A FEW YEARS AGO, I read Tom Regan’s *Case for Animal Rights* (1983). His arguments convinced me to become a vegetarian, and I was able to convince my husband to adopt this diet as well. But I was less sure about whether my ten-year-old daughter should adopt it. I was especially concerned about whether to omit milk.¹ At about the same time, a nutrition colleague asked me to team-teach a course on animal rights. In the unit on ethical vegetarianism, he presented basic nutritional information and expressed concerns about vegan diets for infants, children, adolescents, and women. Vegans omit all meat, fish, and animal products such as milk and eggs (in contrast, most vegetarians include some milk, eggs, and/or fish).²

Because my doctoral training was in genetics as well as ethical theory, I felt capable of researching the scientific studies in nutrition myself.

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¹ At this time we omit meat and eggs but not fish, milk, and cheese. My daughter is now sixteen, and her diet is unrestricted.

² The *Berkeley Wellness Letter* (University of California 1993) classifies vegetarians as follows: *lactovegetarians*—those who include dairy products in their diets; *ovo-vegetarians*—those who include eggs; *lacto-ovo-vegetarians*—those who eat dairy products and eggs, but no fish or animal flesh; *pescovegetarians*—those who eat dairy products, eggs, and fish; *semi-vegetarians*—those who eat dairy products and eggs, as well as a little fish and chicken, but no red meat.

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Aware of how often the mass media distorts information about nutrition, I sought out original research sources. Over the last three years, I have come to see the deep male biases of the traditional arguments for ethical vegetarianism. While it is touted as an ideal lifestyle choice, ethical vegetarianism actually discriminates against women, infants, children, adolescents, some of the elderly, other races and ethnicities, and those living in other cultures. In this article, I will tell you why choosing a vegetarian diet for the sake of animals or as a feminist ideal is much more complicated than many ethical vegetarians might have expected.

Of particular concern to me is the apparent link between feminist ethics and moral concern for animals. Is this a necessary link? Is ethical vegetarianism an eminently feminist ideal? A historical link has certainly existed between feminism and vegetarianism. Josephine Donovan has chronicled the calls of early feminists for an end to meat eating (1990). Many early and modern feminists are, laudably, sensitive to the sufferings of animals. For example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman envisions a vegetarian society in her utopian Herland ([1915] 1992), and Margaret Fuller opposes the slaughter of animals for food in Woman of the Nineteenth Century ([1845] 1971).3 Apparently, a psychological link exists as well between feminism and vegetarianism: ecofeminists charge that the denial of basic rights or moral standing to women and to animals arises from similar motivations for domination (Warren 1990).4 Carol Adams has exposed a Western cultural link between meat eating and strength by showing a mythical association of masculinity with bellicosity and the supposed “need” men have to eat meat (1990). In contrast, vegetable eating is associated with “femininity” and weakness (Adams 1990).5 Adams also claims that these cultural and psychological links make vegetarianism necessary to both feminism and ecofeminism (1991).

Ideals underlie many of our psychological motivations, and history and culture can be changed by the ideals we adopt. So, having the right ideals and knowing why we believe them to be right is paramount. The historical, cultural, and psychological links that feminists have made with vegetarianism have not been developed as a well-integrated feminist ethical ideal. Nevertheless, compelling arguments for ethical vegetarianism

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3 Donovan 1990 gives an extensive bibliography of the women writers who advocate either vegetarianism or animal welfare reform.

4 Ecofeminists have, in particular, emphasized this argument. In Karen Warren’s words, “What all ecofeminists agree about, then, is the way in which the logic of domination has functioned historically within patriarchy to sustain and justify the twin dominations of women and nature” (1990, 131). Carol Adams makes this specific with respect to animals, women, and domination (1991, 126–29).

5 The justifications for moral concern for animals are not made explicit in Adams 1990 or Donovan 1990, presumably because these writings have other purposes. Adams, e.g., begins from the assumption that animals are of moral concern; she presents no systematic defense for this position.

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have been made in the past few years, most notably by Tom Regan (1983) and Peter Singer (1975). Such arguments draw on traditional Western moral theory, which many ethicists argue is the systematic basis of our morality and our laws. I argue, however, that these traditional arguments for ethical vegetarianism cannot be assimilated into a feminist ethic.\textsuperscript{6} Correlatively, limited consumption of animal products and, in some cases, meat is consistent with a feminist ethic. Further, unless better arguments can be found, ethical vegetarianism is at odds with feminism. At the same time I continue to affirm that we have moral obligations to animals and that killing or harming any animal is an evil and is often wrong. I emphatically object to the intensive “factory farming” of food animals, such as the use of gestation stalls, battery poultry production, and feedlot finishing.\textsuperscript{7} In part, this article is an attempt to make consistent sense of my own beliefs about feminism, ethical vegetarianism, obligations to animals, and the conflicting responsibilities that accepting these beliefs entails. I hope that the article will assist the reader in the same quest.

The conflicts I experience are partially generated by the reasons ordinarily given to accept vegetarianism as a moral requirement (as opposed to, say, a health recommendation or a personal preference). These reasons appear in both feminist literature and the philosophical literature on animal rights and welfare. Animals can suffer pain and maltreatment, and the human need for their products and flesh tends to make them into mere objects for our use. As a feminist I empathize with these animals as objects of domination; as a student of moral philosophy, I see the “commonsense” appeal of the traditional theoretical arguments that back up my feminist convictions; as a scientist, I have come to see the contradictions between feminism and the rights and welfare of animals. I argue that (1) traditional moral arguments for ethical vegetarianism, and particularly ethical veganism, contain a contradiction because a male physiological norm is assumed; this norm builds in moral partiality for males; thus, these arguments are internally inconsistent and violate their own principles of impartiality and universality; (2) women and large numbers of other people are granted routine exceptions from achieving the ideal, but as exceptions they are relegated to a moral underclass of beings who cannot be completely moral; so, the logic of domination is imbedded in Western moral theory itself and, by inference, into ethical vegetarianism;

\textsuperscript{6} I do not make the stronger claim that these arguments fail to show that animals have rights or are members of the moral community.

\textsuperscript{7} For an overview of objections to such practices, see Harrison 1964 and Mason and Singer 1980. I do not argue for the status quo in animal production or for the presently excessive consumption of meat and animal products. My arguments turn only on the undisputed fact that nutritional needs differ between women and men and vary with stages of life, circumstances, and other factors beyond the control of the individual.
(3) ethical vegetarianism is the product of a dualistic value system given to abuse of power and privilege and preferring dominance over others; such abuse is evidence of its arbitrariness and bias toward those in power; and (4) ethical vegetarianism is the product of a wealthy society and carries intractable class bias against poorer or "less developed" societies. The conclusion that vegetarianism is not consistent with a feminist ethics follows from the premises above and two foundational assumptions. First, no ethics can admit of arbitrariness in its prescriptions and theories. Second, any specifically feminist ethic must affirm the general goodness of the female body. Whatever else a feminist ethics is or will be, I claim, then, that it must reject requiring women to live as if physiologically identical to men and assigning arbitrary moral burdens and/or benefits to women or other persons based on factors that cannot be changed by human choice. More controversially, I also assume that any feminist ethic will in some way incorporate a recognizable version of the equal worth of differently situated individuals, whether human or animal.8

Moral arguments for ethical vegetarianism based in traditional moral theory

Utilitarianism and rights

Most Western writers who offer a systematic and nonarbitrary defense of ethical vegetarianism have used either utilitarian theory (e.g., Singer 1975) or rights theory (e.g., Rollin 1981; Regan 1983). Although there are several other approaches in this moral tradition, these two theories have dominated recent philosophical discussion in ethics and are widely held to be incommensurable.9

Historically, Jeremy Bentham was the first utilitarian; he claimed that the sufferings of animals must be considered in moral decision making (1789). His comment was not taken seriously in his time and was even

8 Other requirements of ethics and/or of a feminist ethic may exist that are not enumerated here. The question of the meaning of equality in the face of obvious differences among persons has been a recent topic of feminist research; for an overview see Jaggar 1990. Minow 1990 reviews legal issues; see also Scott 1988. Feminist standpoint epistemologies are also relevant to the position I hold; see Harding 1991, sec. 2. Also, Curtin 1991 has recently argued that the notion of "animal rights" is inconsistent with the ecofeminist position, although his reasons differ substantially from my argument.

