

Veganisms

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Introduction

Those of us living in affluent consumer culture under late capitalism, where plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy are readily available, are morally obligated to adopt vegan practice. The source of this obligation is grounded in a widely held belief, namely, that—all else being equal—unnecessary suffering and premature death are bad things and that acting with relatively minimal cost to oneself to contribute to

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a decrease in violence, objectification, domination, exploitation, and oppression is something we should all aspire to.¹ When I say that we² are obligated to adopt vegan practice, not just any type of “vegan practice” will do, so I want to argue for a specific type of veganism I call *political veganism*. I will do that toward the end of this chapter since I first want to establish that it is morally wrong for the vast majority of us living in high-income, highly industrialized, consumer cultures—such as the majority of us living in the Global North—to consume animal³ products.

To clarify, the argument is not an argument for some kind of universal veganism; that is, I will not argue that every human being on the planet is morally obligated to become vegan. Not because I don’t believe it—I do—but because (a) the question of whether an indigenous Inuit subsistence hunter must stop consuming all animal products is complicated and not my focus in this chapter, and (b) I prefer to focus my argument on those of us living in Western societies.

Instead, I offer what I call a “localized version” of the argument for veganism. That is, it’s an argument that applies only locally, not universally, the scope of which is directed, as I said, toward those of us living in consumer culture under late capitalism where plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy are readily available. Central to the argument is the claim that both factory farming and so-called “humane” farming are morally problematic. However, describing the treatment of nonhuman animals used in food production and why these practices are unnecessary and immoral is not the focus of this chapter. Knockdown arguments for why both methods of animal farming are morally wrong are successfully made elsewhere.⁴ Instead, I want to focus on a challenge generated by the central premise of the argument for veganism, a challenge that, *prima facie*, threatens to undermine the obligation to embrace veganism for those who believe that going vegan decreases the suffering and death of sentient beings (which, I imagine, is the reason why a majority of ethical vegans go vegan in the first place). In answering this objection, I discuss a number of solutions that I believe, jointly, meet the challenge. Finally, I explore various kinds of veganisms and advocate for political veganism. But for now, let’s first have a look at the localized argument for veganism.

An Argument for Ethical Veganism⁵

1. It is wrong to cause suffering and/or premature death unless there is good enough reason.⁶
2. The production of animal products causes animals suffering and/or premature death.
3. Consumption of animal products increases the production of animal products.
4. With minimal hardship (if any), a vast majority of those of us living in high-income, highly industrialized, consumer cultures (such as those of us living in the Global North) can flourish without consuming animal products.
5. A vast majority of those described in (4) consume animal products not because such products are physiologically or nutritionally necessary but for convenience or taste preference.
6. Convenience or the satisfaction of taste preference are not good enough reasons to justify the harm that the consumption of animal products causes to animals.
7. Therefore, it is morally wrong to consume animal products (1–6).
8. Therefore, a vast majority of those living in high-income, highly industrialized, consumer cultures ought to stop consuming animal products.

The argument is pretty straightforward and compelling (to me, at least), but the argument for veganism faces what some see as a serious factual and conceptual challenge to the central premise of the argument, namely (3), consumption of animal products increases the production of animal products.⁷

A Puzzle About Ethical Veganism: The Causal Impotence Objection

To argue that the raising and commodification of other-than-human animals for consumption is morally bad is one thing; to argue that individual consumers ought not to purchase animal products is quite another. The reason being that there's a bit of a puzzle—located in (3) of the argument—that few vegans address.

Recall premise (3) of the argument: Consumption of animal products increases the production of animal products. The relation implicit in (3) is a *causal* relation. That is, the idea behind (3) is that my consuming (“consuming” in the sense of my acting as a market *consumer*) animal products creates demand for animal products, and thus, (indirectly) *causes* an increase in the production of animal products, and thus, an increase in animal suffering. The assumption behind ethical veganism—and most likely the central reason why a vast majority of vegans go vegan in the first place—is that going vegan decreases animal suffering. By going vegan, according to the argument, you somehow contribute *directly* to decreasing suffering on both small ranches and factory farms.

I recently ate at the Southern California vegan fast-food chain Native Foods, where, after ordering at the counter, I was handed a placard with my order number on it. The placard read, “Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings: One order saves three chickens!” What exactly does this mean? It can’t mean that there are three chickens somewhere who are waiting to be slaughtered on a factory farm whose lives are spared when I order the Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings.

Maybe what the placard means then is something like this: Three chickens won’t be born, won’t come into existence, and won’t suffer the horrible lives and deaths of factory-farmed chickens because I order the Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings. But how exactly does that work? It can’t mean that I thwart the plan of some egg producer, who is waiting for the thumbs-up to hatch another three chickens, by ordering this particular vegan dish. Besides, you cannot save a nonexistent being, so it can’t mean that. I think the charitable read is something like this: When consumers—as a *group*—order Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings instead of actual chicken wings, the demand for chicken decreases, causing the chicken market to produce fewer chickens. Translating this market decrease into number of chickens actually “saved,” and dividing by the number of consumers who order the Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings, you get the average number of chickens that each individual consumer saves when ordering the Crispy Battered Native Chicken Wings, which in this case is three. But is that really what is intended by the claim on the placard? And even if it is, is it all really that simple? The answer seems to be no.

