

Meat may never die

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The goal of ethical veganism is a vegan world or, at least, a significantly vegan world. However, despite the hard work done by vegan activists, global meat consumption has been increasing (Saiidi 2019; Christen 2021). Vegan advocates have focused on ethics but have ignored the importance of tradition and identity. And the advent of veggie meat alternatives has promoted food that emulates animal products thereby perpetuating the meat paradigm. I suggest that, in order to make significant changes toward ending animal exploitation, ethical vegans give more attention to tradition and identity. Furthermore, I propose that raw veganism is the most ethical diet and can be the best way to move away from animal-based food.

The real obstacle to the goal of veganism may not be the lack of ethical concerns for nonhuman animals, but a more complicated issue. A common assumption among all approaches to animal ethics is that teaching ethics can eventually lead people to the realization that eating animals is immoral or unvirtuous. Moral philosophers have offered forceful ethical arguments against animal exploitation based on various moral frameworks, consequentialism, deontology, feminist ethics, virtue-oriented ethics, and more. Although each approach is unique, all of them implicitly assume that moral philosophy and logical reasoning will make people go vegan. However, most people do not decide whether to refrain from eating animals on the basis of ethical theory or logical thinking.

I have argued that our commitment to veganism and respect for animals is akin to religious faith (Alvaro 2020, 3). Johnson (2015), for example, shows that the definition of ethical veganism is consistent with the legal definition of religion. Also, in the recent legal case of Jordi Casamitjana (BBC News 2020) the judge ruled that ethical veganism is a philosophical belief like religious belief. Many ethical vegans have a strong belief, in spite of ethical/logical evidence, that using animals for food is wrong. If, *ex hypothesi*, one could demonstrate via sound logical/ethical/empirical evidence that

eating animal is not immoral, and that it is perfectly moral, such evidence should not suffice to make an ethical vegan start eating meat. An obvious objection is that ethical veganism is unlike religious commitment because veganism involves more than mere belief or faith. Unlike religion, veganism draws on empirical evidence. But many theists, too, believe in God based on empirical and scientific evidence. Similarly, omnivorism is based, in part, on certain beliefs and convictions, for example, the notion that humans are superior to animals.

Thus, if vegans wish to convince others that animals are not food, they must start addressing certain cultural obstacles hitherto ignored. Consider that animal-based food is a fundamental part of many cultural and religious traditions; some religions even teach that eating animals is an obligation. For many people, eating animal products is important for reasons of tradition, identity, religious, cultural, and even ethical integrity. In the European Union, governments have designated geographical indications and traditional specialties: protected designation of origin (PDO), protected geographical indication (PGI), and traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG). In Italy, what it is to be an Italian, among other things, is importantly defined by the food. In the Lazio region, there is a traditional pasta recipe known as Amatriciana prepared with cured pork cheek and aged sheep-milk cheese. This for the people of Lazio is so important that the Italian government has named those ingredients “traditional Agro-alimentary Products.” Such denomination is conferred upon certain foods by each regional government and by the Ministry of Agricultural, Food, and Forestry Policies. Another example is Neapolitan pizza, which has been declared to be a Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) product in Europe. Pizza making has been included on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) list of *intangible cultural heritage*. Food in Italy is taken very seriously. The fact that such dishes can be “veganized” is irrelevant. Each country, each state, each region, and sub region has specific dishes and products that identify that place and make the people from that place proud of their identity. For example, one of the reasons that renders Neapolitans proud of being Italians and Neapolitans is that they invented pizza.

My point is that the history, tradition, techniques, crafts, accolades, recognition, and other factors related to traditional foods, recipes, preparation, chefs, and cuisine, are very much part of a culture, entrenched in people’s identity. Certain recipes and products are so important that they define people. They are so important that taking them away would be tantamount to taking away people’s very identities. A vegan world, therefore, would not merely entail making a deep, fundamental change of diet, but rather a gargantuan change of culture and personal identity. Practically, it would

amount to cultural genocide. Thus, ethical veganism must figure out the way to address and successfully change such intangible cultural heritage.

