

# BETWEEN THE SPECIES

## The question of veganism, the dangers of moral extensionism, and a pragmatist ecofeminist alternative

### ABSTRACT

In this paper I argue that the framework of moral extensionism relies on human exceptionalism and human centeredness. I discuss the dangers of human exceptionalism and human centeredness using the work of ecofeminist philosophers Val Plumwood, Carol Adams, Lori Gruen, A. Breeze Harper, and Lisa Kemmerer. These ecofeminists each articulate alternative approaches to human relations with other animal beings. There are tensions among these alternatives, though, and I use a pragmatist perspective to interrogate their different positions on how other animal beings should or should not figure into the diets of human beings. I will argue that we need a contextual approach of ethical pluralism that is rooted in a broadened understanding of the human continuity with the rest of life and deeper acknowledgment of human dependency (and interdependency) with the rest of nature.

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I am a vegetarian but I don't like the term as I don't like eating most vegetables. Saying I follow a "plant based diet" has appeal, though this is most commonly associated with those who don't eat animals for health reasons. I am someone who doesn't eat animals and works to minimize the amount of animal suffering and death associated with the foods I do eat (being under no delusion that animals are not harmed while producing a plant based diet). I am not vegan for a number of reasons. Some of the reasons are environmental: animal manures can be important for growing plants in ways that improve the soil and don't poison and pollute the planet; leather can be a longer lasting material, allowing for repair and eventually biodegrading (though the environmental risks of many tanning operations present serious issues); some grazing of animals can improve the land and increase water retention in ways that benefit wildlife. Some of the reasons are practical: unless one prepares meals from scratch it is hard to avoid dairy and eggs without buying products with problematic ingredients such as palm oil; animal byproducts are so ubiquitous that it feels false to claim the ability to abstain from such consumption. This is further complicated by living with dogs and cats for whom I purchase some animal products and with horses whose food is available mainly because of the livestock industry. Interestingly, though, some of the reasons I am currently not vegan are related to my ecofeminism. This gets complicated since many (if not most) ecofeminists call for veganism. As a feminist I am also a pluralist and contextualist and so doubt that any one way of eating can be seen as a moral obligation for large groups of differently situated and embodied human beings. To be clear, none of these considerations results in a position that justifies industrial animal agriculture and/or the current patterns of overconsumption of other animal beings.

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I found myself theoretically at home with most ecofeminist theory, but I do not always draw the same conclusions about diet. For many ecofeminists, the only diet consistent with opposition to the logic of domination is a vegan diet. With great respect for these theorists, I disagree with this conclusion and hope to explain why. This is not meant to be an exhaustive survey of ecofeminism. Rather it is meant as an attempt to work out some of what might lie behind a key tension that is found within these philosophical circles.

Much of the credit for getting contemporary ecofeminists to focus on issues related to the conceptualization and consumption of other animal beings belongs to Carol J. Adams. *The Sexual Politics of Meat* changed the fields of feminism, animal ethics, and ecofeminism. She highlighted the complex interconnections among many issues of social justice. As she notes, the very critiques levelled against animal activists reveal the inability of many to truly take an intersectional approach. It is common to be asked (even by many feminists) why one is focusing on animals when there is so much human suffering. “Human-centered thinkers want to provide a human-centered critique of a theory or practice that de-centers humans. They re-center humans by claiming that we have decided to eliminate humans from our realm of concern. They uphold the idea that humans must come first, all the while failing to recognize that incorporating animals into the dialogue and activism of social change doesn’t eliminate humans from concern; . . .” (2016c, 56). Many miss that working for social justice for other animal beings and the environment also works for social justice humans.

We could argue this for many reasons, some of which end up reinforcing the human/animal division I would

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like to see eliminated. Slaughterhouses are deadly for animals, but they are also the most dangerous places for humans to work. Often undocumented workers are employed there and have few protections against an overly rapid line speed. People who live near factory farms often get ill from the effluvia. Concentrated animal farm operations cause water pollution. Eating vegan can lower one's chances of high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, and diabetes. (Adams 2016c, 56)

The difficulty here is that it is easy to fall back into human centered arguments when de-centering humans is part of what we need to do. The work of challenging the human/animal dualism, and of challenging anthropocentric and human exceptionalist views, is vital to challenging the whole range of dualisms and hierarchies that make the logic of domination so prevalent.

