogma stigma plays out in the real, virtual world. The disagreement began when Grimes posted a picture of herself on *Tumblr* holding a tub of a newly discovered flavor Ben & Jerry's captioned: "1 day hiatus from veganism is being had starting NOw [sic]" (qtd. in Deville). Enter the online vegan police carrying expletives and capital letters in the place of de-veganizing ray-guns:

> Are you actually fucked? What the fuck is a 'one day hiatus from veganism' mate? A one day hiatus on compassion? Just one day where you're like

> 'whoops gonna consume something that was stolen from you and your young [i.e. cows'/calves' milk] because HIATUS MAN' . . . FUCK YOU. (qtd. in Deville)

As Joy points out in "Shaming Vegans Harms Animals" (15 October 2015): "shaming others is the best way to bring about the very opposite of what we desire (unless we are cult leaders, guards of political prisoners, or otherwise seek to disempower and "break" the other)." Melanie Joy uses the term "toxic perfectionism" to explain the phenomenon of vegans who police and shame others and vegans who feel pressure never to make a mistake. She suggests that "[w]hen vegans promote toxic perfectionism, they can create an excessive fear in other vegans (and themselves) of making mistakes. One slipup, one admittance of not being "pure" enough, can lead to being shamed" ("Shaming Vegans"). Unlike the vegan police in the film, the *Tumblr* user focalizes his shaming critique through the experience of the exploited nonhumans, the mother cows and their calves, and not on the commodity that conceals their experience and exploitation, Ben & Jerry's ice cream, however the form of his critique still negates the content. The commenter aggressively calls Grimes out for taking a break from "compassion," and then proceeds to exonerate himself from all civility, let alone compassion, toward her. Having beliefs, and orienting one's life toward the good that arises from them, is one thing; but the dogmatic, and in this case aggressive, expression of those beliefs is another. Individual vegans on- and offline can and should bring their ethical commitments to other animals in line with ethical behavior toward other humans who may not agree with them. Joy suggests that before entering into these conversations, vegans ask

themselves: "What impact on animals do I hope this communication will have?" ("Shaming Vegans").

Interestingly, when Grimes responds, she invokes the dogmatic vegan discourse, which shifts the focus away from the experience of the exploited nonhumans and back onto the perception of vegans and veganism. Here is a partial excerpt from her post:

> this is something i was anticipating and have been meaning to address for a long time: Part of the reason I posted the ben and jerry's thing is because I like to encourage people towards a type of veganism that is inviting and accepting. For the longest time I was vegan but I just wouldn't say I was because of the bad reputation of veganism. most of the vegans i know are dogmatic assholes, and it completely turns people off. (qtd. in Deville)

Grimes perpetuates the notion that the "bad reputation of veganism" is a direct result of "bad" vegans and not of the power and politics of speciesism, claiming: "this comment is why no one wants to be vegan" (qtd. in Deville). While Grimes may have good intentions here, her statements also play into a larger tendency to dismiss our own involvement in exploiting and killing animals because of the fallibility of those humans who advocate for them. The fact that some vegans behave badly is neither an ethical nor a logical reason to continue naturalizing speciesism, nor to dismiss the aims of veganism. In a self-described effort to promote "a type of veganism that is inviting and accepting" Grimes also promotes the veganism-as-dogma discourse, that defines veganism as a set of rules about taboo commodities instead of as an ethical practice about exploited nonhumans who have been commodified. Unsurprisingly, the articles that sensationalized the story used her own words to help fold the the intra-vegan imbroglio back into familiar and dismissive parlance: A 21 November

2013 article on *Steregum* was titled "Grimes Responds to Criticism from Dogmatic Vegan Assholes;" another on *Musicfeeds* from 22 November 2013 was called "Grimes Roasts 'Dogmatic Asshole' Vegans After Announcing One Day Hiatus" and begins by explaining that Grimes "has evoked the ire of a vegan purist" (Bella). None of the articles take up the issue of speciesism that underlies the disagreement or the "ire of the vegan purist" in the first place. Speciesism is what makes possible the choice between a delicious dessert and the forced separation of mother cows from their calves; it is also what make it plausible to choose the ice cream at the expense of the cows and to be praised for it.

Grimes goes on to describe what she calls her "brand of veganism," which seems to be her way of trying to intervene in the cycle of toxic perfectionism by rebranding veganism as something one can take a break from. She explains:

> if your grandparents have no idea what you are talking about then you eat their beef stew rather than upset or confuse them. or if you really want to have cake with an egg in it on the holidays then you have that rather than just not being a vegan because you don't want to give up occasionally having something that you love. (qtd. in Bella)

Even if the dairy and meat industry are essentially one and the same, the consistency question will strike most people as less quibbling and more foundational when it comes to Todd Ingram partaking in the chicken parmesan or Grimes partaking in her grandparents' beef stew. Grimes' answer to the consistency question seems to be that more people will become vegan if they feel there is more leeway to be inconsistent. Her approach to veganism is to treat it more like a diet than an ethical commitment or a belief system and so to feel alright about cheating once in a while.

The story went quiet for a couple of weeks until an online response from Brooklyn-based rock band, DIIV, reignited the controversy. The lead singer of the band disagreed with Grimes' approach to veganism definitively, but without the aggression of the original commenter: "grimes' version of veganism is called "NOT vegan", even if a dairy cow is "treated ethically" doesn't mean u aren't consuming/exploiting her" (qtd. in Deville). In Grimes' efforts to rebrand veganism, she had also detailed that Ben & Jerry's (who it is worth mentioning proudly debuted a line of vegan flavors made from almond milk in 2017), is the only brand of ice cream she eats because she thinks they treat "their cows" ethically (Deville). DIIV's response wound up prompting Grimes to reframe at least some vegans as dedicated, instead of dogmatic. This time, instead of invoking dismissive religious discourse, she wrote: "all i want to say is all respect to Diiv. There is nothing I admire more than someone who stands behind their beliefs. Good for him" (qtd. in Deville). Having been addressed more respectfully and having not been personally attacked or shamed, she could respond more respectfully: "if u don’t want to call me a vegan thats totally cool. i have no interest in fighting over the meaning of a word. my goal from all this was to propose a more relatable and achievable diet that is good for animals and the environment since many people can’t easily sustain a fully vegan diet" (qtd. in Deville). She reiterates the reframe: "no beef with Diiv. I truly admire his dedication" (qtd. Deville). Allowing the dismissive charge of dogmatism to fall away made room for a more positive and nuanced description, germane to the particular situation.

Another way to describe a vegan's commitment to other animals is as someone whose dedication might be admired and as "someone who stands behind their beliefs."

When it comes to standing behind one's beliefs about other animals, finding ways to do so respectfully can make all the difference. One Oxford graduate student's reply to a fellow graduate student in the cafeteria of Balliol College in the early 70s about why he chose the salad over the spaghetti with meat sauce had the unanticipated result of influencing a young Peter Singer to begin to see the exploitation of other animals as an important ethical issue.[43] As early as 1975, in *Animal Liberation*, Singer articulates the importance of distinguishing practices that support animal liberation from religious dietary practice: "The point of altering one's buying habits is not to keep oneself *untouched by evil*, but to reduce the economic support for the exploitation of animals, and to persuade others to do the same. So it is not a *sin* to continue to wear leather shoes you bought before you began to think about Animal Liberation" (232). In a more recent interview, he reiterates this distinction: "I think animal people should think more about the impression they're making on others because my ethics are based on the consequence of what you do. I think it's more important to try and produce a change in the right direction than to be personally *pure* yourself" (qtd. in "Animal Rights Advocate"). If animal liberation is a goal in the future, then one way to look at veganism is as a practice in the present that aims to make that future possible.

Veganism is not a religion in terms of dogma or rules, but an aspiration-based practice toward the good life for humans and other animals. In "Veganism as

Aspiration" Lori Gruen and Robert Jones define what they call Aspirational Veganism "not as a lifestyle or identity, but rather as a practice, a process of doing the best one can to minimize violence, domination, and exploitation" (156). As many other vegan writers and advocates have pointed out, there is no way to totally "avoid complicity in harming other animals" (Gruen and Jones 157). "All aspects of consumption in late capitalism involve harming others, human and nonhuman," which is not to say that there is no value in trying to be vegan, but that "to ascribe moral purity and clean hands to veganism is to make a category mistake" (Gruen and Jones156-157). Drew Winters makes a similar argument for veganism as aspiration, suggesting that "veganism . . . [is] inherently non-absolutist [in] nature: our society is so reliant upon and saturated with nonhuman animal exploitation that complete abstention would be as impossible to attain as it would be counter-productive to attempt." To say that it is aspirational is not just to say that it's not fully possible or attainable in the moment, but that it is a provisional practice moving toward a world where humans will perhaps no longer *want*, or need, to eat and exploit other animals: "The focus of . . . [aspirational veganism] is to imagine and earnestly try and actualize—to the best of one's ability—a world in which there is no animal exploitation by working to minimize violence" (Gruen and Jones 156).

Why Tell Others How to Live?