9 Other important Western approaches include Christian theological ethics and virtue ethics. Many philosophers think that these can be subsumed into either rights or utilitarian theory. A theological defense of animal rights is offered by Linzey 1987; nonsystematic defenses of the moral considerability of animals that draw from virtue ethics include Midgley 1983 and Sапонтис 1987. On the incommensurability of utilitarianism with deontological and rights theories, see Smart and Williams 1973. Other philosophical defenses of animals range into thousands of articles and books over the last twenty years.
derided tangentially by John Stuart Mill sixty years later. In the early rights tradition, Immanuel Kant specifically argued against the inclusion of animals in the moral community and held that only rational agents can be of concern to us (1780: 1963). Recently though, both theories have been extended to include animals. In Animal Liberation, Singer revives Bentham’s dictum that what matters for morality is not whether a being can reason but whether it can suffer (1975). A consistent utilitarian must include animal welfare interests in the overall calculation of the greatest good. In The Case for Animal Rights, Regan shows why Kant’s criterion of rational agency fails as a necessary ground for having rights: many “marginal case” humans (infants, retarded persons, the senile) lack rational agency, and yet we would surely agree that they have rights (1983, 151–56, 260–62). Regan argues that being the “subject-of-a-life” is the relevant criterion. Being a “subject” means having a range of intelligence and sensitivity (to pain, suffering, and other psychological experiences) such that we can say it matters to the being itself what is done to it. Humans and animals alike have interests in not being harmed, killed, or having their important preferences frustrated. They have a good of their own and thus have “inherent value.” Inherent value is contrasted with the “instrumental value” that tools and other mere objects have. So, we should regard other people and animals who are subjects-of-a-life not merely as tools for our use but as good in themselves (1983, 243–48).

10 In chap. 17 of the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789), Bentham wrote: “The day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. The French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the os sacrum are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a moral conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason? Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?” (quoted in Singer 1975, 7–8). In his essay Utilitarianism, Mill takes a shot at Bentham with the following lines: “Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast’s pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool... It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question” (1861: 1979, 10).

11 Kant argued that “so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as means to an end. That end is man” (1780: 1983, 239). Thus, they are not worthy of respect for their own sake. We do have “indirect duties” to them, however, given that we have duties to humans. Persons who are cruel to animals, Kant thought, might also be cruel to humans; thus, for the sake of the humans, we should be kind to animals. Few, if any, Kantians would rely on this argument now.
George SHOULD FEMINISTS BE VEGETARIANS?

It is especially important to see that Singer and Regan agree that animals share with us a degree of intelligence and sensitivity and that they therefore have "welfare interests."12 Their having these interests and capacities makes animals as well as humans members of the moral community. For Regan, this means the members have rights. Some rights are, by tradition at least, very stringently protected, although they are almost never absolute or exceptionless.13 They are held equally by all members.14 The most important rights are those to life, security, and freedom from harm. Justifications for waiver or override of these rights are limited: concerning the right to life, persons guilty of some crime may be punished or even executed. Killing in self-defense usually is permitted, but the burden of proof falls heavily on the defender. These limitations protect the innocent against punishment for crimes and offenses which she or he did not commit. Waiver and override requirements are especially stringent when the other has no guilty intent—something that animals cannot have. Self-defense also implies some clear danger that justifies the defender's action. Thus, animal rights are meant to protect nonhuman animals from arbitrary harm and killing: because animals have rights, it is wrong to confine them and exploit them for our pleasure, convenience, or economic good.

Singer's utilitarian method would allow some animals and/or humans to be killed for the greater good, but he argues for ethical vegetarianism

12 The general focus on interests, rather than on relationships and persons in contexts, is itself objectionable to many writers in feminists ethics. Carol Gilligan has illuminated a different moral development for women, in which relationships among persons are the focus of ethical concern (1982). In contrast, males have been taught to focus on abstract rules or rights. Rights are explicated in terms of interests, which are abstract and tend to decontextualize the ethical concerns of the people involved. Plumwood briefly reviews the objections to focusing on interests and connects this focus to instrumentalism and division of the self (1991, esp. 18–22). In addition, the whole problem delineated in this article can be seen as an example of a standpoint epistemology used as a foundation for an ethics that does not have relevance for those outside the standpoint—even though its proponents mistakenly took their knowledge claims to be true from every standpoint (see Harding 1991). Within traditional moral theory, interests have been a topic of much discussion. For Regan, "welfare-interests" are those things that are good for an individual regardless of whether the being knows or desires these things—e.g., life, health, security. Regan distinguishes these from "preference-interests," which may interest the being but may or may not contribute to or be necessary for well-being (1983, 87–88).

13 For a discussion of whether rights can be thought to be absolute, see Vlastos 1962 and Feinberg 1973.

14 The principle of equality is a separate principle attached to rights theory, which all major rights thinkers have argued for. See Vlastos 1962 and Feinberg 1973 for basic discussions; see also Rawls 1971. We might suppose that some beings are superior to others or have more rights or different rights, but as Regan 1983 points out, what morally relevant difference can be cited? Higher intelligence is often cited; but, even if animals are less intelligent than humans, this merely gives humans more power, not more worth.
on the grounds that we have no real need (and so no welfare interest) for meat or animal products (1975). Our predilections for them are merely matters of taste. These latter interests are of lesser value and cannot outweigh animals’ welfare interest in life and freedom from the confinement practices used to produce their products. Regan also argues for ethical vegetarianism, but justifies his position by citing the animals’ rights to life and freedom from harm coupled with the claim that humans can live well without their flesh and other products (1983). Both thinkers argue that we should actively oppose the raising of farm animals for meat and the current methods of milk and egg production.

Species equality and feminist ethics

Regan and Singer offer virtually the same reasons for including animals in the moral sphere—that they have morally relevant welfare interests. Their differing theoretical approaches commit them to different assessments of the moral value of interests and to different methods for deciding whether specific actions and outcomes are right or wrong. But the question, “Who counts?” is conceptually distinct from and prior to how one is to be counted—at least, within these traditions. It is an open question whether this distinction would remain in a feminist or other account yet to be articulated.

The question, “Who counts?” arises in a post-Darwinian world. James Rachels has recently presented an in-depth analysis of the impact of evolutionary theory on traditional ethics (1990). Before Darwin, it was possible to think that humans were ontologically distinct from animals, but Darwinian theory shows that differences among humans and other animals are in degree rather than in kind. Whereas the Cartesians claimed that animals felt no pain and were simply machines without souls, language, reason, or sensitivity, no sensible person can hold that view now. For an in-depth analysis of the burial of animal consciousness by the Cartesians and nineteenth-century behaviorists, see Rollin 1989.

The question today is not so much whether animals count but, rather, how much they count. Should we consider their interests as equal to ours? What would that equality or inequality mean for us and for them?