Most ecofeminists are committed to some version of Karen Warren's understanding of an oppressive conceptual framework and the connections between women and animals made in the patriarchal conceptual framework that serves to maintain the oppression of women, non-dominant humans, other animals, and nature. First, thinking in disjunctions "supports the sort of 'either-or' thinking which generates *normative dualisms* . . .". Higher value is attributed to one side of such dualisms (male/female, human/animal, culture/nature, reason/emotion, white/non-white, rich/poor . . .) and "value-hierarchical thinking" takes hold and "gives rise to a 'logic of domination which explains, justifies, and maintains the subordination of an 'inferior' group by a 'superior' group . . ." (Adams 2016b, 205). Adams brought this logic into sharp focus around the prac-

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tice of meat eating. “The patriarchal worldview provides an explanation for meat consumption intertwining dualist thinking, value-hierarchical thinking, and the logic of domination: Human beings are different from animals; human beings are superior to animals; by virtue of that difference and concomitant superiority, we have the right to eat animals” (2016b, 208). This is human exceptionalism at its finest.

Adams argues that this practice is made easier by the use of mass terms that remove the individuality of the animals being eaten and turn the animal into an absent referent whose life and death is necessary for the practice of eating meat even while their being is denied. Terms such as beef, meat, and pork hide the individual lives and deaths. Further, this move ontologizes animal beings as edible. Rather than acknowledging that humans kill animals to make them into food, we refer to meat animals or broilers (Adams 1994,101-02). The purpose of the animal is seen as feeding humans (and other domesticated animals). “(T)he ontologizing of animals as edible bodies creates them as instruments of human beings; animal’s lives are thus subordinated to the human’s desire to eat them even though there is, in general, no need to be eating animals” (1994, 87). While Adams acknowledges that the eating of animals may be necessary in very specific or extreme circumstances, ontologizing them as edible is always wrong on her account.

Her concept of feminized protein has also been important. She introduced the term to draw attention to the ways female bodies are doubly exploited in the production of eggs and dairy products. This recognition of exploited female bodies is the ground for her move from calling for a feminist-vegetarian critical theory to calling for a feminist-vegan critical theory. Also worried about the erosion of the meaning of the word veg-

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etarian—people eating fish and chicken and calling themselves vegetarian—she argues that vegan avoids such ambiguity. “A vegan avoids all products arising from the exploitation of animals, not only animalized and feminized proteins, but also . . . fur, leather, and honey.” (2015, 63). Throughout her work Adams argues for the connections between meat and masculinity and concludes that “The patriarchal gaze sees not the fragmented flesh of dead animals but appetizing food. If our appetites re-inscribe patriarchy, our actions regarding eating animals will either reify or challenge this received culture. If meat is a symbol of male dominance then the presence of meat proclaims the disempowering of women” (2015, 178). And so she argues that all feminists should be vegan. While I agree with most of Adams’s analysis I have reservations about this conclusion.

One reservation stems from a response she made when asked whether she thought it was better to buy leather shoes that could be repaired and biodegrade or to buy shoes made of materials that can’t be easily repaired and/or don’t biodegrade. Adams said it was better to avoid leather as any support for the animal industry would keep the exploitation of animal bodies going. Such a position has an enviable clear and single minded focus that allows her to argue that all use of the lives and deaths of other animal beings is wrong and trumps other competing concerns one might have, but I think such issues are complicated and require a more contextual and flexible approach.

Another reservation I have about Adams’ work is that while it is descriptively powerful, it does not take full advantage of the deeper critique to ethics and social and political philosophy that it makes possible by challenging the individuality of classical liberalism. Since this concept of the individual underwrites

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most contemporary legal and political systems in the industrialized countries of the West, it is important to understand the weaknesses of this concept of the individual. This individual seeks to gain autonomy and rights in opposition to others. This blocks people from seeing interlocking systems of oppression and applying an intersectional lens to social and political problems. I think those connections are best articulated by Val Plumwood.