> Ah, it's a monstrous crime indeed
> to stuff your innards with a living thing's
> own innards, to make fat your greedy flesh
> by swallowing another body, letting
> another die that you may live. Amid
> so many things that Earth, the best of mothers,
> may offer, must you really choose to chew
> with cruel teeth such wretched, slaughtered flesh—
> and mime the horrid Cyclops as you eat?
> Is your voracious, pampered gut appeased
> by this alone: your killing of living things?
>
> –Ovid, Book XV, *The Metamorphoses* (8 CE)

> It's not natural, normal or kind
> The flesh you so fancifully fry
> The meat in your mouth
> As you savor the flavor
> Of murder
> No, no, no, it's murder
> No, no, no, it's murder
> Oh...and who hears when animals cry?
>
> –Morrissey (1985)

The simple answer to "Why tell others how to live?" is that even, and especially, when looked at as an aspirational practice, veganism practiced alone in secret will not do much to minimize the terrible exploitation that so many animals suffer. Complications arise around how to tell, or when to tell, others without, whether unwittingly or intentionally, assuming the role of the sanctimonious, self-righteous, proselytizing, preaching vegan. It is important to step back for a moment from the vitriolic fray of social media and even from animal rights protests staged in front of meat counters in supermarkets or outside of stores that sell animals' fur, and remember that what vegans say is part of a counter-discourse.[44] This counter-

discourse is varied and in no way homogenous, but all of its voices—whatever language they may speak and whether they whisper or wail, speak politely or in expletives, inspire or exhort, mutter their message or shout it from rooftops—emerge as responses, and in response, to the dominant discourse. Vegans are always speaking back to power, and that power shapes the way they speak—the power of the multi-billion-dollar coterie of animal-abusing industries, the government that is heavily lobbied by those industries, longstanding traditions, entrenched norms. Tens and tens of billions of land animals and trillions of animals from the sea go to their deaths each and every year at the hands of this power. The latest Gallup poll (August 2018) indicates that in the face of this power, only 5% of people in the U.S. are vegetarian and only 2% are vegan, which means that 95% of Americans still eat some type of animal's meat and 98% still eat dairy and eggs (Reinhart). When vegans tell others about eating and exploiting animals, it is a case of the very few fighting for the very powerless against the very many and the very powerful.

One of the strategies for speaking back to this power has been to take the moral high ground. This is neither a new strategy, nor is it one that is particular to struggles for more ethical and equitable relations with other animals. Writing in the first century C.E., Greek essayist and biographer, Plutarch frames the eating of flesh as an aberration of human decency:

> Can you really ask what reason Pythagoras had for abstaining from flesh? For my part I rather wonder both by what accident and in what state of soul or mind the first man who did so, touched his mouth to gore and brought his lips to the flesh of a dead creature, he who set forth tables of dead, stale bodies and ventured to call food and nourishment the parts that had a little before bellowed and cried, moved and lived. How could his eyes endure the slaughter

> when throats were slit and hides flayed and limbs torn from limb? How could his nose endure the stench? How was it that the pollution did not turn away his taste, which made contact with the sores of others and sucked juices and serums from mortal wounds? (540)

Rather than begin by explaining his own reasons for not eating animals, Plutarch exhorts his reader to reflect on how the "gore" and "stench" of the "slit," "flayed, " and "torn" "sores of others" ever came to be "called food and nourishment" in the first place. He calls into question the "state of soul or mind of the first man who did so," and, also in effect, of all those who continue to "endure the slaughter" and the "stench" of those that had just "a little before . . . moved and lived."

Writing in the early nineteenth century, English Romantic poet and essayist, Percy Bysshe Shelley, a proponent of vegetarianism, invokes the "moral nature of man" in the first sentence of his "A Vindication of Natural Diet:" "I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life" (78). Toward the end of his disquisition, Shelley writes that his intended audience is "the young enthusiast: the ardent devotee of truth and virtue; the pure and passionate moralist, yet unvitiated by the contagion of the world" (78). For Shelley, it is this "kind" of person who "unless custom has turned poison into food . . . will hate the brutal pleasures of the cha[s]e by instinct; it will be a contemplation full of horror and disappointment to his mind, that beings capable of the gentlest and most admirable sympathies, should take delight in the death-pangs and last convulsions of dying animals" (78). Shelley imagines "the moral nature of man" to be "capable of the gentlest and most admirable sympathies." According to Shelley, who looks not only to contemporary ideas about health and anatomy, but to origin stories of a fall from an

idyllic state, such as the Garden of Eden or Prometheus, the "brutal pleasures" of hunting and "delight in the death-pangs of dying animals," not only go against, but have corrupted, this moral nature.

Writing more recently in 1965, English novelist and social commentator and reformer Brigid Brophy, whom some call the mother of the animal rights movement, suggests that our "unremitting exploitation" of other animals not only goes against our morals, but also calls into question our status as "civilized humans":

> But where animals are concerned humanity seems to have switched off its morals and aesthetics—indeed its very imagination. Goodness knows, those facilities function erratically enough in our dealings with one another. But at least we recognize their faultiness...Only in relation to the next animal can civilized humans persuade themselves that they have absolute and arbitrary rights—that they may do anything whatever they can get away with. (qtd. in Linzey and Clarke 160)

For Brophy, writing in the time of factory farming, our behavior toward animals is more than a violation of our "moral nature," it is a place where that bright, though sometimes flickering, moral nature is totally extinguished, not to mention our aesthetics and imagination. Here, "in relation to the next animal," "civilized humans persuade themselves" to have a moral free-for-all so that "they may do anything whatever they can get away with."

Contemporary vegans aren't generally praised for asking others to look critically at the absolute and arbitrary rights they wield over other animals. Instead vegans are by and large put down for being sanctimonious and acting with a sense of moral superiority. Having moral conviction that the next human should not be able to "do anything whatever they can get away with" to the "next animal," or support

industries that do this for them, is not the same thing as having a sense of moral superiority because you act with that moral conviction and others do not. One question facing the vegan movements and communities is: When and why does righteousness become self-righteousness? The holier-than-thou vegan seems to be one of the most widespread and enduring anti-vegan stereotypes, but unlike many of the others it is one that vegan theorists and speakers deem to be accurate, and damaging enough among a number of vegans to be taken seriously. It has become enough of a concern that vegan theorists like Lori Gruen and Robert Jones delineate two senses of being vegan, what they call Identity Veganism and Aspirational Veganism, discussed in the last section. Gruen and Jones suggest that while "[m]any ethical vegans sincerely adopt veganism as a *lifestyle* as an expression of their commitment to ending the suffering that accompanies the commodification of sentient beings, " adopting the lifestyle can lead some to feel they "have achieved a kind of ethical purity" (155). More than that:

> [t]hough there are debates among vegans about questions of purity and commitment, there appears to be a growing public perception of vegans—that may be based in fact, prejudice, or more likely a combination of both—that vegans see themselves as better than and morally superior to non-vegans; that they can be 'preachy,' and even annoying; that they often exhibit a kind of self-righteous zealoutry, acting as 'vegan police' who promulgate veganism as the universal, one-and-only way to fight systemic violence against animals. Often these vegans are thought to judge non-vegans, including ovo-lacto vegetarians, as shirking their responsibility or being self-indulgent or simply cruel. (156)

This perception of vegans whether "based in fact, prejudice, or more likely a combination of both" winds up being harmful to animals if it discourages other people from practicing veganism or taking seriously the plight of animals.

The *OED* defines sanctimonious as: "Of pretended or assumed sanctity or piety, making a show of sanctity [or holiness of life, saintliness], affecting the appearance of sanctity." The words "sanctimonious" and "vegan" have been fused together so much so that on a November 2018 episode of Hasan Minhaj's progressive political commentary show *Patriot Act*, talking about the importance of state legislators to ending voter suppression, Minhaj mentions a group called the United Conservatives of Ohio (4 November 2018). He repeats the group's name and says: "The only phrase more redundant than that is 'thirsty Dicaprio,' or maybe 'sanctimonious vegan.'"According to the stigma of the "sanctimonious vegan," vegans are primarily concerned with appearing virtuous and not necessarily with doing what is right for other animals. Another latent meaning of the "sanctimonious vegan" might also have to do with an underlying rejection of other animals as worthy ethical subjects—vegans are seen as pretending to be righteous because their cause is seen as a trivial one. When non-vegans invoke the stereotype of the insufferably sanctimonious vegan, they tend to use it to imply that far from being better than others, vegans are actually bad people who deserve the same finger-wagging kind of lectures that they sometimes give to non-vegans. "To People Who Don't Eat Animals: You're Doing It Wrong" is the title of a September 2017 article on *Medium*. The writer argues that: "[v]egans and vegetarians are no better in any way, than people with omnivore dining habits. But, oh my God, do they cling to that and tout their superiority non stop" (Dragenescu). The focus here is on cutting vegans back down to their proper moral size. Addressing vegans who do it "wrong," the article chides: "But

when you step up to the mic and tell omnivore people that they commit murder by eating sentient beings with feelings and family, when you call omnivore people cannibalistic . . . when you elicit guilt in people by poisoning their plates with shame, regret, doubt and fear, you are being a really, really, bad person." Here, those whom the article dubs "vegan warriors," along probably with the likes of Plutarch, Shelley, and Brophy, are being "really, really bad" people when they "poison" the plates of others by making the eating of animals a moral issue, comparable to moral issues among other humans.