The idea of species equality is foundational to all arguments for the rights, welfare, and liberation of animals. It is similar to the seed and root of movements for the sexual equality of women, the racial and/or ethnic equality of people of color, or social and political equality of any oppressed people. Singer specifically uses these analogies, arguing that failure to regard animals as full members of the moral community is “speciesism” and is wrong in the same way that racism and sexism are wrong (1975, 7). Both utilitarians and rights advocates accept similar notions of what it is to be...
species equals, and they apparently assume that no conflict exists between species equality and sexual, racial, and ethnic equality.\textsuperscript{17}

This assumption is false. Its falsity has implications not only for our moral relationship with animals but also for our moral relationships with our fellow humans. Recent discussions in feminism concern "the tension between the ideal of sexual equality and the apparent reality of sexual difference" (Jaggar 1990, 239). Traditional moral theory extols an ideal human nature that is heavily rationalistic and commands indifference to physiological differences between persons. Initially, it was just this rationalistic emphasis and indifference to physical differences that permitted arguments for the equality of women. Until quite recently, having reason was the only defining characteristic for being an equal. Early feminists pressed for the rights of women on the grounds that women can reason just as well as men; thus, they should have all of the same privileges (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1988; Mill 1869). In this moral tradition these physiological differences between women and men are regarded as irrelevant to membership in the moral community, that is, to having rights or being counted in the utilitarian calculus. Indifference implies the interchangeability of persons for purposes of moral decision making. All major philosophical texts concerning the moral considerability of animals specifically call for such indifference,\textsuperscript{18} and it was, until recently, the uncritically accepted centerpiece of the struggle for sexual equality. But the differences between the sexes matter: "The sex-blind interpretation of sexual equality rests on an assumption that existing differences between women have relatively little social significance. . . . [But] it ignores the extent to which sex and gender affect every aspect of everyone's life" (Jaggar 1990, 245).

This is not to say that gender is a matter of biology; gender is a social construct. But even though gender is not reducible to physiological differences, general differences exist between the bodies of men and women. The physiology of women makes pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing an infant possible; important—and morally relevant—differences in social situation may and often do arise for women that do not arise for men. The question of how to find an ethic that is responsive to differences but that also respects individuals as equals is perhaps the major task of ethics today. Ethics must not permit arbitrariness—that is

\textsuperscript{17} Although ethical theorists have argued about the implications that utilitarianism requires the sacrifice of innocents and cannot adequately treat individuals as equals, utilitarians almost always specifically deny these charges. Much utilitarian scholarship has been devoted to modifying the theoretical method to account for the common notion of persons as inviolable, deserving of moral respect, and not to be sacrificed to the whims of society. Rule-utilitarianism was one such modification, now thought to be unsuccessful (see Scheffler 1988).

\textsuperscript{18} In addition to Singer 1975 and Regan 1983, see, e.g., Salt (1892) 1980; Rollin 1981; Linzey 1987; Sapontzis 1987; and Rachels 1990.
the mark of tyranny. A uniquely feminist ethic could not arbitrarily re-
quire women to be physiologically identical to men and would reject the
assignment of arbitrary moral burdens or benefits to women from which
men are exempt. As mentioned earlier, too, I believe that a feminist ethic
must also incorporate a recognizable version of the equal worth of all
differently situated individuals—whether human or animal.

The foregoing notion of equality as indifference to "irrelevant" dif-
ferences is presupposed by the traditional theoretical arguments for ethi-
cal vegetarianism. The arguments pick out as relevant the capacities for
sensitivity to pain and sufficient intelligence so that suffering can matter
to the being. These features about animals and the supposed fact that few
humans need meat or animal products for health or survival, coupled
with the value claim that we ought to reduce suffering or respect rights,
produce a moral rule requiring vegetarianism.

Internal inconsistency in traditional moral arguments for ethical
vegetarianism

Impartiality, universality, and exceptions to a rule

Singer, Regan, and virtually all other philosophers defending the
moral status of animals claim animals are our equals and that we may not
kill them for food. We may not use their products unless we could assure
that these products are obtained under painless conditions. Singer's utili-
tarian position would permit these consumptions for persons who have a
strong welfare interest (say, for reasons of ill health), but these would be
exceptional cases (1975).19 Similarly, Regan's rights position allows cer-
tain persons to consume meat as exceptional cases based on what he dubs
the Liberty Principle: "Provided that all those involved are treated with
respect, and assuming that no special considerations obtain, any innocent
individual has the right to act to avoid being made worse-off even if doing
so harms other innocents" (1983, 331). Being made to starve or suffer a
significant decline in health and vigor would make us worse-off, and
Regan accedes that if any humans have a strong welfare interest in con-
suming meat or animal products, this would excuse them from a duty to
be vegetarians. But Regan clearly thinks most persons do not fall into
such a category. He briefly discusses protein complementation and then
dismisses the argument from nutrition: "Certain amino acids are essen-
tial for our health. Meat isn't. We cannot, therefore, defend meat-eating
on the grounds that we will ruin our health if we don't eat it or even that
we will run a very serious risk of doing so if we abstain" (1983, 337).

19 Singer 1979 takes up some of the problems of human interests as they may con-

cflict with those of animals.
The question is, To whom does that “we” refer? Traditional morality claims to prescribe for everyone—not merely for some; its rules are supposed to be universal. Because its rules are universal and rights holders are equal, the rules should also be impartial. All mature and rational persons regardless of their age, sex, race, and other irrelevant factors are supposed to be able to follow a universal rule—or at least to be capable of being taught to do so. Indifference to these factors is built in and the general interchangeability of persons is assumed. Ethical vegetarians and ethical vegans suppose that all of us could adopt these diets if we choose. 20 Here, ethical vegetarians posit a moral norm that is not supposed to be inconsistent with a physiological norm. 21 In other words, if the moral norm or rule prescribing vegetarian or vegan diets is impartial, it should not require greater or very much greater burdens for some groups because of aspects about themselves that cannot be changed and that are thought to be neutral to the interests served by the rule.

For example, under traditional moral theory, all people are expected to keep their promises as a general rule. Some exceptions apply and rights or utilitarian theory can prescribe justifications for these exceptions. 22

20 Regan clearly has influenced many to adopt ethical veganism and follows it himself. His philosophical arguments do not require such strict adherence, however. Only mammals one year of age or older can be subjects-of-a-life. Presumably, this would permit eating veal, chicken and other birds, fish, reptiles, and “lower” animals (or even human infants), but Regan argues that such nonhuman animals should not be consumed either (1983, 349, 367) because we ought to grant them the benefit of the doubt about subjectivity. Further, he argues that we should not eat animal products because they are inhumanely produced. On the question of whether human infants count, Regan notes that the subject-of-a-life criterion is merely a sufficient condition for membership in the class of rights holders. Other sufficient conditions might be found; thus, it does not follow that infants must lack rights. He has also drawn the specific line at “mammals one year of age or older” for the sake of proceeding with the argument. Below that line he claims that we are uncertain about the being’s subjectivity. Finally, he argues that we have a duty to maintain a moral climate in which rights are taken seriously and it would be important to give infants “the benefit of the doubt, viewing them as if they are subjects-of-a-life, as if they have basic rights, even while conceding that, in viewing them in these ways, we may be giving them more than is their due” (Regan 1983, 319–20).

21 Moral norms and physiological norms should not be confused, even though both imply significant value claims. “Moral norms” are rules and standards meant to guide the conduct of beings who have the capacity for morality. A “physiological norm” as it is intended here picks out something about the world, such as, “It is the norm for males to produce more testosterone than estrogen.” We might pick out many more traits that are common for the human species. Abnormal physiology need not and should not be taken to mean moral inferiority or even illness, although it will sometimes impair function.