Critics argue that this kind of linear causal story connecting individual consumer choice to changes in market supply gets the real-world facts all wrong. Markets like the chicken market are too massive to be sensitive to the purchasing behaviors of any single consumer. And since the overwhelming majority of individual consumers have nothing at all to do directly with agribusiness, or the raising or killing of “livestock,” an individual consumer’s choice to refrain from the purchase or consumption of animal products makes *no difference at all* in decreasing the number of animals suffering and dying on factory farms. This is known as the *causal impotence objection* to ethical veganism.

One might object on the grounds that this kind of challenge is too abstract and that it’s obvious that purchasing meat causes animal suffering and death; hence, annoying “hypothetical” puzzles like this should be dismissed out of hand as so much philosophical sophistry. However, it would be too fast a dismissal.

First, it’s easy to imagine someone in the real world reasoning in the following way: Whether or not I order the chicken won’t change anything. Regardless of what I do, the ag industry will do what it’s going to do and the animal rights movement will do whatever it’s going to do, so what I do makes no difference. So I guess I’ll just order the chicken.

Second, it’s certainly true that, (a) *collectively*, consumers of animal products (e.g., meat eaters) cause harm to animals.⁸ However, from the truth of (a), it does not follow that (b) a particular consumer of animal products causes harm to animals. An inference from (a) to (b) would be fallacious since it’s possible for (a) to be true while (b) is false.⁹ But let’s look more closely at the claim made by the Native Foods placard. It would seem that such claims make a kind of simplistic assumption, namely, that supply is sensitive to demand. But imagine the following case. I decide to prepare chicken for dinner, so I head to my local supermarket and purchase a frozen chicken. As Robert Bass points out, this purchase has “no effect on the killing, packaging, freezing and shipping of that chicken a week or two earlier...the decision weeks earlier to raise a certain number of broilers from eggs, or the decision months or years earlier to operate the chicken house where the chicken spent her life. Nothing I do brings it about that one chicken more or less is raised for food.”¹⁰

At this point, you might think that my purchasing that one chicken reflects an increase in demand for chicken, and that an increase in demand will lead to a *future* increase in supply, and thus, one more chicken will be slaughtered as a result of my purchase. But you would be wrong for a few reasons. First, supermarkets order more chickens than they expect to sell since waste and spoilage are built into the ordering process. Second, supermarkets in particular, and agribusiness more generally, are so huge that the chicken market is insensitive to individual consumer decisions. But if this is so, why is it wrong for individuals to purchase or consume animal products such as frozen chicken? Just how responsible are we in causing suffering and harm to other animals when we consume their bodies produced in the industrialized system, and what difference might we make as individuals? It seems that individual consumers are powerless *qua* individuals to cause change in such an enormous market. If so, then (3) is false, and individual vegans make virtually no difference whatsoever in decreasing animal suffering; therefore, ethical vegans who believe that their individual purchases have direct causal efficacy on the lives of nonhuman animals (as the Native Foods placard suggests) are, at best, confused. This causal impotence objection stands as a challenge to the obligation for individuals to go vegan.

Solutions

Vegans have a number of responses to the causal impotence objection. I want to discuss just a few solutions and argue that these solutions can, in concert, answer the challenge.

The first response is simply to deny the claim of causal impotency and ask: How can an individual make no difference if *together* we make a difference? If collective action has causal impact (which it does), then at least *some* individual instances must have causal impact. Collective action is not some kind of spooky “metaphysical” occurrence, but a combination of individual actions that can each have a variety of impacts. Though seemingly imperceptible, there is nonetheless some impact (albeit, very small) that, when combined with the very small impacts of other consumers, results in causal effect.

For example, it may be that my action serves as a trigger or threshold. Suppose that the butcher only makes a call to order more chickens when the 100th chicken breast is purchased, or the poultry industry only reduces production when a threshold of 10,000 people stop purchasing chicken. It may seem that if you are not the one who purchases the 100th chicken breast or are not the 10,000th person who gave up chicken products, your refraining from such purchases makes no difference. However, your refraining affects the timing of slaughter or the cessation of slaughter. This is an impact, even if it is not a direct impact on any particular individual. So buying or not buying animal bodies does make a difference. Further, no matter what the causal impact of your refraining from consuming animal products, what is certain is that your not going vegan is practically certain to delay any threshold event happening, and therefore, practically certain to result in excess animal suffering.¹¹

A second response revolves around the notion of role modeling. Many involved in vegan practice influence others who, in turn, influence others, and so on. This kind of role modeling may be understood as a species of the broader phenomenon of *social contagion* in which an action of a particular type makes another action of that type more likely. Thus, veganism can increase the probability that others become vegan, which increases the probability that the collective action of the aggregate more quickly brings about a reduction in the number of animals produced for food and other consumer goods, decreasing animal suffering and bringing about a decrease in violence, exploitation, and domination.¹²