A *New York Post* article from 4 August 2016 "Selfish Vegans Are Ruining the Environment," echoes the "wrongness" of vegans, but in the context of environmental impact: "If you've ever suspected nothing is more annoying than prissy, sanctimonious vegans, it turns out you have company: Nature wants to punch them in the face, too" (Smith). This example expands the non-vegan's claim to nature: just like nothing is more natural than eating meat, so too is nothing more natural than wanting to "punch [sanctimonious vegans] . . . in the face." The underlying argument here is that it is not natural to apply morality to eating in a dog-eat-dog world. A *New York Post* article "Crazy, Hypocritical Vegans Are Driving Me Insane" (18 May 2016) delights in the example of one particular "bad" vegan in order to vent more general frustration and contempt for "full-of-themselves vegans": "it was delicious to learn that Sarma Melngailis, the former owner of vegan-food mecca Pure Food and Wine, had ordered a cheese-filled Domino's pizza before she was arrested last week for alleged fraud and grand larceny. Cops had hunted her for nearly a year since she

vanished after being sued for not paying employees' wages" (Cuozzo). What could be better than a vegan who cheats on her ethics to illustrate that a vegan can be a bad person, than a vegan who also cheats her employees and the government out of money from the profits of her "vegan-food mecca" business? The writer of this article uses this example of a bad vegan apple to claim: "Phoniness bleeds through every pore of the vegan scene," but then zeroes in on the real culprit: "I have nothing against people who shun meat. Eat and let eat, or not, I say. But my tolerance runs out when they're sanctimonious about their calling, which some regard not merely as a diet, but as a 'social justice movement'—at least until they're caught cheating" (Cuozzo). The problem for this writer is not whether or not one eats meat, but once again whether one draws attention to the reasons for not eating meat. According to this way of thinking, dinner is a well-mannered "eat and let eat" affair where what one eats should be regarded "merely as a diet" and not as "a 'social justice movement.'" Vegans cross this line when they call attention to the terrible ways we treat "the next animal;" eating is perceived as being in the purview of personal decision and not social justice.

Equating the words vegan and sanctimonious affords a kind of cultural permission to tune out what vegans say, in the same way many tune out Jehovah's Witnesses: "You know the type: Newly converted and outspoken, these recent recruits behave with a sense of single-minded purpose that resembles the proselytizing fanatics of one religion or another" (Hamilton, "Veganism Isn't Entirely Unproblematic"). Like Gruen and Jones, Colleen Patrick-Goudreau, author of *The 30-*

Day Vegan Challenge, sees this "toxic self-righteousness" coming mainly from "some well-intentioned ethical vegans," who worry that ethical veganism gets "watered down by the media and celebrities who position veganism as a temporary, trendy diet." She dedicated an episode of her *Food for Thought* podcast to discussing the vegan police, suggesting that "[h]ooked on the ideology, the badge, the label, the purity, this is the group that acts as if veganism is the end rather than the means to an end." Patrick-Goudreau says that she has been "*shocked* at the things [vegan] people say [largely on social media] and *how* they say them. These comments are filled with so much scorn and unkindness, and I have to believe that the people writing it aren't aware of how toxic it is for everyone—including for the animals." According to Patrick-Goudreau, this "small subset of opinionated, passionate, well-intentioned people perpetuate the stereotype of the angry, self-righteous, perfection-focused animal rights vegan when they spew invective at anyone who is not "vegan enough" in their eyes. They are otherwise known as The Vegan Police." Some of the "growing public perception . . . that vegans see themselves as better than and morally superior to non-vegans" comes no doubt from vegans like the *Tumblr* commenter from the Grimes' imbroglio. Goudreau offers some insight on what may be behind some of this behavior:

> I think what happens for so many animal rights activists and ethical vegans is that we feel so acutely aware of how much animals are suffering that we think if we don't demonstrate outrage about this fact *all the time*, then we're not being true to them. We're not being good advocates. I think we think that if we're not in a constant state of anger about how animals are treated, we're letting the animals down.

The opposite though winds up being true; the more vegans express outrage *all the time*, the more they help to grow the public perception that vegans are outrageous.

In *Beyond Beliefs: A Guide to Improving Relationships and Communication for Vegans, Vegetarians, and Meat Eaters* (2018), Melanie Joy suggests that despite the natural tendency for vegans to want to advocate for other animals, the key to effective communication lies in prioritizing mutual understanding over attempts to influence others. She explains that because what motivates many people to become vegan is caring deeply for other animals they may "feel compelled to speak out to raise awareness . . . [s]o they are automatically advocates" (156). According to Joy, this "natural advocacy component of veganism" can lead to two basic problems in communication: whether for veganism or some other cause (religious or political), advocates "are often [automatically] perceived as moralistic, even when they are not, and people are generally defensive against the message of those they see as moralistic" (156). The other obstacle created by the desire to advocate is that it causes many vegans to focus on trying to change others "leading to misunderstandings and defensiveness when what is needed is mutual understanding without any attempt to influence the other" (157). Joy also argues that because advocates "are not direct victims of injustice themselves . . . [they] tend to have less freedom to raise awareness of an injustice without being labeled as 'moralistic' than would a direct victim" (157). She suggests that:

> Advocates are often seen as taking the moral high road, as representing a moral choice that others perhaps could have made but didn't. So non-advocates can feel "less moral" by comparison. When people feel they are in a position of moral inferiority, they tend to...project onto the other that the other

> feels morally superior (even if the other doesn't feel that way), and[/or] they offset their discomfort by trying to prove that the person they are comparing themselves to is in face less moral—to rebalance the moral scales. (157)

Some of Joy's conclusions are supported by a 2011 study, "Do-Gooder Derogation: Disparaging Morally Motivated Minorities to Defuse Anticipated Reproach." The study examines meat-eaters' reactions to vegetarians so as to better understand the phenomenon of do-gooder derogation, or "the putting down of morally motivated others" (Minson and Monin 200). Minson and Monin begin from the premise that "[w]hile societies may differ on what it means to be moral, they agree that is good to be so" (200). In light of this, their study seeks to figure out why moral behavior, can often "elicit annoyance and ridicule rather than admiration and respect," and looks to vegetarians as a prime example of a "relatively harmless group" that despite being morally motivated and "defined by seemingly positive characteristics," is largely resented and viewed negatively (200, 206). They hypothesize that do-gooders' "claim to base their behavior on moral grounds is an implicit indictment of anyone taking a different path . . . it is this implicit moral reproach...that is irksome to the mainstream and motivates resentment against do-gooders" (200-201).

Their first study asked respondents to complete several phrases linking eating to morality with a 7-point scale, ranging from extremely immoral to extremely moral, rating their own morality, that of vegetarians, and then rating their own morality and that of meat eaters more generally from the perspective of vegetarians. Respondents were then asked to generate three words that they associated with vegetarians. The study found a strong correlation between negative perceptions of vegetarians and

anticipated moral reproach: "the more participants expected vegetarians to exhibit . . . moral superiority, the more negative were the associations they generated about vegetarians" (204). Their second study showed an even more direct link between do-gooder derogation and anticipated or imagined moral reproach: two groups were asked the same questions simply in different orders. Group one, known as "Threat First" was first asked to consider how vegetarians would rate their morality as a meat eater and then to evaluate vegetarians, while the second group, "Rating First," began by evaluating vegetarians. The study found that those who were asked to contemplate the moral reproach of vegetarians first were much more likely to evaluate vegetarians negatively: "The fact that we observed such a significant shift in ratings of vegetarians as a result of such a subtle manipulation demonstrates just how sensitive individuals are to moral threat" (205).[45] If the reason to tell others is in fact to bring the rights of animals into the political conversation and to move toward a more vegan world, then vegans who nitpick and name-call at best simply perpetuate the stereotype of the sanctimonious morally superior vegan, and at worst, give non-vegans another reason not to stand up for other animals.

Conclusion: May All Beings Be Free from Suffering?

