Virtuous Veganism

It is indisputable that eating raw would use much less electricity, water and natural gas as cooking, heating and washing would be greatly curtailed. It is also quite indisputable that raw fruits and vegetables and the occasional bit of nuts and seeds retains more nutrients than cooking which kills nutrients. And while cooking may also kill harmful bacteria, this is hardly a worry when eating all fruits and vegetables. Lastly, the vegan aspect of raw veganism is also clearly the best option for animals as they would not be required to be held in captivity and eventually killed. Thus fundamentally, Alvaro’s argument is sound. If one follows virtues such as temperance and nonviolence, raw veganism is the logical conclusion. Vegans who do not eat raw would do well to try to include more raw foods into their diet according to their own ethics, whatever those ethics may be.

But where Alvaro excels philosophically, he is lacking socially and practically. In theory, raw veganism is the optimal diet,
and perhaps even scientifically in terms of
nutrition. But it is a different matter of how
to holistically thrive on a raw vegan diet.

One significant critique I would leverage is
that it is incorrect to equate the social per-
ception of (raw) vegans to that of those with
celiac disease, as Alvaro does. He brings
this up in the context of raising children as
raw vegans and how these children may be
perceived by other children who eat animal
products. Given that eating animal products
is the norm in Western societies it is rea-
sonable to think that children who do not
eat many common foods may face negative
stigma from others. Alvaro doesn’t think so
and states that veganism is no “stranger”
than any other aspect of diversity such as
religious diets, celiac, or being homosexu-
al. Thus, Alvaro states, (raw) vegans would
not be singled out for being vegan. But the
literature on veganism, as well as practical
experience (which I can vouch for person-
ally as well as many stories from vegan
friends and acquaintances), challenges this.

Vegans do face hostility because they chal-
lenge the status quo, purposefully or not;
vegans often report feeling singled and left
out because they do not consume food pro-
vided at gatherings; vegans are often inter-
rogated aggressively and disingenuously
about their dietary and ethical choices.
Furthermore, abstaining from certain foods
due to allergies or religion are generally ac-
cepted by society much more readily than
being vegan which is a conscious choice.
Alvaro too swiftly brushes these consider-
ations aside. But these are important social
and practical matters when considering
whether to become and stay vegan. Indeed,
feeling social pressure to eat animal prod-
ucts is the leading cause of vegans becom-
ing non-vegan.

Alvaro also states that animal prod-
ucts and processed foods are widely sug-
gested to be eaten in moderation. Formal
dietary guidelines and practical wisdom
support this. So, part of Alvaro’s argument
is that foods that are recommended in mod-
eration should be avoided as the recom-
modation itself signals the food’s dubious
nature. Raw fruits and vegetables, on the
other hand, are presumed to be edible in
abundance. Yet, one must moderate how
much sweet fruit one eats as too much sug-
ar can still cause health issues. One must
also moderate to allow for a diversity of
foods eaten as a lack of diversity in foods
is unhealthful. Thus, moderation must still
be exercised in raw veganism and is not an
integral way to dismiss eating animal prod-
ucts and cooked food.

There is also a bit of a practical
problem in Alvaro’s reliance on virtues.
My last critique is that if one is committed
to nonviolence and temperance, then geo-
graphic location poses a major problem for
raw veganism. Many people live in areas
where fruits and vegetables are not avail-
able year-round. Growing and shipping
these foods requires massive amounts of
energy, and roadkill is a leading cause of
death for wild animals. So, to truly follow
a raw vegan diet, it would seem necessary that one lives in a location where fruits and vegetables are easily available year-round. This would suggest, then, that much of the world's population shouldn't live where they live—in theory, at least. This is clearly problematic. To be clear, Alvaro does not claim this, but he also does not address this issue at all. Thus, one can eat all raw vegan foods but still not be virtuous, and virtues form the backbone of Alvaro's argument.

There could have been more practical advice on how to live on a raw vegan diet. One must know how to navigate this space before they can inhabit it. Alvaro simply says that diversity in raw vegan food exists. While I don't doubt him, some more explanation would be helpful. This is especially so as many vegan foods are ruled out for not being raw. Besides the obvious examples of any cooked foods, also ruled out are coffee, tea, alcohol, many spices, as well as some fruits and vegetables like eggplant because they are not optimal to eat raw. Some guidance in how to navigate here would be helpful.

To be fair, I consider myself an ethical vegan and have promoted veganism in my scholarly work on similar considerations as Alvaro. Despite the limitations discussed in this review, I fundamentally agree with Alvaro. I support raw veganism and will look to increase my intake of raw foods because of this book. This is a worthwhile read because raw veganism is an undertheorized component to veganism and the literature on veganism. I simply would have liked to see the social and practical concerns addressed a little more robustly. Such issues are also without as many references to outside literature as Alvaro provides for the philosophical and scientific components. Granted, philosophically, many limitations pointed out in this review do not harm Alvaro's philosophical argument. But they may constitute overall weaknesses that prevent people from actually adopting a raw vegan diet. Raw veganism remains, however, an ideal pursuit in order to reduce one's impact on Earth and all of its inhabitants.