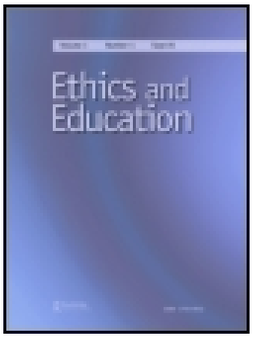

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Vegan parents and children: zero parental compromise

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ABSTRACT
Marcus William Hunt argues that when co-parents disagree over whether to raise their child (or children) as a vegan, they should reach a compromise as a gift given by one parent to the other out of respect for his or her authority. Josh Millburn contends that Hunt's proposal of parental compromise over veganism is unacceptable on the ground that it overlooks respect for animal rights, which bars compromising. However, he contemplates the possibility of parental compromise over 'unusual eating,' of animal-based foods obtained without the violation of animal rights. I argue for zero parental compromise, rejecting a rights-oriented approach, and propose a policy that an ethical vegan parent and a non-vegan co-parent should follow to determine how to raise their children.

KEYWORD
Veganism; Children; Parental Compromise; Religion; Rights

Consider this scenario: dad is an ethical vegan and as such, he wishes to raise his child as a vegan. However, mom is not a vegan and, though she understands the importance of ethical veganism and respects dad's ethical commitment to it, she wishes to raise their child as a meat eater, or at least she would like her child's diet to incorporate some animal-based food. What should mom and dad do? According to Hunt (2019), there are four possible courses of action. One, the parents command nothing. This is unacceptable because parents cannot expect the issue to just go away on its own. Two, only one parent makes a command. But this is not a desirable option either because in such a case a parent's command would, obviously, undermine the authority of the co-parent. Three, each parent makes his and her preferred command, which would make a child left to decide which of the two to follow. Consequently, Hunt observes, the best policy mom and dad should follow, which avoids undermining either one's parental authority, is to reach a compromise.

Compromise is not the claim that one parent has to capitulate entirely; rather, parents should find a middle ground that both can accept. Although Hunt's proposals in this area are lacking, compromising may mean a position between veganism and non-veganism or it may involve a compromise in which one is the designated parent that determines everything about diet,

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while the other parent deliberates over some other aspects of the child's upbringing. Granted, no one would disagree with this point: either mom and dad get into a verbal dispute (which might even escalate to physical) over whose command is legitimate and binding or they come to an agreement that satisfies each parent and respects each parent's authority. But are the convictions that an ethical vegan holds the sorts of principles over which one can compromise?

Josh Milburn (2020) does not think so. He challenges Hunt's parental compromise on the ground that 'Hunt fails to consider a key concern underlying a reluctance to compromise on veganism: the injustice involved in the violation of animals' rights'. (1) However, Milburn suggests the possibility of parental compromise over 'unusual eating.' Unusual eating refers to animal-based food that does not violate animal rights, food such as 'roadkill, bugs, bivalves, in vitro meat, and animal products that will be wasted.' (12) His argument is that the foods just listed lack the capacity to feel or think; and feeling and thinking are necessary for one to be entitled to rights; thus, it follows that consuming such foods does not involve the violation of animal rights. In what follows, I argue for zero parental compromise on the ground that one's commitment to ethical veganism is comparable to religious belief, and thus nonnegotiable. I reject a rights-oriented view as the foundation for ethical veganism. Thus, to show why ethical veganism should accept zero compromise, I describe the quasi-religious ethical uncompromising convictions of a vegan. Such convictions may be properly supported by three arguments: the Aesthetic, the Gustatory, and the Moderation. Lastly, I will recommend a policy that an ethical vegan parent and a non-vegan co-parent should follow in order to determine how to raise their children.

I. Why zero compromise

Parental authority is a delicate matter. As Hunt (2019) points out, the only way to respect the authority of both parents over their child (or children) is for both parents to agree on the same command. Moreover, such a command must be the result of a compromise. Parental compromise, according to Hunt, is not the result of the sort of compromise reached by two parties in a business transaction. Rather, the sort of compromise that co-parents should reach is something like 'gifts or oblations given by each party out of respect for one another's authority.' (11) With regards to veganism, how can co-parents that have opposite views over veganism reach a compromise concerning the diet on which to raise their children? How can parents show respect for one another's authority and dietary commitments in a way that is conducive to their child wellbeing? There are, I believe, a number of things on which one should not compromise. Take an obvious example, religion. A child may be taught about different

religions, but it is arguably undesirable – and, in fact, impracticable – to raise a child as both a Muslim and a Hindu (Hunt 2019, 15).

This is an important observation in the light of Lisa Johnson's (2015) argument. I don't find it necessary to rehearse Johnson's argument here. The important point is that Johnson shows that the definition of ethical veganism is consistent with the legal definition of religion. Also, it should be considered the recent Jordi Casamitjiana case reported in the BBC (BBC News 2020). In that case, the judge ruled that ethical veganism is a philosophical belief of the same nature as religious belief, and therefore grounds for protection in law. Thus, in writing this paper, and considering Hunt's examples and examination of parental compromise, I have realized that the liking of religion and veganism is quite pertinent.

The point is that one fundamental reason that an ethical vegan parent should not compromise with a non-vegan co-parent over whether to raise their children as vegans is that veganism is in many important respects like a religion. Unless one is a vegan in the hope to lose weight or to make an impact on social media or for any other trivial reason, a convicted ethical vegan parent, just as a Christian parent or a Muslim parent or a Jain parent, would find it impossible to compromise over animal-based food. Certainly, there are what I call flexible vegans who, say, would not be upset if they discovered that the bar of chocolate they just ate contains dairy milk or the cookie they enjoyed had egg in it. Perhaps, a flexible vegan might have no qualms accommodating the wishes of his or her pro-meat co-parent. But I am not talking about flexible vegans here. Otherwise, I would not have this conversation in the first place. What I am talking about here is an ethical vegan whose beliefs and convictions are comparable to those of a religious person.