> All beings fear before danger, life is dear to all. When a [hu]man considers this, [s/]he does not kill or cause to kill.
>
> –Dhammapada

The wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering is at the heart of many religious and spiritual teachings.[46] While not all religions automatically or traditionally extend this grace to other animals or even to humans from other religions, some like Hinduism, Jainism, and some strains of Buddhism embrace the principle of ahimsa, or nonviolence, in relation to all beings: Ahimsa though "is not simply a matter of refraining from actual, physical harm. Ahimsa is the absence of even a desire to do harm to any living being, in thought, word, or deed" (Long 97). This ancient, life-affirming, ethic of reverence for and connection to different forms of life is certainly available in the practice of veganism. It is ironic that veganism is rarely formulated or framed as such in popular culture and is instead critiqued and pigeon-holed for some of the very aspirational qualities that motivate the principle of ahimsa. The latent ahimsa in veganism has been distorted into a parade of caricatures: the ascetic and malnourished vegan, the dogmatic vegan police, the sanctimonious level-five vegan.[47]

In the "Lisa the Tree Hugger" episode of *The Simpsons* that first aired in November of 2000, Lisa and her idealism fall hard for a smooth-talking, do-gooder "teenage activist Jesse Grass . . . a 'dreadlocked' dreamboat whose 'Birken stock' is on the rise." After Jesse is arrested for a protest at Krusty Burger, Lisa goes to visit him

in jail. Their conversation crystallizes the stereotype of veganism as a sanctimonious, and perhaps adolescent, quest to erase death:

> **Lisa:** Jesse? [Exhales] You do yoga?
> **Jesse:** Yeah, but I started before it was cool.
> **Lisa:** My name's Lisa Simpson. I think your protest was incredibly brave.
> **Jesse:** Thank you. This planet needs every friend it can get.
> **Lisa:** Oh, the earth is the best. That's why I'm a vegetarian.
> **Jesse**: [Chuckles] Well, that's a start.
> **Lisa:** Well, um, I was thinking of going vegan.
> **Jesse:** [Chuckles] I'm a level-five vegan. I won't eat anything that casts a shadow.
> **Lisa:** Wow. Um-

As with the "Lisa the Vegetarian" episode *The Simpsons* performs a brilliant satire that simultaneously makes fun of vegetarians and biased perceptions of them. One idea *The Simpsons* plays with here is that veganism is always-already a kind of hyperbolic response to the problem of living and dying in a world of innumerable and largely unknowable others who are also living and dying. With Jesse the level-five-vegan, criticisms of veganism and the "deep and imponderable matters" raised by vegan philosophy are brought into a single operation: Veganism could be a slippery slope that ends in refusing to eat anything at all.[48] In the funhouse mirror of Jesse, the level-five vegan, one can simply laugh off and validate their choice to continue eating other animals because it's impossible not to kill. One can also laugh off the impossibility of perfection and with it the claim that just because some killing is inevitable, trying to kill less means denying death. After all, it is not only a denial of death that might lead people to do what they can to preserve the lives of other beings and to work to broaden the capaciousness of their understanding of what constitutes a living being.

We can certainly laugh at Jesse the level-five vegan and others like him for taking their veganism too far, while also being more specific about what exactly it is that they take too far. There may be a directional mistake here in how we frame the question of compassion and connectedness: it may not be a matter of asking anxiously where it ends, but instead asking where it begins. Where might we begin to show more compassion for the other animals whose fates are so connected to ours? Most of the popular discourse examined in this chapter uses religious stereotypes to discredit veganism. Ironically many of the positive things that veganism has in common with spiritual endeavors get completely lost in the religious discourse that surrounds it. Real-world level-five vegans have been around for thousands of years, and many origin myths, including The Garden of Eden, imagine a time before killing when humans lived alongside other animals without bloodshed. When we focus on veganism as asceticism or sacrifice and its potential for dogmatism and sanctimony, we largely, and often it seems willfully, ignore the beauty of the effort to live less violently and to protect those who are most vulnerable and most at the absolute mercy of the absolute power of human beings.

Anti-vegan stereotypes that depict vegans as religious fanatics downplay the fact that veganism can be an expression of identification with other animals; it can be a way of acting on a sense of connection to their suffering and a sense of connection to their wellbeing.[49] In *Animals and World Religions*, Lisa Kemmerer argues that compassion for other animals is a central teaching in all of the world's major religions. Kemmerer roots this compassion in the first millennium BCE, what Karl

Jaspers has called the Axial Age, the time when "the world's largest contemporary religions were formed, and morality—how we behave—was placed 'at the heart of the spiritual life' in the religions that originated in India, China, and the Middle East" (3).[50] Karen Armstrong (quoted by Kemmerer above), writes extensively about the shift that happens during the Axial Age. She explains that in the spirit of the new Axial Age "[w]hat mattered was not what you believed but how you behaved. Religion was about doing things that changed you at a profound level" (Armstrong xviii). According to Armstrong, the sages of the Axial age still valued the rituals of the past "but gave it a new ethical significance" (xviii). Kemmerer adds that "[t]he great sages of that time, who formed each of today's major religions, placed compassion, generosity, kindness, charity, benevolence, inclusiveness—the empathic life—at the core of religious teachings and practice. These sages taught that respect for the lives of all beings was the *essence* of religion" (3).[51]

In some religions, this ethic of compassion is clearly related to eating practices that spare the lives of other animals. For instance, according to Kemmerer, the Hindu reverence for cows "serves as a foundation for a more general responsibility for other" animals. She explains that

> [p]rotecting cows, whom we might easily harm or kill, is an expression of compassion that acknowledges both our power over other creatures and our own vulnerability before the gods—our need for protection from that which is more powerful and potentially deadly. . . . When we protect those who are least able to protect themselves, we show an understanding of the vulnerability of life in general, and of our own vulnerability. (59)

Ahimsa is central to Hinduism, it is also the central ethical principle of the Jain religion, which developed in the sixth century BCE out of the Hindu/Vedic traditions,

and which like Buddhism owes much to earlier Indian concepts like ahimsa, karma, and reincarnation. For the world's remaining 4.2 million Jains, the ethic of compassion "reaches beyond diet to touch every aspect of their lives. Some...walk with whisk brooms to brush away insects who might otherwise inadvertently be crushed underfoot, and . . . wear face masks to avoid inadvertently inhaling insects or microorganisms" (82). Like Jainism, Buddhism also developed in India in the sixth century BCE. Buddhism not only entails the practice and ethic of ahimsa, but also karuna, or compassion, the "intention and capacity to relieve the suffering of another person or living being" and metta, or lovingkindness, the "intention and capacity to bring joy and happiness to another person or living being."[52] For Buddhists moral obligation toward other animals "requires humanity not only to avoid causing harm, but also to prevent and/or alleviate pain and suffering that is caused by others, and also to overtly bring happiness to other beings" (Kemmerer 97).[53]

We might also look to creation stories for connections between spirituality and veganism. Many creation stories hold in common the idea that relations among all animals first existed in a state of non-violence and harmony. Many indigenous creation stories imagine an originary time without bloodshed, in which all animals, including humans existed as a single community speaking one language and sharing one culture: "The Cheyenne of the Great Plains remember the original creation, a world where 'people and animals lived in peace. None, neither people nor animals, ate flesh'" (Kemmerer 30).[54] Donna Rosenberg recounts Navajo stories that likewise tell of a time when food was plentiful and all creatures not only spoke the same language

but also shared the same physiology, "the teeth, claws, feet, and wings of insects;" a time when humans "ate only what food they could gather and eat raw, such as nuts, seeds, roots, and berries" (499).[55] According to many indigenous myths it was predation that disrupted this great peace among creatures and first disturbed "the interrelatedness of creation" (Harrod qtd. in Kemmerer 30).[56]

Similarly, Greek myth imagines a Golden Age, "a time of prosperity and peace that allowed all living beings to live in peace," with no need to kill one another for food. In the Judeo-Christian beginning, there was also animal liberation: work was nonexistent, food was plentiful and meat was made of nuts and fruit. An extended re-reading of the Garden of Eden and the Fall suggests that a desire for less violent relations with other animals is also at the center of Western religious thought. Depending on what purpose you think creation myths serve, the story of Eve's and Adam's utopic beginnings suggests one of two things: Kinship and peaceful coexistence between humans and other prey species lives deep in the Judeo-Christian memory.[57] Or else, Genesis has always been imagining better and kinder relationships between humans and other species, pointing toward a more idyllic future by imagining a fall from a more equitable past. While each of these readings casts a different light on the trajectory of interspecies relations, they are not mutually exclusive and actually flower in at least one of the same fruitful possibilities: What has come to be known and practiced under the sign of "veganism" is actually coextensive with Western culture, and more than that, one of our most powerful cultural touchstones, the story of the Garden of Eden, sets a gold standard for the way

our species treats other creatures.[58] This standard marks the practice of eating (and exploiting) other species as a deviation and perversion from our longstanding and fundamental desire for kinship with them.

Not only is there no killing in the Judeo-Christian paradise, but eating and what should and should not be eaten stand at the center of the narrative—and at the root of the Fall. In the Genesis 1 version of the creation story, the God character has about six lines that directly address the just-created and not-yet-named Eve and Adam, and five and a half of those lines convey information about, first, how they should relate to the other creatures and, second, what they and the other creatures shall eat, or more specifically, what "shall be for meat" : "And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat" (KJV, Gen. 1.29). The next directive on eating concerns the nourishment of the nonhuman creatures: "And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat, and it was so" (Gen. 1.30). No animal species, human or otherwise, has the status of food in the story of Eden. It is only after the fall, and seemingly as a consequence of it, that flesh becomes meat and meat ceases to be plant-based.

