

Veganism vs. Violence

— Abridged Version —

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

— Norman Cousins

Introduction

Everyone would agree that people can be violent to dogs and cats. Well, it is also possible to be violent towards animals raised for food. If we raised humans for food, even if we tried to make that as “humane” as possible, it would definitely be considered violence. So in all fairness, the exact same sort of treatments of nonhuman animals should also be considered violent.

Slaughterhouses are unparalleled places of multifarious screaming, kicking from both humans and others, horror, terror, blood, and guts.

This informal paper will defend the idea that there is no good reason in favour of animal agriculture, but every reason in favour of non-violence.



Veganism versus Omnivorism

The word **vegan** was coined in 1944 by Donald Watson. He was not satisfied with the word **vegetarian**, which had been around since 1837. He wanted a term that described people who abstain from all animal products, including dairy, eggs, ocean creatures, honey, and animal-based

additives to foods and drugs for example.

Veganism has been expanded to include a non-violent lifestyle in general, extending to avoiding fur and leather, animal circuses, zoos, and medical

experiments on animals too. This paper though will focus on diet.

The opposite of vegan is captured by a

If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities.

— Voltaire

Figure 1.

A liberated cow.

word I will coin: **omnivore**. An omnivore argues that eating both plants and animals is morally desirable or at least acceptable.

We are talking about a huge phenomenon here.

Over 97% of animals killed by humans are made into foods.¹ According to many sources, there are more than 50 billion animals killed each year for eating in the U.S. alone. 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

About 2.5% of the U.S. population is vegetarian, which is about 4.5 million people² and about 4% of Canadians or 900,000

individuals.³ Philosopher Tom Regan estimates

that more than half of the world population is vegetarian.⁴ Jeremy Rifkin writes: "two out of every three human beings on the planet consume a primarily vegetarian diet."⁵

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*

A Brief History of Non-Violence

The principle of non-violence originated

from a religion called Jainism in India. The monks are not only vegetarian, but some sweep the path before them so that they do not step on tiny creatures, and some wear masks so they do not inhale micro-organisms. The Jains refer to non-violence as *ahimsa*.

The Jains also opposed animal sacrifice by Hindus, and abstained from being fishers or trappers. Jain animal sanctuaries are commonplace in India.

Interestingly, many Jains believe that it is morally acceptable to use physical force in defence, including in wars. Exactly how such an approach 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.



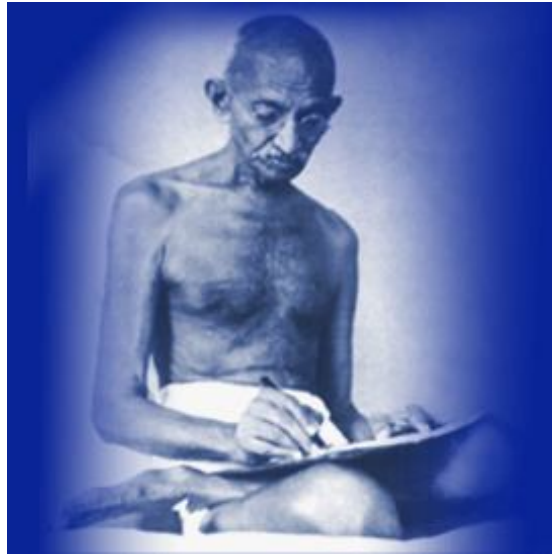
The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

— *Mohandas Gandhi*

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.

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. Of course one can embrace non-violence without subscribing to Jainism. However, historically, the Jains deserve credit for this idea.



reasons stemming from his family’s Hindu practices. When Gandhi was training to be a lawyer in England, however, he met Henry S. Salt, the early animal rights thinker. Salt convinced Gandhi to become an *ethical* vegetarian for the first time.

As an ethical vegetarian, Gandhi famously wrote: “To my mind, the life of a

lamb is no less precious than that of a human being.” He became revered by millions and was given the honorary title, *Mahatma*, which means “great soul.” Again, he was a Hindu, but was happy to borrow *ahimsa* from the Jains.



Another key proponent of non-violence is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who led the struggle for rights for blacks in the United States.

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.

In the modern day, ahimsa or non-violence has been most famously championed by Mohandas Gandhi, who led India to become independent of the British Empire. His means were non-violent forms of protest. Gandhi himself was originally a vegetarian for ritual

Figure 3. Top.

Mohandas Gandhi

Figure 4. Bottom.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

What Is Violence?

