

Food Ethics and Religion*

Tyler Doggett and Matthew C. Halteman

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In this introduction, we survey some of the many food ethical issues that arise within various religious traditions and also consider some ethical positions that such traditions take on food. To say the least, we do *not* attempt to address all the ethical issues concerning food that arise in religious contexts, nor do we attempt to cover every tradition’s take on food. We look at just a few traditions and a few interesting writings on food ethics and religion: What do they say about the ethics of eating? Why do they say these things? If your own tradition is not represented, we hope the selected texts can serve nonetheless as a starting point for reflecting on what your tradition has to say about these issues and why it says those things.

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Food has a prominent place in numerous religions. In the Christian and Jewish traditions, Adam and Eve originally sinned by eating. For Muslims and the ancient Norse, feasting is an important part of the heavenly afterlife. To Buddhists, Hindus, and Rastafaris, some foods are pollutants. Some religions offer food to their gods. Others bless food to make it an object of proper concern or of connection to the divine. Still others require us to eat this or that. In these traditions, food serves as a symbol, a community-builder, an identity-shaper, a source of joy and reverence. Our focus in this chapter is on religion and food ethics.

Here we use the terms “food ethics” and “religion” ecumenically as big tents under which many importantly different sorts of things may be grouped. Among the wide range of food ethical issues we consider in this chapter, for example, are religious views about the ethics of keeping, hurting, and killing animals, killing plants, dominion over creation, wastefulness, purity, blessing, atonement, and the connection between food and character. We realize, moreover, that it might be a stretch to label some of the views engaged by selected readings in this chapter as “religious” on a stringent understanding of that term; Lisa Kemmerer’s “Indigenous Traditions,” for instance, addresses some views that are recognizably spiritual but perhaps not religious in a strict sense. We hope that our ecumenical usage of the term can bring these important traditions to bear on the discussion without reducing them to something they are not.

How, then, does an engagement with religious traditions (broadly construed) illuminate and complicate the task of thinking through the ethics of eating?

The surface commands of various religions

When you think about food and religion, some things that might come to mind straight away are *bans* on certain foods: Rastafaris should abstain from pork. Muslims should, too. Yet *The Quran* is otherwise quite liberal about animals used for farming. It simply prohibits eating

carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah, and those animals killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you slaughter, and those which are sacrificed on stone altars... (5:3)

Leviticus is more restrictive, forbidding Jews from eating pigs and also quite a bit more, telling the Israelites that they may eat any animal with a divided hoof who *also* chews the cud but may not eat cud-chewers who lack divided hoofs (*Leviticus* 11:3). It tells them they may eat water-dwellers with fins and scales but forbids eating water-dwellers without fins and scales (or even the eggs of such animals). It forbids eating *most* insects with wings who walk on all fours (11:20) and forbids eating

the eagle and the vulture and the buzzard, and the kite and the falcon in its kind, every raven in its kind, and the ostrich and the owl and the sea gull and the hawk in its kind, and the little owl and the cormorant and the great owl, and the white owl and the pelican and the carrion vulture, and the stork, the heron in its kind, and the hoopoe, and the bat. (11:13-19)

The Buddhist *Lankavatara-sutra* is still more wide-ranging in its prohibitions on eating meat and even proscribes some drinks and vegetables:

The Bodhisattvas, mighty beings,
Consume no alcohol; they eat
No meat, no garlic, and no onion.
This the Conquerors, the leaders of the flock, have taught...¹ (Chapter 8:
256)

Other prohibitions concern *how* you eat rather than with *what* you eat. For example, the Hindu *Bhagavadgita* states:

With [food] shall you sustain the gods so that the gods may sustain you.
By sustaining one another, you shall achieve the highest good.
For so sustained by sacrifice, the gods will give you the food of your desire. Who so enjoys their gifts yet gives them nothing is a thief, no more nor less.
Good men who eat the leavings of the sacrifice are freed from every taint, but evil are they and evil do they eat who cook only for their own sakes.
From food do all contingent beings derive and food derives from rain; rain derives from sacrifice and sacrifice from works. (III, 11-14)²

The passage encourages its readers to make food for the gods and not just for themselves. They should eat while also leaving some for the gods to eat, too. Note

¹ We use the translation from Shabkar. 2004. *Food of Bodhisattvas*. London: Shambala: pp. 56-57

² We take the translation from

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=nY6PRhqdJJsC&pg=PA420>

whereas the *Bhagavadgita* enjoins readers to eat what's left of sacrifice, to leave the best bits for the gods, some ancient religions took the opposite approach:

Many of the [ancient] Greeks' neighbors found [Greek] eating habits showed irreverence before heaven: the gods had to be content with the discards of sacrifice—'the tail-end and the gall-bladder, the bits you can't eat.'³

Some religions restrict how one may eat in a different way: The religious views of some Buddhists require them to beg for food and then mix whatever they get: popcorn, hot dogs, carrot cake, grits. Likewise, St. Francis of Assisi reportedly felt his Christian commitment compelled him to mix his food with ashes.⁴ Doing so kept him attuned to his view that food is just a source of fuel for his real, spiritual life.

Yet in some religious traditions, food is not simply a source of fuel and eating not simply a necessary, mundane activity. In, for example, the Eastern Orthodox tradition, eating brings the eater closer to God. In that tradition, there is a rhythm of fasts then feasts designed to ensure this closeness. So, too, in Islam, *iftar* follows the fast of Ramadan. Like Easter feasts in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, *iftar* is a communal affair. These feasts are not simply venues for filling up after a time of deprivation, like splurging at a lonely Las Vegas buffet after a day hiking Red Rock Canyon solo. Rather, these feasts are occasions for communities to gather, to celebrate, to share stories, to bond.