Plumwood argues that the legacy of classical liberalism has left us with a monological logic and hyperbolized sense of autonomy that causes humans to deny their dependency on each other and the rest of nature. She argues this is an arrogant and insensitive form of reason that separates us from each other and the rest of nature and results in a lack of sympathy. This is what allows us to dominate and commodify the rest of nature. She argues that we need a dialogical logic and a partnership ethic (2002, 6,12). Without this, humans will continue to think and act only from a human centric point, treating the rest of nature as an unlimited resource and dumping ground for waste (2002, 26-29). She attributes this way of thinking and acting to anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, and androcentrism. Together these result in an instrumentalized view of nature, women, and colonized peoples (2002, 60). This means it won't work just to extend ethical models rooted in classical liberalism.

Plumwood agrees with much of Adams's analysis, but rather than calling for a vegetarian or vegan diet she argues for contextualized eating based on respectful use of all of nature (including humans). Plumwood worries that the call for veganism reifies an animal/plant dualism and so fails to fully address the logics of domination and colonization. Human, animal, and plant life are interdependent. We should eat in ways that

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respect animals and plants as individuals in their own right as well as in relationship with humans. This can include a vegan diet, but veganism is not a universal prescription as Plumwood thinks there are non-instrumentalizing ways of killing and eating other beings.

For Plumwood, respect does not mean non-use and does not entail not seeing plant, animal, and human others as edible. She agrees with Adams that industrialized farming fails to respect the rest of nature and sees animal others only in terms of human use. Such instrumentalizing, though, is not the only option for relationships that entail some forms of use and consumption. She argues that seeing use as food always as a form of domination is to deny the continuity and reciprocity of life. For Plumwood, ontologizing as edible is not always to reduce a being to merely instrumental value. We can use and respect (2002, 156, 159).

Recovering a liberatory direction would mean replacing the over-individualised and culturally hegemonic vanguard focus on veganism as a politics of personal virtue and self-denial, with its demonstrated potential for fostering self-righteousness and holier-than-thouism, by a more carefully contextualized vegetarianism, a more diverse and politically sensitive set of strategies for collective action, and by a stronger focus on the responsibility of systems of economic rationality for the atrocities daily committed against animals, especially in the factory-farming framework. (Plumwood 2012a, 90)

While Adams and Plumwood have more in common than points on which they disagree, I think this disagreement makes



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a big difference. For Plumwood, “Ontological Veganism insists that neither humans or animals should ever be conceived as edible or even as usable, confirming the treatment of humans as ‘outside nature’ that is part of a human/nature dualism, and blocking any re-conception of animals and humans in fully ecological term” (2012a, 78). She continues, “Although it claims to oppose the dominant mastery position, it remains subtly human-centered because it does not fully challenge human/nature dualism, but rather attempts to extend human status and privilege to a bigger class of semi-humans who, like humans themselves are conceived as above the non-conscious sphere and ‘outside nature’, beyond ecology and beyond use, especially use in the food chain” (79). This rests on humans denying their inclusion in the food web.

Plumwood agrees with Adams that “the ruthless, reductionistic . . . treatment of animals as replaceable and tradeable items of property” is an outcome of the logic of domination and needs to be changed (Adams 2002, 162). But not all farming does this and so she does not reject all forms of farming as Adams (and Gruen) does. Further, Plumwood thinks many forms of veganism are dualistic and present value hierarchical ways of thinking and so support the logic of domination. Vegans who reject humans’ ecological embodiment (their existence as food for others) reify a mind/body dualism and so support a form of human exceptionalism. They follow the extensionist model of ethics by “merely redrawing the boundary of otherness in a different place, at the border of animality rather than humanity” (Plumwood 2012b, 61). But the logic is the same. She argues that, “We cannot give up using one another, but we can give up the use/respect dualism, which means working toward ethical, respectful and constrained forms of use” (2002, 159). This requires recognizing that “humans *are* food,

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food for sharks, lions, tigers, bears and crocodiles, . . . and for a huge variety of smaller creatures and micro-organisms.” We need to have respect and gratitude for those we consume as food (animal and plant) and be willing to have our bodies give back to nature. “*In a good human life we must gain our food in such a way as to acknowledge our kinship with those whom we make our food, which does not forget the more than food that every one of us is, and which positions us reciprocally as food for others*” (2012a, 81).