Much like a good host then, God explains to the new human guests what's good to eat in the neighborhood and also what the nonhuman guests in town dine on. This information is preceded by God's only other two lines addressed to Eve and

Adam in Genesis 1: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the seas, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth over the earth" (1.28). Many philosophers, biblical scholars, and other kinds of humans have hedged their bets about the superiority of our species over all others on the word "dominion."[59] Is it a license to dominate and exploit the nonhuman guests in God's garden? The fact that the god figure in the story seems to take great care to delineate all of the creatures seems a good first indicator that these nonhuman others matter; they are worth the expense of many words in what is otherwise a sparse economy of language—God's introduction to life on Earth in just six short lines. The second indication that this dominion specifically bars eating these creatures is that God follows it directly with the information about what is food in Eden, saying, in other words: have dominion over these different creatures but do not eat them, they are not for meat to you or to one another.[60]

In a chapter about Mesopotamian creation stories from a larger collection called *Imagining Creation*, W.G. Lambert suggests that "Genesis conforms to its ancient Near Eastern background where creation . . . is about the processes by which the universe we know reached its present form, with no attempt to delve into the question of ultimate origins" (16-17). Following this line of interpretation, one of the processes that the Genesis myth struggles to explain is the relationship among all of Earth's creatures, and how humans came to dominate other species and relate to them primarily as resources. The myth's sustained attention to the importance of eating and the importance of how humans relate to other creatures in general and specifically

through eating indicates, at the very least, questions about the status of this relationship--and some sense that other kinds of relations might be possible and preferable. Leo Strauss suggests another way to read this story in Harold Bloom's collection, *Genesis*: "The story of the fall is the first part of the story of God's education of man" (32). What are the unexplored possibilities of this education as it pertains to transforming interspecies relations?

Another way of asking this question is: Why does the Fall come as a consequence of an act of eating? Belated spoiler alert for anyone unfamiliar with the way this story ends: Paradise is lost as a consequence of a bad decision about eating. We have been swallowing this story whole for so long that it may be worth trying to estrange ourselves from it for a few moments to really think about what this might mean. Traditionally the Fall is read as being a result of disobedience; Eve and Adam disobey the god figure's commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge and that act of disobedience becomes the source of all human suffering—labor, both childbearing and in the field, scarcity, sickness and mortality. This act of disobedience though could have assumed many forms other than eating: roaming outside of the bounds of the garden, gazing upon a forbidden object or entering a forbidden area, or even killing one of the other creatures in the garden—instead it is the seemingly mundane act of eating a fruit from a particular tree in a garden full of lush fruit-bearing trees.

Despite its differences from the unfolding of creation in Genesis 1, it is remarkable that in the second chapter, God's first words to the man he's just created

also pertain to eating: "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest therof thou shalt surely die" (2.16-17). If this myth is a kind of education, then one of its primary lessons is that eating is a transformative act; it is *the* act that transforms the world from a state of perennial paradise to a state of constant suffering and sorrow. It is an act with the highest possible stakes and the most profound of consequences: A decision to eat the wrong thing brings suffering and death into the world. The story of the Garden of Eden says that far from being a matter of asceticism, dogma, or sanctimony, what we eat can and does fundamentally change who we are and how we live, as well as transforming the state of the world around us.

The transformational act of eating in the myth, albeit eating a fruit, radically shifts the way Eve and Adam relate to the other creatures: the Fall erodes harmony among species in just two bites. Eating the fruit is figured here as a chasm between two dispensations. Before Eve and Adam eat from the tree of knowledge, other creatures are not for meat. Just after they eat the fruit, other creatures first become for clothes. Then just after the banishment from Eden, in the story of Cain and Abel, animal-based meat and animal sacrifice appear for the first time in the Old Testament. Read in this way, the Fall is a myth about how we move from a benevolent and equitable world where all meat is plant-based and all flesh is sacred to a decidedly speciesist one where all creaturely flesh becomes fair game and human dominion becomes tantamount to animal exploitation.

In "The Tree of Knowledge," Martin Buber claims that “the only recorded consequence of the magical partaking” is that Eve and Adam become aware of their own nakedness (47). Another important but often overlooked consequence is that this "magical partaking," or act of eating, leads to the first death in the Old Testament, which surprisingly seems to occur within the gates of Eden. While Eve and Adam choose to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, God overrides their choice of clothing: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3.21). The narration does not provide details about how, or why, God “makes” these “coats of skins” to replace the perfectly adequate plant-based ones. Instead, much like in our own historical moment, the disembodied animal skins simply appear, readymade and available for human use—detached from the painful process by which they were made and the cruel killing that the making requires.

God is the perpetrator of the first killing in the Old Testament and the first death is that of a nonhuman creature. It is puzzling that one result of the Fall is that the god figure suddenly prefers killing and using animal bodies instead of relying on "herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed" (Gen 1.29). Why does the myth attribute this choice to the god character and not to the human ones? And why does the myth figure God's choice as a consequence of Eve and Adam's decision to eat from the tree of knowledge after taking the time to specify God's directives for a seemingly vegan Eden? God's choice to clothe Eve and Adam in the "coats of skins" with the purpose of covering their nakedness brings into one operation knowledge, killing animals, and

intimacy. Knowledge here is mythologized as something that sets humans apart from all of the other creatures: positing perhaps an explanation for how humans came to feel and experience themselves as a species set apart from all the others.

After eating from the tree, Eve and Adam are the only creatures in the garden who perceive themselves as being naked, this "knowledge" leads them to cover themselves with fig leaves further setting themselves apart now as the only creatures wearing clothing. God then marks this new state of separation by killing one (or more) of the other creatures and superimposing the emblem of that killing—skin—onto the emblem of Eve and Adam's nakedness—skin. Here, human skin and skinned animal press against each other for the first time—even the myths' staging of God's deliberate effort to symbolize this new chasm among the garden's creatures belies an intimacy and a connectedness. Skin to skin, human and non-human cannot seem to be torn asunder—our experience of mortality is fused into one figure. The bit of latent hope in the story is that humans fall into exploiting other creatures unintentionally. The story the myth tells is of a condition from which we, human and non-human, skin-to-skin still suffer: Fellow exiles from a small garden we share this mortal curse and coil.[61]

The story of the Fall is an extended rumination on the religious or spiritual nature of eating and interspecies relations. That it is seldom read that way tells us more about speciesism than it does about the story itself. Speciesism and the practices it condones and engenders—eating animals most of all—not only affect how humans relate to other species in practice but also on the page. Eating animals colors what we

think of them and the meaning we make about what is written about them, and us. Eating animals means ingesting more than their flesh: it also means incorporating a limiting and degrading viewpoint of those animals and of the worlds we might inhabit with them. Reading Genesis and other creation myths more carefully and looking to the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist principle and practice of ahimsa helps bring into focus the way a limiting and degrading view of those animals whom we continue to eat may have foreclosed Judge Turner's notion of what constitutes "the religious" in his ruling in *Friedman v. Southern California Permanente Medical Group*. If we can see beyond the smoke-and-mirror stereotypes of vegans as religious fanatics that permeate popular culture, we may be able to look more clearly at the way that veganism not only "addresses fundamental and ultimate questions having to do with deep and imponderable matters," but also implements ways to live based on answers to those questions. Veganism does speak to "the meaning of human existence; the purpose of life; [and] theories of humankind's nature or its place in the universe," we just may not always like what it has to say.

Notes

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[1] This is not only true for popular culture, but even in social research. Matthew Cole has found that social research literature about veganism uses descriptive terms related to asceticism, like "strict," "restrictive," or "avoidance." Cole concludes that this ascetic discourse denigrates veganism as difficult or impossible to maintain in order to validate a hierarchy of Western diets that places the consumption of meat at the top. See Cole 2008.

[2] For examples of these stereotypes, see Richman 2004 and Bourdain 2007.

[3] See Hamilton 2000; Colb 2013; Zeller 2015.

[4] See Gopalan 1973 for explanations of *ahimsa* as practiced by Jains. Gopalan indicates that despite the negative prefix, which has been a source of misunderstanding, in Jainism ahimsa is a "positive philosophy of love . . . [defined by] the ethics of non-violence" (159). According to Gopalan, *ahimsa* in Jainism, "entails a positive and all-comprehensive view of life" (160).

[5] Anthropologists, Mintz and DuBois discuss more generally the connections between eating and identity. In their analysis, "food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart" (109.) See Mintz and Dubois 2002, 109-110. See also Joy 2018. Joy explores the profound alienation that can result from differing beliefs about the status of animals as food, and suggests strategies for improved understanding and communication among vegans, vegetarians, and meat-eaters.

[6] See Mckay 2018, 250-251, for his narration of a "dinnertime discursive moment" that illustrates the cultural threat posed by the vegan at the dinner table. In the autobiographical anecdote, Mckay tells of a scene that repeats each time a certain family member has Mckay, a vegan, over to dinner. Each time, the host prepares ratatouille for Mckay and meat for everyone else. When serving Mckay his ratatouille, the host announces "Here we are Robert, your lesbian food" (251). Mckay suggests that what might connect lesbianism to veganism for his male heterosexual meat-eating host is that both are modes of identification (analogous though not equivalent) that trouble the dinner host's own subject position.

