

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Veganism and ‘The Analytic Question’

ABSTRACT

The (practical) dilemma I explore in this paper concerns two advocacy-oriented aims which, though not mutually exclusive per se, are nonetheless quite difficult for vegans to jointly satisfy in practice. The first concerns the need for individual vegans to rebuff (by example) certain familiar stereotypes about vegans as ‘militant,’ ‘angry,’ ‘self-righteous,’ etc.; the second concerns the need to tactfully resist familiar prompts to, as it were, conversationally parse the logic of one’s own convictions ad nauseam. To better explain, and partially respond to, this dilemma, I exploit an instructive analogy with the (so-called) ‘analytic question’ in epistemology (roughly, what are the severally necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for knowledge?). I conclude by suggesting that, just as not having a fully worked-out theoretical answer to this question is not (good) grounds for epistemic scepticism, neither is not having a fully developed ‘theory of veganism’ a (good) reason for not becoming vegan.

ADAM REID

The Johns Hopkins University
adamcurranreid@gmail.com

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Informal conversation is potentially one of the most important practical contexts for effective vegan outreach and advocacy. Indeed, those of us who are willing to discuss our views, to share our experiences, and even debate the philosophical merits of arguments for (and against) ethical veganism with others understand this very well. This is not to say, of course, that each and every impromptu conversational encounter we find ourselves in will be altogether fruitful in this regard. On the contrary; sometimes—indeed, I think often—individual vegans can find themselves caught between a conversational rock and a hard place. The purpose of this paper is to explicate the nature of this dilemma, and perhaps even overcome it.

To help bring the particular dilemma that I am keen to explore into view, I begin by noting that veganism, *contra* vegetarianism, is generally regarded in society as wearing its ethical convictions on its sleeves. Put otherwise, though there are virtually any number of reasons nowadays for why one might be vegetarian (ethical reasons, yes; but also, e.g., perceived health-related, or weight-loss, benefits; concern for the environment; religious prescription; etc.), the public perception of veganism remains, by and large, that of an *ethically* motivated position. The numbers here are important as well. Recent Harris (2008) and Gallup (2012) polls suggest that while somewhere between 3.2 and 5% of Americans identify as vegetarian (with 10% identifying as “largely vegetarian,” or “vegetarian-inclined”), a mere 0.5 to 2% identify as vegan. In view of this emphasis on the explicitly ethical character of veganism, combined with its status as a tiny, albeit decidedly conspicuous, minority position (even amongst vegetarians, it should be noted; many of whom perceive veganism as supererogatory at best; puritanical at worst), it is not uncommon for individual vegans to encounter question upon question from non-vegan interlocutors (be they

omnivores, vegetarians, or somewhere in-between) not simply about one's *reasons* for being/experience *as* a vegan, but, more pointedly, about one's views concerning any number of (apparent) consistency-threatening, conviction-challenging, 'hard cases' for one's professed beliefs. Indeed, the speed with which, in discussing one's veganism with non-vegans, one can find oneself (hypothetically) transported to a lifeboat somewhere; stranded on the proverbial deserted island; or otherwise cast in the role of would-be saviour of a non-human or a human (but not both!), is enough to cause mental whiplash. Dilemma-posing thought-experiments such as these, however, comprise but one aspect of these encounters. Another standard manoeuvre is to press the vegan about perceived problems (whether real or merely imagined) *at the margins* of his/her beliefs. More often than not this reduces to a general demarcation challenge *cum* (would-be) *reductio ad absurdum*, the question at hand being where, if at all, the vegan "draws the line"—that is to say, the line separating those organisms deserving of moral concern and protection from those which are not. Now, I say "if at all" here because, upon learning that the particular vegan with whom one is conversing (let us imagine) does not, and would not, consume molluscs (i.e. mussels, clams, oysters, etc.)—and because such organisms, lacking a central nervous system (or, at least, anything resembling a 'higher brain'), presumably do not experience pain—many non-vegans are quick to suggest that plants, being likewise non-sentient, perhaps ought equally to count, *by the vegan's own lights*, as not morally edible—or, more charitably, many non-vegans are apt to opine that it is surely rationally incumbent upon the vegan to provide some principled account of how it is that he/she can cogently include *some* non-sentient organisms within his/her sphere of moral concern (i.e. molluscs), whilst at the same time excluding *most* others (i.e. plants). On a similar note, there is a good chance

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that one will also be asked about one's stance on honey (or silk), or, indeed, insects generally. (Bees, for example, unlike molluscs, *do* have brains, albeit of an extremely rudimentary sort—in view of which it is unlikely that their brains are sufficiently complex to allow for the conscious experience of pain. And yet...do we *know* that bees cannot feel pain? Can we really ever be *sure* of this?)

