

Chapter IV Veganism As A Virtue

People use animals for food, clothing, cosmetics, scientific research, and many other purposes. Unbeknown to us, our relationship with animals is cruel and immoral. While the reality is that we bring into existence and raise millions of animals in cages, feed them poisons and chemicals, cut them into pieces of various shapes and forms, ship them to supermarkets, label them with hypocritical euphemisms, such as “veal scaloppini” or “drumsticks,” cook them and consume their flesh. All this happens before our eyes without our realizing its viciousness. As I will argue, morality is about having a noble character. What we do to animals, anyway we word it or try to justify, is ignoble.

Virtue ethics shows that the only morally consistent position with regard to our treatment of animals is veganism. It does this by showing the necessity to have the virtues, among many others, of compassion, fairness, and sensitivity to unnecessary cruelty and suffering. If one acquires these virtues, he will be compassionate, sensitive to cruelty, resist injustice, and thus naturally embrace veganism. The practices of eating animals and using them in various aspects of our lives necessarily entail vices, such as cruelty, injustice, lack of compassion and empathy.

I am not suggesting that there are absolute rights and wrongs. The main characteristic of the virtuous person is that she does the best thing in a situation, all things considered. In fact, there are possible circumstances in which a virtuous character is compatible with using animals. Such circumstances might include, for example, a population that has no other means of sustenance but animals, or a lifeboat hypothetical, i.e., a situation in which a person or a group of people are stranded on a desert island with no food other than animals. However, I argue that the idea that certain populations have no other options but eating flesh, in most cases, is a misconception. In fact, as it turns out certain populations do have access or can cultivate plant foods. So, the option of choosing meat, in preference to plant foods, is in fact due to the absence of virtue.

Certain populations rely on animal products since they can't grow food crops. This is a very important question, which I think is constantly misunderstood. My response to this is a general observation, as the question is not specific. In general, if a population cannot grow plants due to the unfavorable or arid climate, then it would seem peculiar that they could raise livestock. What food could these people possibly feed to the animals if plants do not grow in their areas? But consider that some of these populations do have plant food, but do not use it. As Dr. Richard Oppenlander notes in *Food Choice and Sustainability*,

In Ethiopia, over 40 percent of the population is considered hungry or starving, yet the country has 50 million cattle (one of the largest herds in the world), as well as almost 50 million sheep and goats, and 35 million chickens, unnecessarily consuming the food, land and water...

Much of their resource use must be focused on these cattle. Instead of using their food, water, topsoil, and massive amounts of land and energy to raise livestock, Ethiopia, for instance, could grow teff, an ancient and quite nutritious grain grown in that country for the past 20,000 to 30,000 years. Teff... is high in protein, with an excellent amino acid profile, is high in fiber and calcium, (1 cup

of teff provides more calcium than a cup of milk), and is a rich source of boron, copper, phosphorus, zinc, and iron. Seventy percent of all Ethiopia's cattle are raised pastorally in the highlands of their country, where less than 100 pounds of meat and a few gallons of milk are produced per acre of land used. Researchers have found that teff can be grown in those same areas by the same farmers at a yield of 2,000 to 3,000 pounds per acre, with more sustainable growing techniques employed and no water irrigation — teff has been shown to grow well in water-stressed areas and it is pest resistant.¹

There are other regions of the world where their inhabitants can import food staples, thus avoid relying on animals for food. An example often used is the Inuit, who inhabit the arctic regions of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. Not having fields suitable to grow food for all their meals, the Inuit traditionally ate only fish and seal meat. But nowadays, the Inuit live in communities with stores, schools, and modern buildings. Modern Inuit import food grown elsewhere and buy it in local stores. In fact, According to the Inuit Cultural Online Resource, “Expensive food [is] bought at the local Co-op or Northern store, or shipped up from the south.”²

IV. i. A Positive Account: How Compassion and Fairness Make Us Understand What is Virtuous about Veganism.

If virtue ethics (VE) and care ethics are correct in saying that what is important in morality are a good moral character and acting out of virtue, and not worry about duty or rights, what are the virtues that illuminate our understanding that veganism is a virtuous practice? Although many virtues could be appealed to, I want to consider in particular the virtue of compassion and the virtue of fairness.

Compassion. Compassion is a virtue rooted in love; it is a deep concern about pain of the sufferer, with the hope of alleviating it and that some positive good will emerge from the sufferer's unfortunate situation. In fact, compassion is also a deep concern for others' happiness and joy. Helping others who are suffering is very important; it is what a compassionate person does. But it is equally important to take positive action to increase or maintain others' happiness. A true virtue, after all, strives to produce a good life for us and for others. A compassionate individual feels sympathy for those who suffer. Sympathy is an important moral feeling because it allows us to respond to something unfortunate or unpleasant happening to others. When an elderly person is entering a building, a sympathetic person will hold the door for him. When an animal is hurt, the sympathetic person will offer help. But most importantly, a compassionate person has empathy. Empathy is related to sympathy but goes deeper in that it “recognizes connection with an understanding of the circumstances of the other.”³ An empathetic individual tries to understand thoroughly the situation and circumstances of others and cares about their well-being. These ‘others’ may be close to us or far away. Empathy enables us to extend our love

¹ Richard Oppenlander, *Food Choice and Sustainability: Why Buying Local, Eating Less Meat, and Taking Baby Steps Won't Work*, 175-178

² Inuit Cultural Online Resource, “Modern vs Traditional Life,” <http://icor.ottawainuitchildrens.com/node/48>

³ Gruen, 45

to victims of some natural catastrophe, for example, who may live at the other side of the world. In the case of our treatment of non-human animals, the compassionate individual has empathy for them and tries to understand what matters for them. Thus, a compassionate individual understands that animals exist for their own benefit and do not desire to die or to be turned into food or spend their existence inside a cage. A compassionate individual, therefore, will not merely try to alleviate the pain of an animal who, for instance, is about to be slaughtered by caressing him or by giving him a tranquillizer or by making his death as quick as possible. This would not be the full expression of compassion. Rather, a compassionate individual, who has empathy, also recognizes that such animal does not only wish to avoid pain, but also to survive and flourish. Consequently, by definition, a compassionate person would oppose all forms of animal exploitation. But just like other virtues, compassion seems to lie between two excesses. One way, for example, an individual would be too compassionate is by putting his own well-being at risk. For example, it would be a form of excess of compassion if one refused to wash his hands to protect germs, or if he denied food to his children to feed strangers, or allowed rats to take over his apartment. But on the other hand, one would not be compassionate enough if he deliberately killed animals for fun, or just for the sake of it; or, having an abundance of food, he refused to share it with others in need. In the instant case, veganism is the idea that animals do not belong to us and thus they are not food or property. Considering that humans can thrive on a vegan diet (in fact, as I will show later, a diet devoid of meat is healthier), and considering that the animals that people eat are domesticated farm animals, the compassionate individual will avoid eating those animals or using them as subjects of scientific research or any other practice that involves animal by-products.