22 Hare 1981, e.g., proposes a two-level utilitarianism. Everyone is to follow moral rules most of the time. These rules are put in place because maximum happiness occurs when everyone follows the rules. But if some obvious evil will result from following a rule, the utilitarian may break the rule by appeal to those bad consequences. In contrast, rights theory determines which interests and rights are more important and then builds a hierarchy of rights. Thus, right to life is more stringent and admits of few exceptions because without it other rights are not possible. Utilitarians countercharge that either the ordering is based on maximization of the good (and is thus utilitarian) or is based on an intuitionism that is arbitrary and without foundation.
Also, traditional moral theory recognizes that many people will sometimes find it a greater burden than other people to keep a promise. Traditional moral theory would deny, however, that a valid moral rule or norm would systematically require self-sacrifices not required of others in circumstances beyond one’s own control. Thus, a poor woman who buys a television set, promises to pay for it over time, and then finds she cannot make the payments does have more difficulty than a wealthy person in keeping her promise. But the rule is still impartial if she chose to make the promise and could have refrained from making it. Even though she belongs to a class that makes it more difficult to keep this particular promise, it does not thereby systematically foreclose her ability to make all promises without difficulty.

**The male physiological norm**

The moral rule requiring vegetarianism is quite otherwise. It does systematically impose greater burdens on some. Although most men between the ages of twenty and fifty in industrialized countries can choose to be vegetarians without significant risk, the same cannot be said for other people identifiable by characteristics over which they have no choice or control: infants, children, adolescents, gestating and lactating women, some elderly people, and many people living in cultural and environmental circumstances that are not dependent on industrialized agriculture and high-tech society. That nutritional needs differ with stages of life and between the sexes is well documented in the medical and nutrition literature; vegan diets present greater risk than lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets, but even these latter diets pose risks for some groups. Looking at differences in risk among these groups illuminates differences in physiology between women and men and between adults, children, and the old; and the bias in perspective that is present in traditional arguments for ethical vegetarianism should become clearer.

Young children may be at greater risk for health problems on vegan diets than are adult males.23 Vegan infants and toddlers “may fail to thrive because their diets are too low in energy and too high in bulk” and may lack sufficient quantities of vitamins D and B12, iron, calcium, and zinc (Dwyer 1991, 76).24 Adolescence appears to be a crucial time for building bone mass (Peacock 1991), and young women have already built almost all of their bone by about age seventeen, with some new bone formation perhaps continuing into the twenties (Dawson-Hughes 1991).

24 Even the prestigious vegetarian cookbook *The New Laurel’s Kitchen* does not recommend vegan diets for infants and children (Robertson, Flinders, and Rupenthal 1986, 416–17). Dwyer 1991 reviews 133 studies and sources on the nutritional consequences of vegetarianism.
By age thirty many women begin to lose bone (Rodysill 1987). Adolescent girls who consumed diets low in calcium have been shown to have a greater incidence of osteoporosis later in life (Sandler et al. 1985; Peacock 1991). Continued inadequacy of calcium in the diet is thought to be a major contributing factor to osteoporosis (Matkovic et al. 1979; Rodysill 1987; Dawson-Hughes 1991). and milk is still recommended as the best source of calcium: “The calcium in milk and milk products is well-absorbed, whereas that in most plant sources is either poorly or negligibly available” (Allen 1986, 7). “Negligibly available” means that although chemical tests show a vitamin or mineral such as calcium occurs in plants, it either comes in a form the body cannot use very well or occurs in the presence of other compounds (such as phytates, fiber, cellulose, uronic acids, and oxalates in the case of calcium) that prevent its use.

Lactating vegans may have reduced amounts of vitamin D and B₁₂, and supplementation for these nutrients is recommended not only to protect the woman’s health but also to reduce risk to the nursing infant (Dwyer 1991, 75–76). Gestating vegan women may be at greater nutritional risk for “inadequate weight gain, low protein intake, inadequate iron intake with resulting anemias, low calcium, zinc, and vitamin B₁₂ intakes, and in some instances low vitamin D, zinc and iodide intakes” (Dwyer 1991, 75–76). Because the health of a fetus depends upon the health of the individual woman carrying it, these factors may pose a fetal risk as well.

Let me say something about my thoughts, as a practicing vegetarian and as a mother, when I read the research. I have moral responsibilities to my daughter—should I advise her not to drink milk because dairying is arguably immoral? What would I say later if she were to develop osteoporosis? Should I have given up milk and cheese in premenopause? Ultimately, I came to believe that my husband and I should not eat meat but that my daughter’s diet should be unrestricted, given her stage of life. This decision created other kinds of problems. In my family, I am the person who prepares the food, so the burden of learning new recipes fell entirely to me. I also prepare different foods for my daughter, although she will sometimes (but not always) eat what we do. Both she and my

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25 The loss of estrogen production that accompanies menopause or surgical removal of the ovaries is perhaps the most important factor; estrogen replacement therapy is recognized as the best treatment to arrest bone loss. No new bone can be built after the early twenties, and the best that can be hoped for with any therapy or diet is to maintain bone density. Estrogen replacement therapy carries its own risk, and there are some women who should not use it. On these issues, Dawson-Hughes 1991 reviews sixty-six sources, Peacock 1991 reviews forty, and Rodysill 1987 reviews 178.

26 The value of milk as a calcium source is especially important and may be largely confined to Caucasians, primarily northern and middle Indo-European descendants of people who have for thousands of years lived with domesticated cows and have used their milk for human consumption. Many people—up to 70 percent of the world’s population—are lactose intolerant, although commercial products are available to abate the problem; see Pearkin 1991.
husband dislike vegetables intensely, and there is very little I can do to change their dietary preferences. In my experience, ethical vegetarians usually brush off such concerns as trivial matters of convenience and taste, easily altered by a little education. Yet food preparation is a burden that is disproportionately borne by women not only in our society but worldwide as well. That children can be taught to like some foods and reject others is also widely assumed to be true, but scientific studies show that “many food preferences appear to be determined in large part by the genes. Among these are the preferences for sweet, salt, and milk. The genes also appear responsible, at least to some extent for . . . the rejection response system for bitter substances” (Logue 1986, 79). Environmental factors do play a strong role, of course, but it is simply not true that foods taste the same to everyone or that food preferences are easily or completely amenable to education.\(^\text{27}\)

In the end, I could not restrict my daughter’s diet because even lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets pose some risks. These risks are rare for Western adult males, for whom the ideal is best suited. Greater incidence and severity of iron deficiency in women and children occurs in areas where education about adequate intakes of iron and \(B_{12}\) is not available or where the food supply is inadequate or unpredictable. Vitamin \(B_{12}\) in available forms is not found in any plant food and must always be supplemented in vegan diets (Herbert 1984, 1988). Bothwell et al., in a review of seventy-two studies and related sources, notes that heme iron (from meats) “is absorbed regardless of the other components in the diet, while non-haem [sic] iron absorption is subject to the interplay of promoting and inhibiting substances in the diet” (1989, 357). Heme iron enhances the absorption of nonheme (plant source) iron, but diets with too many polyphenols and phytates from grains give poor iron absorption (Bothwell et al. 1989; Dwyer 1991). Nevin S. Scrimshaw attributes “poor absorption from the predominantly vegetarian diets of most people in developing countries [as] a primary cause of iron deficiency” (1991, 48).\(^\text{28}\) Scrimshaw also notes that “two-thirds of children and

\(^{27}\) Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine promotes vegan diets for everyone and argues that “green leafy vegetables such as kale are as good or better than milk as calcium sources” (quoted in Liebman 1992). Liebman 1992, writing for the Center for Science in the Public Interest, disputes this claim: “A cup of milk has 300 to 330 mg of calcium. A cup of cooked kale has 90 to 180 mg. And how many kids eat kale by the cup?” (2). Also, young children must have enough calories for growth, and the stomach capacity of a young child is too small to permit digesting large amounts of fibrous foods; the low caloric content in these foods may not meet the energy needs of young children and may put them “at risk of inadequate intake of calories” (Jacobs and Dwyer 1988, 813).