First, let me make clear that I am not implying that those individuals who choose to be vegans on the basis of what I call *trivial* reasons or what I call flexible vegans are contemptible individuals. Rather, my point is to stress that ethical vegans approach life and morality in a quasi-religious manner. They are appalled by the capricious ways of meat eaters. Ethical vegans believe that it is wrong to kill animals for food just like Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected after death. I emphasize the word 'believe' here because I want to draw attention to the fact that, despite the variety of defenses of veganism, there is no decisive argument that shows that eating animals is immoral. A possible objection is that there may ultimately be no decisive moral argument for anything – but there are excellent arguments for ethical veganism. Granted, but my point is to draw attention to the similarities between the way in which vegans accept and follow veganism and the way in which most religious people accept and follow a particular religion. After all, there may be excellent arguments for the existence of God; still, most religious people have faith in God and follow a religion in spite of logical argumentation. Similarly, most vegans are not

philosophers, and presumably do not choose to be vegans as a result of some logical-moral argumentation.

Again, as the religious who believe in God in spite of argumentation, most vegans have a quasi-spiritual conviction that what they are doing is right and believe and feel that eating animals is wrong. Thus, I will suggest (but not develop an argument here to that effect, though it is an interesting one) that ethical veganism is in many respects like religion and that ethical vegans hold a belief that it is wrong to eat animals. In an earlier version of this paper, an anonymous reviewer noted that an obvious objection to this point is that ethical veganism is relevantly unlike religious affiliation in that veganism involves more than mere belief or faith. It draws on empirical, scientific evidence – e.g. psychophysical continuity between human and other-than-human animals – and indeed proceeds in terms of more or less sophisticated 'logical-moral' reasoning. But note that religious scholars can say exactly the same regarding religion – belief in God draws on empirical and scientific evidence.[1]

Consequently, the possibility that an ethical vegan parent would compromise over his or her child's vegan diet is analogous to that a Muslim parent or a Jain parent or a Zoroastrian parent compromising over whether his or her child should be raised as, say, half Jain and half Muslim. Not surprisingly, committed Christians marry other Christians and committed Muslims marry other Muslims and committed Jains marry other Jains. As Hunt does, I take parenting very seriously. I myself am the parent of three (ethical vegan) children. Raising children is such an important and delicate job that in my view a vegan and a non-vegan should seriously ponder the question of whether to raise children as vegans before starting a family. Depending on the ethical vegan's commitment to veganism, perhaps a couple should even contemplate not having children. Non-veganism for many (it is so in my case at least) is indeed an extreme commitment like Hunt's pro-murder example (13) or like neglecting certain religious practices for a religious person in my religion analogy. In my case, for example, I would not even date, let alone marry and have children with, a non-vegan or a vegan or vegetarian partner who intended to raise our future children as meat eaters or make sporadic additions of animal products in their diets. What would be a compromise reached by a vegan and a non-vegan parent? Hunt gives an example of a child who eats mostly a plant-based diet and occasionally consumes animal products.

There are many problems with this example. First, where to draw the line? What is occasional consumption of animal product? Consider that there will be times when the 3-times-a-week consumption of fish stipulation (as Hunt suggests, 16) becomes four or five or more times. It is easy to imagine such a situation: 'Sorry I know that our compromise involves three times, but grandma cooked this fish with love and not eating it will offend her'. Such situations may create resentment in the parents' relationship, and confusion for the child. Especially if the child is mature enough to understand basic moral principles,

he or she will wonder why dad is against eating animals while mom is okay with it; and if dad is against it, abstention from eating animals must be important. Therefore, while mom is okay with it, will I not hurt dad's feelings and go against his moral principles whenever I eat fish? And if I don't eat fish, will I not hurt mom's feelings?

Second, taking myself again as an example, assume that my wife were a meat eater or in favour of raising our children on a diet that incorporates a minimal amount of animal products. To compromise as Hunt suggests, I would gift her with my agreement to feed our children animal products sporadically. In such a hypothetical situation, I would show my respect to my wife. However, I would have to tolerate having animal products in my house, in my refrigerator, and in my pots and pans and cutting board and kitchen utensils. My behaviour might strike some as exaggerated or extravagant. However, going back to the analogy between veganism and religion, a committed ethical vegan is no more extravagant or exaggerated than a religious person. When my friend Mark, a committed Jew, comes over, he drinks only out of plastic cups due to his religious beliefs, which I honor. I would never expect Mark to drink out of a glass or consume *treif* food, because I understand that his choices stem from deep religious convictions. Similarly, Mark would never come to my apartment with a pastrami sandwich, because he knows that my choice of being an ethical vegan is based on deep moral beliefs against animal-based food. Granted, we are talking about parental compromise, not of friendship compromise; however, I would not expect Mark to compromise over his principles and drink out of a glass when he comes over – after all, it is only once a week, I might argue, which seems to be a good compromise. If I compromised over veganism, I would have to stomach the smell of animal products, the sight of them, and, moreover, accept stepping over my moral principles (or religious if veganism is considered as such) by contributing to everything that I deem wrong with using animals for food.

Hunt implies that between veganism and omnivorism and similarly between differing religious views 'there are often more intermediate policies available than other conceptualizations might allow'. and continues, 'being "a vegan" is in part defined by abstinence from animal products or that being "a Mormon" is in part defined by abstinence from hot tea.' Consequently, Hunt argues, 'there are lots of compromises and intermediate policies available that partially instantiate each parent's will for the child.' (16) The problem is that being a vegan is not 'in part defined by abstinence from animal products.' Abstinence from animal products is the core doctrine of veganism. A vegan who intentionally eats animal products even once a year is by definition not a vegan. This is comparable to the specific, narrow, and exclusionary claims of Christianity. For example, Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6 New International Version). For a Christian, the words of Jesus exclude all other ways to heaven – attainment of eternal life is

only through Jesus. Such a belief is essential to a Christian. It is more important than drinking tea or going to church. It might be acceptable for a Mormon child to drink tea once a week or for a Christian child to skip church once a month.