To the charge that compassion is insufficient to give us moral guidance, I want to point out that if compassion is consistently applied to our treatment of animals, the result is an inevitable move toward veganism. A person may be thought to be compassionate because she cares about humans and animals within her own circle. For example, many people consider themselves compassionate individuals and animal lovers. However, their compassion is limited to the people around them and their pets; the limit of their compassion is evinced by the fact that they may eat meat. This attitude is not, however, a virtuous one. Compassion must be consistently extended to all animals and people outside one's moral circle. The failure to extend compassion to all animals—not just to pets—creates an incompleteness of the virtue. For VE it is not sufficient to be compassionate only in some instances.⁴ Therefore, one may not claim to be compassionate in the complete sense of the virtue if one's actions are directed only toward humans or a restricted circle of animals. One must be thoroughly and consistently compassionate toward all beings. One is not truly compassionate by simply refraining from directly being cruel to or directly exploiting animals. One must also not be party to the exploitation of animals; he must not purchase leather, fur, meat, or choose to remain ignorant or inactive by shrugging it off and say that he cannot do anything about it.

Compassion, I noted, is a virtue rooted in love. A compassionate individual's actions are guided by love. A compassionate individual recognizes and appreciates the particular and unique characteristics of everything and everyone, animals, and the environment. When we are attentive to the uniqueness of others, and thus realize that every person, every animal, every plant, and

⁴ Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 14

every insect are unique and irreplaceable, we are moved to value their lives and happiness and we desire to relieve their suffering. Therefore, compassion makes us understand that veganism is a virtuous practice.

Fairness. It seems that virtually all people who care about morality want to be or strive to be fair. But what does that mean? If we stand in a long line and one person tries to cut into the line we say that that's unfair. Exploiting people is unfair. Hurting a child intentionally is unfair. Hurting a dog is unfair. The fair-minded individual acts out of justice to ensure that everyone receives what he or she deserves. Treating others fairly means ensuring that they receive the deserved reward or punishment. A fair individual does not exploit others for his own benefit; he tries to be impartial by treating others equally. If exploiting humans or causing suffering to them is wrong, but it is not considered wrong in the case of animals, this is not impartial. The fair individual is fair to all individuals regardless of their skin color, nationality, height, age, species, and so on. Now, eating and using animals causes countless animals to suffer and be killed for trivial reasons, such as taste, fashion, and amusement. In affluent societies like ours where food is abundant and we have no need to use animals for food or clothing, our treatment of animals is, by definition, especially unfair.

We cause animals to suffer because we use them. Animals experience the world. They are individuals. They don't want to be used by us, but rather enjoy their existence the same way we want to enjoy ours. And once again, consider that to have good lives we don't need to use animals for food or other purposes; that eating animals and their by-products is bad for our health; and that raising animals also harms the environment. It follows that tradition, convenience, and taste are not good reasons to use animals, even "humanely." If we are consistently fair, we will not merely try to ameliorate their living conditions, but rather avoid exploiting them in the first place. Using their bodies, their skin, their milk, their fur, or their eggs is unfair. Also, using some animals but not others is unfair. In Western societies, dogs, cats, some birds, and some fish are considered as pets; but other birds, fish, cows, and pigs, are considered as food. Of course, being a pet does not entail that an animal is treated well. The vast majority of pets are also treated callously. However, the only way to be fair is not to use animals at all. Again, this does not mean that we should endanger our health allowing lice to proliferate in our hair or cockroaches in our apartments. Because VE does not require moral absolutes, it is consistent with fairness that we should not intentionally destroy or harm other living beings; but by the same token it would not be fair to allow other organisms to harm us. In the case of lice, for example, if possible, one should try to remove them without harming them. Shaving one's hair seems to be a fair compromise. Thus, fairness entails that we should not exploit or intentionally hurt or kill. That means going vegan. So, fairness also shows that veganism is a virtuous practice and lifestyle.

IV. ii. Where We Draw the Line

A skeptic of the idea that we should all become vegans may point out that being virtuous does not guarantee that we embrace veganism. Particularly, one may ask "But where do we draw the line?" Veganism, as I have defined it, is the idea that animals do not belong to us. This implies that using them is immoral. But which animals are we talking about? All animals? All insects? Where do we draw the line of respect for animals? These questions seem to me to make sense in a context of an ethic that emphasizes universal rules or one that proposes a common denominator for respecting animals, such as sentience, as the locus of morality. The point of VE

is not to draw lines because, as I have explained, VE is a moral approach that deemphasizes universal rules and consequences and focuses instead on the character of the agent. An agent who has a consistently benevolent, compassionate, temperate, and just character will always behave in ways that are benevolent, compassionate, temperate, and just. He will always act well.

Conversely, an agent who is not virtuous will have to rely upon and follow universal rules or prescriptions derived from some utilitarian calculus; but there is no guarantee that the agent will be willing to act according to those rules or that the agent will be satisfied by his required actions. When we approach morality from virtue, we are asked to take into account the relevant facts of a given situation, rather than abstracting those facts. In other words, a utilitarian, for example, may propose that in our dealings with animals we give equal consideration to all those beings that have preferences. The utilitarian, then, may draw a line and declare that, for example, because a fetus or a mosquito are not the kinds of beings whose preferences could be satisfied, we cast them outside the moral community. Kantian ethics, as I have illustrated in chapter I, is another perfect example of this. According to Kant, the so-called line has to be drawn in accordance with rationality; and since animals are not rational, we have no direct moral duty to them.