It's striking that in all three major monotheistic religions, eating together plays an identity-shaping role in important communal rituals like the Jewish Passover Seder, the Christian Eucharistic meal, and the Islamic feast of Eid Al-Fit. (You might compare the motivations here with the community-building motivation behind local agriculture that we describe in Chapter 10-Alternatives to Industrial Plant Agriculture)

It's also striking that the feasts often go with fasts. The feast of Eid Al-Fit follows the month of Ramadan, a month with tight restrictions on when one may eat. Jews observe Yom Kippur by fasting for 25 hours but they feast before then.

Fasts are independently interesting. Some Buddhists eat a single meal a day and never in the evening or at night. Part of the Buddhist justification for restricting *when* one may eat is to restrict *how much* the devout eat. This raises a general issue about how much to eat that crops up in many other traditions as well. For example, St. Thomas Aquinas writes,

The vice of gluttony becomes a mortal sin by turning man away from his last end: and accordingly, by a kind of reduction, it is opposed to the precept of hallowing the Sabbath, which commands us to rest in our last end...(Q[122], A[1]).

Aquinas's advice coheres with some from Gandhi:

³ Fernandez-Armesto, Felipe. 2002. *Near a Thousand Tables*. New York: Free Press: p. 135; quotation within it is from Menander.

⁴ See Prose, Francine. 2003. *Gluttony*. New York: Oxford University Press.

[There is] a great deal of truth in the saying that man becomes what he eats. The grosser the food, the grosser the body. Plain living is said to go hand in hand with high thinking...Plain living may itself be said to be a mode of fasting...

The *Bhagavadgita* enjoins not temperance in food but ‘meagerness’: meagerness is perpetual fast. Meagerness means just enough to sustain the body for the service for which it is made... (Gandhi (1965): 50, 52)

Aquinas’s advice resonates, too, with this Indic proverb: The one who eats once a day is a yogi [divine]; the one who eats twice a day is a bhogi [pleasure-seeker]; the one who eats three times a day is a rogi [a sick man].

Aquinas and Gandhi, Catholicism and Hinduism, might agree on these points. They might agree that one should eat very little or only as much as one needs. But why, according to these traditions, are these commands correct? Catholicism and Hinduism might here diverge. This raises a new issue.

The deeper commands of various religions and what they tell us about ethics

The food rules above can be thought of as “surface” moral rules. They do nothing to *explain* why you should or shouldn’t do this or that. Standing alone they can look somewhat odd or archaic or superstitious. What could the ethical objection to *onions* be? Why *should* one mix foods, ruining their taste? Felipe Fernandez-Armesto claims,

It is pointless to seek rational and material explanations for dietary restrictions, because they are essentially suprarational and metaphysical. Meanings ascribed to food are, like all meanings, agreed conventions about usage: ultimately, they are arbitrary.⁵

Trying to justify this claim, Fernandez-Armesto points out that the Jewish philosopher Maimonides defended the prohibition on eating pork with a patently false theory according to which pork is too moist and full of “superfluous matter” to be a proper subject of eating (*ibid.*). Yet to conclude from poor Maimonides’ error that dietary restrictions are always—or even typically—beyond reason is a mistake. That some attempted justifications for surface commands are spurious, after all, hardly demonstrates that attempted justifications are always or even typically spurious.

In this chapter, we take a more sanguine view according to which some surface commands have reasonable, compelling bases. For example, the Doniger reading in this chapter articulates some surface principles of Indic religions. But it also starts to articulate deeper, plausible justifications that make sense of those surface commands.

The character of this relationship between what we’re calling deep and surface religious commands may come into sharper relief in view of some parallel observations about the moral theory utilitarianism, according to which one is required to maximize wellbeing. If utilitarianism is true, it is typically—but not always—wrong to steal. That is because stealing typically—but not always—fails to maximize wellbeing. It might make

⁵ *Op. cit.*: 32

the thief happy but at the cost of making others much more unhappy. The surface moral requirement, if utilitarianism is true, is that (typically) you shouldn't steal. The deeper requirement that explains *why* you typically shouldn't steal is that you are required to maximize wellbeing. Maximizing wellbeing is the only deep requirement, if utilitarianism is true. It explains a multitude of surface requirements: don't lie, don't cheat, don't steal, etc.

In its surface requirements, utilitarianism might agree with other moral theories. So, for example, a virtue ethical theory will imply that it is typically—but not always—wrong to steal. That is because stealing typically—but not always—is not what a perfectly virtuous agent would do: A perfectly virtuous agent might find herself in a tight spot some time, a spot in which stealing is the only way to avert catastrophe. But such a case is atypical. Typically, not stealing is a sign of good character. The surface requirement, if virtue ethics is true, is that you typically shouldn't steal. On that virtue ethics agrees with utilitarianism. But they differ on the deeper explanation of that surface requirement. (For more on virtue ethics and utilitarianism, see Chapter 4-Consumer Ethics.)

One of the signal things that religion offers to food ethics is a stock of ethical principles that serve as deep explanations for various surface commands and permissions. So, for example, the Quaran's injunction not to eat carrion or swine is explained by a prohibition on eating the harmful, the impure, and the unclean. Allah is the arbiter of what is harmful, impure, and unclean, but the Quaran is straightforward about which things are.