With regard to private actions like eating leftover chicken when no one else is around (or will ever witness or even find out about), doing so may actually increase the chance that one may, in the future, eat more chicken. Veganism urges us to conceptualize chicken or pig bodies, for example, as “not food,” much the way many in Western cultures think of dog bodies as “not food.”¹³ As people begin to view the corpses of others as inedible, the probability that they will want to consume “leftover” bodies is lowered. Someone aspiring to be the kind of person who acts to minimize suffering and oppression will thus adopt strategies that will stabilize their ability to act on their values and refrain from consuming animal products even in the case of private consumption.¹⁴

A third response expands on a notion mentioned above, namely, conceptualizing animal bodies as food. Lori Gruen¹⁵ argues persuasively that the very act of ontologizing animals as food, of putting animals in the category of the edible, strips them of their individual personalities and interests. Animals have interests beyond not suffering that matter—for example, being allowed to live their lives with their family members and not being killed simply to satisfy someone else’s culinary desires. Being categorized as edible, in industrial societies, renders these beings as disposable and consumable. When we place nonhuman animals in the category of “things,” commodities to be bought and sold, we change both the relationships we have with them and how we think of those relationships. As humans, we understand ourselves as not in the category of the edible, and this understanding, in part, shapes how we construct our relations with each other and the ways of life we share. If we were instead to think of our bodies and other people’s bodies as food, the value of our bodies and ourselves changes.

In response, it might be argued that since both human and nonhuman animals are, in fact, consumable, the problem is not that we ontologize animals as food, but that we ontologize animals as meat. Val Plumwood¹⁶ argues that while “meat” represents reductionism, domination, alienation, and commodification, “food” suggests an acknowledgment of our ecological selves. But Plumwood conflates the fact that we are all consumable with the fact that we categorize some bodies as “edible” and others as “nonedible.” That humans could be consumed as prey in certain contexts is distinct from the social categorization of certain others as edible. To be vegan is not to deny ecological entanglement, but to suggest a reconceptualization of animals in their living bodies as fellow creatures with whom we can be in empathetic relationship and for whom we must have deeper respect.¹⁷

A fourth response involves not the notion of individual causal efficacy, but relies instead on the notion of complicity, group causation, and group function. Elizabeth Harman,¹⁸ for example, argues that actions can sometimes be morally wrong, not because they make any difference to the amount of suffering in the world, but because they involve a kind of joint causation, which is neither necessary nor sufficient for an effect. As per Harman’s view, one need not make a causal difference to have good

reason to refrain from participating in collective wrongs. For example, it is wrong to participate in group bullying even if your joining the bullying makes no difference to how badly the victim is hurt. For example, imagine a case where the bullying victim is so upset that he is not paying attention to who is actually verbally bullying him, and so it would make no difference whether you join the bullying. In other words, the causal story for the harm perpetrated upon the bullied is overdetermined by the number of the bullying group. For Harman, though refraining from individual acts of meat consumption may have little or no effect on decreasing animal suffering, it may still be wrong to (a) participate as a joint cause in such a collective wrong, or (b) fail to participate as a joint cause in a collective good. Thus, Harman identifies two moral reasons for individuals to adopt vegan practice independent of whether doing so has any direct or indirect causal effect on decreasing animal suffering. By consuming animal products, one is (a) participating as a *joint cause* in practices that cause animal suffering and/or premature death and (b) failing to participate in a movement that can do a lot of moral good.¹⁹

Expanding on the notion of complicity and group function, Adrienne Martin²⁰ argues that even if adopting vegan practice makes no causal difference to decreasing animal suffering, not doing so makes the consumer complicit in animal suffering in that the consumer shares responsibility for the direct harms perpetrated by meat, egg, and dairy producers. Martin's notion of complicity hinges on the notion of role-taking and group function. For Martin, individual consumers of animal products are complicit in the harm and suffering experienced by animals not because they contribute directly or indirectly to such harm, but because they willingly participate as members of a consumer group that has the function of signaling demand. According to Martin, such a collectivized liability account of responsibility is eminently plausible:

Everyone who voluntarily joins [in the bullying] thereby participates in a cooperative project aimed at making the victim suffer, and it is surely right that each individual participant is thereby liable to be blamed for the victim's suffering, even if the suffering would be just as bad if the ringleader (say) were the only tormentor. What matters here is not whether there is some chance that an individual will make a difference to the suffering, or even that each

individual is a joint cause. What matters is that the individual willingly adopts the role of participant in a group, knowing or at least suspecting that the group has the function of making its victim suffer. The individual is thereby liable to be blamed for what other group members do qua participants, including succeeding in the group's purpose; this liability stands even if the individual does not actually contribute to the victim's suffering.²¹

Likewise, the non-vegan willingly adopts a role as a participant in a *consumer group* that one knows (or ought to know) serves a function of signaling increased demand to meat, egg, and dairy producers. And in this way, consuming animal products makes one complicit in the animals' suffering and/or premature death. Conversely, in order not to be complicit, one must (at the very least) refrain from the consumption of animal products, regardless of whether such refraining is causally efficacious in reducing animal suffering and/or death.