VE sees the issue differently. A compassionate individual, for example, is concerned about the well-being of all living things. He respects all creatures because all have a dignity and deserve moral respect. For a virtuous individual, it is not the case that only certain beings have moral worth, while others are absolutely worthless or irrelevant. This is an attitude embedded in the virtues. A virtuous individual respects insects in that he does not kill them intentionally or take pleasure out of torturing or killing them. Since he also respects nature, he will not destroy plants or pollute waters. At the same time, VE is consistent in its approach because it does not categorically prohibit killing animals who threaten our lives or insects that, for example, might infest our homes. In such circumstances, a virtuous individual is morally consistent. With regard to veganism, considering that we can conduct our lives without using animals for food, clothing, or other purposes, exploiting them is inconsistent with the virtues.

IV. iii. Veganism and Virtue

VE says that the point of morality is social and that we must develop certain character traits conducive to living a noble and good life. In academia, brilliant philosophers have spent their careers criticizing VE. But at the end of the day even the very ones who criticize it recognize that it is a great achievement if an individual is reliably compassionate, honest, just, temperate, and that certain reliable traits of one's character are conducive to a happy life. One important component of morality is that morality is social, that is, a collective effort to create a favorable life for everyone. What can we say about the question of animals, then? A VE says that our actions must be guided by certain noble character traits rather than abstract rules. As I have suggested a number of times, the epistemological distinctness of VE is that by our acquiring a virtuous character, our actions are internally motivated, so our actions need not be regulated by rules but rather by justice, temperance, compassion, and so on. This point is as important as misunderstood in ethics. It would be useless to have an agent act in accordance with virtues. The point is to act from the virtues. That is to say, one is not just or temperate or compassionate because she recognizes that she needs to be just or temperate or compassionate; rather, she acts justly because she has acquired the virtue of justice, and the virtue makes her act justly in accordance to given circumstances. Put this way, the path to veganism becomes easy. Before one

gets there, there is an important factor, information. For VE, moral acts result from a noble character and the recognition of the appropriate action in a given circumstance. But without information, even a virtuous person can misapply judgment. Information means knowing precisely the nature of a moral problem. It is not sufficient to read about an issue or discuss it in philosophical conferences. One must experience the issue firsthand.

It is true that nowadays we need not go too far to see what happens in the world. YouTube and other online platforms make it easy to see, for example, the way cows are brutalized by the meat industry or a now infamous video of male baby chicks being ground alive because only quick disposal satisfies the cutthroat requirements of the egg industry.⁵ At the same time, exposure to such easily viewed images may desensitize people. Surely we cannot all do what the brave Timothy Pachirat has done, getting employment at a slaughterhouse.⁶ He recounts stomach-twisting facts about standard practices of the industry. At any rate, most people like us who live in affluent societies have lost touch with nature and live apart from it. The closest a typical New Yorker gets to animals is watching squirrels in Central Park and on a plate at dinnertime. VE's first step toward virtuous treatment of animals is to inform people of the facts underlying animal exploitation. Facts are not enough, however. We should also have direct experience with animals to understand their moral worth. This will enable us to empathize with animal victims and to acquire the virtues, in particular, of compassion and fairness, among many others.

There are many factors we must consider. First, livestock and pet breeders use artificial insemination and forced breeding to give birth to millions of animals. Dairymen separate cows from their children so their milk can be collected and sold, while the calves are slaughtered for veal. Veal calves—as the industry terms baby cows—are killed early in life when their flesh is still pale. They are given an anemic diet and kept in the dark so their flesh never turns red. Most animals are born and raised in cages, or in ranges where they are shipped to processing plants where they are killed. Their bodies are cut into pieces, packaged, and shipped to supermarkets where they are sold, euphemistically labeled as beef, pork, drumsticks, and so on, so as to hide as much as possible the fact that they are the mutilated body parts of cows, or chickens. Far from being an appeal to emotion, the knowledge of the squalid treatment of creatures that are capable of flourishing, but are destroyed by a meat industry that inflicts pain on them, prevents their flourishing, and sells their body parts as food, is morally imperative for the acquisition of the virtues. One may point out that we should think about the fact that some people know all these things about the meat industry but do not conclude that veganism is obligatory. This is true. But for one thing, VE by its very definition never says that something like veganism is *obligatory*. The idea of obligation is, once again, related to a kind of approach to morality that I reject, the approach of deontology, which argues that we can determine what is obligatory or what our moral duties are. At any rate, if one knows what producing meat entails, but despite his knowledge is not motivated to become a vegan, he is not a virtuous individual since eating and using animals are practices that go against the virtues.

⁵ A search on YouTube leads to numerous videos of baby male chicks ground alive. I am particularly referring to this one: “Egg Industry Grinds Millions Of Baby Chicks Alive” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQ5qAfyUuWE> by *HoTvid HD*

⁶ See Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*, Yale University Press; Yale Agrarian Studies Series edition (March 29, 2013)

Animals are not only killed and eaten, but also tortured and abused while alive. Every minute, every day, hundreds of animals are killed in laboratories in the United States. Millions of animals are used in experiments and die every year.⁷ Many animals die after being administered drugs or cosmetics. Our government requires testing on animals before products are sold to people. But consider that many natural cosmetic products already on the market are not required to be tested on animals. Ask yourself, why do we need to test toothpaste or mascara on animals when we could produce and use only cosmetics and other products that do not require any animal testing? Also, in certain experiments, baboons were strapped down while special helmets cemented to their skulls. Then, a pneumatic device delivered calibrated blows to determine the strength of the helmet.⁸ The blows continued until the skull of the baboons were fractured, resulting in the death of the baboons. Psychological researchers drive dogs to the point of insanity by electric shocks so they can study the effect of brain disorders. Cats are deprived of sleep until they die to study sleep deprivation. Elephants were given LSD to study its effects. Mice had their legs cut off in another study to determine how they walk on their stumps. Polar bears were drowned in vats filled with oil to study the effects of oil spills in polar regions. Cats were blinded, castrated, and rendered deaf to study their sexual developments under these incapacities. Other cats are placed in small rooms heated up to 110 degrees Fahrenheit and left there until they die. This process produces a musk in the cats' genitals, which is scraped off and used in the production of perfume, to make the scent last longer.⁹

With this information in place, there is a much more difficult moral activity that to perform. The next step is to realize an important fact that people seldom acknowledge and often deny: animals do not belong to us. They exist solely for their own benefit. In a discussion of this

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, "Annual Report Animal Usage by Fiscal Year," 2 June 2015.