Ahimsa, the command not to injure, not to injure *any* living thing, is an important component of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. It offers a straightforward explanation of why it is wrong to make agricultural workers suffer as is described in the Estabrook reading in Chapter 1-The Ethically Troubling Food System and Holmes reading in Chapter 11-Workers—doing so injures living things.

What does the command imply or explain about what to eat? How is this command to be carried out in a world in which it is nearly impossible to get food without injuring living things? What sort of food production practices does it support? What sort of *diet*? These are hard questions in Indic food ethics.

Shalom—peace and flourishing of all creatures—is one of the key ideas of Judaism and, in particular, of the Torah. Again, it offers a straightforward explanation of why it is wrong to make agricultural workers suffer, though one different from the Indic explanation: Doing so is neither peaceful nor conducive to flourishing.

Yet it raises big, difficult questions. How to promote the peace and flourishing of all creatures? What does such a commandment imply about food? About food production? Food consumption? About the treatment of animals and food workers?

Finally, to Christians the command to love your neighbor—the claim that you should love your neighbor—is very important. (To Jews, too. It's in *Leviticus* and, in fact, comes very shortly after an agricultural commandment: “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner” (*Leviticus* 19: 9-10).) This command, too, offers a third straightforward

explanation of why it is wrong to make agricultural workers suffer: They are your neighbors and making them suffer is not loving.

What else does the requirement to love your neighbor imply about food? What does it imply about killing animals? What does it imply about less obvious topics like subsidies for American farmers that have the effect of producing huge quantities of food that then flood foreign markets leading to farmers in those countries going out of business? Is that consistent with loving your neighbor? Is it expressive of such love? Are those foreign farmers your neighbors? Are far-off farmers within your country your neighbors? Are animals your neighbors? Are food workers? Is the environment? Are future generations? What is it to show love to these things?

Hard questions! As we said, one of the signal things that religion provides are certain moral principles, but the spelling out of those principles' implications with respect to food ethics is fraught. As Matthew C. Halteman writes,

Those who go to the Bible looking for an open highway to the one true Christian diet usually end up perplexed. The bookends of Eden and the peaceable kingdom (cf. Isa 11:6–9) might seem to show that God's ideal for human beings is a plant-based diet, but the giving of animals to Noah for food and Jesus eating fish (among other things) complicate the picture, suggesting that eating animals is permissible, at least in some circumstances. The strict dietary laws of the Hebrew Bible seem to show that reservations about unrestrained omnivorism have a divine precedent, but Paul enjoins us not to let dietary differences inhibit fellowship. A diet of vegetables emboldens Daniel in the lion's den, yet Paul curiously appears to associate vegetarianism with weak faith. Evidence of God's love and care for animals abounds throughout the scriptural record, but that record also includes animal sacrifice, at least until the Passover lamb gives way to the Last Supper—an event memorialized in the sacrament of a simple vegetarian meal. The debate that ensues from these tensions has ancient roots in both Judaism and Christianity, and the biblical interpretation involved in discerning their contemporary significance traverses controversial theological and philosophical terrain.⁶

Halteman believes that discerning what the deep commands of what one's religion are is itself tricky and then discerning what those commands imply about food is trickier still. But this is not to say these deep commands have no such implications. The Halteman reading in this chapter argues that Christian principles militate against industrial animal agriculture.

The implications of the deep commands of one's religion might be acceptable across a wide spectrum of outlooks on the world, whether religious or not. Some atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, Christians, Jains, and Jews might come to agree about various parts of surface food morality. For example, they might agree—indeed, some do agree—that veganism is the ideal diet.

As the Kemmerer reading demonstrates, some indigenous traditions—like some

⁶ Halteman, Matthew. 2013. "Knowing the Standard American Diet by Its Fruits: Is Unrestrained Omnivorism Spiritually Beneficial?". *Interpretation* 67: p. 391.

Buddhist traditions—endorse that all animals—human and otherwise—have lifeforces or souls or spirits and, moreover, these migrate after death to other animals. So an animal might be a relative. But, also, because it is, say, ensouled, the animal is subject to suffering, and, because it is ensouled, it has moral status and, like persons, should not be made to suffer without good reason.

The moral command underlying some people’s veganism is something like: Minimize harm to sentient beings. When you put together this moral command with the empirical claim that veganism is better than other dietary regimes at minimizing such harm, you get a commitment to veganism as the moral ideal. These are points on which atheist vegans might agree with the Buddhist.⁷

The deeper command to minimize harm is endorsed on Christian grounds by Joel Salatin in Chapter 8-Alternatives to Industrial Animal Agriculture. But there are important points of difference: Salatin understands his commitment to the specific type of animal farming he practices as an explicitly Christian one and also explicitly denies that animals have souls.⁸ It is because of this lack of souls, Salatin thinks, that killing animals is not harming them. Whereas the Buddhist view is not only that animals—like all sentient things—have souls but that those might be the souls of re-incarnated humans. This is a deeper-still explanation of why one should minimize harm, one that Salatin will reject.⁹

Relatedly, consider the surface command not to eat pig. Rastafari, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish views agree on this and agree on a deeper justification for this: Don’t sully yourself. Put that together with the claim that eating pig sullies oneself and the prohibition on eating pig follows. That’s a prohibition that atheist vegans will abide, too, but typically not because of agreement on the deeper commandment.