However, to my knowledge, these are not deal breakers. Conversely, it is a central doctrine of Christianity to believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father and that Jesus was resurrected after death. Similarly, it is a central doctrine of Mormonism that Joseph Smith found the golden plates on a hill in upstate New York and translated them into the Book of Mormon with divine assistance. Thus, it would be as impossible for an ethical vegan to incorporate animal products in his or her diet as it is for a Christian to lack the belief of salvation through Jesus and Jesus' resurrection or as it is for a Mormon to lack the belief that Joseph Smith found the golden plates from which he translated the Book of Mormon. As far as I can see, the only possibility of compromise available over veganism is about the type of food consumed and the frequency of consumption. For example, nowadays it is possible to find all sorts of vegan products, from mock meats to mock cheese that melts on pizza. These are highly processed food items, and thus two vegan parents may reach a compromise that their child be allowed to consume such food items only once a week or once a month. The parent could even agree banning a certain food item. These and other examples certainly represent intermediate policies. However, it would be unacceptable and non-comprisable for an ethical vegan to ever consume animal-based food because it would be tantamount to rejecting the very core moral belief of veganism.

In a recent response to Hunt's article, Josh Milburn (2020) disputes Hunt's parental compromise proposal by arguing that Hunt 'overlooks the idea that respect for animal rights is a duty of justice, and thus not something to be compromised on lightly'. (1) Then, surprisingly enough, Milburn proposes the possibility of parental compromise over 'unusual eating'. Unusual eating refers to animal-based food that does not implicate violations of animals' rights. He writes, 'Despite this, there may be some room for compromise at the margins'. and 'perhaps parents could compromise on feeding children animal products that would otherwise go to waste … or the products of new biotechnological methods of food production, or similar.' (Milburn 2020, 15) According to Milburn, the type of food that does not violate animal rights (quoting Fischer 2018, 263) refers to 'roadkill, bugs, bivalves, in vitro meat, [or] animal products that will be wasted'. (12) Why such a bizarre choice of food? Milburn argues that such creatures are likely incapable of thinking and feeling, and therefore are not entitled to rights on a rights view. While I agree with Milburn that Hunt's parental compromise strategy is mistaken, though for different reasons, I argue that Milburn's proposition does not help resolve the issue of whether and how unlike-minded parents should raise their children as vegans. Hunt underestimates the importance of moral integrity, and that ethical veganism, like religion, cannot accept compromise; Milburn's suggestion of a rights-based

view should be rejected, and his suggestion that parents might consider compromising over feeding children roadkill, bugs, and animal products that will be wasted is not a viable compromise between veganism and non-veganism.

First, before I address the inadequacy of a rights-based view, I want to comment on Milburn's proposed compromise over bug, throwaway animal products, roadkill, and more. I do not know to what extent Milburn wishes to defend this position and on what grounds, and thus will limit my response. Since the topic of this discussion is parental compromise, but most importantly about children's wellbeing, and ultimately about figuring out a strategy to raise a moral and healthy family, I can't imagine parents concerned about the well-being of their children who – due to their opposite view over diet – resort to feeding their children roadkill or thing in the bin behind a slaughterhouse or leftover sandwiches after a department meeting. Milburn's idea is that either someone eats them, or they go in the bin. (Personal correspondence) Granted, wasting food is bad. However, what would be the point? Just because a co-parent wants his or her children to consume meat? Is eating meat so important that one should be wiling to feed his children bugs, roadkill, or animal products that will go to waste? To my knowledge, even meat eaters would be appalled at the mere idea of eating a deer run over by a bus or a bunch of crickets, or a piece of liver rescued from the trash bin. From the point of view of health and nutrition, there is no reason whatever that could justify eating animals found dead on the side of the road, insects, animal parts that will be wasted, or any other creepy crawlers. Considering my argument above, no committed ethical vegan would contemplate feeding such unwholesome food to his or her children. With regard to lab-grown meat, and other in vitro animal products, I think that in principle it could be compromised over – though there are compelling virtue-oriented reasons according to which vegans should not support or consume or feed to their children synthetic meat. (Alvaro 2019)

II. Problems with a rights-oriented view

Regarding Milburn's gesture in the direction of a rights-based position, I want to show why it is not a viable route and in the final section suggest what might work. Note that the rejection of a rights-based view, I realize, will be compelling only to those who agree that Josh Milburn's view is the representative version of such a view. In fact, many animal-rights-approaches would reject the importance of the capacity of animals to think and feel as necessary conditions for rights-possession. They would only accept it as a sufficient condition. Even Tom Regan's approach has been shown to be deeply problematic by other animal rights supporters.[2] However, in the following I respond directly to Milburn's argument.

First, the rights-view argument is based on the notion that animals have inherent rights, the most important of which is the right to life. This is an

argument developed by Tom Regan (1983; 1985). Regan's approach is an example of deontological ethics, though Regan proposes a strong animal rights position. All animals have a right to life, and consequently he argues,

> …The fundamental wrong is the system that allows us to view animals as *our resources*, here for *us* – to be eaten, or surgically manipulated, or exploited for sport or money. Once we accept this view of animals – as our resources – the rest is as predictable as it is regrettable. (Regan 1986, 179)

In *The Case for Animal Rights* (1983) Regan argues that all mammals such as cows, pigs, goats (those mammals that are typically eaten by people), over a year of age have the same basic moral rights as humans. Regan presents his argument, as Warren (1986, 346) observes, in three stages. The first stage is to note that animals, such as those I just mentioned, are more than mere fleshy machines. Animals are sentient creatures, endowed with memory, emotions, desires, identity over time, and other important mental characteristics that are relevantly similar to those possessed by humans. Consequently, Regan believes that animals that possess such capacities are subjects-of-a-life. And since subjects-of-a-life can be harmed or benefited, it follows that animals can be harmed or benefited. Using them for food can harm them. Therefore, we should not use them for food or other practices that can harm them.

The second stage, however, is more problematic. Regan argues that subjects-of-a-life have inherent value. Since animals are subjects-of-a-life, they are ends-in-themselves. According to Regan, all animals have inherent value, that is, since they are subjects-of-a-life, they are morally important beings. The idea is that either a being has value or it doesn't. And if a being does have inherent moral value, its value does not come in degrees. To say that some animals have more value than others, according to Regan, is to adopt a perfectionist moral view, which assigns different moral value on the basis of certain characteristics, e.g., intelligence, species, etc. We know from history that such a theory could justify many unjust positions, such as slavery, male domination, racism, etc. Thus, Regan argues that we must reject the perfectionist view and adopt a view according to which we divide all living things into two categories: those that have inherent value, which have the same basic rights as humans, and those that do not have inherent moral value, which have no moral rights. Consequently, all subjects-of-a-life must be regarded as having rights.