Though none of these responses individually provides a knockdown rejoinder to the causal impotence objection to veganism, it is clear that taken as a group they do in fact adequately provide a rational basis to adopt vegan practice. Just what the vegan practice should look like is the focus of the following section.

Veganisms

Clearly, there are strong grounds for accepting the localized argument for veganism. As a rational and effective response to hierarchical, systemic, speciesist human violence perpetrated against nonhuman animals, veganism plays an indispensable role in dissolving such violence. However, there are a number of ways of conceiving of veganism.

Identity Veganism

In adopting vegan practice, a number of ethical vegans see veganism primarily as an *individual lifestyle choice*, an expression of their commitment to decreasing (and ultimately ending) the suffering and death that accompanies the commodification of sentient nonhuman beings.

Since many ethical vegans may believe (wrongly) that no animals are harmed in the production of their vegan consumer goods and foodstuffs, this ethical vegan “lifestyle” may sometimes be accompanied by a sense of ethical purity, a belief that once one adopts a vegan lifestyle, one then has “clean hands” and may carry on one’s consumerism with a clear conscience. Seen as a kind of litmus test of one’s commitment to social justice for animals, veganism may sometimes be thought as the “moral baseline” for those seeking to end the suffering and domination of other-than-human animals. Though there are debates among vegans about questions of purity and commitment, there appears to be a growing public perception of vegans, a kind of *vegaphobia*²²—which 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 may sometimes appear to be “preachy”; and that they may exhibit a kind of self-righteous zealotry, acting as the “vegan police” who promulgate veganism as the universal, one-and-only way to fight systemic violence against animals.²³ It was perhaps proponents of identity veganism that prompted philosopher Val Plumwood to describe vegans as

crusading [and]...aggressively ethnocentric, dismissing alternative and indigenous food practices and wisdom and demanding universal adherence to a western urban model of vegan practice in which human predation figures basically as a new version of original sin, going on to supplement this by a culturally familiar methodology of dispensing excuses and exemptions for those too frail to reach their exacting moral norms of carnivorous self.²⁴

Such vegans are sometimes perceived—rightly or wrongly—as judging non-vegans (including ovo-lacto vegetarians) as shirking their responsibility or being self-indulgent or simply cruel.²⁵ This view, that the only ethical way to live is to adopt a vegan lifestyle, is called *identity veganism* by Gruen and Jones.²⁶ What distinguishes identity veganism from other kinds of veganism is that identity veganism is more about the practitioner’s self-image, state of mind, and attitude (particularly regarding themselves vis-à-vis non-vegans) than about consumer behavior. Though, *qua* consumers, the behavior of identity vegans may be indistinguishable from that of other types of vegans, it is a kind of deluded self-righteousness of

some identity vegans that distinguishes them from other kinds of vegans. If followed strictly and universally, identity veganism is thought to confer clean hands and a clean conscience. As the name implies, this sort of veganism is often thought of as an identity, or individual lifestyle choice, and is sometimes characterized—again, rightly or wrongly—as exuding an air of moral certitude and superiority.²⁷

However, there are at least two reasons why identity veganism is not a kind of veganism to be endorsed. First, identity veganism is, at best, naïve and Pollyannaish and, at worst, a way to insulate oneself from a terribly inconvenient truth. For in late-capitalist consumer culture, even vegans cannot escape the cycle of state-supported, systemic, industrialized violence and destruction of animals and their habitats. Vegan or not, we all have blood on our hands. Try as they might to believe otherwise, identity vegans must face the fact that regarding our contributions to the objectification of animals and the consumption of animal products, there is no “moral sainthood.”²⁸

Second, since the central focus of identity veganism practice is the rejection of and abstention from the consumption of *nonhuman animal* products, identity vegans may fail to attend to the lives of other sentient beings who may suffer to produce their consumer goods—specifically, *human* sentient beings. For example, workers of the Global South exploited to produce identity vegans’ nonanimal product-containing consumer goods may not be considered in the equation relating personal consumer choice with a reduction or elimination of suffering. Neither may identity vegans dedicate their practice to the environmental costs of their vegan consumerism. The circumstances driving their “clean hands” self-image may exclude damage to habitat that the production of vegan foodstuffs may (and often do) incur. This discussion leads me to the next kind of veganism I wish to address, boycott veganism.

Boycott Veganism

Like identity veganism, the guiding principle behind *boycott veganism*²⁹ is a rejection of the purchase and consumption of all animal products with less (or no) consideration for the human or even environmental costs. Yet, *unlike* identity vegans, boycott vegans may very well accept

that a by-product of the web of production of even vegan foodstuffs may involve the harming of individual sentient nonhuman animals. However, as identity veganism is not to be endorsed, neither is boycott veganism.