Furthermore, consider the importance of the culinary arts and the world's famous culinary schools. Consider the great chefs in history and their teachings, the study of ingredients passed on from generations to generations down the centuries, the evolutions of cooking techniques, the kitchen utensils, recipe books, and all other factors developed around preparing animal-based products. The issue here is considerably more complicated than simply making substitutions: eating a Beyond Meat burger instead of a traditional beef burger or drinking soy milk instead of cow's milk. Rather, the goal of veganism would entail attacking century-old knowledge, value, tradition, expertise, techniques, recipes taught by prestigious culinary schools, the skills of restaurateurs and their restaurants all over the world. It would entail throwing away and forgetting kitchen tools, the manufacturers of those tools; telling the students at culinary schools whose dream is to become great chefs, and the food connoisseurs and enthusiasts, to give up their dreams and passion. It would be preposterous to expect that such important, ancient, deep-seated, enduring traditions, techniques, values, and skills be lost and forgotten so easily.

Therefore, the possibility of a transition to a vegan world is not simply predicated upon the success of ethical-logical-philosophical-scientific argumentation. Moral philosophers have argued that exploiting animals infringes animals' rights, or it hinders the greatest good for the greatest number, or that it is unvirtuous. But it does not follow that people give up, throw away, and forget their identity, their cultural, religious, and spiritual traditions. Therefore, any attempt to discuss the possible future of veganism as a reality rather than as another culinary or socio-cultural tradition among many others, must first consider—and successfully address—such issues. How can we change without asking people to give up and bury such values? This is one of the most important questions regarding the future of veganism that vegan advocates and activists have not even started addressing.

The obvious objection to the claim of cultural genocide is that we have heard this before. Similar arguments were made in the antebellum South about slavery. The death of the plantation system—hundreds of years and many generations old—was also a kind of cultural genocide. That is why some people may still look to the 'Gone with the Wind' mythology with fondness. The real answer is subverting, upending, and eliminating speciesism and human supremacy. However, this is a false analogy. Although owning slaves might be the source of pride for some masters, presumably, slave masters did not have a positive sentimental attachment to their slaves. After all, they were

their slaves, their property, their things. Conversely, the cultural aspects regarding food involve more than deep sentimental attachment and pride. Owning slaves does not define the identity of slave masters. On the other hand, food does define who people are. Regarding speciesism, after more than forty years of speciesism talk, the fact is that people are not persuaded by it.

Another factor that perpetuates animal exploitation, surprisingly, is veganism itself due to the introduction of vegan food analogues, such as veggie meats, veggie cheese, and more. With such products, veganism has shifted its focus from compassion for animals to promoting consumerism and people's self-indulgence. More and more people are consuming vegan products – but it does not necessarily imply that more and more people are becoming vegans. Worse, many non-vegan corporations are now creating new foods that taste, look, and behave like real animal products. Recently, MacDonald's has developed a vegetarian "Happy Meal", TGI Friday's has announced a "bleeding" vegan burger, and Gregg released its vegan sausage roll. The existence of such products that emulate so closely traditional animal products is, in my view, counterproductive to the vegan goal.

Vegan substitutes are a double-edge sword. One edge sends a specific message to the public—animal flesh is the norm and the standard food for humans. Consequently, vegans have become a group of people who consume imitations of "real" food. The other is that veganism is losing its ethical core and is becoming just another trendy diet. Instead of representing the opposition, veganism seems to have become an ally to the meat industry. Instead of engendering the message, "Eating animals is wrong, GO VEG-AN!" veganism is becoming a movement that tries to mitigate the problem of animal exploitation by finding a common ground and understanding and even compromising with the animal industry. Veganism revolves so much around food that, ironically, it has been swallowed and digested by mainstream non-vegan corporations. One might note that virtually all vegan products have been produced in order to entice and please meat eaters more so than to please vegans. Unfortunately, the promotion of such products perpetuates carnist values, that is, the ideal of meat and animal products as the norm and natural human food.