And note that even agreement on the deeper commandment can lead to disagreement about surface commandments. Consider a longer version of the Buddhist *Lankavatara-sutra* quotation from earlier:

The Bodhisattvas, mighty beings,

⁷ Though some atheist vegans may bristle at the thought that their commitments are in any way consonant with the views of the devout, Bruce Friedrich has argued that “a belief in animal liberation qualifies as religion under the Free Exercise Clause jurisprudence of the United States Constitution.” See Bruce Friedrich, “The Church of Animal Liberation: Animal Rights as “Religion” Under the Free Exercise Clause,” *Animal Law Review*, Vol.21, 65-119. Available online as published, as accessed on May 28, 2015: http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1038&context=bruce_friedrich

⁸ Note that there is a parallel between Salatin and the Buddhist even here, though. The Buddhist insists that animals have souls but also insists that only human souls are capable of “awakening.” So there is something metaphysically special about us, Buddhists and Salatin agree, though they disagree on what the specialness is.

⁹ Wendy Doniger writes, “In Tibet...I met a Buddhist who said he would eat yak, but not fish, on moral grounds. That is, if you kill a yak, you destroy one soul but feel many people, but you have to kill many fish, and destroy many souls, to feed the same number of people. It occurred to me that it is a good thing that Tibet does not border on whaling waters” (Doniger, Wendy. 2009. *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. New York: Penguin: p. 10.) The shallow command here is something like: You should eat big animals rather than small. The deeper command is something like: You should minimize harm. When that deeper command is combined with the Buddhist view that each animal has a soul, it yields that conclusion that killing one ensouled big thing—a yak—and getting a lot of food is preferable to killing many ensouled little things—fish—to get the same amount of food. That’s the justification for the shallow command.

Consume no alcohol; they eat
No meat, no garlic, and no onion.
This the Conquerors, the leaders of the flock, have taught...

For flesh is food for wild and ravening beasts.
It is unfitting food, the Buddha taught...

All flesh, of animals as well as one's friends,
Derives from unclean substances, both blood and sperm;
And those who feed on flesh become a source of fear.
Therefore yogis shall refrain from eating meat.
Every kind of flesh, all onions and garlic,
Alcoholic drinks in various forms,
Leeks, wild garlic also—these indeed
Are foods that yogis shall reject...¹⁰

This passage articulates not only a view on *what* not to eat—flesh, onion, garlic—but also views on *why* not to eat it—because doing so is dirty or inferior or makes one fearsome. The implication is that eating pig is not the only dietary practice that will sully you, but so, too, will the practice of eating onion. That's a point Jews, Rastafaris, and Muslims will demur on. So, too, will atheists and Christians. Christianity differs strikingly from the other major monotheistic religions in both its permissiveness about what to eat and in its lack of concern with cordoning off some foods as unclean. Islam only cordones off a few, but it cordones off some. But Christianity seems to cordone none off. So far as there are restrictions on what to eat, the restrictions have to do with gluttony or with the expiation of sin. Peter, in Acts 10, has a vision in which he is told all food is now clean, even pigs, garlic, and onions.¹¹ The claim that garlic is unclean is, then, not one that Christians endorse. And the argument for that claim—that is unclean—is one that a Christian will eschew, but it will be appealing to members of other religious communities, even if the particular claim about *garlic* being unclean will not.

Even the ostensibly baffling surface command to mix the flavor out of your food is defensible against the background of deeper moral principles. It makes sense against the background of a deeper command to turn yourself away from bodily pleasures and the point that food provides a source of great bodily pleasure. As H.L. Seneviratne writes,

In the ideal Buddhist life, that of the monk, food is to be ingested merely as necessity. The practice of begging for food eradicates both the social origin and the uniqueness of food items and flavors and thereby expresses indifference to those qualities such as texture and flavor which are so

¹⁰ Shabkar. 2004. *Food of Bodhisattvas*. London: Shambala: pp. 56-57.

¹¹ Note that traditional Christian permissiveness about what to eat at the level of surface commands is compatible with a conviction of Christian conscience that one ought not to eat various foods for spiritual or moral reasons that arise from deeper commands. If a Christian were to believe, for instance, that she could not genuinely abide in the two deepest commands of the Christian vision—love God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself—while purchasing and consuming animal products, then she would have good reason to believe herself obligated to eschew certain foods even though there are no operative shallow commands that prohibit their consumption.

important in the food ingestion of the laity. The inevitable mixing of food which takes place in this method of food gathering, considered to lower flavor, is repeated in the monk's conscious act of mixing immediately before ingestion.¹²

Relatedly, in the Christian tradition, Augustine writes,

Although the purpose of eating and drinking is to preserve health, in its train there follows an ominous kind of enjoyment, which often tries to outstrip it, so that it is really for the sake of pleasure that I do what I claim to do and mean to do for the sake of my health.¹³

Augustine not only sets out what food's purpose is but counsels against going in for too much enjoyment of food—that would tempt one to sin. This, then, makes sense of St. Francis's practice, mentioned earlier, mixing of food and ash. He should do so lest, as Augustine warned, he be distracted by the pleasure of eating.

There is a related justification underpinning the prohibition on overconsumption. (Compare with the purely secular ideas mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 12—Overconsumption and Obesity.) The Judeo-Christian tradition provides religious, ethical grounds for not overconsuming: Overconsumption leads to weakness in the face of temptation. (Augustine claims, “the snare of concupiscence awaits me in the very process of passing from the discomfort of hunger to the contentment that comes when it is satisfied” (235)) It leads to (disordered) desire for worldly things rather than (rightly-ordered) desire for otherworldly ones. (Augustine again: “The Israelites in the desert deserved rebuke, not because they wanted meat, but because in their greed for food they sulked and grumbled against the Lord” (237)). And, generally, overconsumption leads to bad behavior. In C.S. Lewis's book, *The Screwtape Letters*, the character Screwtape—a devil—claims, “[Mere excess in food's] chief use is as a kind of artillery preparation for attacks on chastity.”¹⁴ And the rich man in the Christian parable of Lazarus, the man who refuses to feed Lazarus and goes to hell as a result, is led by the pleasure he gets in eating to commit a crime of negligence towards Lazarus. (If the food were foul, he'd have been more likely to give some to Lazarus.)