\(^{28}\) Contributing causes in Third World countries include other disease factors such as parasites; these are not, however, thought to be the sole cause of iron deficiency. Scrimshaw also cites reasons and evidence that females are at greater risk than males and speaks to the difficulties and dangers of supplementation for iron.
women of childbearing age in most developing nations are estimated to suffer from iron deficiency. . . . In the U.S., Japan, and Europe, . . . between 10 and 20 percent of women of childbearing age are anemic” (1991, 48).

Only a few years ago, marginal iron levels in women were not regarded with much alarm by physicians and nutritionists. Recently, however, it has been found that iron plays a vital role in childhood development and maintenance of the central nervous system, organ function, and immune function (Dallman 1989). Researchers usually categorize their test subjects as “normal,” “iron deficient,” or “iron deficient anemic,” where iron deficiency is a state preceding anemia. In a review of forty-five studies, S. Hercberg and P. Galan note that iron deficiency has “effects on skeletal muscle, cardiac muscle, brain tissue, liver tissue, gastrointestinal tractus [sic], body temperature relation, [and] DNA synthesis [because] iron participates in a wide variety of biochemical processes. . . . The key liabilities of tissue iron deficiency, even at a mild degree relate to decrease in intellectual performance, and in physical capacity during exercise, alteration of temperature regulation, [and] immune function” (1989, 63; emphasis added). P. R. Dallman, in a review of thirty-one studies, notes that “there is convincing evidence of impaired psychomotor development and cognitive performance” in iron deficient infants and children (1989, 367), and Scrimshaw cites studies that show that iron deficiency anemia has been associated with irreversible neurological impairment in young children (1991, 50; see also Parks and Wharton 1989, a review of twenty-five sources). Thus, the effects of diets without adequate available sources of iron in infancy and young childhood cannot be compensated for by later improvements and/or later supplementation. In addition, “maternal mortality, prenatal and perinatal infant death and prematurity are significantly increased” for iron deficiency in pregnancy (Scrimshaw 1991, 50; see also Dallman 1989). A significant number of women become iron deficient during pregnancy even when they are not vegetarians (Bothwell et al. 1989), and nutritionists have expressed a concern that vegetarian diets may not provide adequate iron (Dwyer 1991). Milk and other dairy products are poor sources of iron, whereas heme iron from beef is available in the highest quantities (Scrimshaw 1991, 48).

We might think that possible deficiencies could be easily compensated for by taking a multiple vitamin and mineral pill. Supplementation, however, especially for multiple dietary requirements, carries significant risks for many people because of the possibility of toxicity, low availability, and interactions among supplements,29 prompting nutritionists to rec-

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29 While it should be emphasized that vegans must take certain supplements (e.g., B_{12}), supplements have varying degrees of availability, meaning that the body can use
ommend that all people obtain their nutrient needs from a variety of foods rather than from supplements (Council on Scientific Affairs, American Medical Association 1987). The availability of such supplements also presupposes the influence of an industrialized food process and a sophisticated medical and nutritional understanding by policymakers and consumers.

Although women are not pregnant and nursing all of their lives, the majority of women alive today have or will have some children. Because women usually remain capable of childbearing for most of their adult lives, women may have different nutrient needs than men even when they are not gestating or lactating. At menopause, many women face a significant threat of bone loss without absorbable calcium. As a review

some forms better than others. Some supplements may not get into the system where needed at all, whereas others are well absorbed (Fairbanks, Fahey, and Beutler 1971; Allen 1986; Herbert 1988; Scrimshaw 1991). Some calcium supplements (but not all) have been shown to contain lead and other heavy metals (Food and Drug Administration 1982). Studies show that many people take megadoses of vitamins, hoping to ward off illness or age, but toxic side effects of megadosing are well documented (Herbert 1980, 123–26). Elderly people and those with incurable diseases are apparently especially vulnerable to overuse of supplements (Hartz and Blumberg 1986; McDonald 1986). Virgil Fairbanks, John Fahey, and Ernest Beutler note that “ingestion of iron medication is a relatively common cause of accidental poisoning in children [and] is serious and often fatal” (1971, 359). In adults iron toxicity can cause hemosiderosis, a serious liver disease (Fairbanks, Fahey, and Beutler 1971; Scrimshaw 1991). Janet McDonald summarizes concerns about overdose: “Supplement use is often inappropriate, is more common among females than males in almost every age group, is higher in the western part of the United States than in other regions of the country, is higher in whites than in blacks, and tends to increase with higher education and income. Some segments of the public consume supplemental nutrients at extremely high levels, giving cause for concern about potential toxic effects” (1986, 27). Ingestion of improper amounts of some minerals adversely affects absorption of others; for instance, taking too much iron can result in a zinc deficiency, but taking zinc can upset copper balance (Festa et al. 1985; McDonald and Keen 1988; Dwyer 1991). Nevertheless, vegan parents may have no alternative but to give their children zinc supplements. Cathy Jacobs and Johanna Dwyer, discussing adolescent vegan diets, state that “in our opinion it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to consistently meet Zn RDA [zinc recommended daily allowances] on an unsupplemented vegan or even lactoovovegetarian diet” (1988, 816). Calcium interacts with aluminum, boron, phosphorus, and others (see McDonald and Keen 1988 for a review of eighty-five studies and related sources). Vitamin B₆ may be inactivated by high doses of vitamin C (National Nutrition Consortium 1978), although taking vitamin C enhances absorption of nonheme (plant) iron (Dwyer 1991).

Scrimshaw 1991 also notes that the particular sensitivity of women to iron deficiency is related to periodic blood loss at menses. Unlike calcium, iron is not lost through the urine, and only miniscule amounts appear in sweat.

Nordin 1966 surveyed populations in Finland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Gambia, Jamaica, India, and Japan and noted a striking relationship between osteoporotic X-rays of the spine and low calcium intake and also between high calcium intake and normal vertebral appearance in those countries, especially among females. Even though this study is old, William Pollitzer and John Anderson still call it “impressive” (1989). Although calcium supplementation is often prescribed for perimenopausal women, the most critical time for calcium consumption appears to be during childhood, adolescence, and young womanhood (Peacock 1991), when bone mass is being built.
of 121 studies and related sources shows, elderly people in general have different requirements for several nutrients (Munro, Suter, and Russell 1987). Adult males age twenty to fifty face these risks to a much lesser extent. Indeed, one may conclude that the nutritional evidence suggests that the best candidates for vegetarianism, and for veganism in particular, are young, healthy adult males. They do not have protein, vitamin, or mineral stresses from feeding a rapidly growing fetus nor are they unduly stressed by their own growth requirements, as most of their growth is accomplished. Males have consistently higher iron levels than females and are at much less risk of osteoporosis in late middle and old age.32

The “male physiological ideal” also includes bias with respect to race, ethnicity, and class. Differences in physiology among these groups is illustrated by differential risk. For instance, black women have a lower incidence of osteoporosis, while Japanese women are especially vulnerable to osteoporosis. Researchers believe that these and other differences are associated with inherited differences in the ability to build skeletal mass (see Pollitzer and Anderson 1989, a review of ninety sources). Priyani Soysa reviews fifty-four sources on the nutritional status of women in developing countries and comments that the dietary requirements for adult women recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization (FAO/WHO) refer largely to the industrialized countries and “would not be relevant for women in the developing world” (1987, 17). Deficiencies in diet are associated with poverty, discrimination against women, inadequate kilocalorie intake, and anorexia secondary to parasitic infection and stress from other infections, plus heavy physical workloads (Soysa 1987, 17). In India, a largely vegetarian society, life expectancy for females is 55.67 years and for males

Nevertheless, according to a review of recent polls on vitamin and mineral usage in the United States, adolescents are among the least likely to take supplements (McDonald 1986).