People will disagree on this matter. Even the dictionary emphasizes the physical nature of violence, although quite clearly emotional abuse, which is psychological, also may be considered violent. Dictionaries also stress great force, but would it not be violent to erase a life, while the victim is sleeping, even with a painless gas?

The word **violence** is probably related to **violate**.

Linguists are not sure. However, I am in any case 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. A sentient being is basically an entity with feelings and desires, who cares about what happens to him or her. 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 cared for on a non-violence ethic.

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 ethics.

There may be some situations which call for what I call non-violent 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.⁶ 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.

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,

Figure 5.

Animals are vulnerable to human violence.

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.



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

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.⁷

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:



veterinary costs), and transporting and killing them forcefully and hurriedly (because workers are paid by the hour and meat is sold by the pound).⁸

Figure 6. Top.

A chick being “de-beaked”.

Figure 7. Bottom.

Food on factory farms may include waxed cardboard containers, poultry manure and feathers, cement dust for up to 30% weight gain,⁹ 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 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 newspaper such as *The New York Times*. 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.



Figure 8. Top.

A so-called “veal” calf.

Figure 9. Bottom.

Cattle beng shipped to slaughter.

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 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.¹⁰ For any human in a like situation would be faring ill.

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*



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.¹¹ And according to the group, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, people who eat animal products have 40% more cancer.¹² 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%.¹³ 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 humans¹⁴ such as from the filth from factory farms commonly seeping into groundwater, lakes, and streams
- animal agriculture uses more than half of our fresh water¹⁵
- we could save 30% of all raw resources by not indulging in omnivorist habits¹⁶
- 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 1987.¹⁷ It takes 500 years for nature to make an inch of topsoil.¹⁸ An estimated 85% of topsoil loss is attributable to raising animals for food¹⁹
- omnivorism, all told, doubles fossil fuels consumption as compared to veganism²⁰

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 breathtaking movie *Avatar*.

Figure 11. Top.

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

Figure 12. Top.

A boy with Down's Syndrome.

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

Figure 13. Top.

R. G. Frey.

Figure 14. Bottom.

Hartheim Castle.



- 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 not 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.²¹ 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...²²

Here Hitler condemns the mentally disabled to death. Indeed, last page has a picture of Hartheim Castle. During the



Third Reich, some 69,000 mentally disabled humans were murdered there.

The killings there were stopped due to protests in Germany. Who

else will decry the comparable violence done to the nonhuman animals who supposedly lack “mental richness” according to Frey? 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 is applicable in both

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

— *Albert Einstein*

cases. Why do we accept ableism as wrong when applied to humans but acceptable when applied to 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 than defence itself. But no speciesist has come up with a brilliant alternative justification of violence in the case of eating dead animals. 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.

In the full-length version of this paper, I go on to show how the most major moral theories in the Western world seem to support the principle of non-violence as well.

The Ruling Out of Violence-Benefits

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

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

— Joseph Joubert

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

Let us consider the sort of thinking that “the end justifies the means.” That is, some people think that the benefits of

omnivorism outweigh all the harms to the animals. To be clear, these benefits would not count at all on non-violence ethics. But people persist in their prejudices, so let’s consider this weighing of benefits versus harms on its own terms.

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 omnivore 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*.

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

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 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. 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.”²³
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.²⁴

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.

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

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

pejorative capacity. For our analysis has shown many non-violent benefits to 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.

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 like²⁵



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.²⁶ This is because as we have seen most crops are grown to feed livestock. All of those plants omnivorists are indirectly consuming.

Figure 18.

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.

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

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

— Bertrand Russell

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? 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 including 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,

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.

— Margaret Mead

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.

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

— William Shakespeare

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 with reference to the Bible.

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.

Nuts and Bolts: Practical Considerations for Going Vegan

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

— Mohandas Gandhi

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/order.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/vsk/>

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).

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

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

— Edmund Burke

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.

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

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, 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.²⁷

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.***

One can make a nearly endless case

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

— Mohandas Gandhi

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.**²⁸ 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.

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 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.

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*The author, David Szybel, 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: davidszybel.info*

*D.S.
Toronto, Canada
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Notes

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⁴ Tom Regan, Preface, *Dead Meat* by Sue Coe (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995), p. 3.

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⁸ David Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 4 (1) (2006): 28. Quoted with minor modifications.

⁹ This last figure was gathered from Jim Mason and Peter Singer, *Animal Factories* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980).

¹⁰ Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," pp. 5-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247. Drawn from *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

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¹⁴ Robbins, *Diet for a New America*, p. 373.

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¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ David Sztybel, "The Rights of Animal Persons," *Animal Liberation Philosophy and Policy Journal* 4 (1) (2006): 1-37; 2.

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