What are we to make of exchanges like this? In particular, how are we to account for their frequency and the (all too) familiar framing strategies that tend to predominate therein? Even granting the admittedly brief, snapshot-esque picture of the situation I have just sketched, it should be clear enough that the recurring theme of such exchanges is always, in one form or another, the logic of vegan convictions. But why, it must be asked, should *non*-vegans exhibit such a keen, even tenacious enthusiasm for probing, pondering, and parsing the logic of *vegan* convictions? Are we really *that* interesting? Well, perhaps we are. Or is it rather that some may simply find this sort of thing edifying—a helpful way of gaining some insight into the character, and motivation behind, an unfamiliar, if not outright bizarre, point of view? Perhaps both?

In what follows, I will suggest an alternative explanation; one that, it is hoped, may begin to shed some light on how it is that we ethical vegans, by times, *ourselves* contribute, albeit unwittingly, to a culture of debate, the tropes of which—first and foremost being a disproportionate emphasis on the importance of thought experiments, and the uncritical foregrounding of contentious, often marginalizing issues (e.g. molluscs; honey; abortion)—are actually doing more harm than good. The worry, to put it bluntly, is that we have become—or, at

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least, are in danger of becoming—unwitting accomplices to our own cross-examination.

Consider: veganism, by its very nature, dares to dissent from—and, by that measure alone, to *problematize*—a great many of the deeply held, if rarely examined, norms, assumptions, and attitudes in our society concerning our treatment, use, indeed our overall *conception* of non-human animals. More to the point, veganism, again by its very nature, represents an alternative ideology, or philosophy of life, to that of the omnivorous, animal-exploiting majority: in view of this, many non-vegans, even if only intuitively, and even if only in virtue of a vegan's *presence* (e.g. at the table), may feel called upon (or, indeed, *called out*) by vegans to *justify* their lifestyle and consumptive choices. This is, to be sure, a rather unfamiliar position for members of the dominant majority to find themselves in—indeed, one might even have thought that part of what it means to *be* part of a cultural or ideological majority is precisely that one *need not* give an account of one's choices in this regard. In slogan, the majority simply does what it does, no justification necessary. Surely, if anything, it is those who would *depart* from convention and eschew majority practices who should be expected to justify, or at least explain, their deviance...?

Now, while I do not mean to deny that some non-vegans who press the sorts of questions we have been considering thus far do so because they are genuinely curious, I would suggest that, in a good number of cases, they are raised, and pressed, less in the spirit of good faith dialogue, and rather more as a means of *deflecting*—that is to say, of resisting the uncomfortable, unfamiliar, justificatory burden of having to defend one's omnivorism. To be sure, this shifting of the burden of proof

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to the omnivorous majority is an absolutely central tenet of ethical veganism and of vegan advocacy generally; the trouble is that we vegans sometimes fail to notice when it has been shifted back—as happens, in particular, when one’s non-vegan interlocutor succeeds in steering the conversation away from, e.g., the matter of course goings-on of the dairy, egg, beef, and poultry industries, and instead toward the logic of vegan convictions *vis-à-vis*, say, molluscs, honey, or, indeed, the latest permutation of Tom Regan’s *Lifeboat* scenario.

To clarify, I do *not* mean to suggest that the answers to these sorts of questions are either obvious or trivial; indeed, they are neither. I am an ethical vegan, and I, for one, consume neither honey nor molluscs. I also freely admit that I do not have anything like a fully worked-out philosophical account in hand to explain, or theoretically undergird, my abstinence in this regard. I should perhaps also add that I am not at all convinced that Regan’s own proposed solution to his *Lifeboat* scenario (2004, pp. 324-325; see also pp. 307-312), which, in part, is intended to illustrate his “worse-off principle,” really is the correct response to give, particularly given the implication (which he fully accepts) that, *even if* the choice were between, say, a million dogs and a single human, special considerations aside, we ought *still* to sacrifice the dogs in order to save the human. Nor am I convinced that there actually *is* a single correct response, or set of responses, to these (and related) questions; though I accept that there may be. The point that I should like to stress here, however, is that *whatever* the correct responses to these sorts of questions turn out to be, the point, and value (such as it is), of considering them *at all* is ultimately to be seen as a matter of helping to shed light on different facets of what, in this context, we might best think of as ‘the analytic question’ [for veganism]. By ‘analytic question’ I mean, roughly;

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what is the length, breadth, scope, and precise logico-theoretical parameters of ethical veganism? Alternately phrased: what must vegans say, do, think, and perhaps even *feel*, in this or that scenario, if they are to remain ‘consistent’ with their own convictions?

