

Veganism vs. Violence

“We are becoming casual about ... violence.”

— Norman Cousins

Introduction

People vary widely in their responses to food. Many individuals regard the types of meals that they have enjoyed since childhood with fondness and affection—including the animal products such as meat, dairy, and eggs. Yet often that warm feeling is superficial and fails to acknowledge the many ways in which violence is arguably implicated in many food choices.

It would be bigoted to assume that violence can only be executed against human beings. I argue that animal agriculture is violent towards its victims. **If we slaughtered humans for food—even if we tried to do it so-called “humanely”—there is no doubt we would call that violence.** We would be kidding ourselves if we concluded that the exact same forms of treatment are *non*-violent when they are directed

If we believe absurdities,
we shall commit atrocities.

— Voltaire

towards *non*human sentient beings. Slaughterhouses are unparalleled places of multifarious screaming, kicking from both humans and others, horror, terror, blood, and guts. They are also violent to humans, with the general chaos resulting in the highest on-the-job injury rate of any profession.



Many of these violent patterns first interweaved with our lives in the innocence of youthful ignorance. They did for me. But do they stand up to mature scrutiny? I

doubt that anyone could provide any really good reason in favour of meat-eating and the like. Part of why I believe this will become apparent in the course of this essay.

This informal paper will defend the idea that violence towards nonhuman animals for food and other unnecessary products and services cannot be defended. I am not implying that there

Figure 1.

A liberated cow.

cures and treatments while harmfully using animals, is sometimes wrongly considered to be “necessary.” But please see the sister paper to this one, entitled, “Anti-Vivisection and Anti-Violence.”

Veganism versus Omnivorism

What is **veganism**? The term was coined in 1944 by Englishman Donald Watson. The term **vegetarian** had been around for over a century, since 1837. Watson wanted a word that did justice to people who not only abstained from meat-eating, but also other products derived from the bodies of animals.

Vegans are often defined as not eating animal products, but veganism is also much more than that. First, veganism is more of a non-violent lifestyle with respect to nonhuman animals than avoiding animal

products. We can prove this. Many vegans breast-feed their children. Well, breast milk is an animal product, albeit not a *nonhuman* animal product. However, breast-feeding is non-violent and therefore vegan. If women were exploited for their eggs or breast-milk, by contrast, that would *not* be vegan.

Second, veganism has taken on a meaning that goes well beyond just eating, which was the original focus. It is a non-violent lifestyle including anti-vivisection, not wearing fur, leather or wool, boycotting animal circuses, aquaria and zoos, and opposing hunting.

Veganism is a holistic lifestyle, not just a way of eating. I will focus here on the

eating though. There are people who embrace veganism for health reasons alone, but I do not consider in this essay people who do not substantially care about violence towards nonhuman animals.

The opposite of dietary veganism is not just “meat-eating,” since there are many other animal products that people eat besides so-called “meat”: dairy, eggs, ocean creatures, honey, and animal-based additives to foods and drugs for example. Melanie Joy, popular author and speaker on veganism, calls **carnism** the opposing view to veganism.

However, this does not seem accurate. A carnivore eats *only* meat, such as the case of snakes, who are true carnivores. Omnivores, however, eat both animal and plant foods. So the opponents of vegans

are ethical omnivorists, who maintain that it is ethically permissible, or perhaps even desirable, to consume nonhuman animal products. I will coin my own term—**omnivorism**—as a short-form of this other new term, “ethical omnivorism.” Omnivorism will include an implicit reference to ethics, especially: the morality of diet.

Goliath

Tom Regan reckons that debating meat-eating and so forth is:

...speaking out...against the enormously powerful forces of

Our task must be to [widen] our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

— Albert Einstein

social custom and personal habit. Here, surely, animal rights is David and the vast wrong of meat eating is Goliath.¹

Animal agriculture accounts for more than 97% of animals killed by humans in the U.S.² According to many sources, more than 50 billion animals are killed each year for eating in the U.S. alone. Agriculture Canada attests that 640 million—that's 0.64 billion—animals are killed each year in my country, Canada. The Toronto Vegetarian Association estimates that the average meat-eater's lifetime kill-toll is:

- 12 cows
- 29 hogs
- 2 sheep
- 37 turkeys
- 984 chickens
- 910 pounds of fish

That much is about Goliath.

“David” is getting bigger too though. Of adults in the United States, 2.5% are vegetarian, which is about 4.5 million people.³ Slightly less than 1% were vegan.⁴ And 4% of Canadians were reported as vegetarian, which is about 900,000 people.⁵ Alan Beardsworth and Teresa Keil note that membership in the British group, the Vegetarian Society, jumped from 7,500 to 18,500 between 1980 and 1995.⁶ Philosopher Tom Regan estimates that more than half of the world population is vegetarian.⁷ Jeremy Rifkin writes: “two out of every three human beings on the planet consume a primarily vegetarian diet.”⁸

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

— Mohandas Gandhi

A Brief History of Non-Violence

I will show how non-violence flows as an implication of the major Western theories of ethics. For now though, let us look to the Orient for the origin of the principle. The principle of non-violence emerged in a South Asian religion called Jainism more than five millennia ago in the geographical area now known as India. The Jains called this principle *ahimsa* in Sanskrit. Literally, *ahimsa* means *non-injury*, but many have translated it as *non-violence*. Traditionally, non-violence of the Jains applies to all sentient beings, or entities who have consciousness, and in particular, affect (feelings, desires, preferences, and moods).

Jain *ahimsa* has long been generally opposed to animal exploitation or neglect. Jain animal sanctuaries in India are not uncommon. Religious Jains cannot be hunters, fishers, or trappers. They are vegetarian and often objected to Hindus engaging in animal sacrifice



Figure 2.

The raised hand stands as a symbol of non-violence for the Jains. *Ahimsa* in the Sanskrit is artfully inscribed in the palm.

over the ages. Yet Jains have had a cultural blind-spot about enslaving cows for milk, as with many South Asians of that region. It is rationalized in ways that need not detain us here. Although Jains are a small part of the population of India, they are well respected and very widely recognized.

Interestingly, Jains commonly believe that it is morally acceptable to use physical force in defence, including in wars. Exactly how this can be defended will not be examined in this paper, but it may well relate to choosing the least of expected violence. An attacker is not only not innocent, as a rule, but will generally inflict more damage than someone simply seeking to restrain or to end a threat.

The Jain justification of non-violence is essentially compassion, although the Jains also believe that violence causes

people to gain bad *karma*. Karma literally means “fruit,” that is, the fruit of action, or what it results in from a causal perspective. In fact, the Jain theory of karma is that there are physical karman particles that adhere to wrong-doers, weighing them down, and preventing them from leaving this Earth when they die. Like so many of their region, Jains are pessimists about this world and



generally value escaping it after death. The Jains are atheists but they nevertheless believe that each soul is holy: infinitely knowing, joyous, and compassionate in pure form. Of course one can embrace non-violence without subscribing to any of the religious aspects of Jainism.

However, it is absolutely necessary in the history of ideas to credit the Jains with non-violence. Certainly the notion never had any important genesis in Western thinking in a way that is so full of integrity as to include non-violence to *all* beings to whom violence could matter: sentient beings. Presumably, *nothing*—including violence or the absence of it—matters to non-sentient beings.

Jain monks are much more strict than householders. Lord

Mahavir is especially revered as a “self-conqueror” who exemplified ahimsa since ancient times.

Figure 3. Top.

A statue of Lord Mahavir.

Figure 4. Bottom.

Jain monk with a face mask.

Some Jain monks wear face masks so they do not breathe in micro-organisms. In modern times, ahimsa or non-violence has been most famously championed by Mohandas Gandhi. The latter himself was a Hindu, but he was happy to borrow ahimsa from the Jains. Gandhi was originally a vegetarian for ritual reasons relating to his family's Hinduism. When Gandhi was training to be a lawyer in England, however, he met early animal rights thinker, Henry S. Salt, who convinced Gandhi to become an *ethical* vegetarian for the first time, and not just a *traditionalist* vegetarian. Gandhi led a movement seeking South Asia's independence from the British Empire.