[7] See McDonald 2000 for analysis of experiential accounts of how individuals underwent the process of becoming vegan. McDonald interviewed people who had been vegan for at least one year to try to learn how others, like herself, became and maintained their veganism. Some participants described the moment when they decided to become vegan as a "catalytic experience...akin to a religious conversion" (8). One interviewee, Larry, stated: "I just decided not to eat meat anymore. Just all of a sudden, that afternoon, for whatever reason, whether it was a force that made me

decide, I don't know. But, it was that instant that I decided to give up meat" (8). Another, named Lisa, was "converted" by watching a video on animal abuse. She told McDonald: " I watched the live video. It was almost, like they say, the curtain was pulled back. The truth was made known. I felt like I had been born again. It was like there is no turning back now. Now that I know the cruelty exists" (9). In *Vodka is Vegan,* Phil Letten uses similar language of conversion to describe his catalytic experience at age seventeen: "And by the end of the video [PETA's *Meet you Meat*] I wanted to die. I was horrified. You could say I was born again. I immediately stopped eating meat . . . " (24). See Matt and Phil Letten 2018.

[8] In a blog entry about a similar court case from 2012, by Cornell professor of law Sherry Colb, she details a range of positions ethical vegans tend to take on non-vegan vaccines and medications. See Colb 2013.

[9] Friedman's formulation of veganism as a "relational lens" through which to see the world is in line with Mckay's analysis of veganism as a "form of life" (a term he borows from Wittgenstein) in Mckay 2018. Mckay suggests that " a) that implicit in vegan practices is some kind of identification with non-human animals, and (b) that this form of identification is culturally unintelligible" (251).

[10] The EEOC's definition of religion was first developed in *United States v Seeger* and *Welsh v United States*, and according to Justice Turner, EEOC has applied this standard consistently in its decisions. See California Court of Appeals, section II, 4a.

[11] The Fair Employment and Housing Association, Turner noted, has defined “religious creed” to include “any traditionally recognized religion as well as beliefs, observations, or practices which an individual sincerely holds and which occupy in his or her life a place of importance parallel to that of traditionally recognized religions." See California Court of Appeals, section II, C, 1.

[12] See Wise 2000 for a thorough exploration of the legal status of nonhuman animals.

[13] See *Chenzira v. Cincinatti Children's Hospital* for an example of a similar case that ruled in favor of the vegan employee. In this 2012 case, Sakile Chenzira, a Christian vegan brought a religious discrimination case against her employer for terminating her employment because she refused to take a vaccine with animal derivatives. Alison Covey compares the outcome of *Chenzira* to that of *Friedman*, concluding that Chenzira was "successful at court" because she grounded "her case in Biblical arguments for vegan beliefs" citing key biblical passages that support a vegan practice" (236). See Covey in Quinn and Westwood eds. 2018, 225-248.

[14] A discussion of what constitutes life is beyond the scope of this chapter, particularly in the case of human fetuses. See Colb and Dorf 2016 for a full-length

analysis of abortion and animal rights, and the context for maintaining a pro-choice stance while advocating for animal rights based on the principle of sentience.

[15] There are historical connections between Christianity and the modern vegetarian movement: in fact, the Vegetarian Society in England developed out of the Bible Christian Church, often called the Cowherdites after William Cowherd who founded the church in 1809. Influenced by Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedonborg, Cowherd believed in the kinship of all nature because there was a part of God in everything that lives ("[s]o for him to kill an animal was to kill a part of god which was a sin"); he also found biblical precedent for vegetarianism in Genesis (Antrobus, "Vegetraian Movement in Salford"). Cowherd broke with the Swedenborgian New Church because they disagreed with his insistence on vegetarianism as part of a Christian practice. Cowherd connected vegetarianism to broader ideals of liberation (emancipation, workers' rights). When the Vegetarian Society was formed in 1847, James Simpson, a deacon in the Bible Christian Church was elected as its first president. The founder of the American Vegetarian Society (1850), Reverend William Metcalfe, was also a member of the church; he was later to influence Sylvester Graham to become vegetarian. See Antrobus 1998 and 2009.

[16] Cole and Morgan conclude that one result of the discourse of the ascetic vegan is that it reaffirms the "normality" of meat eaters' "dietary ethics," (142). See "Vegaphobia" 2011.

[17] See Sorenson "'Doctrine of Demons': Attack on Animal Advocacy" for an analysis (and many examples) of how animal rights and veganism are dismissed by both the religious right and the liberal left.

[18] For a discussion of the the importance of asceticism and meat in the history of Christianity, see *Theology on the Menu: Asceticism, Meat, and Christian Diet,* Grumett and Muers 2010. Interestingly, in their analysis, what one does or does not eat often marks the boundary between orthodoxy and heresy; the Cathars are a good example of a Christian group that were suppressed as heretics on the basis of their decision not to eat meat.

[19] See Korb 2007 for a personal food narrative that perpetuates the discourse of the abstemious vegan. In Korb's autobiographical narrative veganism becomes a mode of asceticism and religious eating that separates the eater from family and friends and becomes a socially viable way to refuse food in general. For Korb, veganism is detached from concern for other animals and is a form of discipline and personal salvation.

[20] See Cherry 2006 for ethnographic research on the importance of supportive social networks to successfully remaining vegan. Cherry "argue[s] that maintaining

participation in the vegan movement depends more upon having supportive social networks than having willpower, motivation, or a collective vegan identity" (155).

[21] Lisa's experience is consistent with Barbara McDonald's research into the experience of becoming vegan. In her interviews McDonald found that many participants reported a lack of support, and even resistance, from friends and family. See McDonald 2002, 11-13. Almost all participants indicated that they learned and found support for how and why to be vegan from reading about veganism from an array of sources including, philosophical texts, cookbooks, and animal rights pamphlets.

[22] According to Hank Azaria (who does the voice of Apu), the McCartneys struck a deal with *The Simpsons'* producers that they would appear on the show on the condition that Lisa's character become, and remain, vegetarian. See Van Luling, "Here's Something You Don't Know about The Simpsons," *Huffpost*, 17 Aug. 2016.

[23] Though outside of the scope of this section, it's important to note that Grant and MacKenzie-Dale analyze Lisa Simpson and Darlene Conner as feminist-vegetarians whose characters make clear the connections between patriarchy and carnism.

[24] Wright's chapter "Death by Veganism, Veganorexia and Vegaphobia looks at popular culture's and news media's framings of veganism as a form of disordered eating, of particular interest is her analysis of studies that link female vegetarianism and veganism to anorexia (96-102). See Wright 82-106.

[25] See Fiddes 1991, 11-19, for a discussion of how cross-culturally meat has come to be synonymous with "real food."

[26] See back cover of *Sweet Potato Soul*.

[27] See also back cover of *Sweet Potato Soul*.

[28] See back cover of *The Wicked Healthy Cookbook*.

[29] Some of PETA's attempts to make veganism sexy and attractive, like anti-fur campaigns featuring naked models with the byline "I'd rather go naked than wear fur," have received substantial criticism for objectifying female human bodies in an effort to convince people to stop objectifying the bodies of other animals. PETA's commercial "Boyfriend Went Vegan" features a young woman in a neck brace limping and carrying vegetables home from the market to her newly vegan boyfriend. The video counters the stigma that veganism is not masculine by implying that when men go vegan they are so virile and sex-crazed that they injure their girlfriends. For a

critique of the ad see Adams 2012, "Sigh, the Sexual Politics of Meat Once Again," caroljadams.blogspot.com.

[30] For Adams' analysis of Bruni's review and other examples of sexual politics of meat see Adams "Consumer Vision: Speciesism, Misogyny, and Media."

[31] See Clarke et al. 2000 for a study on the socially constructed value of meat that tests the proposition that one "symbolic meaning of meat is a preference for hierarchical domination" (405). Using the Social Dominance Orientation Scale, the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale, and the Rokeach Value Survey, the study finds that not only were those who eat meat more likely to support hierarchical social structures and to want to be in the dominant position, but they were also more likely to reject the value of emotional states.

[32] See also Twigg 1983, 21-22, for an analysis of meat as "the most highly prized food...the centre around which the meal is arranged...[and at] the top of the [food] hierarchy" (Twigg 21). In Twigg's analysis red meat is at the top of the food hierarchy, with "bloodless" meats like fish and chicken below it, followed by eggs and cheese, and finally vegetables.

[33] Cole uses the term "veg*anism" to refer to both vegans and vegetarians with one term.

[34] This isn't to say that some vegans don't still crave meat or cheese or that there's something wrong with them if they do. Again as illustrated by "Lisa the Vegetarian," much of our relationship with food is determined by our culture and our immediate family and social network.

[35] See Winter, "As Far as Possible or Practicable." See also Singer 1975 (161-164) for his ideas on vegetarianism as a boycott. Singer argues that "Until we boycott meat, and all other products of animal factories, we are, each one of us, contributing to the continued existemce, prosperity, and growth of factory farming and all the other cruel practices used in rearing animals for food" (162). Singer also suggests that telling others about why we don't eat animals is an important facet of an effective boycott.

[36] See Clark 2004 for an interesting discussion of the intersections of veganism and punk approaches to food as resistance to consumerism and industrialization.

[37] See Singer 1975 and 2006.

[38] See Op-Ed by Steiner 2009 for discussion of some of the everyday questions and quandaries that arise in the life of a vegan negotiating relationships with those who eat meat.