⁸ See *Classic Cases in Medical Ethics: Accounts of Cases that have Shaped Medical Ethics, with Philosophical, Legal, and Historical Backgrounds* by Gregory E. Pence, 250-251.

⁹ The following is a list of references for the mentioned scientific experimentation involving animals:

Jouvet D, Vimont P, Delorme F, Jouvet M; Vimont; Delorme; Jouvet (1964). "[Study of selective deprivation of the paradoxal sleep phase in the cat.]" *C. R. Seances Soc. Biol. Fil.* (in French). 158: 756–9.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1972). "Learned helplessness". *Annual Review of Medicine*. 23 (1): 407–412.

Pojman's *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 6th edition, 608

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/more-than-600000-animals-die-annually-in-science-labs/news-story/aec0d7aa495fbd7b172b2fa933399b78>

http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/biomedical_research/qa/questions_answers.html

<http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-experimentation/>

<http://www.houstonpress.com/news/tens-of-thousands-of-dogs-are-still-used-in-laboratory-testing-every-year-7400834>

"Why Every Day Needs To Be World Animal Day" 04/10/2016 08:03 | Updated 04 October 2016, <http://aavs.org/animals-science/how-animals-are-used/testing/>

point with colleagues, I was asked to explain what is wrong with a cow that lives happily on a farm. This question evinced a profound misunderstanding that when we say things like “happy cows” we make the decision on behalf of the cow. It is actually we who determine that a cow is happy. This is the same as a slave owner ensuring us that his human chattels are happy slaves. VE fits into this by arguing that a virtuous individual avoids making this sort of mistake because she has acquired certain character traits that illuminate important facts about nature, such as the fact that animals are not our property and have the capacity to flourish when left alone.

Thus my argument here is not so much one that provides a systematic account of precisely what the virtues are, how one acquires them, and how an agent acts upon acquisition of the virtues in every circumstance. As I mentioned earlier, the virtues are moral character traits acquired through information and, as Aristotle might put it, through practical reason. What is important to note is that these traits that help the agent make wise choices are praised by all types of moral theorists. This is not to say that virtues need not be explained and discussed. But even Kant or Singer, though they may argue that such characteristics alone are incapable of moral guidance, would recognize that compassion and empathy, for example, are valuable moral characteristics. After all, as I have been trying to emphasize in my discussion about utilitarianism, why would Peter Singer care for his mother and do the best he could to keep her alive (in spite of Singer’s own philosophical position suggesting the opposite)¹⁰ if not for the simple un-philosophical and un-utilitarian fact that he loves her and is compassionate?

So my argument is that VE, alongside care and feminist ethics, makes a cumulative case for ethical veganism. It starts with the premise that we all live a noble and happier life if we acquire moral virtues, such as compassion, empathy, justice, temperance, and more. These virtues open our eyes to a reality that other moral theories are incapable of doing. They demonstrate facts about our relationship and our treatment of animals that we might miss if we look at the world only in terms of what is beneficial to the greatest number or which rights belong to which individuals. Indeed, VE argues that a life devoid of blood dripping from the corpses of animals, devoid of millions of animals artificially brought into existence to live a miserable existence is a life that is beneficial to us, as well.

The animals that meat eaters consume are highly sensitive and intelligent creatures. It is no longer a matter of debate that creatures like pigs and chickens have elaborate social systems. They are peaceful and are playful, and I don’t believe it is anthropomorphism to say that they enjoy their existence. We know this because those animals are incapable of expressing the same passion for life when confined in pens or crowded spaces and forced to live away from their natural environment, offspring, and friends. At this point, there are hundreds of testimonies of people who experienced firsthand the horror of slaughterhouses and factory farms. They all tell the same tale of animals suffering and, most importantly their own negative experiences of witnessing the fear in the eyes of animals that are about to be killed. It is not a mystery that humans share the same concerns about life and death. We value our freedom, our ability to have a social life, and have a strong desire to live free from suffering. It is not inconsistent or implausible, then, that we should value these aspects in the lives of animals.

What I just outlined above, I believe, marks a salient distinction between various moral theories. Namely, VE, unlike other theories, argues that we need to acquire moral skills such as

¹⁰ See my discussion of Singer in Chapter II

empathy, temperance, compassion, and justice, among many others, the acquisition of which causes in us the required paradigm shift from the mistake of seeing animals as property to regarding animals for what they really are: creatures that value their own existence and with whom we share relevant moral characteristics. This mental shift, I believe, enables us to answer questions that seem hard to answer from a vegan worldview. For example, I often am asked to point out the wrongness of, say, raising a cow, allowing her all the air, water, and social interaction as she cares for and, after a supposedly “happy” life, turn her into steaks. Again, the point of VE is not to give people a series of rules or prescriptions that must be followed, though it is not excluded that a virtuous individual could offer general prescriptions that conform with the actions and sentiments of a noble character; rather, VE, as I understand it, argues that we need first acquire, among other virtues, compassion, temperance, justice, and empathy. Also, it invites us to learn about the life of animals. Learning what animals are like enables us to see that they are creatures whose existence matters. When we realize that a cow is not an object that we may use for our benefit, but rather a creature capable of being happy who exists for her own sake, by the very definition of the virtues we cannot possibly regard her as a walking hunk of meat waiting to be killed and used as food. So the idea is not that we refrain from killing her, but that a just, temperate, compassionate, and empathetic individual by definition sees a cow (or any other animals) as a precious being endowed with feelings and many important capacities that we recognize as morally important. A virtuous individual, therefore, does not regard a cow as food no more and no less than he regards a human baby as food.

IV. iv. Why We Should All Become Vegans

But perhaps there is a more difficult question, “Why vegan and not vegetarian?” Why does VE, when properly understood, lead to veganism? For example, what is wrong with taking the milk of a cow and drinking it or using it to make cheese or to take the eggs of a chicken for food? Suppose these animals are not slaughtered and live “happy” lives. In the first place, such is not the scenario that is in question here. Cows and chickens are domesticated animals that long ago humans decided to dominate, and possess for food, clothing, and more. A virtuous individual takes these facts into consideration and realizes cows or chickens are truly happy if they are not exploited. The fact that many people do not see the wrongness of a so-called happy cow “donating” her milk is because many people have been disciplined into thinking that human beings have the right to exploit animals. Naturally, if we start with such a presupposition, we will find no fault in the idea of taking milk from a cow or eggs from a chicken. Conversely, a virtuous individual realizes that a cow is not something that we have the right to possess and that a cow’s milk is not human food but a baby cow’s food. Cow’s milk is in reality a bodily secretion not meant for human consumption.