First, boycott veganism (like identity veganism) sees vegan practice as a kind of individual lifestyle choice, ignoring the larger social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which systematized, institutional violence, suffering, exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification of both human and nonhuman animals are required to produce consumer goods of all kinds, including “vegan” consumer goods. As Jenkins and Stanescu make powerfully clear:

[B]oycott veganism conflates conspicuous consumption with ethical action and political change....Simply replacing animal with plant-based products only transfers capital to global corporations through different mechanisms; boycott veganism serves to reinforce capitalist institutions and neoliberal social structures that promote the commodification of life and disguise market forces as neutral, amoral means of distributing social goods.³⁰

Some identity and boycott vegans (e.g., “Taco Bell vegans”) either tacitly or actively condone the continued existence of the very same exploitative consumer-capitalist structures that produce things such as the milk found in milk chocolate (which they refuse to consume), and the cacao produced using child slave labor (which they may willingly or perhaps unknowingly consume),³¹ or palm oil, a ubiquitous ingredient found in a large number of prepared “vegan” foods produced by clear-cutting which devastates endangered (and non-endangered) species’ habitats.³²

Second, by reducing veganism to individual consumer choices, boycott vegans unwittingly reinforce the belief that by “voting” with your vegan dollars you can make real moral progress and effect political change, leaving the exploitation of human and nonhuman animals and the unprecedented catastrophic global destruction of the natural environment and animal habitats to the will of consumer-capitalist markets.³³

Importantly, boycott vegans fail to acknowledge that a vegan lifestyle, particularly in the Global North, can be an environmentally high-impact lifestyle. For example, the packaging from vegan food doesn’t take up less space in the landfill or consume fewer resources just because the food is

vegan.³⁴ Additionally, boycott vegans overlook the fact that in terms of net suffering, harm, and destruction, being a high-consuming vegan can, in some contexts, be more damaging than being a meat eater.³⁵ With regard to behaviors that most impact global climate change, much attention is paid to the ways that people's home energy use, travel, food choices, and other routine activities affect their emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and, ultimately, their contribution to global warming. However, the reproductive choices of an individual are rarely incorporated into calculations of their personal impact on the environment. Yet, the extra emissions of fossil CO₂ that an average individual causes when he or she chooses to have children far exceed the lifetime emissions produced by the original parent. In the USA, for example, each child adds about 9,292 tons of CO₂ to the carbon legacy of an average female, 5.7 times her own lifetime emissions. Even more startling is the fact that the potential savings from reduced reproduction are huge compared to the savings that can be achieved by changes in lifestyle. For example, a woman in the USA who adopted six basic, nonreproductive lifestyle changes would save about 486 metric tons of CO₂ emissions during her lifetime, but, if she were to have two children, this would eventually add nearly 40 times that amount of CO₂—an astonishing 18,584 metric tons—to the earth's atmosphere.³⁶ Again, my point here is that boycott vegans may overlook the fact that in terms of net suffering, harm, and destruction, being a high-consuming vegan can, in some contexts, be more damaging than being a meat eater. It's probable that a Michael Pollanesque omnivore who has no children, doesn't own a car, rides her bike everywhere, and doesn't travel by plane nor shop at Walmart can have a less-damaging welfare and environmental footprint (or hoofprint) than a conscientious boycott vegan who produces two children, drives a Prius, often travels by plane, and purchases vegan products at Walmart. Additionally, it is the poor and impoverished of the Global South who will take the brunt of climate change in the coming decades.³⁷ Clearly, a different kind of vegan practice is called for, one that engages with, rather than ignores, the global devastation to which even a vegan practice can contribute.

Revisionary Political Veganism

The kind of veganism that I advocate I call revisionary political veganism (or just political veganism, for short). Political veganism has three virtues: It is (a) revisionary, (b) aspirational, and (c) intersectional and inclusionary.³⁸

Political veganism is in part a *revisionary* project in that it calls for a rejection of the conventional concept of veganism as an individual lifestyle or consumer choice. 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.³⁹ In this sense, veganism becomes a kind of stance—an anticonsumer-capitalist stance—toward economic and political structures of violence and oppression.

Political veganism—in fact, *all* veganisms—can be only *aspirational*. The belief that abstaining from animal products allows one to avoid complicity in harming other animals ignores the complex dynamics involved in the production of consumer goods of all kinds, global entanglements we engage with each time we purchase and consume food of all sorts. Living today, even for vegans, involves participating in the deaths of sentient individuals. Vegan diets have welfare footprints in the form of widespread indirect harms to animals, harms often overlooked or obscured by advocates of identity and boycott veganism. Though vegans have attended to the tragedy that farmed animals experience, few pay much attention to the harms other animals suffer in the production of vegan foodstuffs. For example, the raising and harvesting of crops in industrialized agriculture harms and kills a large number of sentient field animals such as mice, voles, rabbits, and birds in the production of fruits, vegetables, and grains produced for human (not livestock) consumption.⁴⁰ Even if some vegans can practice “veganic” farming, few of us can afford to create food in this way.