[39] See Greenebaum 2012 for first-hand narratives by sixteen vegans about negotiating ethical veganism in a consumer world filled with animal products. Greenebaum focuses on issues of identity, purity, and authenticity. She looks specifically at the way that ethical vegans navigate grey areas like accidentally eating an animal by-product, honey, medication, and benign products (like paper towels) that are produced by companies that test other products on animals. She suggests that the quest for purity is a quest for authenticity in the performance of a social identity.

[40] It is important to note that one reason the question of consistency may haunt many vegans is that many vegans report having become vegan in the first place because they had a realization about how inconsistent they were in their affect toward companion animals and animals used for food. Given that the desire to be more consistent in relations with other animals is the impetus for many people to move toward veganism it makes sense that this desire continues to motivate the practice of veganism. See Gibert 2015 for a discussion of moving toward veganism as a movement toward coherence in our moral relations with other animals, 11-18.

Carol Adams tells the story of the night she returned home from her first year at Yale Divinity School, only to discover her childhood pony had just been shot. Later as she bit into a hamburger she "stopped in midbite." She recalls: "I was thinking about one dead animal yet eating another dead animal. What was the difference between this dead cow and the dead pony I would be burying the next day?" She concludes: "I could summon no ethical defense for a favoritism that would exclude the cow from my concern because I had not known her." See Adams 2015 "Why I Became a Vegetarian."

Tom Regan's story of becoming vegetarian is similar to Adams' story. When Gleco the miniature poodle died, Regan and his wife were bereft. This experience of grief catalyzed the thoughts they had been contemplating about the connection between their anti-war stance and a vegetarian one. See "For Gleco: Tom Regan's Fight for Animal Rights" 2014, *vrg.org*.

James Serpell has argued that as a culture we resolve the cognitive dissonance produced by the inconsistency between our love for companion animals and our exploitation of other animals by trivializing our affection for and commitment to companion animals. See Serpell 1996.

[41] Interestingly, as will be discussed later in the chapter, the "vegan police" is a term used by vegans and non-vegans alike.

[42] See Freeman 2014 for a discussion of the way that media reifies carnonormative values.

[43] Singer 1975, 162; "Peter Singer, Animal Rights Advocate Tells How He Became a Vegetarian" 2013, *YouTube*; "The Ethics of Food: The Making of a Vegetarian and Professor of Bioethics–Peter Singer" 2013, *YouTube.*

[44] Melanie Joy has written extensively on "carnism" as a dominant ideology and discousrse. See Wietzenfield and Joy 2014 for a brief discussion of "vegan counterdiscourse." They caution that: "[b]ecause of the power of discourse to construct perceptions and affect to reinforce the dominant narrative, it is particularly important that the vegan counterdiscourse not mirror the language of oppression" ((24). They argue that by and large dominant ideologies maintain their power by remaining invisible. Because of this, "[t]he transformative vegan counternarrative discourses and practices must therefore not only provide alternative narratives but explicitly expose the fictions of the speciesist-carnist narratives" (24). This strongly suggests, as does Singer's notion of a boycott, that "telling others" is part and parcel of a vegan praxis.

[45] See also Zane et al. 2016, *Journal of Consumer Psychology.* Zane et al. did a study to test whether or not less ethical consumers negatively judge and denigrate consumers who seek out ethical information about consumer goods. They found that in cases where ethical information about a product is not readily available the majority of consumers will opt not to seek out the information. When these consumers are informed that others have sought out the ethical information (in one test the optional piece of ethical information pertained to whether or not jeans were manufactured using child labor), they denigrate the more ethical consumers. Importantly to the issue of vegan praxis, the study also finds that "willfully ignorant consumers" who denigrate more ethical consumers for making purchases based on ethics actually have less anger at those firms that violate the ethical principle in question and are less likely to act ethically on that issue in the future. The researchers attribute the denigration of more ethical consumers to a perceived self-threat that occurs when "willfully ignorant consumers" compare themselves to consumers who try to act ethically.

[46] This is essentially the argument of Lisa Kemmerer's *Animals and World Religions*, which suggests that even Judeo-Christian religions have animals at the center of their thinking about morality: "When the world's largest and oldest religions come together on a single point of morality, it is likely that we have struck upon something that human beings cannot afford to ignore, something to which we might all aspire, something that is central to who we all aspire to be more generally, whether or not we adhere to any of the world's many religions" (16). Will Tuttle has argued similarly that "all of the world's major religions support the cultural and spiritual transformation that veganism calls for" (235). See Tuttle 2005.

[47] The principle of non-violence at the center of ethical veganism, is also at work in modern arguments for vegetarianism and veganism that focus on spirituality or the "eating vibrations" of food produced from violence. Queen Afua, who has been a pivotal figure in popularizing vegetarianism and veganism with African Americans, suggests that "What we consume dictates who we are and what we are" (164). See Afua 2000. Will Tuttle has a chapter in *The World Peace Diet* called "The Metaphysics of Food," where he discusses what he calls the "physical and metaphysical toxins" of foods made from the bodies of animals (135). Aside from physical toxins in animal-derived foods, he also writes about food "as an intimate vehicle of energy and consciousness" and foods made from animals as being filled with "vibrations" of "violence...and fear" (140). See Tuttle 135-151.

[48] See Wright 6 for another vegan reading of this scene.

[49] See Diamond 1978 for a discussion of why an appeal to fellowship as mortal creatures or an appeal to pity might be more effective ways of explaining why humans should not eat other animals than utilitarian arguments (like Singer's) about equality.

[50] Kemmerer is quoting from Armstrong 2007, xviii.

[51] Kemmerer again is building on her reading of Armstrong xvii–xix.

[52] Kemmerer quotes Hahn on 97. See also Stewart 2016 for his ethnographic research with Sinhalese Sri Lankan Buddhists. Stewart relies on first-hand accounts of how vegetarianism does or does not intersect with Buddhism to navigate the historical controversies about what role vegetarianism plays in the Buddhist religion and practice and how to interpret what many scholars see as "the Buddha's ambivalent attitude toward vegetarianism in the canonical texts" (3).

[53] Kemmerer is referencing Hahn, 28.

[54] Kemmerer is quoting Erdoes 1984, 390.

[55] Kemmerer quotes Rosenberg on page 30.

[56] Kemmerer is quoting Harrod 1987, 44.

[57] When Reverend William Cowherd founded the Bible Christian Church (which later developed into the secular English Vegetarian Society) he read from Genesis 1 to make the case for spiritual vegetarianism. See Antrobus, "Cowherd's Meat Free Movement," 30 Jan. 2009, *www.bbc.co.uk.*

[58] In "A Meatless Dominion: Genesis 1 and the Ideal of Vegetarianism," Ryan Patrick McLaughlin, professor of religious ethics, uses what he calls an "animal-friendly hermeneutic" to read Genesis. He juxtaposes Genesis 1 with Genesis 9 to "reveal a shift from human dominion, which is meant to be peaceful and other-affirming, to something altogether different—a relationship that is built on terror" (145). See McLaughlin 2007. McLaughlin is careful to point out that he is not claiming that there is no single biblical view regarding how humans ought to relate to other animals, rather he is arguing that there are many passages in the bible that "promote the extension of theological and moral concern beyond the scope of the human community" (145).

[59] See McLaughlin 148-151 for one "animal-friendly" interpretation of the Hebrew word for dominion, *radah*. McLaughlin argues that " Beyond both despotism and stewardship, "dominion" in Genesis 1 suggests a human rule that God intends to establish—a nonviolent Earth community" (149). McLaughlin also supports his peaceful reading of *radah* by comparative analysis of the post-diluvian account in Genesis 9: *radah* does not appear in Genesis 9 at precisely the moment when God gives humans animals for food: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything" (Gen 9:1–3). McLaughlin points out: "[t]here is no mention of dominion in Genesis 9. In its place, new terms appear: *mowra'*("fear") and *chath* ("dread"). These terms bear a consistently negative connotation in biblical literature" (151).

[60] Following other scholars, McLaughlin supports this reading as well: The verses that follow the appearance of the word *radah* in Genesis 1 don't just limit what is meant by *radah*, they define it: Indeed, Genesis 1:29 is the closest in–text exegesis we have of the Hebrew term radah" in Genesis 1. McLaughlin continues: "If verse 29 exegetes radah, then, as Claus Westermann notes, human dominion "cannot mean killing them for food" (149; quoting Westermann, 159).

[61] It is noteworthy that just after the fall, the Cain and Abel story magnifies God's new preference for human dominion as animal exploitation, while also bringing into focus the connection between killing other species and killing our own. Genesis 4 stages the second and third killings in the Old Testament: first Abel's animal sacrifice to God and then Cains' human sacrifice to his own jealousy. It seems important here to remember that Cain kills his brother because of God's preference for Abel's offering of dead animals over Cain's offering of fruit: And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell (4.3-4.5)

Three lines later Cain kills his brother Abel. It is clear here that God's own unexplained preference for animal-based meat and his disrespect for Cains' fruit-based offering motivate Cain's jealousy. The story never explains God's sudden disdain for fruit. Does Cain's offering perhaps remind God of Eve and Adam's transgression in eating from the tree of knowledge? The sudden shift in God's preference just after the fall draws attention to that preference as some kind of aberration; the fact that the preference for killing other creatures leads immediately to fratricide should draw our own attention to the stakes of who “shall be for meat” in this myth.