Returning to the idea of compassion, I argued that a compassionate individual is concerned about the well-being of all living things. He respects all creatures because all have a dignity and deserve moral respect. So, one may object that since plants are also exploited and used as food, it would seem to follow that a virtuous individual would also avoid eating them. In other words, why eating plants is compassionate but eating animals by-products is not? I think the answer starts by considering that the actions of a virtuous individual are measured according to the given circumstances. Compassion is applied in different degrees according to the particular

living organism. This means that while a compassionate individual has moral respect for all living things, the degree of respect is different for different beings and different situations.

Considering the cognitive capacities that animals have, and considering the horrendous practices required to turn animals into food, it is reasonable to say that a compassionate individual avoids using animals because it causes pain and suffering to them. In this case, a compassionate individual may consistently eat plants but avoid eating animals and their by-products because using plants do not require those painful practices that I outlined above. So, it might turn out that plants have certain important cognitive capacities, that they are sentient; but it is reasonable to say that it is more compassionate to use them than to exploit animals who exhibit a higher degree of sentience and conscious experience of the world. Namely, unlike plants, animals are social creatures possessing cognitive capacities, by virtue of which they experience the world. We see that they are not mere objects but beings that experience feelings of fear and joy, and have relationships with friends and with their own offspring.

Plants are alive too. Why vegans eat plants. Granted, plants are living organisms. A compassionate individual, then, must make a choice between eating animals and their by-products or eating plants. The compassionate approach is to choose to use those organisms that are less likely to be morally disrespected. Plants' "being alive" is different from that of animals in a way that makes it difficult to see in what sense it could be said that we wrong or disrespect a plant by eating it. Things like rice, mangoes, beans, bananas, lettuce, or broccoli do not seem to have conscious experiences or to be concerned about their existence. It is very unlikely to say that they enjoy life and the company of their parents and friends, like animals and people do.

Furthermore, the most important aspect of VE as it relates to the question of whether plants are alive, and whether veganism is a compassionate moral position is this. VE concerns organisms that are alive. It is not the case that a virtuous individual would have no moral feelings or respect for mountains, waters, and plants, but only for living and breathing organisms. This is a mistaken conception of VE. As Iris Murdoch argues, "The moral life... is something that goes on continually, not something that switches off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices. What happens in between such choices is indeed what is crucial."¹¹ The virtuous individual is respectful of all things—mountains, rivers, and the whole of nature. His eating choices are informed by virtue and his actions are always appropriate in relation to the good of not only himself but also nature as a whole. Therefore, vegans eat plants because it is not unkind, cruel, indifferent, or intemperate to do so. It would be unkind, cruel, indifferent, and intemperate, for example, to deliberately damage or destroy plants. But the fact is that plants give us a vast variety of fruits that can be eaten without being imprisoned or tortured, disrespected, killed, or being separated from family and friends. These considerations make us realize that there are degrees of moral respect toward different forms of life. The degree of compassion that we have for a cow need not be the same as that we have for a mango. Therefore, a compassionate individual should avoid using animals and their by-products because exploiting animals causes them a great degree of suffering. By using their milk, eggs, or labor, we severely disrespect them. As I explained earlier, animal by-products are obtained through practices that make them suffer and prevent them from flourishing. But in the case of plants, although they are living organisms, our exploiting them does not require the same cruel practices that inflict pain upon animals.

¹¹ Iris Murdoch, "The Idea of Perfection," in *The Sovereignty of The Good*, London: Routledge, 1970, 8

IV. v. The link Between Virtue and Veganism

What link is there between VE and ethical veganism? I suppose we may frame this question by considering two further points: 1. Given the virtues, what ought we do? In what way are the virtues capable of guiding us to veganism? 2. Is it all about cruelty? If we treat animals with respect—“humanely,” as they say—are we morally permitted to, say, own pets or drink the occasional freshly squeezed milk or eat eggs or wear wool?

1. The action guiding is one of those aspects in ethics that strikes me as being portrayed as the most difficult and a deal breaker for VE. Expanding on Hursthouse’s discussion about this,¹² I have to mention that deontology and consequentialism, which are typically regarded as great action guiding theories, stand in the same need of an explanation for moral action guiding as VE. At any rate, the criticism that VE fails to give moral guidance stems from an approach to VE with the same standards used for non-VE theories. That is, it is a type of category mistake to ask about action guiding of VE, like asking whether a chair is compassionate. Yet, it is not entirely out of the question that VE directs us in right moral directions.

Because VE is not a formulaic theory, its action guiding power is possessed by it in a different form, internally. Formulaic theories are those that offer a procedure, such as the utilitarian calculus or the universalizability principle leading to categorical imperatives, to determine the right action; such theories are purported to yield decisions that are right actions and at the same time moral actions. VE has no formula per se, so the action guiding force is internal to the agent rather than external. The acquisition of the virtues creates an individual who by nature makes good and right decisions and arguably rational decisions. In the literature, this is a serious point of contention against VE, but not a correct one. To work this out with an analogy, think about a well-educated individual having a discussion. He listens to his interlocutors, allows them to express their position, and then politely responds. An ill-educated individual, on the other hand, may not be so polite to allow others to talk or may not use the principle of charity in a discussion. Now, the idea is that a well-educated individual is one who enjoys having polite discussions because he possesses certain virtues that make him a polite and respectful individual.