All aspects of consumption in late capitalism involve harming others, human and nonhuman. When we live with companion animals, other animals will have to die, most obviously to feed those animals. But even if they are vegan, dogs and cats will kill and eat other animals if they get a chance.⁴¹ While neither ignoring nor resigning oneself to these realities, as political vegans we acknowledge our complicity in these institutional vices, while doing the best we can to minimize them. Not to do so would be bad faith.⁴² Political veganism commits us to striving for a moral goal, as something one works at rather than something one is. Of course, there is overlap between identity and boycott vegans on the one hand and political vegans on the other. In different contexts, someone who recognizes that veganism can be but an aspiration may also express her commitments in ways that make it seem more like a lifestyle.

However, to see that veganism is only aspirational is not to see veganism as *merely* an aspiration. To call oneself a political vegan while continuing consciously and without necessity to act in ways that condone animal exploitation (e.g., proclaiming your aspirations to vegan commitments while ordering a cheeseburger at your favorite fast-food restaurant) would be to disingenuously appropriate the language of veganism and, again, be inauthentic and act in bad faith. Despite wanting it to be otherwise, vegan or not, we cannot live and avoid killing, even if only indirectly. Given all this, veganism can be but an aspiration, and imagining otherwise is an illusion. Political veganism incorporates this fact into practice, imagining and earnestly trying to actualize—to the best of one's ability—a world in which there is no violence, exploitation, or oppression, while working at the individual, political, cultural, and structural levels to reduce harm and foster a vegan world, while fully recognizing that, even as vegans, we are complicit in this cycle of violence.

Finally, the greatest virtue of political veganism is that it is intersectional and inclusionary. Political veganism acknowledges the connections between and rejects the structures of oppression—such as human exceptionalism, speciesism, racism, sexism, ableism, and militarism—while emphasizing the relationships between the consumption of animal products and environmental destruction. Thus, political vegans reject the notion of a meat-eating environmentalist, feminist, or queer advocate. Such binaries are not aligned with the goals of dismantling

speciesism and eradicating the commodification and consumption of nonhuman animals.⁴³

Political veganism is wide in scope and limited not only to a rejection of the consumption of animal products but also to a rejection of the structures and institutions that link the commodification and exploitation of animals, vulnerable human populations, and the environment. Thus, political veganism is not a personal dietary lifestyle choice, but rather an active and engaged worldview dedicated to an inclusion of nonhuman animals in social justice theory and practice.⁴⁴

Political veganism acknowledges the link between structural violence and exploitation, and the consumer-capitalist structures that drive demand for vegan foodstuffs and other “vegan” consumer goods. These include the experiences and sufferings of nonhuman animals and human workers in slaughterhouses, the trafficking and slavery of farmworkers who grow and pack vegan foodstuffs, and the impoverishment of Bangladeshi children who are beaten and forced to work 20-hour shifts, 7 days a week, for pennies to produce clothing containing no animal products for retailers such as Walmart—to point out just a few.⁴⁵ Political vegans also recognize the role that state-sponsored subsidies of agribusiness play in the dietary racism that results when such subsidies make available high-fat, cheap, animal-based foods in impoverished neighborhoods truly in need of healthful, whole, plant-based foods. Given that political veganism can be but aspirational, sincere political vegans do their best to decrease their contribution to global suffering by actively opposing these industries and the fetishizing of commodity consumer culture.⁴⁶

If taken seriously, political veganism has some interesting—if not counterintuitive—consequences. For example, on the one hand, someone in the Global North with disposable income who eats an exclusively plant-based diet solely for reasons of personal health or who abstains from eating animal products out of concern for “animal rights” but who purchases “vegan” (e.g., non-leather) consumer goods from Walmart while cognizant of the conditions under which those kinds of items are produced would not be vegan in the sense that I am characterizing political veganism. Conversely, I can imagine a “fellow traveler” who earnestly and sincerely aspires to political veganism, but who lacks the resources, income, or employment (e.g., a freegan and perhaps a poor, vulnerable

single parent) and “dumpster dives,” or in some other way chooses to take in animal bodies or their by-products for sustenance, who could constitute a political vegan in the sense that I am articulating. Rather than seeing these seemingly odd consequences as a deficiency, they instead act to highlight the virtues of political veganism, illustrating why political veganism is both revisionary and aspirational.

Conclusion

I have argued that those of us living in affluent consumer culture under late capitalism, where plant-based alternatives to meat and dairy are readily available, are ethically obligated to adopt vegan practice. I have provided an argument for localized veganism and answered a number of objections to it. Further, I have identified a number of veganisms and advocated for one, namely, political veganism. I ultimately argue that vegans are obliged to actively engage with and resist those power structures built on speciesism, violence, oppression, exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification of all sentient beings—human and nonhuman—and their habitats. I see political veganism not merely as a theoretical construct, but as a call to action and engagement by those of us in the Global North to retreat from our destructive consumer-capitalist ontologies and use our privilege to reduce and ultimately eliminate suffering, while forging moral and just relations of care, compassion, and respect.