This led to the formation of two modern states once autonomy was won: India and Pakistan. British colonial security forces would mercilessly beat Gandhian protesters.

These agitators for independence were completely non-violent, and so the British ended up being shamed on the world stage for carrying out utter savagery. The Indians were sympathized with as they themselves were wholly innocent, only wanting their own country again rather than living under a tyranny by a far away imperialistic government. Gandhi was successful in his non-violent campaign. Be it noted though that there were many

kinds of protests: non-violent and violent alike. In any event, he became revered by millions and was given the honorary title, *Mahatma*, which means "great soul."

An ethical vegetarian, Gandhi famously scribed: "To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being."



Another key promoter of non-violence, although not for animals as Gandhi, was Martin Luther King, Jr., the great civil rights advocate on behalf of African-Americans in the United States. King was a great orator and leader, but

unfortunately, like Gandhi, was assassinated.

Coretta Scott King, Dr. King's wife, went vegan in 1995, claiming that animal rights is a logical extension of her husband's philosophy of non-violence. Dexter Scott King, son of Martin and Coretta, is also a vegan for animal rights reasons.

Figure 5.

Gandhi had a few possessions: a loincloth and a bowl.

What Is Violence?

This is a highly controversial subject. Traditional definitions, such as are to be found in dictionaries, emphasize the physical. But child abuse can be *verbal*—or psychological. There is nothing remarkable of a physical nature going on there, except perhaps inside the brain, and so forth. Old-style thinking also emphasizes great force, but is it not violent to erase a life, while the victim is sleeping, even with a painless gas?

Etymologically, **violence** is probably related to **violate**. Linguists are unsure. However, regardless, I am going to use what I call the violationist theory of violence. *Violence is whatever violates sentient beings*. At least violence for the purposes of ethics, since things matter to sentient beings but not to nonsentient beings. Someone's psyche is violated so long as they are deliberately made to feel so much as significantly uncomfortable, thus violating their peace. But although comfort is emphasized in this way, it is in a non-violent manner. Thus, a rapist's discomfort at being stopped would not count. His or her satisfaction as a rapist is part of violence, not non-violence. Only what is consistent with non-violence is esteemed and cared for on non-violence ethics.

It is noteworthy that none of us wishes to be subject to violence—apart from, say, masochists. However, for reasons which we will not enter into here, masochism is not a suitable basis for an ethical theory, and not simply democratically.



There may be some situations which call for what I call non-violence approximation. In those cases, violence is expected, and we have to get as close to non-violence as possible by *minimizing* violence. Defence was raised as an example earlier. However, **non-**violence as such is to be executed in as many cases as possible. That is: **no** violence as the gold

standard. Each non-violent agent must, generally, be non-violent towards each and every sentient being.

Omnivorism and Speciesism

Michael Allen Fox points out that people commonly *compartmentalize* when it comes to animals.⁹ That is, many are kind and good to humans but, essentially, cruel and violent to animals. Meat-eaters generally do not apply the same moral standards to our treatment of all sentient beings.

Figure 6.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discriminatory violence against nonhuman animals can be referred to as **speciesism**, which is analogous to racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, ageism, and discrimination against people of different nationality, politics, creed, or appearance. Each of these makes its victims uncomfortable at the very least, often with much greater violation on top of that as well. Any one of these oppressions can be defined as discriminatory violence towards only a specific class of targeted sentient beings—most apply only to humans.



Violence from Factory Farming

Philosopher Mark Rowlands writes:

...the way we currently kill [animals for food] is, at best, merely painful and terrifying. At worst, it surpasses the nastiest excesses of even the most warped horror writer.¹⁰

It may be supposed that Rowlands is exaggerating, but he is not. It is cheaper to treat animals violently than not, it turns out.

As I wrote in earlier work:

It is usually thought that there is more money to be made in

confining animals by cramming them into minimal indoor spaces (less rent or land costs), in feeding them awful food (which is cheaper),

keeping them in filth (rather than paying for cleaning), letting them suffer stifling, toxic air and extremes of hot or cold (rather than pay for adequate

regulation of the atmosphere in factory farms, transport vehicles, or slaughter facilities), failing to attend to their medical needs (to offset veterinary costs), and transporting and killing them forcefully and hurriedly (because workers are paid by the hour and meat is sold by the pound).¹¹

Food on factory farms may include waxed cardboard containers, poultry manure and feathers, cement dust for up to 30% weight gain,¹² and corpses from unsaleable meat that might be cancerous.

Veganism takes the focus away from so-called “beef” or “pork” and considers eggs and dairy as

Figure 7.

Animals are vulnerable to human violence.



well. I will focus here on factory farming for eggs and milk.

Consider now the treatment of hens. Five birds are often crammed into tiny cages whose bottom is about the size of a folded regular newspaper such as *The New York Times*. All male chicks are killed, often by being macerated live or suffocated in plastic bags. As chicks, hens are standardly “de-beaked” or mutilated by a guillotine-like device or a hot knife, without anesthesia.

Hens’ feet are often damaged by the wire cages. Their talons grow unchecked and sometimes wind around the cage wires since the

birds do not run around. They often lose feathers, exhibiting semi-skeletal wings and skin



rubbed red raw.

Hens have a natural pecking order, but under these unnatural conditions, the result is often that a passive hen will stay in a corner and die because she will not have access to the food or water. The stench and noise in these “egg factories” often overcomes human visitors, let alone the sensitive prisoners of these confines. Morality rates of 10-20% are not uncommon, but all the “operators” care about is profit.

Dairy cattle are often intensively confined, and live imprisoned in carts that automatically go to milking stations, which may be fully automated as well. Cows often are made to endure concrete or slatted stalls without bedding. They are slaughtered after about five stressful years, usually for the majority of “hamburger” flesh in

Whenever people say, ‘We mustn’t be sentimental’, you can take it they are about to do something cruel. And if they add ‘We must be realistic’, they mean they are going to make money out of it.

— Brigid Brophy

Figure 8. Top.

A chick being “de-beaked”.

Figure 9. Bottom.

Hens on a factory farm.

fast food restaurants.

What is more, the male calves are not useful to the industry and so are frequently sold off to become “veal.” The veal industry is one of the most cruel. These

male calves are auctioned off after being weaned at 2-4 days old, often with umbilical cord still attached. A mother will bellow for days for her missing young. The milk is essentially stolen.

The calves are kept for 13-16 days before slaughter in stalls that are standardly 19-22 inches wide, with slatted floors above concrete. This flooring often

becomes slippery with excreta (often diarrhea) causing frequent falls to these recently born animals. They are often kept tethered so their muscles or “meat” will be soft. Naturally playful and skipping around the fields, these animals are not allowed even to walk, let alone to socialize, although cows are deeply social creatures. In order that their flesh appears pale on the plate, these so-called “veal calves” are kept deliberately iron-deficient or anemic—just not so much that they will necessarily die before slaughter. They are often kept from so



much as turning around in their stalls because they will lick their urine for iron.

So yes, factory farming is far less humane than traditional farming, and we have used the examples

pertaining to eggs and milk that are so germane to veganism. But no omnivorist situation is really humane. If humans were slaughtered even with maximum attention to their comfort under the circumstances, we would

never call this “kind” treatment, and it would still be violent.

So we need to avoid speciesist language such as “happy meat.” That does not mean

that no animal welfare measures are possible, each of which has the aim to improve welfare, but the overall situation is still “animal illfare” as I have noted elsewhere.¹³ For any human in a like situation would be faring ill.



Figure 10. Top.

A so-called “veal” calf.

Figure 11. Bottom.

Cattle beng shipped to slaughter.

Omnivorism's Violence Done to Human Health

Those who participate in violent eating habits also get much higher risks of:

- arthritis
- asthma
- cancers
- constipation
- diabetes (adult-onset type)
- gall stones
- gout
- heart disease
- kidney stones
- multiple sclerosis
- obesity
- osteoporosis
- salmonellosis
- strokes
- ulcers, and still other morbid conditions

To get a sample of how bad it is, consider that, according to the World Health Association, 30% of people die of heart disease. Vegans only have about a 3% risk.¹⁴ And according to the group, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, people who eat animal



products have 40% more cancer.¹⁵ People are playing with their own lives or quality of life eating animal products, not just killing and degrading nonhuman animals.