Now, at the most general level, veganism can be described as an ethical orientation to non-human animals, based firstly upon ideals of compassion and non-violence, which enjoins the cessation and elimination of our *use* of them in any and all ways that are harmful to them, or otherwise against their interests and inclinations. Practically speaking, one satisfies this ideal, *inter alia*, by striving, so much as possible, to avoid consuming all animal products. Though familiar enough, this articulation is of course far too broad to count as anything like a *full* response to the analytic question, since, in failing to provide specific, action-guiding direction for any number of hypothetical scenarios one might imaginatively project oneself into, it does not tell us whether, in doing one thing over another therein, one has done what a ‘true’—or perhaps better, an ‘ideal’—vegan would do. Can we, then, do better than this rough and ready description? More to the point, *must* we?

One of the dangers, I argue, in lavishing too much time and philosophical energy on thought experiments, problems at the margins, and so forth for ethical veganism is the risk of unwittingly pandering to those who, intentionally or not, may already be inclined to conflate the analytic question with the *practical* question of whether or not to *become* vegan. Though the problem that I see with this will become clearer in a moment, let us first consider the sense in which vegans are themselves partially responsible.

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As it happens, there is a practical and entirely straightforward explanation for why it is that many of us, when prompted, are only too eager to parse the logic of our convictions with those who do not share them (indeed, up to and including with those who appear to be seeking nothing so much as the opportunity to denounce, or even denigrate, them): many ethical vegans, I have increasingly observed, particularly when interacting with those unfamiliar with, or sceptical of, the position, appear to feel a certain responsibility, *qua* advocate, to personally give the lie to that singularly depressing, thoroughly unfortunate, but, alas, distressingly popular stereotype of vegans as morally self-righteous, argumentatively aggressive—in a word, *angry* individuals. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon to find pejorative qualifiers such as “militant”—as in, “militant vegans”—used interchangeably with, or even in place of, “ethical,” “strict,” “abolitionist,” or equivalent expressions—any one of which would, of course, suffice were it not for the *further* implication to be conveyed that, over and above their ‘radical’ beliefs and queer consumptive practices, these vegans are not, shall we say, the friendliest people you are likely to meet. One of the ways that ethical vegans can, and very much do, strive to rebuff this stereotype is by patiently indulging virtually any and all questions, lines of inquiry, reductio challenges, and so forth that one’s interlocutor should happen to raise, almost irrespective of how *jejune*, half-baked, inherently thought-experimental, or otherwise conceptually far-removed from the plight of *actual* living, breathing, suffering animals in the world these might be. To better illustrate what I have in mind here, consider this brief passage from Regan (2004), which appears in the very early pages of his “Preface to the 2004 Edition” of *The Case for Animal Rights*.

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My treatment of lifeboat cases has given rise to something like a cottage industry of objections, not all of which can be considered here. Personally, I think the attention showered upon my treatment of such cases is vastly disproportionate to their importance within my general theory. For this reason, I hesitate to say anything more on this topic, concerned that, by doing so, I might breathe new life into an issue that should be allowed to enjoy a quiet death. But lest it seem that I am trying to avoid some really serious objections, I will take the risk. (p. xxx)

The emergence, and proliferation, of Regan's "cottage industry" is as predictable as the questions and concerns that drive it are beside the point—or, more charitably, beside what we should in the very least think of as the *central* point, or the *first* point: to wit, that the question of whether or not we ought morally to become vegan neither depends on, nor is especially usefully informed by, our ability (or inability) to articulate universalistic, general moral principles to range over as many hypothetical cases as possible. On the contrary, the problem with our willingness to engage (often at length), in such speculative treks through Regan's cottage industry (and those like it), is precisely the sense of intellectual distance, or philosophical remove, this ends up affording our interlocutors from the heart of the matter; a perspective which, I argue, not only fails to make it *harder* to avoid confronting the here-and-now, very much life-and-death, implications of one's choice of diet and lifestyle, but actually makes it that much *easier* to do just this. And yet, lest it appear that we are avoiding "some really serious objections"—or worse, lest our efforts to keep our conversational sights trained upon, say, the fate of male chicks at "layer chicken" hatcheries, or female cows (and their calves)