So properly understood, VE suggests that a virtuous individual possesses a good character that leads her to the right moral direction. The issue about whether VE can be a viable action guiding theory is exacerbated by lifeboat hypotheticals. That is to say, a critic may point out: granted, trustworthiness and telling the truth are noble aspects of one’s character; but how do you deal with this and that situation? As I mentioned before, we must realize that every theory is open to that criticism, but this is not simply a *tu quoque* fallacy. Consider deontology, which I find plausible. For instance, I help you because I have a sense of duty and not because I have an ulterior motive—or, I do the right thing for the right reasons. So, for example, I never lie because not lying is a duty that requires that I act from a good will. But then what do I do in case you were hiding in my house from a hypothetical killer and the killer asked me if I had seen you? Should I tell the truth according to the imperative “never lie” and risk your life, or should I lie to protect you? In such a case, a deontologist is morally paralyzed. But VE is an entirely different approach because, arguably, a virtuous individual is caring and compassionate and would lie every time in

¹² Here I refer to Rosalind Hursthouse, “Normative Virtue Ethics,” from Roger Crisp, ed., *How Should One Live?* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 19-33.

such hypothetical circumstances to save another's life. But what's important here is to understand that there is not a formula that says, in such and such circumstance, tell the truth or lie or what have you. Right action is not one that occurs independently of an individual's state of mind—one that shows respect for life, concern about justice, benevolence, empathy, and friendship—which moves the agent to perform a proper action, and what is appropriate in given circumstances. In the specific instance the circumstances are that we can thrive on an exclusive vegan diet and so do not need to exploit animals.

A virtuous individual is not preoccupied about which action is right and which method or formula will lead to the right action. This is the sense in which VE is action guiding: an honest individual is one that never lies unless lying is for a good cause. For example, such an individual, having the virtue of honesty but also of compassion, might find it appropriate to avoid telling a child that her mother was raped and brutally murdered. The point is that a virtuous individual, unlike a deontologist or a consequentialist, need not worry about calculating the right action because what is right is dictated so to speak by the virtues.

Now the question of how to move from the virtues to veganism requires a few steps. But how does this work? When I think about people, I do not think of them as potential food. VE suggests that I consider my feelings and assess the specific situation when I interact with others. Once again, in terms of universalizability, my feelings toward others are objective because I objectively recognize a moral worth in others. So while my decisions may change according to particular circumstances, the fact that others have moral value is a fact about nature that is unchanging. A virtuous individual recognizes that others are valuable individuals deserving attention and moral respect. As we recognize our value, we recognize the value of others. I believe that this cannot be put any more saliently than in the words of Albert Schweitzer when he says,

Just as in my own will-to-live there is a yearning for my life, and for that mysterious exultation of the will-to-live which is called pleasure, and terror in face of annihilation and that injury to the will-to-live which is called pain; so the same obtains in all the will-to-live around me, equally whether it can express itself to my comprehension or whether it remains unvoiced.¹³

It is not the case that I respect others because they are rational beings or because I want to promote the highest aggregative good. Rather, I respect them because I recognize that their existence, their "will-to-live," is valuable to them as my existence and my will-to-live is for me. A virtuous character, in other words, enables me to have reverence for life itself and recognize that animals are not objects that can be exploited, but rather highly sensitive creatures that have a yearning for their lives.

2. Consequently, I do not see animals as things that I might eat or use. So ethical veganism is not only a matter of avoiding cruelty. I see animals as they are: they are individuals, siblings, mothers, fathers, and friends; they are beings that care for one another, that enjoy each other's company. These considerations do not stem from a principle of rights or what might lead to the promotion of the greatest good for the greatest number. Rather, I acknowledge what

¹³ Schweitzer, "The Ethic of Reverence for Life," 32-33

animals are as living beings by observing them and learning about them and listening to them. They do not behave like food, smell like food, or look like food. They are cute, playful, funny, aggressive, affectionate, dangerous, and much more.

Learning about animals makes us realize that they have interesting social lives. Like humans, animals enjoy the company of their siblings, friends, and parents; many animals also enjoy human company. Animals have to be turned into food. This involves no pretty sights or smells. In this process, there are forcible appropriation of animals, and forcible reproduction, lacerations of the skin, castration, debeaking, with blood and other fluids flowing out of their bodies, broken bones, their experience of fear and pain, and unpleasant odors, just to mention a few crude events involved in the transformation of animals into food. The horrendous sights, sounds, and odors caused by the death of an animal are, I argue, atrocious events. Consider that such animals, very plausibly, do not desire to be turned into food. Also interesting to note is that unless we purchase their body parts in a supermarket, conveniently cut into welcoming shapes and packaged, most people would feel distress were they themselves required killing and turning animals into food. Furthermore, an equally important consideration, though not an essential one for the case, is that the human body requires no consumption of animal flesh or animals derivatives. So, because animals are individuals with intrinsic moral worth, they exist for their own sake, I also realize that it is unjust, cruel, and uncaring to use them in any kind of way. Furthermore, considering that animals such as cows and chickens have been domesticated for the very purpose of being eaten and used in various practices of human existence, consuming milk, using wool, or any other practice that some might label as “humane,” are in disaccord with the virtues.

To spell this out, just as in the case of our relationship with other humans, a compassionate, just, temperate, and empathetic individual does not regard animals as property and, consequently, does not use or eat any animal or animal by-product. VE does not suggest that we avoid exploiting and eating humans or animals only because we should avoid cruelty; also, we do not refrain from eating or using people or animals because we are interested in maximizing utility or because we must follow certain fixed rules dictated by reason. Rather, we respect others because we recognize their intrinsic moral worth and because we are capable of relating to them and have relationships. Consequently, I recognize that even drinking a mother’s milk is immoral, unless she is my mother and I am at an age that requires that I drink breast milk. The point is that avoiding cruelty is not enough to realize which practices are immoral. Only through the virtues can we realize that most of our practices and attitudes toward animals that we consider humane are in fact morally bankrupt.

Therefore, having realized important facts about us and about the lives of animals, VE’s approach cannot be vague or yield equally possible courses of action. If VE wants me to be a just individual, for example, once I realize that animals do not belong to us, yet are forcibly impregnated, held captive, and arbitrarily used, I know that what is involved in the process of turning animals into food is in no sense just. Similarly, VE suggests that we be empathetic and compassionate. Empathy is a virtue that enables us to fully understand the situation of another being. Compassion is the sympathetic and genuine concern with the feelings of others, especially for their suffering and misfortune. Now, having realized that animals exist for their own benefit and it is not their purpose or wish to be imprisoned and turned into food, a practice that inflicts pain and suffering, we then realize that using animals does not conform to virtue, and therefore

regarding animals as things that we can eat is uncompassionate. Notice that an evaluation of these important virtues enables us to address the second point, i.e., whether it is morally permissible within a VE framework to *use* animals if we avoid making them suffer. The emphasis on the word *use* is important here. For, considering the virtues, any kind of use is impermissible, though we might believe that certain ways of using animals are humane.