Omnivorism's Violence Done to the Environment

The omnivorist diet is the world's worst environmental disaster:

- according to a 2006 United Nations Report, it is the #1 contributor to global warming at 18%.¹⁶ That by far surpasses all forms of human transport combined
- omnivorism causes 10 times as much water pollution than all that is otherwise attributable to humans¹⁷ such as from the filth from factory farms commonly seeping into groundwater, lakes, and streams
- animal agriculture uses more than half of our fresh water¹⁸
- we could save 30% of all raw resources by not indulging in omnivorist habits¹⁹
- growing grains to feed livestock uses up the majority of arable land. For example, 95% of oats in the U.S. are grown to feed animals. This causes:
 - habitat losses
 - massive extinctions due to clearing lands for grazing animals—mainly cattle
 - a loss in biodiversity
 - a greatly increased use of pesticides when so many crops are grown for animal feed
- animal agriculture is the leading source of topsoil depletion. About 75% of the original United States topsoil was gone by 1987.²⁰ It takes 500 years for nature to make an inch of topsoil.²¹ An estimated 85% of

topsoil loss is attributable to raising animals for food²²

- omnivorism, all told, doubles fossil fuels consumption as compared to veganism²³

Any initial skepticism that omnivorism is the worst environmental destroyer dissipates when we learn these facts—only there is a lot more not reported here. Each of these impacts violates the dignity of sentient beings in some way.

Omnivorism: Justifiable?

People do have ways of justifying violence—in this case to animals through slaughter and factory farming, and to humans in respect of their degraded health and a despoiled natural world that we all share. Perhaps the premier way of justifying violence is defence as we have discussed. However, meat-eaters are not “defending” themselves against animals so the “defence defence” is altogether inapplicable. Are there other ways in which we can justify violence?

People justify violence if it is **unavoidable**. For example, we endure significant pain or suffering from the dentist if this is inevitable as part of a treatment program for our teeth or gums.



We justify it using non-violence approximation. However, consuming parts of animal corpses is completely avoidable. Abstinence is exactly what the vegans are advocating. Meat-eating in no way approximates non-violence, but flagrantly goes against the principle in question.

We cannot harm nonhuman animals just because they are **not human**. That would be dwelling on an irrelevant biological characteristic. It would be like saying that one

can be violent towards blacks because they have darker skin, or patriarchalists claiming they can be violent—subtly or grossly—towards those of the female sex. *District 9* is a film—whatever one’s overall assessment of the work might be—that calls into question inferior treatment of aliens who come to Earth and are vulnerable. They are treated badly partly because—yes—they are *not human*. The film is implicitly critical of such a kind of discrimination, which is a form of speciesism and xenophobia, depicted also in the breath-taking movie *Avatar*.

What about omnivorism because nonhuman animals are mentally inferior to humans? Having surveyed the animal

Figure 13.

E.T. was far more intelligent than humans and telekinetic.

ethics literature, I have had the opportunity to observe that this is actually the #1 rationalization used for violence against nonhuman animals.

If we accepted this form of argument, then aliens who are far more intelligent and otherwise superior would be justified in being violent towards *us*. There might be creatures who are vastly more mentally powerful than ourselves. We would not accept such inferior treatment, perhaps including stir-fried humans, for a second thought. So why use the exact same principle in the case of local creatures of other species?

Speciesism.

The idea of violence towards those not as mentally gifted has more prosaic and real-world implications. Some people advocate violence towards mentally challenged humans, such as this boy pictured above who was born with Down's Syndrome:



Do not suppose I am jesting about violence carried out against such innocent victims. Utilitarian moral philosopher, R. G. Frey, advocates that they **and** nonhuman animals should be sacrificed on the altar of medical vivisection. Why? Because they are mentally inferior in his view, or possess less “rich” lives, to use his preferred terminology.

Now Frey never suggests that we should *eat* such humans. But if we can eat nonhumans on the grounds that they are mentally inferior, it is not clear why

the same grounds do not justify consuming these unfortunate humans.

It is often misconstrued that Frey is not a speciesist, because he is species-blind. He would exploit humans and nonhumans alike if they have less “rich” lives. That, however, would be labouring under a simplistic understanding of speciesism.

There are two sorts of speciesism:

1. discrimination on the basis of *species*, e.g., in favour of humans and against nonhumans
2. discrimination on the basis of real or supposed *species-characteristics*, e.g., average intelligence for a species

Frey is ableist in inciting violence towards the mentally disabled. However, less mental “richness” is now

Figure 14. Top.

A boy with Down's Syndrome.

Figure 15. Bottom.

R. G. Frey.

a species-characteristic for humans, so he is an ableist. However, the nonhuman targets of Frey's violent ideology have "less mental richness" as a *species-characteristic*. So this is clearly violent treatment on the basis of species-characteristics. That is a kind of speciesism, in fact the most important kind. For speciesist thinkers standardly denounce the first kind but, in effect, endorse the second.²⁴ But Frey is quietly of the first kind too: he *eats* no mentally challenged humans.

And Frey is not alone in stirring up violence against the mentally disabled. The Nazis put them to death, calling them *lebensunwert*, a phrase that means "unworthy of life." Here is what Adolph Hitler had to say, which goes well beyond Frey:

The more serious of the hereditary diseases, especially the mental diseases, make their carriers completely unsuited for living. They rob those so afflicted of the capacity to reason and the feeling of responsibility so that they become of little value to the community. The less worthy multiply without restraint and are continually

spreading their hereditary sufferings abroad...²⁵

Here Hitler condemns the mentally disabled to death.



Indeed, here is a picture of Hartheim Castle, in which, during the Third Reich, there were murdered some 69,000 mentally disabled humans.

The killings here were stopped due to protests in

Germany. Who else will decry the comparable violence done to the nonhuman animals who supposedly lack "mental richness"? Of course most people do not advocate that we eat mentally disabled humans. But that is part of the point. If we would



not eat such humans, then *why* eat nonhumans of comparable abilities and harms in many cases? The same justification "should" work since it applies to both cases. Why

do we reject ableism applied to humans but not nonhumans? It seems like philosophical hypocrisy and incoherence, plain and simple, which is also mirrored in our refusing to eat dogs but not cows.

There is no better defence of violence

Figure 16. Top.

Hartheim Castle.

than defence itself. But no speciesist has come up with a brilliant alternative justification of violence in the case of eating dead animals—more on this later. No one can successfully argue that the violence is unavoidable, as though the slaughterers or corpse-eaters are somehow controlled by someone or something. And their biggest argument—the argument from mental inferiority—they would *never* accept applied to themselves by aliens, and would only condone towards fellow species-members through violent bigotry. With the failure of pro-violence we would be left with nothing less than veganism as part of **non-violence**.

Basic Argument for Non-Violence

Above, I have offered a very basic argument for non-violence based in:

- each of us demanding non-violence towards ourselves, including as it affects us as sentient beings; virtually none of us is willing to feel so much as uncomfortable if we can reasonably avoid that state of affairs
- consistency, integrity, non-hypocrisy, equity, or the Golden Rule demanding the same non-violent treatment for others

Just as it is common-sense that none wants violence done to the self, so the five principles named in the second part of the basic argument are also common-sensical. Millions, probably even billions of people adhere to these distinct but overlapping moral ideas in their everyday moral lives, and in laws and policies around the globe.

The Golden Rule is ancient. Three prominent versions are as follows:

1. Treat others as you would be treated. *Non-violently*.
2. That which would be hurtful to you do not unto others. *Do not practice violence*.
3. Love thy neighbour as thyself. (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:9) *That is, non-violently*.

The Rule is part of religious but also secular discourse. Many religions have different but related versions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism, Baha'i, and Zoroastrianism. However, there are also many moral theories that arguably carry non-violence as an implication as well.

Many Roads to Non-Violence: Moral Philosophy and Its Implications

A variety of ethical theories might accept non-violence. They do not mention the principle explicitly, and yet perhaps they imply it. Rather than present my own philosophical justification of non-violence here,²⁶ I will now newly present how the main moral theories entail non-violence, thus adding to the basic argument for non-violence already presented.