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on dairy farms, be received as artless, obnoxious, “militant,” or what have you—the settled opinion of many ethical vegans, it seems to me, is that exchanges of this sort are not only to be expected, and tolerated, when they arise; they are actually to be *welcomed*, as occasions to exhibit the magnanimity of ordinary (non-militant!) vegans. This is, I think, an unfortunate state of affairs. With this in mind, I suspect that I may be in a minority when I say that I, for one, am of the mind that not only should Regan not have said *more* regarding his treatment of lifeboat cases and their kin; he probably ought to have said even less to begin with.

A possible objection strategy at this point would be to suggest that the cleavage between what I am calling ‘the analytic question’ for veganism on the one hand, and its practical counterpart on the other, is overstated. More precisely, the worry is that I have ignored the extent to which the (so-called) analytic question importantly *informs* the practical question. In particular, one might wonder at this point how exactly one could seriously undertake to persuade someone to become vegan if one cannot even so much as explain, e.g., whether vegans *properly so-called* may (should?), or may not, consume honey and/or molluscs; wear second-hand leather and/or wool, and so forth. In other words, are we not, perhaps, obliged to solve the analytic question for veganism—or, at least, make some serious theoretical headway in that direction—as a necessary precursor to informed, successful practical vegan advocacy? I do not believe so. On the contrary; I will now argue that the analytic question for veganism does not so much need to be solved, as *dissolved*. In the very least, we would do well to reconsider its importance and, above all, to substantially deprioritize its role in vegan advocacy, theory, and practice. Questions about honey, molluscs, used leather and wool, and so forth are prop-

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erly, and non-threateningly, matters over which sincere, morally and intellectually serious persons can reasonably disagree. Acknowledging this in no way compromises our ability to represent veganism as an attractive, coherent, morally necessary, and perfectly practicable lifestyle. Simply put, these are non-obvious cases. Acknowledging the existence of non-obvious cases does nothing to undermine the obviousness of obvious cases.

To better appreciate the force of what I am suggesting, a brief detour, and review, of a somewhat analogous point in epistemology may prove helpful. Consider: in simplest terms, to raise the analytic question in epistemology is to ask: what *is* knowledge? More explicitly, it is to inquire as to what conditions are severally necessary and jointly sufficient for knowledge to obtain, or in order for an ascription of knowledge to be justified. Next, notice that there are at least two distinct framing perspectives according to which efforts to address this question can be broadly defined and differentiated. The first—by far the stronger (and, I think, less plausible) of the two—is to regard the very legitimacy with which we take ourselves as having *any* knowledge at all as at least formally suspect and thus open to doubt. The epistemologist who conceives of her task in this sense, then, affirms a form of methodological scepticism, and thus appears to suggest something like the following: unless and until we have a fully developed, carefully worked-out account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, and perhaps also a clear grasp of the normative implications of this for thought and action, we shall have to at least formally suspend judgment as to whether, in fact, we *know* anything. Alternatively (and surely more plausibly), one might conceive of the task of developing such an account (of parsing its various implications, testing them against dif-

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ferent counterexamples, etc.) as an exercise in uncovering, and clarifying, the foundational structure of the knowledge that we (correctly) take ourselves *already* to have, but whose precise *nature* has long been unclear or puzzling. Regardless of which perspective one adopts, the enterprise of actually pursuing a detailed response to the analytic question [in epistemology] is the same, for it is ultimately just that of constructing a *theory of knowledge*.

By this same token we may describe the enterprise of pursuing as detailed, as analytically rigorous—in a word, as *complete* a response to the analytic question for veganism as possible as essentially just that of constructing a *theory of veganism*; and thus we may also ask which of the two framing perspectives we have just considered in the context of epistemology best characterizes our efforts in this regard. To pose the salient question introspectively; unless and until a complete response to the analytic question for veganism has been formulated, ought I, perhaps, to seriously question, or even doubt, whether or not I am a *bona fide* ethical vegan? I do not believe so. One no more requires a theory of veganism in order to *be vegan* than one requires a theory of knowledge in order to *know* (or, for that matter, to *know that one knows*). Granted, one surely *would* need a theory of knowledge, or something like this, if one's ultimate aim were to be able to confidently identify and distinguish any and all cases of knowledge from cases of non-knowledge; after all, there are surely any number of hard cases where, absent such a theory, we may not be quite sure what to say...