The third stage is to argue that all beings that have an inherent moral value must be respected; they must not be treated as mere means to our ends. This implies that we have a direct *prima facie* duty to respect and avoid harming all subjects-of-a-life. It is these considerations that ground moral rights. All morally valuable beings have a right to life. And rights imply obligations. We have the duty to avoid harming others or to treat them as means to our ends – and moreover, we have the duty to avoid harm and to help others that are endangered.

Regan uses as examples the distinction of normal mature mammals and other species. In his defense, perhaps Regan wanted to emphasize normal mammals for practical reasons: first, animal agriculture treats normal mammals horribly. Second, Regan might have thought that if we accept his argument, a great deal of injustice and animal suffering can be avoided since they are mainly caused by animal agriculture. Perhaps, Regan thought that if we accept his subject-of-a-life principle, we would eventually be kind and considerate to all forms of life and even the environment. However, his examples of normal mammal generate difficulties. For example, what makes a mammal more special than a reptile or a bird? And why does the animal have to be a normal mature one to have inherent value? I find it peculiar that Regan proposes that there should be any correlation between age and inherent value when his very theory argues that inherent moral values do not come in degrees. One possible answer is that whenever we are uncertain of whether a being is a subject-of-a-life, we may give it the benefit of the doubt. However, how exactly is it to be applied? As Warren notes,

> If we try to apply this principle to the entire range of doubtful cases, we will find ourselves with moral obligations which we cannot possibly fulfill. In many climates, it is virtually impossible to live without swatting mosquitoes and exterminating cockroaches, and not all of us can afford to hire someone to sweep the path before we walk, in order to make sure that we do not step on ants. (Warren 1986, 348)

Indeed, according to Regan's argument, since animals, like humans, have a life that can go well or can be frustrated, they all have the right to life and to be treated with respect. But it does not seem to follow from this that every life has the same value. It is true that animals have the same value as humans? Granted, Regan qualifies his position: that animals have a life that, like humans, can go well or badly *for them*. If a cow has a good or bad life, it depends on cowly factors. However, does it follow that cows and humans should have the same basic rights? The very concept of right, especially human rights, is a thorny one. While it is important to talk about rights, it must be noted that many philosophers (Kant being a notable one) are sceptical of assigning rights to animals and argue that humans, if any, have rights on account of their having an understanding of rights and their capacity to enforce them. As Carl Cohen aptly states,

> . . . this much is clear about rights in general: they are in every case claims, or potential claims, within a community of moral agents. Rights arise, and can be intelligently defended, only among beings who actually do, or can, make moral claims against one another. (Cohen 1986, 865)

Regan's argument is an admirable position in theory. However, it is not conducive to respect of animals, and much less to veganism. For one thing, it is unconvincing because it is based on the assumption that because animals, like humans, have a life that can be good or bad *for them*, it follows that both humans and animals have the same basic rights. This does not seem to follow if

we consider that talking about rights, as many have pointed out, makes sense in a contexts in which the parties can intelligently make sense and impose certain rights. Animals, obviously, would be excluded.

The adoption of a rights-view leads Milburn to make the mistake of first contesting Hunt's parental compromise on the account that Hunt overlooks the importance of animal rights; and then concedes the possibility of compromise in the way of feeding children roadkill, bugs, and other types of animal-based food obtained without violating animal rights. I argue that this is a symptom of embracing moral positions – such as the rights-view – whose linchpin is the concept of sentience. I do not deny that the notion of sentience and that of rights are important factors to consider when discussing our moral obligations toward animals. However, it seems that all too often a consideration of rights and of sentience casts a shadow over other factors, such as aesthetic and virtue-based values, which are the fundamental principles of veganism, to which I shall turn next.

III. The aesthetic argument and the gustatory argument

III. i. The Aesthetic Argument

I argue that we must take seriously what I term the Aesthetic Argument and the Gustatory Argument. First, the Aesthetic Argument rejects animal-based food on the basis of the negative aesthetic nature of animal agriculture and the violence required to produce animal-based food.[3] The first part of the argument can be outlined as follows:

(1) We ought to eliminate as far as we can (and we ought to avoid promoting) those practices that produce unnecessarily repugnant sights, sounds, and odors.
(2) Rearing animal for food produces unnecessarily repugnant sights, sounds and odors.
(3) Consequently, we ought to eliminate (and not promote) intensive animal farming.

Virtually all people (except for the mentally deranged) experience aversion to blood, bodily fluids, bad odor, and a negative emotional reaction and dislike to acoustic roughness (Davey 2011; Curtis 2011; Arnal et al. 2015), all of which are aspects characteristic of animal rearing and meat production. The aversion to blood and acoustic roughness, such as crying, screaming, and other expressions of distress, has important moral implications. Even meat eaters show aversion to the processes involved in animal food production, as recent studies have shown. (Kunst and Hohle, 2016). Interestingly, Kuhen (2004) notes that people like their vegetables to look like vegetables, but do not like their meat to look like animals. The explanation is quite obvious: the process of rearing animals,

slaughtering, and the final products, the animal parts, the blood, and more aspects related to the rearing animals and the preparation of animal-based food, are inherently repugnant.