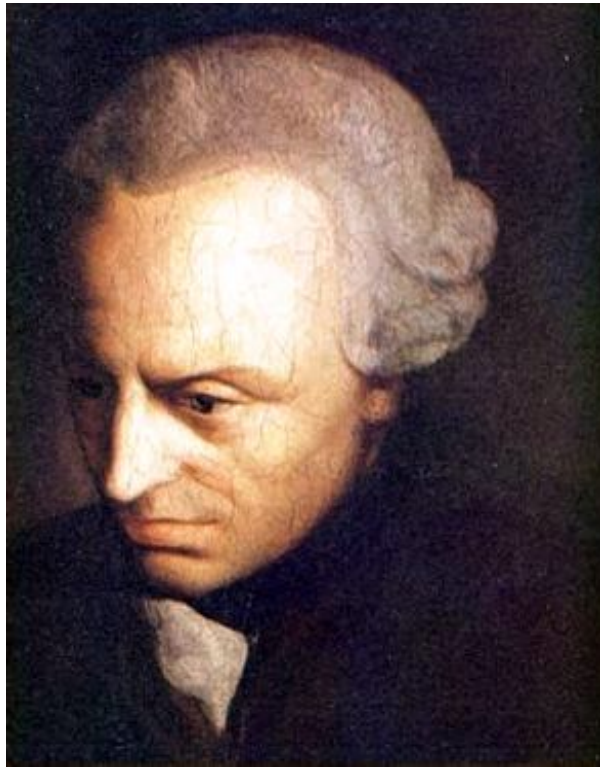
The end of ... discussion
should be not victory, but
enlightenment.

— Joseph Joubert

Some people might be intimidated by discussions of moral theory. However, this essay is based on a live presentation, and two 13-year-olds claim they understood clearly how various ethical theories imply non-violence. So I hope to reach a good number of people with these arguments, although those not interested in moral theory may skip this section. But fair warning: you would be missing some very interesting material!

Let us start with the three main types of rights theories. These views started out in the field of human rights but have also been extended into the realm of animal rights. Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, is known as “the father of rights.” Contemporary philosopher Julian Franklin applies Kant’s theory to animal rights. Kant prescribed that people, when trying to do the morally right thing, should only do what they can “universalize.” For example, a shopkeeper should not cheat a customer. If you universalized such dishonesty, that means you would approve of being cheated yourself. People do not accept that, and so it does not make sense to

universalize such a practice. It creates “a contradiction in the will,” as Kant put it. Well, then, who would universalize *violence*?



John Rawls is a neo-Kantian. In his classic, *A Theory of Justice*, he asks us to imagine that we are souls who are not yet born. What principles of justice would we formulate if we faced a “veil of ignorance” and do not know if we will be incarnated as “white” or “black,” rich or poor, male or female, intelligent or dim, strong or weak, and so on? Thus people in what Rawls labels “the original position” would enact principles

against racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and so forth. Mark Rowlands has extended this theory to animal rights because, he suggests, we might not know if we would be born human or of limited intelligence either. None of the negotiators of justice would wish to be subject to violence, we may presume.

Figure 18.

Immanuel Kant.

Alan Gewirth is yet another writer in the Kantian tradition. He rightly observes that everyone needs welfare and freedom in order to do anything at all. There is some truth to this observation. If someone is very sick or bound up in a strait jacket, what can they do? Gewirth thinks that everyone should want rights to welfare and freedom as a result. And due to what he calls *the principle of generic consistency*, this neo-Kantian states that *all* humans should have these rights. Evelyn B. Pluhar has applied this theory to animals, who equally need welfare and freedom. Yet if there is a strict duty not to harm beings in respect of their welfare and freedom, this is a form of non-violence.



chosen. This theory also comes in the form of rule utilitarianism: we should choose that set of rules which results in the most good and the least bad overall.

Utilitarians may think in terms of subtracting total pain from total pleasure. Consider for example these predicted possible futures:

1. 400 pleasure units - 200 pain units = 200 utility units
2. 350 pleasure units - 120 pain units = 230 utility units
3. 10,500 pleasure units - 10,260 pain units = 240 utility units

utility units

Utilitarians ostensibly hold a very different theory than individual rights. These theorists, with famous British founders Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, believe that we should aim for choices that have the maximum good and the minimum bad overall. Bentham famously penned of animals: “The question is not ‘Can they reason?’ nor, ‘Can they talk?’ but rather, ‘Can they suffer?’”

Often those following Bentham and Mill equate good with pleasure and bad with pain, for example. However, utilitarians do not think in terms of individuals as rights theorists do. No, utilitarians consider different futures, and add all of the pleasures and all of the pains together for each possible path. The one with the most pleasures and least pains should be

Therefore, even though Option 3. involves far more pain, it supposedly should be preferred because it has the most net utility. Animals too can *feel*.

Yet utilitarianism is sometimes used to justify omnivorism. R. G. Frey wrote an entire book arguing that the harms to humans of halting animal agriculture outweigh any harm to animals. In other words, omnivorism is thought to be the path with the most net utility. I will address this argument soon, but for now would like to show how utilitarianism of a sort can be used to justify non-violence just as the major rights theories.

Figure 19.

Jeremy Bentham.

Isn't man an amazing animal? He kills wildlife by the millions in order to protect his domestic animals and their feed. Then he kills domestic animals by the billions and eats them. This in turn kills [humans] by the millions, because eating all those animals leads to degenerative—and fatal—health conditions like heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer. So then man tortures and kills millions more animals to look for cures for these diseases. Elsewhere, millions of other human beings are being killed by hunger and malnutrition because food they could eat is being used to fatten domestic animals.

Meanwhile, some people are dying of sad laughter at the absurdity of [the human], who kills so easily and so violently, and once a year sends out cards praying for 'Peace on Earth.'

— C. David Coats

My doctoral supervisor, Wayne Sumner, is an indirect utilitarian. He believes that we should not aim for maximum net utility directly because we cannot really measure utility units and there is a chance that people will do risky things from acting in an ignorant or biased manner. Therefore the indirect utilitarians say that rather than aim for the most utility, we should *forget* about acting like utilitarians and go by common-sense morality: being trustworthy promise-makers, of virtuous

character, respecters of rights in Sumner's version, and loyal friends and loves. *That*, paradoxically, maximizes utility. Sumner denies rights to animals while asserting them for humans which I dispute elsewhere.²⁷ But assuming here, for the sake of argument, that we can apply indirect utilitarianism to animal rights too, then it is conceivable that utilitarianism can justify non-violence for all sentient beings.

We will return to the pro-omnivorous schools of utilitarian thought later. Utilitarianism is perhaps a treacherous path to walk, but most consequentialists are of the kinder, indirect form. That is not too surprising, since most Western thinkers support the politics of human rights.

Virtue ethics is another major type of ethical theory. It holds that we should promote positive character traits such as kindness, integrity, courage, and so on, while avoiding vices such as cruelty, hypocrisy, cowardice, and so forth. It can be argued that it is unkind or cruel to deprive others of the non-

violence that, as I argued earlier, we tend to demand for ourselves. This puts the lie, by the way, to those who say that they can make omnivorous violence "kind" or "humane." We generally do not consider violence to humans to be at all *humane*.

The feminist ethic of care has been attractive for people who are critical especially of rights theory and

utilitarianism. Advocates of the care ethic maintain that we should base our actions in caring, which can be understood as sympathy or empathy. It can be argued that it is only truly *caring* to be non-violent.

Then there are thinkers who are skeptical about the major ethical theories that we have been discussing. Skeptics doubt that any of these views could be fairly characterized as absolutely right or wrong. The problem is, we *do* need ethics to guide us in society. So how can we be skeptics and moral advocates at the same time?

America's solution to this problem is called *pragmatism*. Even if we cannot know moral absolutes, people still need principles of ethics that "work." One could argue that we also need moral codes that "work" for mentally disabled humans, and hence animals too. Well, violence does not "work" for *anybody* on the receiving end. Therefore perhaps even moral skepticism—with the help of pragmatism—can lead to non-violence as well.