Plumwood offers an important counter to Adams, but it is not only Adams who calls on all feminists and social justice advocates to adopt a vegan diet. Ecofeminists such as Lori Gruen, Lisa Kemmerer, and A. Breeze Harper do so as well. But each of these thinkers offers slightly different arguments. I think, in the end, Adams and Gruen end up reinforcing a kind of human exceptionalism and moral extensionism we need to avoid. Kemmerer and Harper are more complicated.

Gruen is mostly committed to Adams’s approach, but feels some of the tensions that Plumwood’s view introduces. In *Entangled Empathy* Gruen notes that humans find themselves already in a myriad of relationships with other animal beings and that humans need to recognize the particularity of these animal others and work to be responsive to their needs and desires (2015, 64). Relationships that are based on an exploitative instrumentalism are ruled out on this ethic. While in some places Gruen seems to accept that some amount of use, death, and even consumption are part of our entangled biological and social relationships, in other places Gruen is worried about seeing any being as consumable.

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This tension is evident when she addresses the idea of animals as food. Gruen notes that even as we must work to end exploitative relationships “we can’t live and avoid killing. . . . Vegan diets are less harmful than those that include animal products, to be sure, but the harms and deaths occur nonetheless” (2014,132-33). At the same time, however, she thinks that the raising and killing of any animals for food is exploitative and so is by definition unethical. Whether this occurs in industrial or small farms it “violently instrumentalizes individuals in deeply troubling ways, obliterates their personalities and interests, and turns them into both real and metaphorical fodder” (2014, 130).

She argues that they shouldn’t be seen as food. “Humans are not food. Imagine how our interactions with one another might be different if we saw humans . . . as consumable. If we saw each other as edible . . . this could lead to a breakdown in respect for one another and for humanity as a whole” (2011, 102). It is important that “We humans understand ourselves as not in the category of the edible, and this understanding, in part, shapes how we construct our relations with each other . . . . If we now think of our bodies and other people’s bodies as food, the value of our bodies and ourselves changes” (2011, 103). She goes on to say that even eating animals who die a natural death fails to respect them as “‘fellow creatures,’ who, like us, do not belong in the category of the edible.” She then moves to equating this with “turning other animals from living subjects with lives of their own into commodities or consumable objects” and this means “we have erased their subjectivity and reduced them to things.” She thinks that seeing another being as food “forecloses another way of seeing animals, as beings with whom we can empathize . . . . When we identify non-human animals as worthy of our moral attention because

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they are beings with whom we can empathize, they can no longer be seen merely as food” (2011, 103).

Note the use of the word “merely.” Here Gruen moves from an absolutist position that entails that seeing animals as food means not having empathy or respect for them. She notes that in some contexts humans kill other beings to survive. “Killing other animals for food does not necessarily mean that the animals are viewed as merely food, as just consumable objects. . . . (It is possible to see other animals as individuals who are members of their own social groups, who have their own lives to lead, but who nonetheless can be killed out of necessity. In certain contexts, it is possible that humans will respect other animals as fellow creatures but also consume them” (2011, 103). But this is not the context most contemporary humans find themselves in and so she argues for the moral necessity of adopting a vegan diet.

The problem, for me, is Gruen’s refusal to see human and other animal beings as food. Not seeing humans as food is a form of human exceptionalism. While she admits there are contexts where killing animals for food is necessary and that it can be done in a way that doesn’t reduce them to a thing to be consumed, her main concern seems to be to remove other animal beings from the category of edible. (It is important to note that this move creates an animal/plant dualism and hierarchy just as Plumwood worried. In *Entangled Empathy* Gruen says that empathy does not apply to plants, rocks, mountains, and even animals too different from humans such as spiders.) But, as Plumwood argues, human and other animal beings are edible and serve as food for many creatures from microbes to megafauna. Plumwood knew the experience of being seen as food as she survived an encounter with a crocodile. She writes

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that in the eye of the crocodile humans will see either indifference or hunger and realize we are food. She thinks that our ability to remove so many predators from our daily existence has made us lose sight of our own animality and embodiment and so the idea of us being food has become unthinkable (2012d, 10, 13). Her experience with the crocodile shows that “some powerful creature can ignore your special status and try to eat you” (2012d, 11). She argues that we need an ecological animalism that recognizes the complex reciprocity among animals and their environments which includes the idea that we are all food and more than food (2012d, 18). For her this entails rethinking many practices and realizing that we all gain life at the expense of another’s and we shouldn’t avoid this complexity (2012b, 61).

