

Virtuous Veganism

Carlo Alvaro: *Raw Veganism. The Philosophy of the Human Diet*. Routledge 2020.

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Alvaro's intent with *Raw Veganism* is to convince people that eating a raw vegan diet is the optimal diet for all of humanity. As a philosopher, he set out to achieve his goal philosophically. Alvaro finds the prevailing animal rights theories of utilitarianism and deontology (chiefly associated with Peter Singer and Tom Regan, respectively), lacking in that they both logically support the eating of animals. Instead, therefore, Alvaro argues for raw veganism on the grounds of embracing and following virtues such as temperance, nonviolence and others, and eschews the necessity of an overarching ethical theory. Being virtuous, then, suggests raw veganism as the ideal way to eat not *only* for the animals but for human health and environmental protection. In fact, being virtuous would imply that raw veganism is the *only* way to eat because eating animal products and cooked food is clearly violent, unnecessary, widely destructive and energy intensive.

Philosophically, Alvaro is on point.

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 perception 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 reasonable 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 homosexual. 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 personally as well as many stories from vegan friends and acquaintances), challenges this. Vegans do face hostility because they challenge the status quo, purposefully or not; vegans often report feeling singled and left out because they do not consume food provided at gatherings; vegans are often interrogated aggressively and disingenuously about their dietary and ethical choices. Furthermore, abstaining from certain foods due to allergies or religion are generally accepted 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 products is the leading cause of vegans becoming non-vegan.

Alvaro also states that animal products and processed foods are widely suggested 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 moderation should be avoided as the recommendation 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 sugar 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 unhealthy. Thus, moderation must still be exercised in raw veganism and is not an integral way to dismiss eating animal products 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 geographic location poses a major problem for raw veganism. Many people live in areas where fruits and vegetables are not available 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 vegan-

ism 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.