Ironically, omnivorists often refuse to debate their critics. They carry on as if veganism is not the slightest bit respectable, or only for cranks. Yet

consider what we have demonstrated concerning the most well-respected moral theories in society:

- all apply to nonhuman sentient beings if we restrict against speciesism as surely as racism
- all readily result in non-violence
- non-violence in turn leads to veganism

For the animal shall not be measured by [humans]. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught up with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.

— *Henry Beston*

So it appears that it is the omnivorists, perhaps, who might not be so ethically respectable, that is, if needless violence is not respectable.

Three Pro-Omnivorist Philosophies: Utilitarianism, Ethical Nihilism, and Ethical Egoism

But perhaps we would be

premature to rule in favour of non-violent eating and living. Utilitarianism, again, we have seen sometimes claims that the harm to animals is outweighed by the benefits to humans. However, utilitarianism seems to have a key flaw. Many critics have pointed out that the theory does not seem to take individuals seriously. Thus the good of the many can outweigh that of the minority or the individual, resulting in dire consequences.

In my writing, I have noted that we can only ultimately act for sentient beings. Only sentient beings care if they are benefited or harmed. Mere things such as toasters and abstractions, most everyone presumes, do not care about anything. Thus all good and bad is significant to each and every sentient being *separately*.

Utilitarianism fails to capture this key insight, unlike non-violence. Non-violence demands that each moral agent exercise ahimsa towards each and every sentient being with whom they interact, as much as possible. So non-violent agents honour the fact that they act ultimately for sentient beings as wholes, the only intelligible option. Thus non-violence may seem to be in some sense inevitable.

However, utilitarianism fails to act for each and every sentient being as a whole, even though the latter seems appropriate due to the nature of reality. We have already seen that individuals can be treated violently on utilitarian reasoning if their utility is “outweighed.” Even though we cannot act ultimately for abstractions, that is precisely what the utilitarians seem to be doing or attempting. Instead of doing what is appropriate for each and every sentient being as a whole, the utilitarians act for “maximal utility,” or utility units. This fixation must be carried out *bar nothing*, including consideration of what is best for each sentient being. The view, then, is excessively centred on mere things, and fails to act ultimately for sentient beings in the way that *each* of us demands: non-violence. There are other critiques that I can offer, but this one—only briefly summarized here—seems damning.

Ethical nihilism is another moral philosophy that can be used to justify omnivorism. Essentially, the nihilists believe that we have “nothing” to guide us in terms of moral absolutes. Elsewhere I try to provide sufficient grounds for disagreeing with this idea.²⁸ Here we need only the admission of the pragmatists, discussed above, who say that we still need ethics for society. What “works.” And violence does not work for anyone as a recipient. We also need society’s ethics to be fair. We can still be unfair even if there are no moral absolutes. So non-violence must apply to everybody. Nihilists might object that their way allows the most “diversity.” We do not, however, honour **violence** as some wonderful addition to diversity.

Another, not very popular ethic is ethical egoism. It was started by British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, although the name “egoism” did not arrive till the twentieth century from the philosopher Max Stirner.

There is a certain genius to ethical egoism. It does not simplistically say that we should all be selfish. Rather, it observes that it is in everybody’s self-interest to agree to laws requiring citizens not to kill, maim, rape, rob, cheat each other, and so forth. If *everyone* agrees to such a “social contract,” then others will not do these nasty things to *oneself*. Essentially, we could characterize ethical egoism by noting that it is in every citizen’s self-interest to be non-violent towards others.

The problem with ethical egoism, or rather one of them, is that it seems to leave out nonhuman animals and the

mentally disabled from direct consideration. Perhaps rights could be extended to the latter since egoists never know if they are going to have a mentally disabled child or end up mentally disabled themselves. Still, as Evelyn Pluhar points out in her book, *Beyond Prejudice*, it is an absurd consequence of ethical egoism that we would not care about mentally disabled humans directly, but only because some “normal” humans would otherwise object. However, nonhuman sentient beings cannot return the favour if one is non-violent towards them. So they seem totally excluded from the non-violent “social contract” based in self-interest. Does that mean no non-violence for nonhumans at our meal-times?

Most people despise selfishness, and although ethical egoism goes far beyond simple selfishness, it is arguably still selfish. There does not seem to be any credible ground for holding that violence to oneself is “special” as ethical egoism seems to imply. Violence has very comparable consequences to every sentient being. It makes sense, in light of this reality, to be impartial, which ethical egoism is not. It is markedly partial towards ego, or perhaps groups favoured by ego. Saying “it’s me” does not give a reason to show why ego is special. And most egos are not special in *any* dramatic way. Therefore, ethical egoism seems to be without any plausible basis. If we respond to similar impacts similarly, we will directly respect *all* sentient beings, and not just one of them. Egoists manifest the vice of selfishness, sophisticated as they are, and also the irrationality of

arbitrary favoritism and discrimination associated with the oppressions we listed earlier.

So none of these “rogue” moral theories that purportedly justify violence towards animals by omnivorists is the least bit plausible upon closer inspection.

The Ruling Out of Violence-Benefits

If [humanity] is to survive,
we shall require a
substantially new manner
of thinking.

— *Albert Einstein*

In social interaction, if we apply the principle of non-violence that we demand for ourselves—and others if we have integrity enough to be equitable towards

them—then this has consequences. One of them is that we normally rule out **violence-benefits**.

Examples include:

- crimes which confer a possible benefit to criminals, including murder, rape, theft, perjury, and so forth
- exploiting wage slaves, producing hardship on the job and during off-times, when the inherent violations of poverty must be endured as well
- politicians with conflicts of interest, thus violating social equity
- robbing future generations of humans of resources through overconsumption
- fouling natural areas with pollution

- noxious experiments on humans without informed consent

If we are consistent, we will rule out animal agriculture too because violence-benefits are ill-gotten gains. Animal agriculture generally results in suffering and loss of life. However, we have discussed modern-day factory farming, which took hold post-World-War-II. It is now almost ubiquitous in many countries, and, we have seen, involves specialized forms of violence—*many* more than I have recounted, such as in the case of hogs, “beef” cattle, goats, rabbits, and so on.

Benefits from Ethical Omnivorism: Redundant at Best, Atrocious at Worst

I have already offered a refutation of utilitarianism, which is associated with “the end justifies the means” type of thinking. However, people persist in their prejudices. So let us consider whether the benefits of meat-eating somehow outweigh the cost, namely the violence. Such a weighing procedure would generally be speciesist, since perhaps most people would rule out violence-benefits in the case of humans—at least in theory. However, again, prejudices persist. Some people claim that the following benefits are associated with meat-eating:

- taste
- nutrition
- fitting in socially, say, using food-sharing rituals
- profits and jobs, e.g., raising animals, slaughter, transport, butchers, grocers
- contributing to the tax-base for government
- by-products from slaughter
- convenience or time-saving
- the opportunity to interact with animals by workers, and, say, at agricultural fairs
- moments of contentment for animals
- joys from fishing and hunting
- brain and tool development from our evolving as a species engaged in hunting

None of these benefits are needed, because vegan food can be delightfully tasty and nutritious, an occasion for socializing, profitable and taxable. Slaughterhouse by-products all have vegan analogues, and nowadays, vegan products in general are quite convenient. Many omnivorist interactions with animals are violent, whereas vegans can interact with rescue animals and those who live out their lives at sanctuaries. There are other joys for vegans than hunting and fishing. (Of course, violence-based joys are not respectable on a non-violence ethic. Such pleasures involve oppressive domination as well as cruel indifference to profound suffering.) And our brains and tools have developed well enough. War also has been a huge stimulus to technological innovation, but that does not mean that war is *desirable*. We can conclude that not only are all of these violence-benefits to be ruled out on a non-violence ethic, but they are needless anyway. And none of them would justify eating mentally disabled humans—that they are tasty, nutritious, profitable, and so on—whom we would also consume on such reasoning but for speciesist favoritism.