Conclusion: Haters

> "I'm turning into a vegetarian" she was thinking sadly, "one of those cranks; I'll have to start eating lunch at health bars."
>
> –Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (1989)

> "The world runs," Lowell said, "on the fuel of this endless, fathomless misery. People know it, but they don't mind what they don't see. Make them look and they mind, but you're the one they hate because you're the one that made them look."
>
> –Karen Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013)

> Undismayed by being a crank, I will make you a free gift of another stick to beat me with, by informing you that I am a vegetarian. Now, surely, you have me. Not only am I a more extreme crank, a member of an even smaller minority, than you had realized; surely I *must*, now, be a killjoy. Yet which, in fact, kills more joy: the killjoy who would deprive you of your joy in eating steak, which is just one of the joys open to you, or the kill-animal who puts an end to all the animal's joys
> along with its life?
>
> –Brigitte Brophy, "The Rights of Animals" (1965)

What would it mean to live as though the "animals of the world exist for their own purposes?" (Walker 14). Ethical veganism is based on the conviction that the animals of this world, as sentient, affective beings whose lives are their own, have value totally apart from their usefulness to humans. There is beauty to this conviction that, when presented with the choice, we might choose to contribute to the wellbeing of other animals, show them hospitality and neighborliness instead of exploiting them for pleasure and profit. What might be a gospel of love, though, is attached to the lodestar that humanity is currently responsible for killing billions of affective beings every year. In the case of land animals and fish raised on aqua-farms, humanity is also responsible for bringing billions into being for the sole purpose of eventually killing them. Even egg-laying hens and dairy cows, who are allotted the longest of

these miserable lives, and who, it might be argued, suffer the most because of it, are eventually killed when their forced reproductive labor cannot keep up with industrial demands; their flesh becomes chicken soup and hamburgers.[1]

Cranks, misanthropes, haters: these are not really surprising roles for vegans and vegetarians to fall or be cast into, given the "stupefying proportions" of animals' deaths, coupled with the omnipresence of the evidence of those deaths—milk; cheese; meat; eggs; fish (Coetzee 69).[2] In a way, the elitist, freak, and fanatic are all, to varying degrees, forms of "the hater." The political elitist who wants to legislate what others can eat by enforcing national mandatory veganism; the overly-emotional and idealistic freak who can't stop talking about veganism and the militant freak who commits acts of terror to defend the lives of other animals against those who exploit them; the holier-than-thou, dogmatic fanatic, along with members of the vegan police who sanctimoniously judge everyone who is not perfectly vegan—these are images of vegan haters that circulate in popular culture and everyday conversation. The apotheosis of these vegan haters is the vegan-as-misanthrope. This understanding of the vegan posits that because they love other animals, vegans hate other humans.

Here is one example of this discourse from a November 2019 *New York Times* book review of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals*, called "You Know That Chicken Is Chicken, Right?" (19 November 2009). While the author agrees that the practices of factory farming are indefensible, he takes issue with Foer's suggestion that eating animals is a social justice issue:

> It's arguments like this that undermine the many more valid observations in this book, and make readers wonder how the author

> can expend so much energy and caring on the fate of pigs and chickens, when, say, malaria kills nearly a million people a year (most of them children), and conflict and disease in Congo since the mid-1990s have left an estimated five million dead and hundreds of thousands of women and girls raped and have driven more than a million people from their homes. (Kakutani)

The assumption, which seems to originate along the human/animal divide, is that one must choose between "caring" about the "fate[s] of pigs and chickens" and the fates of human victims of malaria "and [tragic human] conflict and disease in Congo." According to this discourse, Foer's concerns with other animals are somehow misanthropic, coming at the expense of the attention he might give to the fate of distressed humans around the world. This argument, that caring too much about other animals necessarily means not caring enough about other humans, figures "care" as a finite reserve. Thus, the same philosophy that turns other animals into resources for human use also turns care and empathy into limited resources that should be reserved for humans.

This is a good example of the way that the very notion of a hierarchical human/animal divide poses significant obstacles for the type of relational thinking that will be critical to helping humans and other animals survive in a rapidly changing world. The discourse upholds the misleading and increasingly dangerous idea that the fate of humans is not completely interrelated with the fate of chickens and pigs. Even if one were to discount any spiritual, ethical, or political problems with this thinking, the animal-based food system exploits other animals to the endangerment of the entire planet. Continuing to valorize the human/animal divide is akin to burying your head in the sand by ignoring every scientific report that asserts that eating animals is one of

the leading causes of climate change, species extinction, and environmental degradation. More than any other time in history, today what we do to other animals, we also do to ourselves.

If loving (or respecting, or upholding the rights of) other animals allegedly means hating (disrespecting, or challenging the rights of) other humans, does it follow that the non-vegan is an animal-hater? Few people would really make the argument that non-vegans actually hate the animals whom they eat or whose forced reproductive labor they consume in the form of milk, cheese, or eggs. Many non-vegans still call themselves animal lovers; but would any of them call themselves an animal hater? That no term really exists for hating animals might speak to the degree to which this concept is absent even from the philosophy of the human/animal divide. Yet the majority of humans on the planet support the raising and killing of other animals for food in numbers and conditions that make factory farming not merely analogous but tantamount to genocide.[3] The singularity of the crisis in which we find ourselves with domesticated species is that it is based on the widespread support—even if in the form of silence, indifference, or confusion—for the systematic imprisonment and killing of billions of individuals whom we generally neither hate nor politically oppose.

Sometimes all signs seem to point to the conclusion that the problem between vegans and meat-eaters is a problem of incommensurate worldviews: animals are sentient beings or animals are commodities; meat is dead animals or meat is food. Such a conclusion, however, does little to help other animals or to help humanity

make the transformative changes necessary for survival. Few people think consciously about the human/animal divide when they sit down at the table to eat. Tables bring people together. Eating is one of the primary ways humans connect to one another, share joy and even love. When vegans and animal-based foods are in the same room, whether spoken or not, the question "Is meat food or is it dead animals?" is put on the table. How does one have this conversation? If one thinks that other animals are beings who exist for their own purposes, then it stands to reason that one is ethically implicated anytime one participates in or witnesses a situation where animals are treated otherwise. If one thinks other animals are food, then it stands to reason that one is ethically implicated anytime that status is questioned.

Hospitality is one way to frame the problem less polemically. On the one hand, the desire for companionship and association links humans to many individuals of other species through intimate ties of love, friendship, and solidarity. On the other hand, the desire for acceptance in intra-human associations embeds us in the ideology that other species are to be used for the benefit of humans. In everyday relations, the idea of the vegan-as-misanthrope probably has much more to do with perceived norms of hospitality than with the human/animal divide. The problem is largely a relational one among humans. Figuring the vegan as a hater of humans and the meat-eater as a hater of animals may start from different figurations of hospitality. What would a new community of hospitality look like? Maybe that would be a more generative question for vegans and meat-eaters to put on the table. Elitists, freaks, fanatics, haters: each of these anti-vegan discourses is a way of saying there is

something wrong with people who value other animals in such a way that when they see a piece of meat they see a dead animal before they see food, commensality, or hospitality. However, there may be something hopeful in these discourses. Perhaps popular culture figures the vegan as threatening, anxiety-causing, and ridiculous because, even if still struggling to find the right words, veganism makes a compelling claim on us, the response to which we do not yet know how to fully imagine.

Notes

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[1] Further research is needed as to why the majority of animal people become vegetarian before becoming vegan. This is perhaps a symptom of the degree to which we are alienated from the experiences of cows and chickens. Veganism is still figured as an extreme form of vegetarianism, even by many vegetarians. However, if the lived experiences of other animals were put at the center of our thinking about our relations with other animals, people might in fact begin their transitions toward being vegan by leaving dairy and eggs out of their diets.

[2] Though there isn't time to discuss it here, Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello is the perfect example of the vegan/vegetarian as hater and misanthrope. This quote is excerpted from Costello's dialogue with her son at the airport at the end of the novella: "It's that I no longer know where I am. I seem to move perfectly easily among people, to have perfectly normal relations with them. Is it possible, I ask myself, that all of then are participants in a crime of stupefying proportions? Am I fantasizing it all? I must be mad! Yet everyday I see the evidences. The very people I suspect produce the evidence, exhibit it, offer it to me. Corpses. Fragments of corpses that they have bought for money" (69).

[3] In *The Animal That Therefore I Am,* Derrida invokes the figure of genocide to think about what he calls "the unprecedented proportions of this subjection of the animal" (25). He writes: "No one can deny seriously any more, or for very long, that men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves; in order to organize on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence, which some would compare to the worst forms of genocide (there are also animal genocides: the number of species endangered because of man takes one's breath away) (25-26). Derrida goes on to consider the specificity of the figure of genocide here: "It gets more complicated: the annihilation of certain species is indeed in process, but it is occurring through the organization and exploitation of an artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival, in conditions that previous generations would have judged monstrous, outside of every presumed norm of life proper to animals that are this exterminated by means of their continued existence or even their overpopulation" (26).

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