Also, Holdier (2016) suggests a moral dimension to aesthetic judgments to shows that the repugnant often signals that something is immoral or bad for us (Holdier, 2016, 633). Recent work in the psychology of disgust confirms that our reaction to the ugly, such as the sight of blood, bodily fluid, exposed flesh, and so on, is a warning that something is dangerous or wrong for us (Chapman and Anderson, 2014). The repugnance experienced at the horrific sights and sounds involved in the production of animal-based food elicits an internal cognitive mechanism that recognizes the wrongness of such practices: 'an internal preventive measure relative to the potential danger of disease and bodily harm.' (2016, 638)

The overall point of the aesthetic argument is that a life that contains a lesser amount of unpleasant sights sounds and odors is more desirable and more conducive to flourishing than a life that features such unaesthetic value. Rearing animals for food and the processes that turn animals into meat, dairy, and other animal byproducts, undermine the natural beauty of the world.[4] No one would deny that slaughterhouses are, to put it candidly, aesthetically disagreeable. Furthermore, the livestock sector causes tremendously negative environmental impacts (DeLonge 2018; Aleksandrowicz et al. 2016). Regardless of whether animals can think and can feel pain (and I am convinced that they can) or have rights, the practices involved in rearing and slaughtering animals are aesthetically unpleasant features that ought to be avoided or eliminated. Virtually all people would accept that we ought to avoid or eliminate as much as we can unpleasant sight, sounds, and odors, which are the very characteristics of animal rearing and animal food production. Thus, the first part of the Aesthetic Argument gives us a plausible reason to avoid and not promote the production of animal-based food on the ground that such a production supports practices that generate negative aesthetic externalities that we ought to avoid.

Some objections expressed by anonymous reviewers:

Objection I. The aesthetic concern regarding meat production leads to the conclusion that we ought to eliminate other practices that generate ugliness. For example, in any industrialized system there are inevitable processes that may be considered ugly.

Response to objection I: There is a significant moral difference between the ugliness of, say, metalworking factories, septic tanks, and landfill sites and the practices of rearing and slaughtering animals. Some practices are ugly but more necessary and less ugly than others. Intensive animal agriculture can be controlled or eliminated; other processes, such as making cars or cleaning septic tanks, disposing of garbage, surgical procedures, are not easily avoidable because are necessary aspects of our lives. Furthermore, animal agriculture

creates egregious negative externalities such as environmental degradation and animal-based diets are unsustainable (Carus 2010; Walsh 2013).

Objection II: The Aesthetic Argument smacks of anthropocentrism, that is, the displeasure, the disgust etc. are ours.

Response to objection II: This is hardly an objection. First, I am giving an argument as to why *we* humans should reject consumption of meat and animal products on the basis of a virtually universal (possibly innate) repulsion caused by the negative aesthetic nature of animal exploitation. Furthermore, although it would be hard (but not impossible) to determine the animal-centric view, it would seem that even animals do not find the sights, odors, and sounds of slaughtering and exploitation to be pleasant.

Objection III: The Aesthetic Argument is problematic when one considers who does or does not have the luxury of living a life with minimal 'unpleasant sights, sounds and odors'.

Response to objection III: Granted, many people do not have the luxury of living in lavish villas on Beverly Hills or elegant apartments on Park Avenue. But that's the very point of the Aesthetic Argument – we ought to eliminate as far as we can (and we ought to avoid promoting) those practices that produce unnecessarily repugnant sights, sounds, and odors. Such a prospect is not elitist in nature. If we eliminate, or at least reduce as far as possible, unaesthetic sights, sounds, and odors, it will not be beneficial only to the chosen few, but rather to all people.

Objection IV: Turning to disgust as justification to reject something (or someone) is a dangerous logical strategy when we think, for example, of homophobic violence, or violence committed against homeless people, for which the perpetrators cite disgust as justification for committing the violent act.

Response to objection IV: The gist of objection IV is that using our feeling of disgust to determine the morality of something runs the risk of leading to the wrong conclusion. However, as Kass (1997) and Alvaro (2019) aptly point out, just because feeling of disgust may lead to the wrong conclusion, it does not follow that this feeling should be discounted forthright. There are cases and cases. Our feeling of revulsion may not be in itself an argument against a practice, but it certainly signals that something requires our attention because it might be morally wrong. Certainly, the validity of such a feeling can be confirmed or disconfirmed by other important factors. For example, the feeling of disgust toward homosexuals or homeless people clearly stems from ignorance and personal bias – and it is often fueled by hate.

On the other hand, the feeling of disgust toward slaughterhouses, the suffering of animals, and environmental degradation does not involve ignorance, hatred, or discrimination. Furthermore, we can ask the simple question of whether or not the issues considered are conducive to any kind of flourishing. It would seem evident that violence committed against homosexuals and homeless people is not conducive to the flourishing of anyone. Conversely, reducing

or eliminating the odors, sights, and sounds produced by the livestock industry is conducive to some good.

The second aspect of the Aesthetic Argument relies on the notion of *Non-Violence*. Arguably one of the most daunting aspects of society is the constant prevalence of aggression and violence. It might not be obvious that the injunction against useless or gratuitous violence is a matter of aesthetics. However, useless violence is wrong, among other reasons, because is aesthetically displeasing. The argument is the following:

(1) Non-violence is a virtue in and of itself.
(2) Unnecessary violence ought to be avoided or eliminated.
(3) Intensive animal agriculture produces unnecessary – yet avoidable – violence.
(4) Therefore, intensive animal agriculture ought to be avoided or eliminated.

Non-violence as a moral principle has been used as a peaceful way to attain political and social changes by the likes of Pythagoras, Socrates, Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Lydia Maria Child, Violet Oakley, and others. ('Women Champion Peace & Justice through Nonviolence,' n.d.) I argue that the practices necessary to transform animals into food engender gratuitous violence, and gratuitous violence is inherently wrong. A similar argument was used by St. Pius V, who issued a papal bull titled 'De Salute Gregis Dominici' to ban bullfighting. Pius V was concerned about the danger of fighting animals; moreover, he was concerned about human souls. He understood that violence undermines human dignity. The violence involved in the operations of the meat industry, should be condemned for the same reason.

Some reader will immediately observe that killing is not always wrong. But my argument is that *useless* violence is always wrong, and we are better off without it. Killing and then slaughtering an animal for food inherently involves violence. The details of killing animals for food will bring most sensitive people to tears and make them sick to their stomach. This is not a fallacious appeal to pity. My argument is not that killing cute and innocent creatures is immoral because they are cute and innocent. My point is that killing and slaughtering involves useless violence because it is not done out of necessity; rather, it is done out of trivial reason such as taste. No one would seriously deny that useless violence ought to be avoided and eliminated. Since young children are not yet morally emancipated, they should not be raised on meat-based diets because they are not yet in a position to make moral judgments. We typically don't hold young children morally responsible for their actions. Consequently, parents should not feed their children animal products because animal products are the result of useless violence. By feeding a child animal-based food, parents indirectly impose upon their children actions and practices that are highly

(morally) controversial and that children might in time regret and begrudge. Consequently, children should be raised on animal-free diets until they are morally mature and able to make their own decision.

Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant both discuss the potential danger of violence. Thomas Aquinas argued that despite their capacities that are similar to those of men, it is not a sin to kill animals because God created them for the benefit of humans. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1480), Aquinas states that animals exist for our benefit. However, this fact does not warrant animal cruelty. In fact, cruelty to animals should be avoided. He writes, 'If a man practices a pitiful affection for animals, he is all the more disposed to take pity on his fellow-men'. (Aquinas 2016, I–II 99, 1). Immanuel Kant echoes Aquinas. In *Lecture on Ethics*, Kant writes, 'he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men'. (1963, 24). The point that Aquinas and Kant make seems to me to be plausible: that violence can lead to more violence. Not surprisingly, several studies show that many slaughterhouse workers suffer from psychological disorder and pathological sadism (Eisnitz 1997; Fitzgerald, Linda, and Thomas 2009; MacNair 2002; Beirne 2004; Dillard 2008). It is quite common that slaughterhouse employees suffer psychological harm as a result of their violent job, which inevitably involves animal abuse that creates a spillover to inter-human violence. Thus, we should avoid using animals for food because it involves inherently violent practices that can create more violence, which can and should be avoided.

Some objections (also expressed by anonymous reviewers):

Objection I: The second aspect of the Aesthetic Argument enlists the questionable support of Aquinas and Kant – whose positions notoriously grant animals no direct moral status at all. Therefore, the argument cannot be sound.

Response to Objections I: While it is true that Aquinas and Kant regard animals as 'things' for us to use, their specific position on this matter is irrelevant. What is relevant is the fact that both Aquinas and Kant (as well as many others) recognize that hurting animals is likely to lead to a spillover of violence toward other humans. The point that Aquinas and Kant make seems to be empirically supported. As Sarah Watts (2018), writes, 'Jeffrey Dahmer. Ted Bundy. David Berkowitz. Aside from killing dozens of innocent people (combined), these men – and a significant percentage of other serial killers – have something else in common: Years before turning their rage on human beings, they practiced on animals'. (Watts 2018)

Furthermore, to say that an argument is not sound because it relies on the position of some individual or individuals whose moral character or opinion is controversial in some respect is the textbook example of the *ad hominem* fallacy. The point of Aquinas and Kant is that violence against animals promotes violence against humans. If their conclusion is true, as I think it is, it does not matter whether Aquinas or Kant or Mao or Hitler or Jerry Springer said it.

Objection II: Animal exploiters have been known to resort to ingenious tactics to demonstrate that their violence against other animals is anything but 'useless' or 'gratuitous.'

Response to objection II: it is quite true that animal exploiters employ ingenious tactics to show that their violence against animals is necessary and not gratuitous. However, their tactics fail when it is considered that intensive animal agriculture is the leading cause of environmental degradation, that animal-based food has the potential to cause negative health effects, and that animal-based food is not necessary for good health.

III. ii. The Gustatory Argument

Some authors (Kazez, 2018, Lomasky, 2013) observe that meat tastes good and, consequently, it is an important value that contributes to a good life that may justify rearing animals for food. Eating well, they argue, is a significant value to humans, and eating meat is a significant part of eating well. Consequently, not eating meat is a significant value-loss. I do not dispute that eating well and the role of flavor are important values to humans. However, I want to make three observations: First, plant-based food tastes good as evinced by the fact that not only vegetarians, but also meat eaters, enjoy it. I think it is important to consider that many vegans and vegetarians, who formerly consumed meat, and thus know both worlds, prefer the taste of plant-based food.

Second, the notion that not eating meat is a significant value-loss to humans is an exaggeration. Perhaps, the 'not eating meat is a value-loss to humans' argument would have some force under these conditions: if taste of meat were somehow *essential* to humans in the sense that without it humans would get ill or life would be utterly unbearable; or if meat were the only food that tastes good, while plant-based food were inherently bad. Clearly neither is the case. Humans can easily adjust their taste, and plant food tastes just as good or even better than meat. Furthermore, considering the Aesthetic Argument, and given the negative environmental impacts of animal-based diets, it is sensible to adjust one's taste to plant-based food, which avoids and prevents health problems and environmental degradation.

Third, meat is not inherently good. Meat dishes become delicious under the chef's skillful hands. I anticipate resistance here. It may be objected that this applies to vegetarian food as well. Also, it may be pointed out that flavour is subjective. I argue that it can be shown that vegetarian food is inherently flavorful while meat is not. Fruit and greens and even grains don't require special preparation or seasoning. Mangos, bananas, watermelons, spinach, peppers, and more, are flavorful in their raw state or just by minimally cooking them. There are vegetables that when raw have little taste or cannot be eaten. For example, broccoli and eggplants are not ideal eaten raw. However, they are not repulsive and with very simple cooking methods, such as steaming, they become flavorful. On the other hand, meat is foul when raw and requires certain steps necessary to render it edible. In fact, unlike vegetables, meat is the flesh of

once living animals that is cut and shaped in ways that do not resemble animals. Some may object here that it is not always the case. For instance, oysters, some cuts of fish, and some meat dishes are eaten raw. Note, however, that even those dishes that are served raw, such as beef tartare, oysters, are practically never consumed straight up, but rather eaten with some herbs, spices, lemon juice, or oil. So while I concede that some people eat raw meat or fish, my point is that meat eaters seldom consume these products because such products, when raw and plain, are foul and not flavorful at all.

Also, meat often requires maturation. Maturation means that the flesh of a slaughtered animal is aged for at least a few days, sometimes up to several weeks. This process is necessary to tenderize the tough muscle fibres. Furthermore, meat is never consumed as is. With very few exceptions, people would never kill, say, a cow or pig or chicken, carve out the flesh and consume it on the spot. Meat is always aged, marinated, seasoned, and cooked. For example, consider a popular dish typical of the Italian region of Piedmont called brasato. This dish is cattle flesh braised in red wine and spices for hours.