We can go even further than showing that all of the benefits of omnivorism

are unjust and redundant. Several benefits can be magnified for vegans. Many though not all vegans report that food for them is tastier because their taste buds seem more sensitive, and they sample foods from cultures with vegan-positive offerings such as Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Ethiopian, Middle-Eastern, Italian, and so forth. Vegans also get superior nutrition and health benefits, as we have already touched on. Food-sharing rituals are much more positive when there is greater health to toast, consciences that may be free of violence, and we are not being anti-social towards nonhuman animals too. After all, let us

Gandhi was once asked what he thought about Western civilization. He replied: "I think it would be a good idea."

consider the social from a non-speciesist perspective. Interactions with animals in vegan contexts are far less violent and joyless than in omnivorist contexts.

In sum: the benefits of meat-eating do not outweigh the harms. The benefits are overall inferior anyway, and also redundant.

Even utilitarians normally avoid redundant benefits if they result in violence—unless we are talking about gross speciesists. And the great health and environmental benefits of veganism additionally tip the scales quite a ways in the opposite direction of omnivorism.

Honey: Not So Sweet?

There are a number of non-violence considerations relevant to exploiting honey bees:

1. Bees produce honey for their food. When humans take it away, the bees must work harder. That is called *exploitation*.
2. When “gigantic” humans interact with bees, accidental killing and injury are quite common.
3. Bees are very aware and social creatures. Even if they are not killed or physically injured, they are all *disturbed* when humans interact with them, and these animals might perceive a threat.
4. When creatures are treated as slaves, that is inherently violent because it violates their freedom. The slaves end up spending most or all of their time serving the slave-master(s). According to the International Bee Research Association, “To produce a single jar of honey, foraging honey bees have to travel the equivalent of three times around the world.”²⁹
5. Often beekeepers use smoke or more commonly, caustic chemicals when interacting with hives so they do not get stung. This no doubt is noxious to these animals since it repels them.
6. Exploiters kill whole colonies, such as by blow-torching, if the latter acquire a bacterial infection. Like all factory farmed animals, human-controlled bees are much more



- subject to infectious diseases. But whole colonies are also slain to save feeding them over the winter.
7. When colonies are kept over the winter, the honey is often removed and replaced with sugar candy or syrup, which are cheaper although less healthy for the bees.
 8. Queen bees are often bred, killed, and replaced, have their wings clipped, and are artificially inseminated with sperm from crushed males.³⁰

Prejudices persist that insects are mindless, but they have eyes and so visual awareness. We must extend the benefit of the doubt that they have feelings-consciousness as well. Certainly they are motivated and I would say *evidently* feel peaceful or angry at different times. This is not anthropomorphic—projecting *human* traits onto nonhumans. It is more what I would call “sentientomorphic,” reflecting a *common* nature among sentient beings.

What about Sanctuary Eggs?

Taking milk from cows at sanctuaries to feed humans robs the calves. However, some animal rights people believe that there is nothing wrong with eating eggs that chickens lay in animal sanctuaries, which are not fertilized and would never

grow into birds. However, although there is no direct violence caused by such a decision, we must consider indirect and long-term factors too:

1. We should phase out keeping chickens as slaves for human benefit; starting a regular dependence on sanctuary eggs in the diet does not maximize such phasing out, but risks prolonging it, with eggs becoming increasingly rare and in demand in vegetarian societies; present-day practices create a precedent
2. This creates a conflict of interest in looking after the chickens; we avoid people in positions of power benefiting from the vulnerable such as teachers not having sex with students, and politicians not getting financial gains from their public life; unless we are speciesist we will avoid conflict of interest situations with these birds too; humans have proven to be grossly untrustworthy in protecting animals’ interests if people have anything to gain from the animals in question
3. It would be regarding animals as instruments for human use which is a conception that we



- need to discard because it leads to violence against animals
4. Eating or selling these eggs abandons a clear standard of veganism that we need to promote in society for the sake of billions of animals, and eating eggs sullies and neutralizes that standard
 5. Approval would allow fake sanctuaries to appear that really wish to market the eggs and use the sanctuary image as a cover
 6. The chickens cannot give their consent
 7. Non-interference that we should exercise with wild animals can and should be extended to domesticated animals too

Karen Davis of United Poultry Concerns offers the best solution, I believe, by feeding eggs that emerge on her sanctuary back to the birds who are in her care.

I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch and I will be heard.

— William Lloyd Garrison

veganism, and only redundant violence-benefits to omnivorism, many of which are of a degraded form anyway. The fact is, omnivorism is a lot worse than veganism, and the excuses only make omnivorism appear even worse in the end, although these pleas are originally intended as rather desperate bids to save face. Natural predators do not need any excuses, by contrast, because excuses only apply to moral agents. Besides, *needing* to eat animals to survive is unlike the case of humans, and we cannot truly use predatory violence as our model for human behaviour—no excuses there.

Excuse #1: Humans should always have priority.

Even if someone believes this, it is easy not to eat animals while attending to human

concerns. In fact, though, ignoring violence to animals is ignobly speciesist as we have seen.

Exposing Omnivorist Excuses

Objections to something such as veganism try to show that it is *worse* than something else, namely omnivorism. An **excuse**, in contrast to an objection, tries to show that what is worse—omnivorism in this case—is either equally good or in fact better—in this case, than veganism—and therefore omnivorism is desirable or at least acceptable. I am using excuses in this technical sense rather than in any pejorative capacity. For our analysis has shown many non-violent benefits to

Excuse #2: Animals cannot behave ethically towards us, so we owe them nothing morally speaking.

If so, then human moral incompetents have no right to non-violent treatment either. It would be speciesist to apply non-violence to these humans but not also to nonhuman animals.

Excuse #3: Humans are natural omnivores.

We cannot thus abdicate our moral responsibility. “Nature” permits all manner of crimes. And again, predators cannot be our moral heroes. It is also much healthier to be vegan, given human nature. We can leave nature in general much more robust and vital from an ecological perspective by adhering to a vegan diet.

Moreover, if we look at human anatomy, humans, who are technically omnivores, resemble herbivores far more than carnivores:

- we have short, soft fingernails and very tiny “canine” teeth in contrast to carnivores’ sharp, rending claws and large canine teeth for tearing flesh
- we move our jaws up and down but also side-to-side to grind fruits and vegetables with our back teeth using our molars, whereas carnivores have no molars and their jaws only move up and down in order to tear off chunks of flesh and eat them whole
- we have weak stomach acids compared to carnivores
- we have long intestinal tracts unlike carnivores, and digesting flesh creates risk of food poisoning and colon cancer in us but not so for the carnivores

- we lack the instinct to devour raw carcasses and we are not excited but innately sickened by the sight of blood, intestines and the like³¹

Excuse #4: What about plant rights?

First of all, non-violence matters because sentient beings “mind” when



treated violently. Most agree that plants are not sentient. But suppose for the sake of argument that plants *are* sentient. We do not

need to eat animals, although we do absolutely need to consume plants to survive. Most of us would choose to save ourselves over a piece of broccoli, although there is no such “dilemma” in the case of animals contemplated as food. And again, even if plants are sentient, vegetarians consume at least ten times fewer plants than meat-eaters.³² This is because as we have seen most crops are grown to feed livestock. All of those plants omnivorists are indirectly consuming.

Figure 22.

This, not atrocity images, is part of what animal rights looks like.

Excuse #5: Only saints are vegetarian.

In human terms, perfectly ordinary people are obliged to be non-violent. Only speciesists would not count this as a general duty towards nonhuman sentient beings as well.

Excuse #6: The animals never know anything better than being raised for slaughter.

This excuse does not vindicate child abuse, so animal abuse fails by the same reasoning. We know better than treating others violently even if animals are so deprivileged that more or less violent treatment is all they know.

Excuse #7: Animals are our property, to do with as we will.

Little more than racism rationalized slavery in the case of humans. Anti-speciesism would forbid this form of violence to autonomy in the case of nonhumans as well.

Animals cannot be property in the way that an inanimate object can be. Nothing matters to a glass, presumably, but plenty matters to animals independently and individually.

Excuse #8: But animals are mindless.

This is one of the weakest excuses in the history of human thought.

Nonhuman animals used for food have central nervous systems and brains in the vast majority of cases, and even mollusks show evidence of sentience. Fish are robustly conscious and sensitive to pain. Animals exhibit many feelings-associated behaviour such as avoiding, screaming, trembling, fleeing, and so forth. The theory of evolution also suggests that we would have much in

common with our evolutionary kin. Charles Darwin indicated that the minds of animals are not different in kind from human minds, but only in degree.