Discussing the parable of Lazarus, William Ian Miller writes, “For that earlier economic order [eating too much] was, in a sense, murder or a kind of criminal negligence, like drunk driving is for us.”¹⁵ And impoverished human beings aren't the only earthlings going hungry when some of us eat too much, as Lisa Kemmerer reminds us in her reading in this chapter in describing the agricultural practices of the Bhima Saoras of central and southeast India:

Their broad-minded attitude [that they are just one species among many all of which depend on the land for survival] restricts the amount of land

¹² Seneviratne, H.L. 1992. “Essence of Food and the Essence of Experience” in Khare, R.S., ed. *The Eternal Food*. Albany: State University of New York Press: pp. 188-189.

¹³ Augustine. 1961. *Confessions*. New York: Penguin: p. 235.

¹⁴ Lewis, C.S. 2003. *Mere Christianity and The Screwtape Letters*. San Francisco: HarperCollins: p. 330.

¹⁵ Miller, William Ian. 1997. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: p. 97.

that they are willing to take for crops, even though many of their own children die of starvation each year. The Bhima Saoras' spiritual understanding of their rightful place in the natural world prevents them from contributing to the massive human overpopulation problem that has devastated landscapes and destroyed animal communities throughout most of the world, too often driving animals to extinction.

Considerations like these raise a final justification for not overconsuming, recognizable in both secular and religious contexts: When you overconsume, you take more than your share of food. In a world in which millions of people do not have enough to eat, and billions of animals are both displaced by our agricultural expansion and killed for the excessively rich diets of affluent people, overconsumption might be especially objectionable.

What else religion makes available to adherents

One thing, then, that religion provides to its adherents is a set of moral guidelines to steer their consumption. There are the surface guidelines like that you shouldn't eat onions and the deeper ones like that you shouldn't pollute yourself.

There are other things religion provides that matter to food ethics. In addition to providing substantive *moral theses*—e.g., you should love your neighbor—that yield substantive moral conclusions, it might provide substantive metaphysical theses—e.g. all animals have souls or all living things have souls. It might even provide something still grander, what you might think of as a cosmic vision. Let's think of such a vision as an intersubjective, communal, evolving way of both understanding and being in the world. The vision often encompasses origin myths, folklore, oral history, sacred texts, and other sources of wisdom such as philosophy, literature, and lived experience. It can provide an earnest, savvy, and ultimately pragmatic identity politics (i.e., a set of rules for deciding who is a member of the community and who is not, who is a good or successful member of the community and who is not, etc.). These, in turn, can provide practitioners with an identity and social glue.

Neither the metaphysical theses nor the cosmic vision are themselves moral theses. But, combined with moral theses, they might yield insights about whether to kill a yak or some number of fish. They might have implications about whether it is permissible to kill plants.

As Kemmerer notes in her reading in this chapter, some religious groups have a certain metaphysical vision of the world—one according to which animals, plants, even rocks are spiritual beings who, moreover, are all related—and then a certain moral view—you should minimize harm to spiritual beings and, when you do harm them, you should atone. The implication for food ethics is that you should minimize harm and offer thanks for the food you get.

It's a conclusion lots of people have arrived at independently. Religion might, then, provide substantive justifications for conclusions you could arrive at otherwise—e.g. atheist vegans and Buddhists agree that one shouldn't eat pork but differ about why. And Rastafari agree that one shouldn't eat pork, but their justifications differ still further. The Rastafari justification is overdetermined: Like all forms of meat, pork derives from

death and, because of this, is to be avoided. Also, independently, pork is to be avoided because pigs are tainted animals.

These justifications provide different adherents different reasons to avoid eating pork. For some moral theories, the reasons for which you do things are *very* important. From the deontological perspective of Immanuel Kant, for instance, to act well, it is not enough to, for example, save a baby from drowning. You have to save the baby from drowning for the right reasons. Whatever the right reason—and ethicists differ on what the right reason is—one wrong reason is that saving the baby would make you famous. If you save the baby for that reason, Kant would deem your act less morally impressive than saving the baby for the right reason.

So while the atheist vegan, the Buddhist, and the Rastafari agree that eating pork is wrong, they disagree on the reason(s) that it is wrong. And this disagreement is morally significant and is attributable—not to be too grand about it—to the cosmic visions that Buddhism and Rastafarianism endorse. Indeed, these groups might disagree amongst themselves, and these disagreements can be traced to differences in their cosmic visions.

We finish this chapter by discussing three other religious ideas that are important for food ethics, each interestingly pertinent to an adherent's efforts to conform her life to her religion's cosmic vision.

Symbolism

According to utilitarianism, an action is permissible if and only if no other option produces more happiness. An act is required if and only if all other options produce less happiness. So, for example, if you have a choice between doing something that makes your little brother happy but affects no one else and doing something that makes him sad but affects no one else, utilitarianism implies you are required to do the former. If you have a choice between doing something that makes him really happy but affects no one else, doing something else that makes him equally happy but affects no one else, and doing something that makes him sad, utilitarianism implies you are required to do one of the first two actions but permitted to do either one.