22 At this point, someone might object, “You have only shown that women (and children) may face these risks, not that any of them will be harmed by such diets. The qualifier may weakens your case.” Yet may can be used as a permission and as a probability operator. If I were using may as a permission (as ethical vegetarians may be doing), then I would be implying that you may choose the vegetarian lifestyle and avoid its risks by taking some additional action open to you. If I use may to express a probability of risk, then some persons in a population (as opposed to individuals) will incur the injury and others will not. I might say to a friend, “Don’t smoke or you may get lung cancer.” It would be incorrect to say emphatically, “. . . you will get cancer.” Scientific arguments concern probabilities and individual experiments are specifically designed (or at least the attempt is made) to reduce variables to only one. Based on the results of numerous studies above, some persons will indeed be harmed by vegetarian diets. Identifying which individuals is no more possible than saying with certainty which smokers will get lung cancer. And because of physiological differences, the risks differ with sex, race, age, ethnicity, health, and probably other unknown genetic factors that individuals cannot choose or change.
55.40 years (United Nations 1991). In a study of pregnant women and their newborns in Udaipur, India, Sharma et al. conclude that “vegetarianism may be one of the important causative factors of anaemia in pregnant women in this region and their newborn children” (1991, 13).

The foregoing nutritional research suggests that ethical vegetarians may be emphasizing some facts and ignoring others in making their arguments. They typically cite only the nutritional evidence that total protein in the diet can be obtained through a combination of plant foods, such as a balance of grains and legumes. Nutritionists generally agree that protein adequacy is not usually the primary concern in Western countries (Dwyer 1991), although it has been a major concern in the Third World (Scrimshaw 1991). But those arguing for ethical vegetarianism typically de-emphasize problems of obtaining proper amounts of other nutritional necessities or may consider these as “technological obstacles” to be solved by supplementation. Medical and nutritional reports of health problems for certain people are relegated to the class of exceptional cases.

Also, vegans often lobby for universal all-plant diets. They assume that almost every person, put in the right set of environmental circumstances (which must include social and moral settings as well as purely physical ones), could be happy and healthy on a vegan diet. They assume that these circumstances can be changed by human choices and, further, that such changes will make the world better rather than worse. The assumption that humans can be healthy on vegan diets posits a paradigmatic “normal” human as an herbivore and ignores any and all differences of biological constitution, especially those that are genetically inherited. In contrast, scientists are beginning to find that these inherited differences in metabolism are correlated with health and well-being or failure to thrive in alternative environments and circumstances. Real people are not interchangeable with a presupposed “ideal human.”

By showing that ethical vegetarians have the facts wrong about nutritional requirements, arguably I have not shown that the moral rule is invalid; values cannot be derived from facts alone. I have, nevertheless, given adumbrations of an argument about why I think the very conception of the moral rules and values presupposed by the traditional moral arguments are not those to which feminists can subscribe. Moreover,

33 These figures are improvements over the life expectancy of 44.7 years for females and 46.4 years for males from the U.N. Demographic Yearbook 1978 cited in Soysa 1987.
34 Although ethics has presupposed this kind of ideal, it does not seem necessary that science do so except as a practical stratagem applied to individual experiments. Indeed, it seems a consequence of scientific method that more and more individual differences rather than similarities will be delineated. Considerations of space do not permit defense of that claim here, although I hope to make it a future project.
because the nutritional claims are mistaken, the primary support for ethical vegetarianism is removed. In other words, facts act as the reasons one has to hold a particular belief. If there are now no good reasons to hold a belief, then it is apparently arbitrary. One must either find new reasons—which could be new facts or other values—or one must give up the belief. So, at the very least, the attack on the facts undermines the traditional arguments for ethical vegetarianism.35

Have I shown that all feminist ethical theorists must reject arguments for ethical vegetarianism that are grounded in traditional moral theories? Some feminists might claim that these arguments could be saved by rejecting the false principles of traditional moral theory (Warren 1993). Perhaps the notion of impartiality could be recast or the principle that moral rules apply universally (i.e., universalizability or universality) should be rejected. The task is hopeless. Suppose universality is rejected in order to save traditional moral theory and with it, ethical vegetarianism. This strategy will deliver an even deadlier blow to the moral status of animals because rejecting universality would undermine the principle of equality as it is articulated within that tradition. Without the principle of equality, the arguments of Regan and Singer cannot stand. In other words, rejecting universality provides even less reason to be concerned about animals, and even less reason to be a vegetarian on moral grounds.

Traditional moral theory is dead. Today, we need an adequate interspecies ethic. Traditional moral theory is riddled with bias and cannot adequately account for perspective or context. The central tenets and methods of both rights and utilitarianism rely on a common subjective perspective and context, however “ideal” these may be.36 Yet these do not exist. Worse yet, in assuming these could exist, the group in power is most likely to assume itself to be closest to realizing it. My arguments show that traditional moral arguments for ethical vegetarianism cannot be imported into any feminist ethic. Indeed, the “minimal version” of feminist ethics offered at the beginning of this article rules out moral vegetarianism as a feminist ideal. Recall the two claims that surely every feminist must agree to: any feminist ethic must reject (1) requiring women to live as

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35 Some feminists might be tempted to claim a complete, self-sacrificial pacifism: even if one needs to kill an animal for its meat to ensure her own health or the health of her child, it is still wrong to do this. There are several reasons to think this is a poor moral rule, however, at least as a universal prescription. Most important among these is that self-sacrificial pacifism undermines morality—it takes away an important reason we have for living morally in the first place. Among the usual rejoinders offered to anyone who wishes to be immoral is that she or he will benefit by living in a society where everyone follows moral rules. If, in following those rules, however, one could be required to give up one’s life or sacrifice a child, then pure egoism or “immorality” is likely to be more beneficial.

36 I do not claim that there are no good reasons left to assert rights or utility. The language of “rights” is and will continue to be a very important way women and others have to assert themselves in the political and social arena. Political and health reasons also continue to be important considerations in choosing vegetarianism.
if physiologically the same as men and (2) placing arbitrary burdens upon females that males do not have to bear. Being a moral vegetarian on traditional grounds would require women and their children to accept these burdens rather than reject them. That can hardly be a feminist ideal.

Nevertheless, I have also claimed that any specifically feminist ethic will in some way recognize the equal worth of differently situated subjects, whether human or animal. Am I not relying upon the very theories and principles that I claim to reject (Warren 1993)? No, I am not. It is perfectly reasonable to reject these theories and principles and still reaffirm the important values within them. A feminist ethic would structure and conceptualize these values differently. In conserving a notion of equality, I do not assume that the concept will go into any new ethic without some transformation.

Arbitrariness, power, and privilege

Male self-interest and vegetarianism

There is another reason to think that the moral rule of ethical vegetarianism rests on arbitrariness. Vegetarians exhibit fewer health problems than those who follow a typical American high-fat diet (American Dietetic Association 1988). Animal rights groups and their affiliates are promoting vegetarian diets not only on moral grounds but also as a way of deferring or avoiding heart disease and cancer. Although women may benefit from the reduction in fat consumption that may accompany vegetarian or vegan diets, men are likely to benefit more because they do not have the protection that estrogen apparently affords many women against atherosclerosis and heart disease. Nearly all research on heart

37 Most prominent among these is the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM). This group has been associated with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which promotes ethical veganism grounded in animal rights. The Physicians Committee opposes medical research on animals on moral grounds. They urge adoption of vegan diets on health grounds (PCRM 1991). Their claims about the safety of these diets, however, are chosen solely from a small number of scientific articles that tend to support their viewpoint. Many of these articles are hypothetical in nature or are inappropriately applied to the question. Their recommendations tend to ignore or minimize research that points to risk for pregnant vegan women, infants, and children (see George 1992, 1994; and Liebman 1992 for critiques of the use of many of the sources cited in PCRM 1991). Meanwhile, the American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a statement responding to PCRM affirming that "milk is a major source of nutrition" and that "the Academy will not be altering its recommendation that milk be a standard part of children's diets" (1992, 30).