Take the example of a so-called “bird brain,” Betty the Crow. She had a bully of a cage-mate who monopolized the food. Betty took a

wire, bent the end, then took the other end in her beak and pulled the food bucket towards her. This happened more than once. It was widely reported in the Associated Press on August 8, 2002. It debunks the theories that animals are solely determined by genes, instincts, or environments.

Excuse #9: Humans have souls but nonhuman animals do not.

There are five replies to this. First, how can you show that *anyone* has a soul?

When I put food before him
my dog eats it; when I throw
the stick, he fetches it
Several times, I have tried
putting food before him and
throwing a stick at the same
time; each time he has sought
neither the food nor the stick
but stood looking at me.

— R. G. Frey

Second, if souls are essentially psyches, then animals have psyches too. Third, it is ethnocentric to deny animal souls when many cultures declare the opposite such as Jains, Hindus, and many aboriginal peoples. Fourth, Cardinal Bellarmine declares that if animals only have this one life, then we should be even *kinder* to them, because they cannot have other experiences to balance things out. Fifth, souls are no basis for a cosmopolitan ethic in societies which include agnostics and atheists.

Excuse #10: Vegans should not dictate their ways to others, but rather honour moral diversity.

First, I am not dictating behaviour to anyone but rather informing free choices. Second, speciesists violently *force* pigs to be beaten and electro-shocked through slaughterhouses—since they don't like to be told to move—so that humans can enjoy a passing sensation of tasting the hogs' carcasses. Third, any diversity beyond non-violence is *violence*. Why “honour” violence? Fourth, non-violence permits tremendous diversity so long as it is not significantly harmful.

Excuse #11: You are suggesting that I am a violent person, but I most certainly am not.

Someone is not a violent *person* if they do not set out to do violence, and are deceived about the nature of their actions, perhaps due to language. Some people will think they are “exercising human rights” in eating animals rather than being violent. It is possible to engage in violent *actions* and not be a violent *person* if one does not quite realize what one is doing.

Someone might also disagree with my definition of violence. It does not necessarily mean they do not care about the violation of sentient beings, so long as the latter is accounted for in another way. However, if someone knowingly embraces the violationist theory of violence, and recognizes the violations they are participating in, then that individual is at risk of being described as a violent person even in his or her own conscience. A violent person is paradigmatically someone who carries out violence. Perhaps a meat-eater is only someone who is *complicit* in violence rather than violent themselves. There is also *neglect* of violence that one is involved with. Money for animal products, too, is part of what occasions omnivorist violence. The latter would cease altogether without consumer participation. Hitting is a form of agency that results in violence, but so is neglect. Omnivorists are not *generally* violent, but regardless, they may look in the mirror and desire to become a better person by finally renouncing omnivorism. Now someone who not only denies my definition of violence, but does not care about the violation of sentient beings can be described as uncompassionate or oppressive, for violation qualifies in most peoples' minds as oppressive harm. After all, it includes emotional abuse, and that is standardly recognized among therapists as a legitimate problem because it is so harmful. If someone does not care about emotionally abusing animals, that is simply another instance of speciesism.

Excuse #12: The Bible suggests that it is acceptable to eat meat.

The Bible also states outright that eating on the mountains, coming near a menstruating woman, and engaging in usury is punishable by death. (Ezekiel 18:5-9) Clearly, we must use critical thinking before we accept what the Bible teaches.

We should not accept needless violence just because the Bible tells us to. It would be speciesist to accept violence to animals in the name of religion, contrary to the Golden Rule.

Excuse #13: But I like the taste of meat...

This is extreme speciesism. If someone uses as an excuse for violence that they enjoy it or its results, you are talking about a mind that needs help. This pleasure—a violence-benefit—does not count **at all** on non-violence ethics. And if one is a utilitarian, the enjoyment does not weigh as anything compared to the violence that the animals endure, including prematurely cutting off lives with all of the possible pleasures and comforts. Besides, it is readily possible to like or even to love a well-prepared vegan food or drink.

Many of these excuses are offered by people who are *in denial* about how positive veganism is and just how

negative omnivorism is. But I ask people to be open-minded: rational as well as compassionate.

Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do.

— *Bertrand Russell*

**Nuts and Bolts:
Practical
Considerations for
Going Vegan**

Each individual vegan does make a difference. If all of

the vegetarians in the world suddenly decided to become meat-eaters, the market could not even support the demand for some time.

You can order a free Vegetarian Starter Kit from People for the Ethical

Treatment of Animals on the following site:

<http://goveg.com/or der.asp>

Then there is the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM)

free Vegetarian Starter Kit (which emphasizes human health):

<http://www.pcrm.org/health/veginfo/vs k/>

PETA has vegan recipes at:

<http://vegcooking.com/>

You have a practically endless supply of great recipes. The following link is to my own favorite vegan recipes:

<http://davidsztybel/info23.html/recipes.html>

Use an accredited list of animal ingredients in order to avoid them in your foods and other consumer products:

<http://www.vegfamily.com/lists/animal-ingredients.htm>

Ensure that you are eating a healthy diet. Eat foods from the PCRM's new, vegan four food groups of fruit, legumes, whole grains, and vegetables:

http://www.pcrm.org/health/veginfo/vsk/food_groups.html

No, you do not need to fuss too much about nutrition. Yes, it is very easy to have a nutritious vegan diet contrary to popular myths.

You may have heard of concerns about vitamin B-12. Vegans need to make sure that they get enough vitamin B-12, because current ways of processing foods tend to eliminate the bacteria that generate B-12. That said, it is easy to get enough B-12 without special measures, and the human system requires only minute quantities of it that in fact are recycled over and over again. Soy beverages such as Silk include doses of B-12, and that suffices for me.

For those who wish to research vegan nutrition, an excellent book is Vesanto Melina and Brenda Davis, *Becoming Vegan: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Plant-Based Diet* (2004).

Here are some tips for vegan activism:

1. Request vegan items at your grocery store; you may just find these products suddenly appearing on the shelves
2. Support vegetarian restaurants inasmuch as your budget, time, and preferences permit; they at times go under due to lack of clientele
3. "Veganize" your cafeteria for your college, university or residence with a simple step-by-step procedure:
<http://www.peta2.com/college/cyc-veganize.asp>
4. One of the most effective forms of activism which groups such as the Toronto Animal Rights Society have successfully pioneered is showing videos of animal exploitation, such as PETA's 12-minute short film, *Meet Your Meat*, on the streets using portable televisions and leaflets, and then inviting people to regular vegan potlucks, each one featuring an educational video or guest speaker

Be a force for veganism and help spread non-violence to the world!

Conclusion: Eating and Living without Violence

We cannot choose but to be omnivores in the sense of what we *can* eat. We can choose to be herbivores in terms of what we *actually* eat. Regardless of the fact that scientists classify humans as omnivores, anyone can choose whether or not to be an omnivorist or a non-omnivorist—that is, a vegan.

Herbivorist is another term I would coin which refers to the *dietary vegan*, although we have noted that veganism

extends into a far more generally non-violent lifestyle. It can be objected that everyone has to be an ethical omnivorist because humans *are* omnivores. But that is confused thinking. Being an omnivore and an omnivorist are two different things. Again, we can choose *actually* to eat as herbivorists, even if we are obviously *capable* of nonvegan food choices too.

Non-violence and truth are inseparable and presuppose one another.

— Mohandas Gandhi

can see just how low people have sunk in mistreating fellow sentient beings.

I have sought to add to the animal ethics debate surrounding diet. In the course of doing so, I offer apparently original points that contribute to our discourse in both this essay, and its

sister paper, “Anti-Vivisection and Anti-Violence”:

I realize that some would think using the term “violence” in relation to the mistreatment of animals is too “scary” or “radical” for some people. Yet we need to be *truthful* about the violations that animals face. If violence is done to animals then people should be *accountable* for it.