Now think about, say, abstaining from eating pork. It might be that doing so makes you unhappy and affects no one else—not even a pig—and that eating pork would make you happy and affect no one else. If so, then utilitarianism implies you should eat the pork. What if you're a Muslim? Well, if it really won't make a difference to happiness, you should eat the pork, according to utilitarianism. Even though doing so is forbidden by your religion. For some religious people, though, acting morally is not simply a matter of producing the most happiness but, rather, of being a certain sort of person or standing for certain things or siding with God. Such a person abstains from pork not because of its effects on happiness but, rather, because doing so is a way of showing her devotion to God or a way of indicating the alignment of her being with a certain vision of the world. Refusing to eat animals is like wearing a flag lapel pin or voting for a candidate who is sure to win anyway: It's a way of showing support for something. But, in the food case, because our eating practices are often central parts of our identities, showing support for this dietary regime over that one is also, typically, a way of showing who you are. Moreover, its value is not reducible to the effects it produces.

In the *Laws of Manu* reading in this chapter, as in the introduction to Chapter 5-Food and Identity, eating is made out to be a way to display one's character. This display might have a value in itself, apart from its effects on anyone else.

Actions might be good for what they symbolize as well as what they produce. The *refusal* to eat can be a way to bring oneself closer to God—this is a good reason for a religious person to do it, a reason based on effects. Refusal to eat might also improve one's character. Again, this is a good reason to do it, a reason based on its effects. And it has further good effects: For some believers, it increases their awareness of their dependence on God, makes them contrite and humble, or more attuned to spiritual concerns. Yet it is also valuable because it symbolizes something—in this case, abstinence from sin, a strengthening of the will, and a general alignment of one's life with one's cosmic vision.

For some vegetarians, the refusal to eat meat is something they think they *should* do, are morally required to do. When you ask them why they abstain, however, they often say things that, on reflection, seem off-topic: "It is wrong to kill animals for food" or "Do you know how animals are hurt on factory farms"? In situations like these, the philosophical (if somewhat flat-footed) response might be something like: I'm not asking about killing and hurting animals. I'm asking why you don't *eat* them.

But it could be that what the vegetarian has in mind is something like: I believe meat is wrongly produced. If I eat it, I symbolize that I am indifferent to that wrongdoing. I shouldn't symbolize that. So I shouldn't eat meat.

And while, as Chapter 12 -Overconsumption and Obesity demonstrates, overconsumption is a fraught, complex topic, there is a kind of overconsumption that this idea about symbolism is well-positioned to criticize. As we write these paragraphs, several thousand children are dying from hunger-related causes. And, as we write these paragraphs, some well-off college student, having already eaten plenty, is having an extra burrito just because he wants to see if he can pack it in. It's not the case that if he *stopped eating so much* he would thereby be able to save the people dying from hunger-related causes. It's not like the college student who eats one too many burritos could've shipped the offending burrito to a starving child and thereby saved a life. But, all the same, by eating too much the student might be doing wrong because symbolizing that he is willing to take more than his share. As Robert Adams writes, it is an important part of Christian and Hindu thought that

A central part of living well is being for the good and against evils. We face the question, how we can be for and against goods and evils that we are relatively powerless to accomplish or prevent. One of the most obvious answers is that we can give more reality to our being for the goods and against the evils by expressing our loyalties symbolically in action. For this reason acts of martyrdom represent a particularly important possibility for living well for people who find themselves in situations of comparative helplessness...¹⁶

¹⁶ Adams, Robert M. 1999. *Finite and Infinite Goods*. New York: Oxford University Press: p. 225.

Virtue

As we said above, food is often tied up with personal identity. Both as individuals and as members of particular communities and social groups, people tend to think of themselves as defined, at least in part, by their food choices: Ana is a feminist vegan, Pat is a freeranger vegetarian who keeps chickens, Keith loves a good steak with his teammates on game day.

When it comes to the communities and social groups that shape culinary identity, religious communities often play a particularly influential and often morally-inflected role in the lives of their adherents. If Darryl eats no pork because he's Muslim, for instance, his abstinence from pork is likely to be an important part of how he thinks of himself. If he eats no pork just because he's never liked the taste of it, less so. A religiously-motivated refusal to eat pork might, for Darryl, be part of what makes his life meaningful to him, a life with the qualities and narrative he wants it to have, as the author of his own life. A vivid example, described in the introduction to Chapter 5-Food and Identity, comes from Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals*. Foer recounts his grandmother's flight from the Nazis and how, even when starving, she kept kosher. She stayed true to her convictions even when that meant going hungry rather than eating pork. Keeping kosher gave meaning to her life, as she confirms when she says, "If nothing matters, there's nothing to save."

For a different example of the way that religious commitment can shape food choices and the underlying traits of character they aim to mold and express, consider Confucianism. In Confucianism, manners—not only food-related manners but certainly including those—are highly important. Manners build character and also display respect for others. The Confucian text *Mencius* claims "[T]hose who have propriety (li) respect others" (*Mencius* 4B:28).

Glossing the passage, Tae Wan Kim and Alan Strudler write,

Li, it seems, is a pattern of behavior, whereas respect is an attitude that one may take when engaging in ritual with a person worthy of respect. One may show respect for a person by engaging in appropriate ritual behavior, and one may deserve respect by engaging in appropriate ritual together; both the respecter and respectee must collaborate in ritual for meaningful respect to occur, on our reading of Confucius.¹⁷

Manners are important in part because they express moral virtue (rather than because they produce the best consequences). But they are also important because they build moral character.