38 Studies tend to show greater benefit for men. Fraser reviews several studies of Seventh-Day Adventist populations. The data show "lower risk for IHD [ischemic heart disease] in Adventist men ... probably related to their [mostly lactoovegetarian] habits, nonsmoking status, possibly their better exercise habits, and greater social support. ... Similar data for women are somewhat conflicting" (1988, 833). Reviewing ninety-one sources, E. Barrett-Conner and T. L. Bush report that "most, but not all, studies of hormone replacement therapy in postmenopausal women show around a 50% reduction in risk of a coronary event in women using unopposed oral estrogen" (1991, 1861).
disease has been done on men by male research scientists. Researchers usually rationalize that they assume women will be similarly affected (on the principle of similarity and thus physiological interchangeability) but contradict this claim with the additional rationalization that including women would skew the results by adding the variable of hormonal differences (Ames et al. 1990). We do not know whether these diets (and other treatments) will benefit women with respect to heart disease. As recently as July 1991, two studies showed that “although heart diseases kill more than 250,000 American women every year, . . . women are not diagnosed or treated as aggressively as men” (Holloway and Yam 1992, 13). The National Institutes of Health has responded by funding a “study of more than 60,000 postmenopausal women . . . to answer questions about the effect of diet and estrogen replacement therapy on cardiovascular health and the prevention of breast cancer and osteoporosis” (Holloway and Yam 1992, 18).39 Middle-aged men more often die of heart disease; the predominance of white men in government, funding agencies, and the sciences can lead them to focus on problems they are more likely to experience. As Evelyn Fox Keller has remarked in a review of masculine biases in science, “presumably had the concerns of medical research been articulated by women, these particular imbalances would not have arisen” (1982, 590).

Vegetarian diets appeal to men’s self-interest because these diets can be quite low in fat and may reduce men’s incidence of heart disease.40 Although powerful lobbies continue to press for meat consumption, the power struggle takes place on male terms. The debate entirely overlooks possible differences in the effects of wholesale adoption of restrictive dietary practices (whether they be all-plant or heavily dependent on meat consumption) on women and children, as well as on people of color, old people, and people living in other cultures.41

39 We also do not know whether they will benefit women on balance. The high-fiber diets (particularly including wheat bran) recommended to most vegetarians have been correlated with a drop in estrogen levels in women (Rose et al. 1991). This would be good for victims of breast cancer, but estrogen decline is also associated with bone loss and osteoporosis (Rodysill 1987; Dawson-Hughes 1991) and may result in increased risk of coronary heart disease in women because estrogen is thought to delay its onset (Barrett-Connor and Bush 1991). I have not yet seen any studies attempting to correlate osteoporosis with high-fiber diets, however.

40 It is a common but incorrect assumption that vegetarian diets must be low in fat and meat-containing diets must be high in fat, but vegans who eat too many fried foods (such as french fried potatoes), margarine, nut butters, and other fatty plant foods may easily exceed the limit on daily fat intake recommended for heart safety. Vegans will have an advantage in that much of the fat will be unsaturated and contain no cholesterol. But similar diets, low in unsaturated fat and cholesterol, may be planned that include some meat.

41 Federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Welfare also have ignored differences in ethnicity in their recommendations for diet. See, e.g., Perkin and McCann 1984.
If attaining an ideal assumes that one first is an adult Western male, age twenty to fifty, then it is impossible for women ever to find that setting; they cannot chose to be male and, not having this choice, they cannot choose to be moral.

**Women and others as a moral underclass**

Differential risks are borne by different people following vegetarian diets. These differentials support the claim that the bodies of men and women are physiologically not the same. The bodies of the old and the young are not the same. In certain relevant respects, the bodies of those of different races and ethnicities are not the same. Yet, risk is not the primary issue. The main issue is this: From whose perspective and context shall we assess risk? From the perspective of largely white, relatively affluent adult Western males? Or from the perspective of women or their children? From the context of a high-tech society or that of the so-called Third World?

If the main concern were about risk, advocates for animal rights such as Regan could simply respond that, if women need milk or meat, they have a valid moral excuse (based on the Liberty Principle) from a duty not to kill or harm animals. Women whose health would be jeopardized or whose fetuses would be injured are excused from a duty to make themselves worse off for the sake of another. What they do not see is that the male ideal perspective is assumed, and all of the others are assigned a place of secondary value. The perspectival bias is especially apparent when we consider the position of many Third World women and children, whose food choices and medical care make a vegan diet much more likely to compromise health. When such women are routinely excused for doing what would normally be considered wrong, they are relegated to a moral underclass of beings who, because of their natures, are not capable of being fully moral. They are physiologically barred from “doing the right thing” because they are not “being the right thing.”

Failure to accord equal value to these various physiological perspectives builds in the logic of domination by setting up the conditions of unwarranted guilt and lowered self-esteem. In a wholly vegan (or even lacto-ovo-vegetarian) world, even if the “excused classes” felt rationally justified in consuming meat or animal products, these people would nevertheless suffer feelings of responsibility for the associated evil—just as a person who kills in self-defense still feels responsible even if not culpable for a killing. Additionally, in a vegan world, even if a minority of people were to consume animal products for health reasons, they would

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42 The notion of “responsibility” is broader than its moral relation, “obligation,” or “duty.” In the broadest sense, one is responsible for an action if she or he caused it to occur. Whether one is to blame depends on the person’s intention, the ensuing consequences, and considerations of negligence.
probably suffer social condemnation—largely because we do not ordi-
narily know the reasons for a stranger’s actions. Perhaps such individuals
could be issued armbands or other marks designating their status as
“excused.” In that case, though, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that
they would be regarded as abnormal at best or pariahs at worst.

Intractable class and ethnocentric bias in the vegan ideal

Adams (1990) and others have noted the significant class bias associated
with meat eating. Only wealthy countries can afford such luxury—and
decadence. There are reasons to think that the vegan ideal, as supported
by traditional moral theory, is also class biased as well as ethnocentrically
biased. For the moment, let us ignore the problem that ethical vegetari-
anism presupposes a male physiological norm. Veganism, when held up
as the purest, most virtuous of lifestyles, will also presuppose a wealthy
society and an industrialized culture with open access to information and
a wide variety of food, education, and medical care. Vegans must supple-
ment their diets with certain vitamins, especially B₁₂ and D. They should
be monitored for nutritional health (Dwyer 1991). This presupposes a
certain level of medical care and the existence of vitamin factories
with the ability to synthesize supplements without using animal products.
For that, chemistry labs are necessary. Research biochemistry is also
presupposed so that available sources of the proper vitamins can be
synthesized. The continued understanding of differences in nutritional
requirements among women and men at various stages of life and of
various ethnic/genetic hereditities presupposes a sophisticated research sci-
entific and industrial complex. Imparting the necessary information
about how to be healthy on vegan diets presupposes a population of lay
persons who are very well educated by world standards—as anyone who
takes the time to read the last section of The New Laurel’s Kitchen must
realize (Robertson, Flinders, and Ruppenthal 1986). Some knowledge of
basic chemistry and biology is necessary, as is an advanced (by world
standards) reading level. All of this likewise requires an understanding of
basic principles of scientific medicine. Most people in Western countries
take for granted having this kind of knowledge or having the resources to
find it. Nevertheless, many Western people are still “illiterate” about
science and medicine.⁴³ The vast industry that promotes megadoses of

⁴³ Dwyer 1991 advises gestating and lactating vegan women, vegan infants, and el-
derly vegans to obtain nutritional counseling and carefully plan their diets before at-
tempting to eliminate meat, fish, milk, and eggs from their diets. That “new vegetarians”
often risk health problems in Western countries is supported by several studies. For in-
stance, a highly educated group of persons formed a primarily vegan commune known
as The Farm in Summertown, Tennessee, in the late 1960s. They were well educated but
apparently were not nutritionally aware of the risks associated with veganism. In 1971,
the Public Health Service examined and treated several of the women and children for
vitamins and the taking of unregulated substances such as amino acids, trace elements, and even completely useless medications such as Laetrile is testament to the difficulty in educating the public, too (Herbert 1980).