Some people may shy away, but those people are also the least likely to *do* something on behalf of animals. There is nothing that more powerfully motivates a ready conscience, I believe, than shame over violence. This is therefore a stratagem on behalf of animals that should not be surrendered. Those who shy away may go to less truthful and more anti-animal sources. The latter will coddle speciesists into continued inaction. And everyone would agree that we are talking about violence if it were done to human animals. We should not encourage or even tolerate speciesist double-talk. It would be at the expense of the animals, and therefore a form of exploitation. Hiding the violence, or rendering it invisible, is one of the surest paths towards perpetuation. We need to keep the moral high ground, from which we

1. showing how veganism does not simply mean avoiding animal products
2. coining the terms “ethical omnivorism,” or “omnivorism” for short, and “herbivorism”
3. the violationist theory of violence, including the idea of (non-)violent comforts
4. the principle of non-violence approximation
5. redefining all of the forms of oppression in terms of violence, gross or subtle, using the violationist theory of violence
6. the term “violence-benefits,” and their being ruled out
7. the critique of Frey as a speciesist although some say that he is species-impartial
8. the basic argument for non-violence rooted in common-sense
9. the analysis of how the main moral theories all imply non-violence
10. my critiques of ethical egoism and utilitarianism
11. my defense of non-violence in response to nihilistic “diversity” celebration

12. my critique of the use of sanctuary eggs
13. countering accusations of anthropomorphism with findings of sentientomorphism
14. showing how omnivorism's benefits are unjust, redundant and inferior
15. my critique of lame objections to veganism as mere *excuses*

In a forthcoming book, I will add much more still to the ethics of non-violence, including with respect to analysis, critiques, and justification.

We all want a world in which everyone is non-violent towards us, and in all fairness we should be non-violent towards everyone else too.

If we pursue lines of eating and lifestyle that honour ahimsa, we will not have violence to that extent, and the fruits of those actions will be ahimsic goods.

By contrast, utilitarian and other rationalizations of omnivorism lead to extreme violence, and therefore only violence-benefits. If you are not a vegan, then to that extent it is very likely that you are engaged in violence. The good news is that everyone can **do** something about it. There can be very little doubt that to be anti-violence is to be anti-omnivorism.

Some people complain that veganism is too difficult.

However, it is no comparison to how hard speciesism is on farmed animals. Moreover, there is nothing harder than what is impossible. If one has sufficient moral and rational determination, one can make it psychologically impossible for oneself to be knowingly speciesist. No difficulty can compete with such determination.

For those who are reluctant, I cannot respond better than philosopher Peter Singer, who writes in response to those who have some anxiety over a change in diet:

People who have no experience of how satisfying an imaginative vegetarian diet can be may think of it as a major sacrifice. To this I can only say: "Try it!" Buy a good vegetarian cookbook...and you will find that being a vegetarian is no sacrifice at all.³³

I think that Singer is right. People who say they "cannot" give up animal products are deceiving themselves, only covering over the choices they are continuing to make so that they appear somehow "inevitable." ***We can always choose non-violence.***

[People] at some time are masters of their fates.

— William Shakespeare

All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good [people] to do nothing.

— Edmund Burke

One can make a nearly endless case about how positive veganism is. But only by trying it can one get a full dose of that positive energy. **Indeed, a study shows that over 95% of former meat-eaters report that a switch to a vegetarian diet increases their energy, vitality, and overall feelings of well-being.**³⁴ What about the other 5%? Well, this can easily be accounted for by the fact that some people might not feel better, but perhaps do not feel any *worse*. Also, there are those who irresponsibly adopt nutritionally inadequate diets and therefore might not enjoy as much health from their meals.

Consuming animal cadavers creates a conflict of interest in evaluating every possible use for animals. Dietary veganism alone prevents such conflict of interest. Omnivorism involves violence to human health, the environment, and never least of all, the animals, and provides only redundant violence-benefits. Omnivorism, therefore, could not possibly be best. Veganism, though, may fairly be described morally as part of the best possible diet. I could never go back to eating animal corpses—may the same prove to be true of you.

I have said there can be no good reason in favour of omnivorism. You are in highly distinguished company if you are still searching for such a reason. The world is still waiting for **any** one good reason pro omnivorism, that the best minds on what I believe to be the wrong side of the argument have not been able even to begin to supply. Each animal you are connected to through relations of indirect violence, however, cannot afford to wait

with the world. Their time is up each moment before the next act of violence.

There is every reason for choosing against omnivorism and in favour of affirming veganism.

Imagine a new world without avoidable violence to animals—human or other. It would contain much healthier people, enjoying life even into the sunset years. They would be at peace with their fellow creatures. Vegans are perhaps

more fully *Homo sapiens*, which means “wise human.” Humans without the burdens of omnivorism would relish their compassionate

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

— Mohandas Gandhi

living both in their peaceful consciences, but also in seeing the joys of rescued animals in peaceable homes and sanctuaries. Envisage recovering forests, oceans, and our very atmosphere and you will have a glimpse of some of the wonders that await a non-violent, vegan world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Stephen Kaufman for his helpful feedback, which significantly improved this paper. Paul York and Adam Wilson were also very helpful. I also appreciate the editorial assistance of my wonderful wife, Cassandra Prince, and my dear mother, Doris Szytybel.

The author, David Sztybel, Ph.D., is an animal ethics philosopher who has published numerous articles, and lectured at Queen's University, University of Toronto, and Brock University.

See: davidsztybel.info
D.S.
Toronto, Canada
September/October, 2011

Notes

- ¹ Tom Regan, *The Struggle for Animal Rights* (Clarks Summit: International Society for Animal Rights, Inc., 1987), p. 65.
- ² Eric Marcus, *Meat Market: Animals, Ethics, and Money* (Ithaca: Brio Press, 2005), p. 83.
- ³ American Dietetic Association, "Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dieticians of Canada: Vegetarian Diets." *ADA Reports* 103 (June 2003): 748-765.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Jen Wrye, "Should I Eat Meat? Vegetarianism and Dietary Choice," in Fritz Allhoff and Dave Monroe (eds.), *Food and Philosophy: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007): 45-57; 51.
- ⁷ Tom Regan, Preface, *Dead Meat* by Sue Coe (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), p. 3.
- ⁸ Jeremy Rifkin, *Beyond Beef: the Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture* (New York: Dutton, 1992), p. 163.
- ⁹ Michael Allen Fox, *Deep Vegetarianism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), p. 40.
- ¹⁰ Mark Rowlands, *Animals Like Us* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 116.
- ¹¹ David Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 4 (1) (2006): 28. Quoted with minor modifications.
- ¹² This last figure was gathered from Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980).
- ¹³ Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," pp. 5-6.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247. Drawn from *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.
- ¹⁵ Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine fact sheet, 2009.
- ¹⁶ 2006 report by the United Nations. The World Watch Institute estimates carbon contributions as being much higher at 51%, which some believe is a bit too high an estimate.
- ¹⁷ Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 373.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 367.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 357.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 358.
- ²³ An estimate used by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals website, 2010. Interestingly, I heard a study reported that people trust PETA's information more than animal industry

statements, or even government assertions that are often blatantly biased to be pro-industry. The public is not always so naïve as is commonly assumed.

²⁴ David Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 4 (1) (2006): 1-37; 2.

²⁵ Adolph Hitler, *The Nazi Primer: Official Handbook for Schooling the Hitler Youth*, trans. Harwood Childs (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938), pp. 6-7.

²⁶ My basic theory in this essay is a normative ethic built on the non-violence we all want. A meta-ethical case for non-violence awaits to be revealed in a forthcoming book.

²⁷ David Sztybel, "Animal Rights: Autonomy and Redundancy," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 14 (3) (2001): 259-273.

²⁸ In a forthcoming book on ethics.

²⁹ FAQ of the International Bee Research Association, retrieved October 17, 2011 from: <http://www.ibra.org.uk/categories.faq>.

³⁰ The Vegan Society, "Honey Ain't So Sweet for the Bees" Retrieved October 17, 2011 from: http://vegansociety.com/uploadedFiles/User_Hubpages/Education/Education_Resources/Honey.pdf.

³¹ PETA website, October 2011.

³² Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 1st ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 249.

³³ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1990), p. 171.

³⁴ Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 163.