There is an idea—not only in Confucianism but also in, say, Eastern Orthodox Christianity and the Jewish tradition of Jonathan Safran Foer's grandmother—that what you eat, how you eat, and with whom you eat are expressive, indeed even constructive, of who you are. Lots of things we regularly, frequently do are not nearly so expressive or

¹⁷ Kim, Tae Wan and Alan Strudler. 2012. "Workplace Civility," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22: p. 563. For more on manners, see Møllgaard, Eske. 2012. "Confucian Ritual and Modern Civility." *Journal of Global Ethics* 8: 227-237 and Stohr, Karen. 2011. *On Manners*. New York: Routledge.

constructive of character—how you breathe, when you go to bed—but in some religious traditions what you eat (and refuse to eat) shows off and even creates who you are.

Authenticity

Finally, return to the cosmic vision that some religions offer. As we said, that vision itself offers various non-ethical theses: Garlic makes you fearsome. Each living thing is ensouled. Etc. These can be poured into your ethical grinder, churning out substantive conclusions: Don't eat garlic. Give thanks for any food you get since that food was once a living, ensouled thing. Etc. As we said, the vision can itself offer substantive ethical theses: Stand with God against factory farming. Be kind to all living creatures. Etc. It can also offer substantive justifications for theses you might be antecedently committed to: Mind your manners *in order to* build character. Don't be a cannibal *because* doing so offends God. Etc.

There is something else that one might think the cosmic vision offers, something that manifests clearly at the table and in the kitchen: the principles with food ethical implications, whether surface or deep, can serve the purpose of guiding people toward a flourishing or a God-pleasing life, or both. Food and the regulation of food plays such a huge role in the spiritual disciplinary regimes of these religions because food connects us to every level of being in the cosmic vision—what we eat affects the health of our bodies, the sustainability of ecosystems and human communities, the well-being of other creatures, and on and on and on. As such, any effort to envision holistic flourishing within a harmonious order of things—a cosmic vision that motivates a sustainable identity that is compatible with human beings doing well with one another and by the rest of the world—will obviously have to say quite a bit about how, what, and when human beings should eat.

Religious food ethics, from a certain perspective, can be seen to have practical advantages over ethics like Hare's or Harman's or Singer's in Chapters 7-Industrial Animal Agriculture and 8-Alternatives to Industrial Animal Agriculture insofar as the latter usually tries to begin from a neutral standpoint that has very little power to compel a person viscerally or habitually into action, whereas religious food ethics shapes and cultivates a person's deepest ways of apprehending the world and its significance. Relatedly, this line of thought goes, part of the reason that food ethics is so central in religions is that eating is such a holistic endeavor that connects us to everything else that chances are good that if we eat badly, we might well end up being-in-the-world badly as well.

As the Halteman reading discusses, the cosmic vision thus holds out a model for living a purposeful life. If one aligns one's daily attitudes and actions with that purpose, one will live an authentic life—that is, a life that exemplifies genuine adherence to the commitments that arise from one's professed cosmic vision. The goal is to live into this cosmic vision and concretize it in one's daily affairs to whatever finite extent is possible given the inevitable limitations of being human. In doing so, one will live a life that is mindfully in sync with the flourishing of the whole, at least as this order of things is framed within that specific religious vision.

Mindfulness of the humble place of humankind in the grand scheme of things, however, doesn't come naturally to most human beings. As such, religious efforts to live

in accordance with a cosmic vision typically require the adoption of spiritual disciplines—repetitive daily practices that remind adherents of their unchecked tendency to live without regard for the whole, and that entrench, through the doing, more mindful habits of thought and practice. Thus, a Jewish person might take up the daily discipline of kosher vegetarianism in hopes of being in more genuine accord with the shalomic vision,¹⁸ or a Buddhist might adopt veganism as a means of more deeply instantiating the karmic vision.¹⁹

But if such cosmic visions have the power to inspire people to live more mindfully in certain regards, they also have the power to entrench hierarchies, promote and exploit systemic injustices, and foment legalism and exclusion. Indeed, some people²⁰ think that some religious visions of the world have done especially egregious harm where “food animals” are concerned. The Halteman reading in this chapter provides a different perspective on this issue, asking whether paying closer attention to food ethics can help to reinvigorate religious visions and make them more authentic. Halteman considers this question from a Christian perspective, but others in the chapter speak to it, too.

Further Issues

1. *Moral Taint.* An important idea for some religious groups is that members should remain pure. (You hear discourse about this having to do with food, with social groups, with sex.) What does this—being pure—mean? Does being pure have moral importance? Consider an example derived from one by Kwame Anthony Appiah: You work in a hardware store. Someone comes in, looking for a knife to use in a fight. If you don’t sell it to him, he’ll just go to a nearby store and get exactly the same knife. You are about to put the knife on the shelf where the customer will buy it. Is that permissible? Will you be “tainted,” in Appiah’s evocative word, by the crime? In what ways might eating certain foods be considered to “taint” one morally?

2. *Moral Motivation.* Part of what is powerful about religious food ethics is its provision of a cosmic vision. And part of what is powerful about a cosmic vision is its ability to compel adherents to live a life that lines up with their values. This is well and good if the values are good values, but it is easy to imagine a cosmic vision that leads to very bad things. (Various visions have led to very bad things. ISIS does not lack for a cosmic vision.)

This raises interesting issues about moral motivation. Some think that you must be motivated—to *some extent*—to do whatever you judge you morally should do. They think there is a necessary connection between judging you ought to do something and being motivated to do that action. Others think that the connection is contingent: It’s possible to judge you ought to do something and be motivated to do it but also possible to judge you ought to do it while not being motivated to do it.