Notes

1. I present here an ethical argument for veganism. The argument for veganism is even more compelling when we consider the environmental argument for veganism (i.e., the horrendous environmental destruction caused by the industrial–grain–oilseed–livestock complex. See Tony Weiss, *The Ecological Hoofprint: The Global Burden of Industrial Livestock* (London: Zed Books, 2013).

2. I am assuming that the target audience of this collection of essays is those of us living in the affluent Global North in consumer culture under late capitalism. That's who I mean here by "we."
3. The term "animal" is fraught and troublesome. The use of the term acts only to reinforce *human exceptionalism*, a paradigm of division and oppression that perpetuates the dangerous and misguided notion that those sentient beings, commonly referred to as "human beings"—who are normatively and operationally interpreted as metaphysically distinct from and morally superior to so-called "animals"—are outside and "above" membership in the "animal kingdom," a distinction that has served the interests of the dominant species at the expense of those oppressed species. However, rather than entirely repudiating this linguistic convention in this chapter, for ease of the reader I will instead use the terms "animals," "nonhuman animals," and "other-than-human animals" to refer to so-called nonhuman "animals."
4. See, for example, James Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism" in *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 70–80, Dan Imhoff, *The CAFO Reader: The Tragedy of Industrial Animal Factories*, (Berkeley: Watershed Media, an imprint of U California Press, 2010), Mark Hawthorne, *Bleating Hearts: The Hidden World of Animal Suffering*, (UK: Changemakers Books, 2013), and Hope Bohanec, *The Ultimate Betrayal: Is There Happy Meat?*, (iUniverse, 2013).
5. The basic infrastructure of this kind of argument is found in Mylan Engel, "Why YOU Are Committed to the Immorality of Eating Meat" in *Social and Personal Ethics*, 4th edition, ed. William Shaw (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2002), 212–21, and James Rachels, "The Basic Argument for Vegetarianism" in *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 70–80.
6. Within the context of the relation of speciesism to the treatment of non-human animals, reasons that are "good enough" are varied and, some believe, not uncontroversial. I'm not interested in those debates as I believe the notion as I am using it is pretty straightforward. All I need to run this argument is for you to agree that—*ceteris paribus*—satisfying my taste or desire for bacon is not good enough reason to slaughter a pig. There are many arguments against this conclusion, but none that I know of that are not speciesist.

7. See Robert Bass, “What Can One Person Do? Causal Impotence and Dietary Choice,” unpublished manuscript (2014), for a clear and thorough treatment of this challenge to vegan practice, namely, the *casual impotence objection*.
8. By “products,” in the term *consumers of animal products*, I intend the products of animals—such as meat, eggs, and dairy—produced by the livestock industry. I say this because it may be possible—at least, in theory—to produce animal products that do not cause harm to animals (e.g., eggs from rescued hens, who are loved, protected, and well cared for), but these examples are so extremely rare and are such a minuscule fraction of all animal products produced and consumed as to be negligible.
9. To conclude that a *particular individual* causes x because consumers *as a whole* cause x is an error of logical scope. Bass in Robert Bass, “What Can One Person Do? Causal Impotence and Dietary Choice,” unpublished manuscript (2014), sees this as an instance of the fallacy of division. Either way, it’s a bad inference.
10. Robert Bass, “What Can One Person Do? Causal Impotence and Dietary Choice,” unpublished manuscript (2014), 3.
11. Alastair Norcross, “Puppies, Pigs, and People: Eating Meat and Marginal Cases,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004), 232.
12. Ben Almassi, “The Consequences of Individual Consumption: A Defence of Threshold Arguments For Vegetarianism and Consumer Ethics,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 28, no. 4 (2011), 404–7.
13. See Melanie Joy, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism* (San Francisco: Conari Press, 2011) for a nice book-length discussion of these kinds of cases and the speciesist and carnist worldviews underlying them.
14. Interestingly, when we consider that role-modeling behavior can have both positive and negative aspects and recognize that some “negatively contagious” actions (so-called “backfire” role modeling) can affect others’ behavior such that it increases the probability that an observer will engage in behaviors *opposite* to the role modeler, we have evidence that perceptions of vegans as self-righteous zealots may very well push non-vegans *away* from veganism and toward meat consumption.
15. Lori Gruen, *Ethics and Animals: An Introduction*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 101–4.