The refusal to see humans as food is a form of human exceptionalism that is central to many ecofeminist points of view. I agree with Plumwood that this is problematic and results in narrow understandings of who can be food and under what circumstances. Kemmerer and Harper do not seem to make this move, but both do call on feminist and others working for social justice to adopt a vegan diet.

Adams argued that all Women’s and Gender Studies conferences should be vegan spaces. Based on the ecofeminist recognition of the shared logic of domination operating within sexist, racist, and speciesist theory and practice, she argued that one could not work to undo one “ism” while consciously promoting another. Lisa Kemmerer takes up this call and argues that “it is necessary for each of us to try to understand how privilege affects the ways we think about and engage in social justice” (2011, 2). Since all humans have privilege in relation to other animal beings, it is as necessary to rethink and pull out

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of speciesist practices as it is for white feminists to rethink and pull out of racist practices. “My whiteness—my blindness and ignorance—limits my effectiveness as an activist. Race matters (Sex matters. Sexual orientation matters. Species matters.) Ignorance of what others face, where they are coming from and where they have been, limits my ability to dialogue with others in any meaningful way” (2011, 3). One of the questions she urges her readers to consider is “Does our diet contradict our antiracist, feminist agenda?” and she writes that we need to see “speciesism as an important concern for all social justice advocates” as it “makes critical connections between social justice movements” and “encourages animal advocates to network with other social justice advocates to expose and dismantle all forms of oppression, and (at a minimum) avoid contributing to other forms of oppression . . .”. One of the main ways to avoid contributing to oppression, for Kemmerer, is for all social justice advocates to “adopt a vegan lifestyle” (2011, 6).

Different forms of injustice share many features and sources and so must not be addressed in isolation from one another. “Oppressions, then, are by definition linked—linked by common ideologies, by institutional forces, and by socialization that makes oppressions normative and invisible” (Kemmerer 2011, 10-11). Kemmerer critiques dualistic and hierarchical thinking that supports patriarchal structures in which “devalued individuals are viewed as a means to the ends of the dominant group” (2011, 13). Unfortunately, many feminists and social justice advocates themselves participate in such dualistic and hierarchical ways of thinking, especially with regard to species. This frustrates the “ever-growing understanding of linked oppressions” and the ability “to develop the kind of understanding that will lead to a lifestyle—a way of being—that works against all oppressions” (2011, 23, 28). While there are

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injustices (food deserts) and practical obstacles (living where it is very cold) that make adopting a vegan lifestyle not possible for some, Kemmerer points out that academic conferences do not face those obstacles. While many argue that serving vegan foods at a conference fails to honor differences and is a kind of “ethical colonialism,” Kemmerer notes that these conferences do little to honor indigenous or ethnic diets. Instead they further normalize the dominant diets of the places in which they meet. An important question here is “Can those putting on ecofeminist or feminist conferences serve nonvegan [or non-ecofriendly] foods and remain true to their mission and ideals” (2011, 29)? Kemmerer concludes that “those who stand against exploitation of the less powerful by the more powerful will need to select vegan food options whenever possible” (2011, 30-31). She agrees with Adams that if one is working to lessen subordination, “consistency *requires* a vegan diet” (2011, 31).

It is also important for those working for change to be willing to change themselves. Pointing to the work of A. Breeze Harper, Kemmerer writes, “In light of interlocking oppressions, feminists and ecofeminists must take a stand on behalf of all who are oppressed, rather than seek loopholes in the hope of defending their habitual diet while continuing to ask others to make fundamental changes in their understandings and lifestyle on behalf of women and other oppressed human minorities” (2011, 32). Harper works “to explore how critical race, critical whiteness studies, and postcolonial feminist theory can help us to understand the Western world’s unique, ongoing, systemic, racist beliefs and acts, in which whiteness, speciesism, and sexism are the norm” (Harper 2011, 75). Harper notes that many animal advocates become frustrated that when confronted with the reality of the cruelty toward, and exploitation of, the animal beings used to provide their food many

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people become defensive or hostile and dig in to justify eating animals. But many of those same animal advocates become defensive and hostile when asked “to reflect on the effects of ‘whiteness as the norm,’ racialization, and racism on [their] perceptions . . . .” (Harper 2011, 77). Harper argues that in order to be in a position to ask others to reconsider, much less change, positions and actions one must be willing to engage in ongoing questioning and critique of oneself. Most people don’t want to admit that their choices and actions cause suffering to other human and animal beings and so this work is hard.