¹⁸ See Kalechofsky, Roberta. 1992. *Judaism and Animal Rights*. Boston: Micah Books.

¹⁹ See Phelps, Norm. 2011. “Buddhism and Animal Liberation: The Family of Sentient Beings,” in Kemmerer and and Nocella, Anthony. 2011. *A Call to Compassion: Religious Perspectives on Animal Advocacy*. New York: Lantern.

²⁰ See the Singer (2002) and Camosy (2013) readings in Further Readings for some relevant literature.

Can you think of examples that support the second position? And what do you make of a version of the first position according to which the moral motivation is *very powerful*, that if you judge you ought to do something, you are very powerfully motivated to do it? In a short stand-up routine that is easy to find on-line—“Louis C.K.’s Justification for Eating Meat”—the comedian Louis C.K. provides a counterexample. What is the justification for eating meat that he offers in that video? Is it part of a cosmic vision?

3. *Food As Fuel*. A Buddhist/Franciscan view is that food is simply fuel. Against this, consider this passage from Dan Barber’s *The Third Plate*:

Without cuisine, Glenn [Roberts] said, farming systems can’t last. ‘They don’t,’ he said. ‘Maybe for our lifetime, or for our children’s lifetime, but eventually, forget it. Food and cuisine have to be an important part of our culture, and not just something that fuels the culture in one way. Food as fuel is a dangerous concept. That’s where we are right now—food as fuel. It’s why nothing tastes good, and why our farming systems are collapsing...[T]he culture of food is as important, if not more important, than the production of food.’²¹

Roberts makes a couple of *causal* claims. First, he claims that the view that food is simply fuel, if sufficiently widespread, *produces* food that is not particularly flavorful—if it’s just fuel, it might as well be a nutrition pill, so why need it be flavorful? Second, he claims that the view that food is fuel, if sufficiently widespread, *produces* “collapse” in farming systems. What do you think he has in mind? One idea might be that the view, if spread wide enough, produces environmental damage that undermines farms—how might that happen? Why would it happen?

4. *Farms As Organisms*. The Austrian mystic Rudolf Steiner—“mystic” is not meant to be pejorative, but it is hard to classify Steiner’s spiritual views—claimed that farms are themselves organisms. He claimed life on those farms is, like the lives of cells within your body, something to be preserved and supported. There are cases in which things on a farm need to be rooted out but, as with your body, this is a sign that something is not right within the body. The problem on the farm—late blight on your tomatoes, for example—is like a bacterial infection you pick up.

Compare this view to the Buddhist metaphysical view according to which all living things are ensouled or the traditional Melanesian metaphysical view in which animate and inanimate objects alike are viewed holistically as members of a single community.

The Steiner view supports “biodynamic farming” and is popular among some organic farmers. After reading about organic farming in Chapter 10-Alternatives to Industrial Plant Agriculture, consider whether these views—Steiner’s, the Buddhist, the traditional Melanesian’s—have implications for, say, organic farming? If so, what are they?

²¹ Barber, Dan. 2014. *The Third Plate*. New York: Penguin: p. 380.

5. *Profiting from Wrongdoing and Having Others Do Wrong*. Counter to stereotype, not all Buddhists are vegetarian. As mentioned above, some Buddhists are *required* to eat what is given to them, flesh or otherwise. About this, Charles Goodman writes,

Though all Buddhist traditions attach moral significance to animal life and animal suffering, not all Buddhists practice vegetarianism. For example, Theravāda monks, who live by begging, are expected to eat whatever food is placed in their bowl, including meat, without preference or discrimination. However, they are forbidden to eat meat from an animal if they have seen, heard, or suspected that the animal in question was killed specifically for them.²²

This is importantly connected to issues about consumption we discuss in Chapter 4-Consumer Ethics. It is also connected to this interesting passage about Buddhism from H.L. Seneviratne:

The carnivorousness of the Sinhalese has baffled many who reason that since Buddhism proposes nonviolence toward all beings, the Sinhalese, who are Buddhist, should not eat meat. This is certainly a logical expectation, but the ordinary Sinhalese people think differently. They hold that what is non-Buddhist is killing, and not eating—a position which is perfectly in keeping with the doctrinal Buddhist idea that *karma* is volition and not action. The large majority of the Buddhist Sinhalese do abhor killing, often hesitating to kill even pests, and certainly avoid killing for purposes of food. Who then does the killing? Muslims and Christians... A more difficult logical problem faces those Buddhist Sinhalese who actually do kill, such as the seafaring communities of the southern and southwestern seaboard. The dilemma is solved by the resort to the well-known distinction, made by many [Buddhist] peasants..., between merit and demerit. These fisherman admit that when killing fish, they actually commit unwholesome karma, which produces demerit. But they believe that merit gained by good works cancels the demerit. How do these fisherman gain merit? By avoiding fishing on the sacred full-moon days and by feeding Buddhist monks with a portion of the catch.²³

What is it for merit to cancel demerit? How plausible it is *in general* that merit cancels demerit? How plausible is it in this case?

What do you think of the ethics of Buddhists profiting from actions by Muslims and Christians that the Buddhists are themselves unwilling to do and that they think

²² Goodman, Charles. 2014. "Ethics in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/ethics-indian-buddhism/>.

²³ Seneviratne, H.L. 1992. "Essence of Food and the Essence of Experience" in Khare, R.S., ed. *The Eternal Food*. Albany: State University of New York Press: pp. 186-187

would be wrong for them to do? After doing their readings about consumption in Chapters 1 and 4 what do you think Grace Boey and Tristram McPherson would think?

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