IV. vi. Reaching People In Non-Manipulative Ways

In order to shake off the idea that animals are our property and food, it necessary to deprogram people from the false ideas of food inculcated in them by society, especially the idea that animals are food. So here I want to discuss what forms of non-manipulative instruction may succeed in reaching people. But before such an endeavor, I want to point out in what respects the meat and dairy industry manipulates people. There are, I believe, mechanisms that subvert our opposition to animal exploitation. The aspect of VE that I emphasize is information, as I believe that understanding these mechanisms enables us to acquire a noble character. VE suggests we must acquire certain moral character traits that will enable us to live well, and consequently regard animals as beings existing for their own sake. Being virtuous makes us realize that we do something immoral if we use animals in any kind of way for our convenience. Thus a question is prompted: what prevents us from having sympathy and compassion toward animals so that we oppose animal exploitation? My answer is that the meat-and-dairy industry alongside the hunting lobby, and scientific research, have established very powerful mechanisms to subvert and override our moral feelings of sympathy toward animals.

Tom Regan questions whether in morality our emotions alone can move us in the direction of opposing animal exploitation. In particular, he questions whether care ethics can “go far enough.”¹⁴ He writes,

What are the resources within the ethic of care that can move people to consider the ethics of their dealings within individuals who *stand outside* the existing circle of their valued interpersonal relationships?...Unless we supplement the ethic of care with some other motivating source—some other grounding of our moral judgment—we run the grave risk that our ethic will be excessively conservative and will blind us to those obligations we have to people for whom we are indifferent.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this possibility more evident than in the case of our moral dealings with non-human animals. The plain fact is, most people do not care very much about what happens to them...

And thus it is that a feminist ethic that is *limited to an ethic of care* will, I think, be unable to illuminate the moral significance of the idea that we (human) animals are not superior to all the animals.¹⁵

¹⁴ Tom Regan, *The Three Generations: Reflections of the Coming Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 95

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95-96

And Peter Singer argues that the best way to make us realize that we should accept equal consideration for animals and thus oppose animal exploitation is the utilitarian idea of preference. Like Regan, Singer believes that reason, not emotions, is necessary for us to see the wrongness of animal exploitation. In fact, he writes that,

Altruistic impulses once limited to one's kin and one's own group might be extended to a wider circle by reasoning creatures who can see that they and their kin are one group among others, and from an impartial point of view no more important than others.¹⁶

Singer and Regan here argue that people lack sympathy with animals. What I find interesting is that neither denies the value of sympathy. Regan says it is “a plain fact” that people do not care about animals and for Singer it is a natural fact. In my view, people do not care about animals because they are taught to do so by manipulative mechanisms created by society used to undermine sympathy with animals who stand outside our circle of care. What seems to be infelicitous about our relationship with animals is that we have to be taught to exploit them. Early on in our lives, we have to be slowly habituated to regard animals as food. Animals are always fed to children in forms that do not remotely resemble animals, such as mush or cute shapes, such as nuggets or things labeled as “happy meals.” Moreover, children's books make sure to distort children's reality by presenting animals as happy friends of, say Farmer Joe's, rather than showing them amassed in cages inside factory farms. Not surprisingly, children are not taught that burgers and steaks are former body parts of the same cute cow they see in their book where the cows appear so peaceful and content. There is a clear mechanism that disconnects children's understanding of the lives of animals and prevents the acquisition of important moral virtues such as compassion and fairness.

Another mechanism is arguably religion. I am not arguing that religion is deliberately deceiving, nor am I suggesting that belief in a god is illusory. Rather, I want to point out that religions, insofar as they are social phenomena, regardless of whether a god or gods exist, are affected by social trends just like everything else in society. So it is not surprising that the prevalent religious view accommodates exploitation of animals. In Christianity, for example, Genesis 1:29-30 says:

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it — I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.¹⁷

This passage clearly states that animals were not created as “human food” but rather as creatures that exist for their own sake, who will eat plants, fruits, and seeds, just like humans. And in

¹⁶ Peter Singer, *The expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociology* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981), 134

¹⁷ *Gen.* 1:29-30

Genesis 1:1-2:3 animals are created before humans and are regarded as good independently of their relations to human beings. But these passages are rather unknown by most Christians, who actually know of passages where animals are offered to humans by God as food. The *Qur'an* also describes animals as beings that form communities, just as humans do, rather than describing them as food or property:

There is not an animal that lives on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but they form communities like you. Nothing have we omitted from the Book, and they all shall be gathered to their Lord in the end.¹⁸

But once again, it is understandable that most Muslims prefer other passages of the *Qur'an* where meat is food. But my point about the unreliability of religion is that there are many interpretations of the same concept within the same religion and there are also religions, such as Jainism, that teach reverence for life and veganism. Jainism, for example, prescribes a vegan diet. And the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, a Protestant Christian denomination, eating meat is not encouraged, “We believe God calls us to care for our bodies, treating them with the respect a divine creation deserves. Gluttony and excess, even of something good, can be detrimental to our health.”¹⁹

Language is possibly the most powerful manipulative mechanism. It is obvious by watching commercials or reading meat trade or hunting journals, or just by going into a supermarket meat section, how terminology has changed in order to divorce the image of slaughter, blood, imprisonment, torture, suffering, and more, from meat. Cooking shows typically talk about the “juices” of a piece of meat; but meat does not have juice. The liquid dripping from a piece of meat is blood. Butcher shops nowadays are almost all known as “meat markets.” Slaughterhouses prefer to be called “meat plants” or even “meat factories.” And the meat industry introduced terms such as beef, pork, white meat, flank steak, round, mountain oysters, and many other euphemisms to avoid saying cow meat, pig, the side of a cow, the breast of a chicken, the rear end of a cow, the testicles of a cow or lamb. Similarly, vivisectionists prefer to use terms such as “dispatch,” “terminate,” or “sacrifice” instead of “kill.” And hunters favor terms such as “harvesting” to refer to killing animals by shooting them. And to top it all off, this type of deliberately deceitful language pervades society through and through with the help and impact of the media. Countless TV shows and movies try to give a negative connotation to vegetables and veganism, while praising the meat and dairy lifestyle. They portray women as weak individuals who eat weak food; women in the media are typically “salad eaters” while men are strong “meat eaters.” As an example, in the popular sit-com *Two and a Half Men*, the main character, Charlie, played by Charlie Sheen, is the stereotypical male, a gambler, drinker, womanizer, who enjoys eating meat and smoking cigars. In one episode, Charlie is dating a woman, also portrayed as the stereotypical female, a submissive, longhaired, ballerina, who has the preposterous idea to try to change Charlie into a “better” man by taking him to a vegan restaurant. The result is disastrous, as Charlie rebels by shouting that he cannot stand having to eat “medallions of bean curd in lawnmower sauce”²⁰ like a woman.