The point is to render the meat tender and allow it to acquire the taste of the wine and the spices because it is tough and unpleasant tasting. In other words, taste is conferred upon the meat by the wine and the spices and through hours of cooking. Another dish typical of the Italian region of Bologna is a sauce with ground beef known as ragú, not to be confused with the Italian-style American brand Ragú. This sauce is prepared by sautéing the ground meat in oil and adding to it, again, wine. The reason is to fix the foul taste of the animal flesh and make it taste interesting with the use of wine and spices and transform it into a dish. After all, meat is, like it or not, decomposing flesh. It is true that vegetables and fruits decompose, too, but in that case we avoid consumption and discard them. All meat is prepared with some kinds of powerful spices, oils, or wine, and is cooked to modify its naturally foul flavour.

With regard to taste, Anderson & Feldman (2016) tested whether people's beliefs of how animals are raised can influence their experience of eating them. Samples of meat were accompanied by respective descriptions of their origins and treatment of the animals on factory farms. Some samples were said to be the product of factory farm, while others were labelled as 'humane'. In reality, all the meat samples were identical. Interestingly, the participants of this study experienced the samples differently: meat described 'factory farmed' was perceived as looking, smelling, and tasting as less pleasant than 'humane' meat. The difference was even to the degree that factory-farmed meat was said to taste more salty and greasy than 'humane' meat. Furthermore, the participants who were told that they were eating factory-farmed meat consumed less of the sample. According to the authors of this study, 'These findings demonstrate that the experience of eating is not determined solely by physical properties of stimuli – beliefs also shape experience'. (Anderson & Feldman, 2016, p. 16).

My point is that meat is not consumed because it is good in itself. It is rendered good by masking and modifying its original flavour with the use of potent spices or liquids used to marinate, season, and cook the meat. Furthermore, meat is enjoyed because it is eaten socially, during holidays for example. The taste is not consistent and not exactly pleasant, as the study just mentioned explains. Thus, my argument is that,

(1) Meat is not inherently flavorful, but rather unappetizing.
(2) Whatever is inherently unappetizing should not be consumed.
(3) Therefore, meat should not be consumed.

I think that there is good evidence to show that the first premise is true. Also most meat eaters would, in good conscience, concede this much. The second premise needs to be unpacked, especially in light of an obvious objection: it might be objected that it is irrelevant whether a given product is good in itself. What matters is how it contributes to a dish. And most people seem to think that animal products make dishes taste better than they would without them. First, premise 2 is not meant to apply universally. It applies to affluent societies where people have ready access to an abundance of nutritious plant-based food. I do not claim that it applies to a circumstance where one, say, is stranded on a desert island, for example.

Second, the reason we should avoid food inherently unappetizing in the case of meat is to avoid self-deception. That is, since meat is not inherently tasty, as I discussed above certain steps must be taken to mask its unpleasant taste, appearance, smell, and texture by curing, seasoning, and cooking it. Taking such steps constitutes an act of self-deception. Since one should avoid deceiving oneself, it follows that one should avoid eating meat. It is not the taste of meat itself that meat eaters like, but rather the taste of the seasoning, spices, and flavors created by the cooking process. Thus, realizing these facts may constitute a reason for one to avoid eating meat.

There are two obvious objections (again, expressed by reviewers). Objection I: the Gustatory Argument is hardly compelling, appealing as it does to Western culinary and gastronomic practices. Manipulating animal flesh for our consumption, both in terms of appearance and taste, is largely a cultural matter.

Response to objection I: it is true that in the exposition of the Gustatory Argument, I focused on Western culinary and gastronomic practices. But the same argument applies to non-Western culinary and gastronomic practices. The argument is deductively valid. And I provided plausible reasons to show that the premises are likely true, making it a sound argument. The fact that manipulating animal flesh is a cultural matter does nothing to undermine my argument that such manipulations constitute self-deception, which should be avoided.

Objection II: The point that animal flesh, when consumed raw, provides no gustatory pleasure is both empirically problematic and philosophically weak.

Response to objection II: if raw animal flesh were inherently good (or even remotely good) the culinary manipulations that I described would be hardly necessary, and more people would consume raw animal flesh. The reason that animal flesh is cooked is to remove bacteria and parasites that live on the surface and inside of the meat. Also, cooked flesh is easier to chew. And the reason that animal flesh is seasoned and marinated is not merely a cultural fact; rather such procedures are implemented in order to transform the bacteria and parasite-ridden, and inherently unpalatable raw animal flesh into something palatable.

The Aesthetic and the Gustatory Arguments, give us a richer understanding of the ethical vegan's commitment to veganism. The rights view, on the other hand, leads to the issue of whether animals are the sort of beings entitled to rights. The Aesthetic and the Gustatory arguments are not, however, completely problem-free. But they add an important dimension to the understanding of an ethical vegan's moral commitments. Considering the suggestion of regarding ethical veganism as more than a simple ethical view, but rather as a religion, one whose principal values are non-violence, integrity of character, and aesthetic beauty, it is clear that there is no room for compromise. As such, there can be no room for compromise, whether it be three servings of fish per week or roadkill or cockroaches or ants. Consequently, there is no way that a co-parent could compromise without thereby attacking his or her ethical, aesthetic, gustatory, and religious (as I proposed that ethical veganism be regarded as a religion or quasi religion) convictions.

What is, then, the best policy an ethical vegan parent and a non-vegan co-parent should follow in order to raise their children? I argue that since the consumption of animal products (as is evident from the number of publications on the subject and the rise of veganism in the world) is a very sensitive and morally controversial issue, parents ought not to make their children bear such moral responsibilities. Consider that children may in time resent their parents in the event that they will grow up to be convicted ethical vegans. How odd would that be for a child: dad is a vegan, and yet he made a compromise with mom about feeding me animal products? He undermined his integrity by allowing me to have animal products, and undermined the importance of raising me as a vegan, not to mention that I consumed foods that can be deleterious for my health. This is what a child might think. Consequently, in my view the best policy to observe is to raise children as vegans, paying particular attention to their health (if that is even an issue). When they reach moral maturity, they will have options to continue to be vegans or to consume animal products.