Addressing and overcoming the issues of tradition, heritage, value, and identity that I discussed is complicated, though not insurmountable. Regarding the dietary direction that veganism should follow going forward, I suggest embracing raw veganism. My suggestion, after all, is to embrace our natural diet. Prior to the discovery and use of fire, the diet of early hominins consisted of fruit and tender leaves (Andrews & Martin 1991; Milton 1999). All animals eat an uncooked diet to which they adapted.

Non-human animals don't benefit from cooked food and, consequently, there is no reason human animals should benefit from cooking, either. As primatologist Katharine Milton writes, "The widespread prevalence of diet-related health problems...suggests that many humans are not eating in a manner compatible with their biology." (Milton 1999, 488) Modern humans have deviated from "a diet on which the primate line has flourished for many tens of millions of years and *produced them*" (Dehmelt 2001, 3).

Cooking enables the consumption of foods that are inherently indigestible or toxic. Enzymes are deactivated by cooking at temperatures over 117°F (47°C). (Chen, Gregory, Sun, & Golovlev 2011; Peterson, Daniel, Danson, & Eienthal 2007) Cooking destroys water-soluble vitamins (Rumm-Kreuter Demmel 1990; Deol & Bains 2010) and phytonutrients (Gupta and Prakash 2014; Marcus 2013, 279-333). Cooking denatures protein and "Most genetic diseases can be linked back to a protein that does not have the structure it should." (Rehman and Botelho 2019) Furthermore, cooked fats can become rancid and carcinogenic (Vieira, McClements, & Decker 2015).

Grains contain toxic anti-nutrients, lectins, phytates and, possibly the worst of all, gluten. Some animals, birds, rodents, and some insects can consume grains. Humans, however, cannot unless grains are cooked, in which case grains become tolerable and easier to digest, but not easy. Lectins in grains cause diseases (Freed 1999; Cuatrecasas & Tell 1973; Jönsson, Olsson, Ahrén, et al. 2005; Franks, Brage, Luan, et al. 2005). It is believed that 1% of the population is affected by celiac disease, a disease that can lead to osteoporosis, infertility, neurological conditions, cancer, and other disorders (cureceliacdisease.org, n.d.). However, it is significantly more than 1% of the population that suffer from celiac disease. Gluten is not only dangerous to those who exhibit the symptoms that normally affect the celiac but to humans in general (Fine 2003).

Finally, in 1930, Dr. Paul Kouchakoff discovered an increase of leukocytes (white blood cells) in subjects that ate cooked food, while subjects that ate raw food had no change in white blood cells count. (Kouchakoff 1930, 490–3) This phenomenon is known as digestive leukocytosis. Leukocytosis typically occurs as a result of an inflammatory response. It is interesting that it also occurs as a result of consuming cooked food. What is the most plausible explanation? The most plausible explanation is that cooked food is unfit for human consumption (Link & Potter 2004).

Can a cooked, plant-based diet do the same job? In my view it cannot. In addition to being unhealthful as I explained above, first, so long as we continue regarding food as cooked and highly processed substances, we may never shake off the idea of cooking animal flesh. Second, grains and legumes have a negative environmental

impact. According to the World Wildlife Foundation, the “surging demand” for soy is causing deforestation, a great deal of greenhouse gas emissions, and a significant use of water and pesticides (Worldwildlife, n.d.). And rice significantly contributes to global warming (Lamb 2019). Third, cooking requires either gas or electric stoves, excessive amounts of water, and other such resources that hurt the environment. Thus, the most environmentally friendly diet, which is the least deleterious for humans, for the environment, and for the animals is a raw vegan diet. Therefore, ethical veganism should promote raw veganism. The difficult task to achieve the goal of veganism, of course, is to figure out a way to successfully perform cultural genocide.

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