Harper edited *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*. She also is a founder of the Sistah Vegan Project which “serves as a supportive connection point for people of color (and others) interested in plant-based diets, social justice, anti-racism, feminism, LGBTQ issues, holistic health and wellness, natural mothering and “green” lifestyles” ([www.abreezharper.com](http://www.abreezharper.com)). In *Sistah Vegan*, Harper and other authors bring attention to the adverse health impacts of a diet rich in sugar, meat, and dairy. Since sugar plantations and the bringing of livestock to the Americas are consequences of European colonization, a decolonial perspective argues for not being complicit in this diet. Further, since slaves in the Americas were bought, sold, bred, and treated like livestock animals, African-Americans have special reason to see the connections between racism and speciesism. Harper believes that intersectionality requires that we see connections between the rights of women and minorities and the lives and deaths of many other animal beings and that “we extend our antiracist and antipoverty belief to all people, nonhuman animals, and Mother Gaia” (2010b, 29). Another author in *Sistah Vegan*, Delicia Dunham, makes this claim when she writes that “many of us black female vegans realize that much of how non-hu-



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man animals are treated in the USA frighteningly parallels the way black females were treated during slavery.” Female slaves were “bred,” had their sexuality and reproduction controlled by their owners, and had their offspring taken away (2010, 44). Harper is clear that those who find this kind of comparison degrading are still in the grip of a speciesism that perpetuates injustice and harm to black bodies, as are those who continue to eat other animal beings.

I think Harper and Kemmerer make compelling cases about the importance of adopting a vegan diet as way of working for social justice, decolonizing bodies, and standing in solidarity with a variety of oppressed beings. Their case does not rest on denying death as part of life, or refusing to see living beings (human and other than human) as ever usable or consumable. Kemmerer’s position does make the claim that anyone working for social justice must adopt a vegan lifestyle (inasmuch as it is possible), and so does fall in line with Adam’s position that all feminists should adopt a vegan lifestyle. Harper makes the case for going vegan, and calls for ongoing questioning of one’s positions, but her position doesn’t seem to demand veganism of everyone or even everyone working for social justice. I think this is more in line with Plumwood’s position and one that I think is supported by a pragmatist ecofeminist approach.

A pragmatist ecofeminist approach is rooted in an understanding of humans as beings on an evolutionary continuum with the rest of life. Humans are not different in kind and separable from the rest of nature. It takes pluralism and fallibilism seriously and works through issues by way of experimentation and dialogue. No one person has the ability to understand all experiences and perspectives. Further, everyone is mistaken about some things as we are all prone to error. For these rea-

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sons one needs a plurality of perspectives in a dialogue that allows for the revision of positions and growth in one's actions and beliefs. This is seen as an ongoing process rather than one that settles into fixed actions (habits) and beliefs. Changes in environment and context can call forth a need to rethink actions and beliefs that worked well in other environments and contexts. It takes effort and openness to engage in this kind of ongoing inquiry and revision.

I think Harper's insight that one needs to be open to examining and changing oneself if one is involved in questioning and critiquing the actions and beliefs of others is in line with a pragmatist ecofeminist stance. For me, this rules out a mandate that all feminists or social justice activists must be vegan. Starting with that position makes dialogue difficult. While I think Plumwood's characterization of vegans as "fostering self-righteousness and holier-than-thouism" also prevents constructive dialogue and mutual understanding, I do think her call for contextual eating (with veganism as one of many options) is more in line with a pragmatist ecofeminist approach. Adams's and Gruen's position that all forms of farming are forms of domination and exploitation, and that veganism is the only ethical option for most humans, leaves little room for most people to enter the conversation as the position is settled and fixed. Similarly, while Kemmerer notes the capacity for growth and change as a positive characteristic of feminist theory and practice, I do worry that her conclusion that "consistency *requires* a vegan diet" limits the very possibility for the continued conversations that make such change possible.