My point is this: a child who was raised on a vegan diet and in his later life decides to eat animals will arguably not resent his parent for not feeding him or her animal products. I cannot provide any empirical evidence to support this. However, it seems plausible to me at least, there is no reason that a child raised as a vegan who grows up and chooses to be a non-vegan would be upset or

angry at her parents for not feeding her animal products. After all, following a vegan diet is not a punishment! And though this is anecdotal, my own children often remark how lucky they are to have been raised as vegans. On the other hand, a child raised on an animal-based diet (whether a complete animal-based diet or a three-serving-per-week diet) who grows up to be a convicted ethical vegan will likely be disappointed in his parent's decision or resent his parents for using him or her as a guinea pig of parental compromise over animal products – especially if one of his parents is a vegan who had to come to a compromise.

Moderation Argument

I now turn to the Moderation Argument. I argue that ethical veganism should be the embodiment of the virtue of moderation (Temperance). Thus, an ethical vegan should be a moderate person, and moderation entails that a person avoids animal-based food; this conclusions follows from the following premises: (1) Animal food has been shown to cause a plethora of health problems (Etemadi et al. 2017; Stripp et al. 2003, p. 3664; Zhong Van Horn, Cornelis, et al (2019).; Castañé, Antón, 2017). (2) In light of its potential health dangers, its negative environmental consequences, and its inherent violence, it is sensible thing to avoid consuming – even if in moderation – animal-based food. (3) Giving up animal-based food when we have an abundance of readily available plant food is not a sacrifice of taste or nutrition since plant food is quite exquisite, nutritious, and abundant. Here I am not arguing that taste is irrelevant. One has to weigh taste against other factors, factors that are obviously more important. We have to consider that taste can be easily adjusted, and that the taste of meat is not superior to the taste of plant-based food. (4) Well-planned vegan diets are optimal for all stages of the life cycle (Craig and Mangels 2009; Melina, Craig, and Levin 2016), and indeed of a high nutritional quality (Castañé and Antón 2017). Consequently, the temperate individual will consume food that is essential to flourishing, and not primarily for its taste. Thus according to the principle of temperance, since animal products are not required for good health, in fact, consuming them can be unhealthful, animal-based diets can be a form of self-deception (the Gustatory Argument), and animal-based diets are inherently violent an unaesthetic (the Aesthetic Argument) eating animal-based food should be avoided and not ethically supported.

I anticipate the objection that the appeal to moderation may fail to convince, since moderation and temperance would, in their application to animal-based food, imply that we should consume it in moderation. However, I want to suggest that moderation regarding food in general does not mean consuming it in moderation. The moderate individual is not attracted to food just because it smells or tastes good or it is pleasurable. Rather, she will eat in moderation, not to satisfy her pleasure, but to be nourished; and she will choose healthful food that, moreover, causes the least suffering and environmental degradation. Since vegan diets are optimal, but animal-based diets are potentially unhealthful,

cause animal suffering, and most importantly are the leading cause of environmental degradationit is plausible to say that the moderate individual refrains from consuming animal-based food altogether (Pimentel and Pimentel 2003).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that vegan parents have compelling moral reasons not to compromise over whether to raise their children as non-vegans, and thus rejected Hunt's parental compromise proposal. Milburn and I, in the end, agree that vegans should not come to a compromise over feeding their children animal products, but for different reasons. Milburn argues that ethical veganism belongs to the class of moral matters that concern justice and injustice, and these should not be compromised upon. As I have argued, in my view the idea of justice, or more specifically the idea of rights, supports his thesis only if we accept the controversial claim that animals have rights. I argue that the rights-view approach should be rejected. Not because it is controversial, but because it is not compelling at all. One fault of the rights-view is that it stops the moral conversation over veganism by focusing on rights. As a result, it accepts eating animal-based food so long as it has been obtained without violating rights. I have proposed that veganism be regarded as a religion or a quasi-religious worldview that embodies certain uncompromising principles that I described in terms of the Aesthetic the Gustatory and the Moderation Arguments. Such principles, more accurately that political commitments to rights, describe the ethical vegan's commitment to veganism. Considering ethical veganism as more than a simple ethical view, but rather as a religion, one whose principal values are non-violence, integrity of character, aesthetic beauty, and temperance, it follows that there is no room for compromise. Consequently, there can be no room for a compromise over animal products, whether it be three servings of fish per week for lunch or roadkill or cockroaches or ants once a month for snacks. Therefore, ethical vegan parents should accept zero parental compromise over veganism.

Notes

1. To name a few, see for example, W. L. Craig (2001) *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*, Jason Waller (2019) *Cosmological Fine-Tuning Arguments: What (if Anything) Should We Infer from the Fine-Tuning of Our Universe for Life?* And Alvin Plantinga (1979) *The Nature Of Necessity*.
2. See, for example, Kai Horsthemke's recent book *Animal Rights Education*, for both a critique of Regan's view and the development of an alternative rights perspective.
3. Here I want to consider an objection. That is, does that apply to all cases? Is eating the eggs of backyard chickens, for example, or picking up cockles at the beach steeped in violence or negative aesthetic values? Certainly it is not evident that it is. Thus, the Aesthetic Argument addresses the inherent ugliness of intensive factory farming and slaughterhouses. The Gustatory Argument addresses the reasons that we ought to avoid products such as the eggs of backyard chickens, which do not directly involve violence. Furthermore, there may be advanced a compelling argument against such products on

the basis of environmental considerations, which I do not develop here. For arguments against animal products not derived directly from violent practices see Deckers (2016). *Animal (de)liberation*. London: Ubiquity Press. https://doi.org/10.5334/bay.

4. This might be regarded as a utilitarian argument. Although I am not a utilitarian (and I don't think this line of argument is utilitarian in nature) I am not bothered by it. Even if it turned out to be, it would not undermine my aesthetic-based argument.

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