By arguing that the vegan lifestyle is an ideal to be aimed for, moral vegans are compelled to accept the presuppositions that attend it—that our Western way of life is best. But with that way of life comes an industrialized complex that has implications for culture, the environment, and the expenditure of labor and resources, that is, wealth. If the only way to have a truly ethical relationship with animals is to adopt a vegan lifestyle, it also means that we must live in a society like ours; all other “less advanced” societies would be (magnanimously) excused as morally ignorant or culturally backward or both. But this is simply moral arrogance. On that view the economically poor who consume animals and their products in cultural and environmental contexts that are migratory, marginal, tropical, arid, arctic, alpine, oceanic, isolated, or otherwise nonindustrialized would be routinely excused, just as women, children, and old people would be routinely excused from attaining the most virtuous life of veganism. But as I have argued above, the routine excuse of nearly everyone in the world except Western young adult males from “true morality” suggests that there is something wrong with the morality, not with those excused from it. Why should we think that our Western culture—with its attitude of dominating nature, of using nature solely as a tool for human ends—is the only one capable of a moral relationship with food animals? We should wonder, instead, whether our culture is not on the wrong track entirely concerning such a relationship.

**Ethical vegetarianism as the product of male culture and domination**

Western male-dominated culture is infused with a mind-body duality that is often viewed as a dichotomy. Adams has very effectively shown that meat eating has mythically been linked to bodily strength and physical power (1990). Meat has been promoted as physically necessary for hard-working laborers and for soldiers. Those in less demanding physical occupations (and women are always included in this class) have been denied meat on the grounds that they do not “need” it. The association between virility, violence, brutality, and physicality is clear.

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vitamin B₁₂, iron, and possible protein deficiencies. Subsequently, the community became very interested in monitoring the nutritional health of its members. The Farm established a research organization and a health clinic to monitor the growth of the children and health of the community. Members began taking vitamin B₁₂, iron, and calcium supplements after 1971. Although children on The Farm are typically somewhat shorter in stature and lighter in weight than the rest of the U.S. population, they are otherwise healthy (Carter, Furman, and Hutcheson 1987; O'Connell et al. 1989). This shows that even in Western countries, special nutritional education and medical care are advisable for those on vegan diets.
George  SHOULD FEMINISTS BE VEGETARIANS?

But we should reflect on the other side of the duality—that of the mind. Intellect, mind, and soul have also been viewed as distinctly masculine faculties. When related to dietary practices, the improvement of the soul and especially the promotion of rationalistic and mystical knowledge has been thought to be served by restrictions on meat consumption. In fact, all major world religions have vegetarian sects within them. The more exquisitely spiritualistic the religious order, the more likely the monastic male is to exist on a limited diet of bread and water—a vegan ideal. In fact, bread and wine (both all-plant foods) are still the celebrated Christian sacred symbols of life and spirit.

Christianity is decidedly rationalistic in its theology, and much of Western ethics, especially rights theory, has inherited this rationalistic orientation. Male-dominated religion and ethics reflect a two-sided struggle. On one side, the male struggle is for domination over others, to make others do as the dominant wills, not as the submissive wills. Conceptually, this is usually associated with brute, physical (bodily) strength, war, weaponry, and materialism and with a conception of the body as a machine that is an intervening, interruptive, and containing force among natural objects, some of which are other human beings. For most of the history of Western religion, the all-male church leaders ruled even the kings, often by commanding armies; bishops, cardinals, priests, and even popes did armored battle. On the other side, a struggle for self-control or self-dominion prevails, cloaking an equally insidious aim at dominion over others. In the Christian religious tradition, the male who gains ascetic self-dominion is also accorded the authority of rule over others—as saint, virtuous ideal, and prelate. He—because of his mind, that faculty shared with God—is the one who will interpret the divine law, who will make church law, who will be accorded the authority of rule. How shall he attain this elevated level? Augustine clearly recommends denial of the experiences of the body, valuing only the spirit; Aquinas extols reason as the authority to reveal the natural law (Jones 1969). Indeed, the struggle for domination takes it most visible form in the intellectual translation of moral justification into church and then secular law. Laws, like some aspects of Christianity, may reflect an authoritarian orientation, which expects the citizenry to bow to the paternalistic choices of their leaders. Alternatively, laws may also carry with them the inheritance from Christianity of the

44 Religious spiritual power was accorded to both men and women who could demonstrate control over the body. In the case of women, the ability to go for long periods without food was, during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and perhaps beyond, regarded as a special mark of saintliness and was more often attributed to holy women. Fasting is known to bring on visions, and some of the visions associated with fasting saints (including those of some women) have been incorporated into Christian theology. Caroline Walker Bynum discusses the history and significance of these women in her Holy Feast and Holy Fast (1987).
good of each individual soul and thereby require the government to serve the good of its citizens, investing in their judgment the authority of rule.

It is not my purpose here to indict Christianity. Rather, I wish to expose one of the dichotomies that underlies arguments for ethical vegetarianism. An examination of ethical vegetarianism must be done within the background of understanding this mind-body duality even if we wish to surpass it (Scott 1988). The dual power of the mind to seek self-dominion and domination over others through civil, criminal, moral, and religious law seems to me to be at least as important as the physical power of the body for concerns over the oppression of women, other classes of humans, and nonhuman animals. It is through this moral self-justification that dominants construct a favorable self-image, which, when placed in the social context of cultural approval, permits them to arrogate to themselves the “right” to rule others.

Conclusion

Traditional Western moral theory is inadequate for dealing with questions that require the just resolution of conflicts between ourselves and other species. This is no surprise given that one of the major projects of feminist ethics has been to show that such moral theories fail to resolve conflicts between women and men (Jaggar 1991). Both utilitarianism and rights theories are fatally flawed by the assumption that there can be at least some common human perspective and human nature upon which an objective ethics can be constructed. Under the conceptions of personhood and equality assumed by both utilitarianism and moral rights theory, the ethical rule demanding vegetarianism violates its own conditions of universality and impartiality because it presupposes a male physiological ideal and cannot apply without prejudice across gender, age, race, class, and ethnicity. Likewise, traditional arguments for ethical vegetarianism cannot be imported into feminist ethics—unless one wishes to reject my foundational assumptions—that is, that any feminist ethics must affirm the goodness of the female body and that it must reject the arbitrary placement of disproportionate burdens on females that males do not have to bear.

Feminists perhaps should be careful not to make a virtue of our oppression. Women and children have been consistently denied meat and animal product protein and have suffered ill health and starvation in all male-dominated cultures. Why should it make sense now to adopt this limitation as an ideal?

Moreover, these arguments for ethical vegetarianism may be accused of arbitrariness because they can be shown to appeal to and serve the interests of the dominant class in retaining power and privilege. Because
any ethic must avoid arbitrariness, any new arguments for ethical vegetarianism must show how the practice could be fair and equitable. Further thought and a new understanding of our relationship with one another and with the natural world will be required to articulate any ethic concerning food practice.

As a step to be taken in that direction, though, I think we must adopt practices that acknowledge the differing nutritional requirements of people as they grow and change. Prescriptions that guide these choices may very well be of an entirely different moral order than those that guide promise keeping, lying, and other more psychologically oriented choices. Articulating this will require a thorough reassessment not merely of the old norms from traditional moral theory, but also of their very structure and conceptualization. As such, this project is coextensive with the efforts of many feminists to develop a contextual ethic.

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