¹⁸ *Qur'an* 6:38

¹⁹ “Living A Healthful Life” Seventh-Day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/en/vitality/health/>

²⁰ “My Tongue is Meat” episode 15 season 3 of *Two and a Half Men* (CBS, 2003-2015), February 27, 2006

The point is always the same: meat eating is praised with a good/positive connotation, and is generally associated with ideas of strength, masculinity, and is synonymous with reason and righteousness; while veganism or even vegetarianism, is undermined and ridiculed as associated with femininity, and femininity, which is offered as synonymous with irrationality, emotiveness, daintiness, and overall silliness.²¹ Films, magazine articles, TV shows, comedies, talk shows and more, portray vegans negatively. They are always soft-character, bunny-like, salad eaters or obnoxious individuals who bother other people, feel superior, or who want to save the world. The very term, “vegan” is nowadays synonymous with diet, so that it is viewed as just another diet among hundreds, and the actual moral question of our treatment of animals is obscured. My point here is that animal exploitation thrives not because humans do not have a natural bond with animals, but in spite of it. People are deliberately manipulated by a system of exploitation, which comprises scientific research, meat and dairy industries, hunting, and the food industry. If we are constantly told these messages, we cannot be properly informed about the lives of animals, and therefore cannot sympathize with them.

It is rather unsatisfactory to admit that the answer to the question of what forms of instructions can inform us in a non-manipulative way and help deprogram people from the false idea that animals belong to us and that they are food is not a straightforward one. It is a rather complicated issue that has to do with multi-million-dollar industries that hold sway over government and the media. But the first step is to realize the subversive ways used by the media to discipline people out of their empathy for animals. One answer is to become more involved in moral education and move in the direction of VE instead of in the prevalent view of morality that teaches us about rights, utility, or about detached principles and rules. Informing the public might also involve a new direction for academic philosophers toward a more practical way of teaching and doing philosophy. Perhaps more professional philosophers should spend less time on trying to figure out whether Platonic forms really exist or trying to decipher *Being and Time*, and focus on teaching the importance of virtue. After all, I believe that the moral mistake of exploiting animals stems from a lack of virtue and an abundance of vices: for example, besides indifference to the suffering of animals, intemperance is manifested in people’s obsession with food, regardless of whether or not such food comes through the suffering of animals. But also, self-indulgence manifested in the insistence in consuming animal secretions such as milk and honey as food. So, viable ways of instruction will require a demand of clear information from government and the media. This may start, in my view, from educating children about the lives of animals and the procedures involved in turning animals into food and shoes and wallets, the use of animals in scientific research, but most importantly showing examples, through literature, the arts and entertainment, of the lives of vegans as they really are—morally consistent and dietarily fulfilled—and the lives of animals as they are—i.e., beings that have important moral characteristics; beings that want to exist for their own sake and not for the sake of humans.²²

The issue of tobacco is similar in my view in that it is an immoral business that thrives on misinformation and the intemperance of millions of people who indulge in smoking cigarettes. In

²¹ See *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* by Carol J. Adams

²² Some books exist, not many. For example, J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, Princeton University Press (July 1, 2001), Will Potter’s *Green is the New Red: An Insider’s Account of a Social Movement Under Siege*, City Lights Publishers; First Edition (April 12, 2011), Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People: A Novel*, Simon & Schuster; Reprint edition (March 17, 2009)

2009, the *Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act* was signed into law and required, among many other provisions, the display of color graphics and texts that depicts the negative consequences of smoking. I am not suggesting that we should require showing photos on packages of meat of animals being slaughtered, (though it is not an entirely bad idea). However, despite the message and the images and our knowledge of the lethal consequences of cigarette smoking, people continue to smoke, although far fewer than in the past. This is once again due to the lack of virtue and the continuing promotion of smoking by the tobacco industry through movies and celebrity usage. In a similar fashion, both the meat and dairy industry and the tobacco industry work very hard to make immoral practices such as the exploitation of animals and the sale of a lethal drug as necessary items in our lives.

I want to make a final point about language, morality, and information. Earlier I mentioned a YouTube video of a food demonstrator in a supermarket offering samples of sausage to passing-by customers. When the customers sought to purchase the product, the demonstrator would remove a piglet from a box and pretend to drop the cute squirming piglet into what seemed a meat grinder. The reaction of all customers is the same: they are shocked and appalled at the cruelty and cold heart of the demonstrator who pretends to throw the piglet into the meat grinder without hesitation. This predicament occurs while most of the customers are still chewing their sausage. But then why are the customers shocked? Also, why are many meat eaters and leather wearers opposed to animal exploitation? Usually people say that they are against inhumane treatment of animals. But what makes them say that a certain treatment is inhumane? Why do some people bother at all worrying about whether the treatment that animals receive is humane or not. If one has such worries, why eat animals or wear their skin in the first place? Such conflicting attitude, I believe, evinces a truncated expression of our moral feelings of compassion, fairness, and benevolence for non-human animals. So the point of moral education should be to nurture these feelings and enable us to apply them consistently. As I have pointed out, one is truly and fully compassionate when feelings of compassion are consistently directed toward all animals, and not just those closer to us. Also, a fair individual is one who, having acquired a just moral character, is fair in all circumstances. The compassionate and fair-minded individual feels sympathy for all animals and avoids exploiting them because it is fair to do so. In other words, a virtuous individual understands that animals are not our food, and therefore chooses to be a vegan.