16. Val Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis," *Ethics and the Environment* (2000), 296.
17. Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals*, (New York: Lantern Press, 2015).
18. Elizabeth Harman, "Eating Meat as a Morally Permissible Moral Mistake" in *Philosophy Comes to Dinner: Arguments on the Ethics of Eating*, eds. Andrew Chignell, Terence Cuneo, and Matthew Halteman (NY: Routledge, 2015) 215–31.
19. Ibid.
20. Adrienne M. Martin, "Consumer Complicity in Factory Farming" in *Philosophy Comes to Dinner: Arguments on the Ethics of Eating*, eds. Andrew Chignell, Terence Cuneo, and Matthew Halteman (NY: Routledge, 2015) 203–14.
21. Ibid., 210.
22. Matthew Cole and Karen Morgan, "Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers," *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 1 (2011), 134–53.
23. See Lori Gruen, "Facing Death and Practicing Grief" in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014) 127–41, and Matthew Cole and Karen Morgan, "Vegaphobia: Derogatory Discourses of Veganism and the Reproduction of Speciesism in UK National Newspapers," *The British Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 1 (2011), 134–53.
24. Val Plumwood, "Integrating Ethical Frameworks for Animals, Humans, and Nature: A Critical Feminist Eco-Socialist Analysis," *Ethics and the Environment* (2000), 286.
25. A parody of this kind of vegan has even found its way into popular culture via *The Simpsons*. In the episode "Lisa the Tree Hugger" (S4E12), Lisa's earnest proclamation to environmentalist and animal rights activist Jesse that she is a vegetarian is met with a chuckle as Jesse condescends to Lisa, "I'm a level 5 vegan. I won't eat anything that casts a shadow."
26. Lori Gruen and Robert C. Jones, "Veganism as an Aspiration" in *The Moral Complexities of Eating Meat*, eds. Ben Bramble and Bob Fischer (UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 153–171.
27. It was pointed out to me that to avoid any potential vagueness (given that this section is rife with "many" and "some,") I should point the reader to one of these identity vegans. And so, if I must, I will. I have in mind someone like vegan superstar Gary Yourofsky.

28. See Susan Wolf, "Moral Saints" *The Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 8 (1982), 419–39, for a brilliant and pointed rejection of moral sainthood as a virtue.
29. "Boycott veganism" as I am characterizing it, is—to my knowledge—introduced, and sharply dissected in Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu's, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 74–85. At least that's the first place that I came upon the term.
30. Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 78.
31. Lauren Ornelas's Food Empowerment Project (F.E.P.) is a model organization encouraging consumers to recognize the connection between food choices and animal abuse, the depletion of natural resources, unfair working conditions for produce workers, and the unavailability of healthy foods in low-income areas. At their website <http://www.foodispower.org/>, you will find the F.E.P. list of slave chocolate producers, many of whom produce "vegan" chocolate products.
32. Mark Hawthorne, "The Problem with Palm Oil," *VegNews*, (March 22, 2013), retrieved January 15, 2016 at <http://vegnews.com/articles/page.do?pageId=5795&catId=1>.
33. Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 74–85.
34. Warren Oakes, "Why freegan?" Freegan.Info, retrieved January 15, 2016, from <http://freegan.info/what-is-a-freegan/freegan-philosophy/why-freegan-an-attack-on-consumption-in-defense-of-donuts/>.
35. Thanks to Patrick Newman for pointing out this criticism of boycott veganism.
36. Paul A. Murtaugh and Michael G. Schlax, "Reproduction and the Carbon Legacies of Individuals," *Global Environmental Change* 19, no. 1 (2009), 14–20.
37. Vicente R. Barros, Christopher B. Field, et al., eds., "Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, Part B: Regional Aspects," *IPCC*, retrieved January 15, 2016, from https://ipcc-wg2.gov/AR5/images/uploads/WGIIAR5-PartB_FINAL.pdf.

38. Political veganism integrates the central ideas found in *engaged veganism* (Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 74–85.), *aspirational veganism* (Lori Gruen and Robert C. Jones, "Veganism as an Aspiration" in *The Moral Complexities of Eating Meat*, eds. Ben Bramble and Bob Fischer (Oxford University Press, 2015), 153–171.), and *freeganism* (Warren Oakes, "Why freegan?" *Freegan.Info*, retrieved January 15, 2016, from <http://freegan.info/what-is-a-freegan/freegan-philosophy/why-freegan-an-attack-on-consumption-in-defense-of-donuts/>).
39. Marti Kheel, "Vegetarianism and Ecofeminism: Toppling Patriarchy with a Fork" in *Food for Thought: The Debate Over Eating Meat*, ed. Steve F. Sapontzis (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004), 327–41.
40. Joel MacClellan, "Animal Agriculture and Welfare Footprints," *Encyclopedia of Food and Agricultural Ethics*, eds. Paul B. Thompson and David M. Kaplan (NY: Springer, 2014), 140–143.
41. Lori Gruen, "Facing Death and Practicing Grief" in *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014) 127–41.
42. See John Sanbonmatsu, "The Animal of Bad Faith: Speciesism as an Existential Project" in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, ed. John Sorenson (NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 29–45, for a brilliant analysis of the role of bad faith in speciesist commitments.
43. Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 74–85.
44. See Robert C. Jones, "Animal Rights is a Social Justice Issue," *Contemporary Justice Review*, 18, no. 4 (2015), 467–482, for greater discussion of the relationship between animal liberation and social justice.
45. See <http://www.globallabourrights.org> and <http://slaveryfootprint.org> for details of the horrors in the production of many "vegan" consumer goods.
46. Stephanie Jenkins and Vasile Stănescu, "One Struggle," in *Defining Critical Animal Studies: An Intersectional Social Justice Approach for Liberation*, eds. Anthony J. Nocella II, John Sorenson, Kim Socha, and Atsuko Matsuoka (NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2014), 77–81.

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