Now, of course, the work of Adams, Gruen, and Kemmerer have in fact produced a great deal of conversation and change as people have agreed with their views and changed practices

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and beliefs or disagreed with their views and responded with radically different views such as Plumwood's or slightly different views such as Harper's. Some suggest that we consider the idea of veganism not as a moral requirement that is used to judge people, but as an aspirational position that serves as a catalyst for conversation and change. For example, by making the claim that all feminists should be vegan Adams has made it harder for feminists to refuse to see that the question of who and how we eat matters to any work addressing domination and oppression. The seemingly more moderate pragmatist ecofeminist view calls for ongoing critical examination of practices and beliefs, but because it does not issue in one particular mandated action (though it sees many actions as unethical) it does not necessarily compel the same kind of response from those who are challenged by the positions offered. It is easier to ignore if one does not want to examine the connections between food and oppression. So isn't a call for veganism actually a better conversation starter than the call for reflective and respectful contextual eating?

I continue to wrestle with this question. For now, I stay with a pragmatist ecofeminist approach and argue that while there are clearly many unethical ways to engage in relationships with other animal and plant beings, there isn't just one way to engage such relationships ethically. To suggest that there is only one way, even if for rhetorical or activist purposes, encourages the kind of moral absolutism that already runs rampant and often causes serious harm. I believe the pluralism and fallibilism of a pragmatist ecofeminist approach are also key to working against domination and oppression without falling into the trap of re-inscribing domination and oppression in some other manner. Even if one means a call for veganism in an aspirational and flexible way, such a position is easily co-opted by what Ste-

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ven Fesmire calls moral zealots (Plumwood's holier than thou vegans). Fesmire makes the point that committed meat eaters and vegans share a kind of moral absolutism and certainty that belies the complexity of actually situated lives. Such absolutism, by its very nature, fails to have respect for others or to be open to the possibility of being changed by another. This kind of attitude is itself a component of the logics of domination and colonization that ecofeminism seeks to undermine. This absolutism also ends critical examination and inquiry rather than encouraging it. Many people are more comfortable with fixed and settled belief than with ongoing inquiry and change, but a pragmatist ecofeminist seeks to change that very habit and encourage ongoing inquiry and change as a better route to undermining the logics of domination and colonization.

While ecofeminism in general works to dismantle the logics of domination and colonization some aspects of ecofeminism, and many (if not most) aspects of feminism more generally, continue to be influenced by a belief in human exceptionalism and a habit of trying to use various forms of moral extensionism to improve the lives of other animal and human beings. Calls for veganism that rely on the rejection of ontological edibility, inadvertently re-inscribe human exceptionalism as they seek to extend the boundaries of moral consideration because these calls for veganism rest on a view that starts by understanding humans as inedible. This view is connected to classical liberalism's notion of humans as rational, autonomous, atomistic individuals who are not intricately embedded in the rest of nature but are masters of it. Pragmatist ecofeminism rejects this view and works to create a more inclusive and pluralistic conversation. Along the lines of Plumwood, this means being open to other ways of thinking and being. "The outcome of rethinking predation and replacing predation demonizing theories by less

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alienated and more ecologically compatible accounts is that we can still justify well-contextualized forms of vegetarianism. Although the resulting theory is of necessity more flexible, less dogmatic and universalist, it still provides plenty of good reasons for being a vegetarian in most modern urban contexts . . . .” It also has “the consequence of requiring us to avoid complicity in contemporary food practices that abuse animals, especially factory farming” (2000, 289). With Plumwood’s position, though, the critique of contemporary food practices that abuse animals does not entail further alienating the rest of nature (mountains, rivers, plants, or spiders) or rejecting out of hand many indigenous cultures and their complex understandings of the human relationship with other animal beings (which often includes killing and eating) and the rest of nature. Such an approach creates room for different ways of seeing and being rather than continuing attempts to extend western liberal humanism in a slightly altered form.

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