And thus we have hit upon one of the principal functions of theory-building; namely, to explanatorily encompass as much of one's target phenomena as possible; to remove ambiguity; and, finally, to promote a particular interpretation (of some pre-

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viously unclear, or contested, question or family of questions) as singularly correct. As it happens, we have also just hit upon one of the principal conceits of theory-building in this mould—I am referring, of course, to the unstated, possibly even unnoticed, but, regardless, the deeply held assumption that the kinds of questions that drive the whole enterprise in the first place are such as to admit of singular ('correct') responses at all, as opposed to some *range* of better or worse, more or less plausible, responses. Now, with all due respect to any professional epistemologists keeping score, I for one very much doubt that there is, or even that there ever could be, a singularly correct theory of knowledge—or, if there is, then it will be one whose very nature is such as to positively require continual revision and update in light of new information; new expectations; new apparent counter-examples; or, indeed, new conceptions as to what a theory of knowledge (or *theory* generally) is supposed to *do* for us, or be good for. Of course, to conceive of theory in this way is effectively to regard it as properly, and inevitably, an *ongoing* endeavour or perpetual work-in-progress. Clearly, this does not sit well with the idea that there is a final, definitively correct, account “out there,” so to speak, waiting to be discovered (on the related point; even if there were, and even if we were to successfully hit upon this in our theorizing—perhaps we already have?—how would we ever *know* that we had? How, in principle, could such a thing ever be confirmed or disconfirmed?).

To clarify, though I am strongly inclined to doubt that there is, or even that there could be, a final, singularly correct, theory of knowledge (to say nothing of the matter of how it is that our possession of such a thing could ever be non-question beggingly determined), I am happy to grant that this is something over which people can reasonably disagree. Thus, it *may* be the case

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that, at some point or other, some intrepid epistemologist will succeed where all others before her have failed in formulating *the* single, master theory of knowledge—or perhaps some ingenious *synthesis* of the best elements of all previous theories—that commands universal, and enduring, assent (although, it must be said, even here we might still wonder whether damning counterexamples, or upstart rival theories, do not, perhaps, lay in wait, beyond the horizon of the foreseeable future...)—of course, this epistemological “new dawn,” so to speak, may well be very nearly forever in getting here. The point, however, is that we can *afford* to theorize forever in domains of inquiry such as this; again, the stakes are exceedingly low, for none of us, professional epistemologists included, seriously doubts whether or not we know anything. *That* we know is, one could say, *antecedently vindicated*; even granting that the question of *how* [this is possible], or what, precisely, this amounts to, is another matter.

The situation, of course, is crucially different with ethical veganism; again, though I grant that there *may* be a singular response, or set of responses, to the various hard cases, hypothetical dilemmas, demarcation challenges, etc. that, in the aggregate, constitute the analytic question for veganism, this is *not* something that we can afford to theorize about forever—or, more precisely, this is an intellectual project that can, and should, be deferred to another day: specifically, to the day when the paradigm has well and truly shifted to the point that veganism, like knowledge, is also vindicated in the hearts and minds of the many. As things stand now, alas, veganism is in fact antecedently *suspect*; moreover, as I have been at pains to elaborate, one of the more curious (and increasingly entrenched) *senses* in which it is suspect is substantively similar to the strong, highly implausible, way of framing the analytic

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question in epistemology: to borrow a familiar turn of phrase from discussions of epistemological scepticism (in particular, from contextualist responses therein), like the epistemological sceptic, it is as though non-vegan interlocutors “raise the standards” for what counts as sufficient grounds for rationally accepting an interlocutor’s position to the point that, unless and until *all* sceptical questions can be perspicuously answered, *all* hypothetical challenges satisfactorily met, and so forth, ethical veganism has not made its case. Indeed, to make matters worse, there may also be a certain *naïveté* on the part of vegans at play during these exchanges, the upshot of which being that vegans, at times, may have a very different idea of what the discussions in which they find themselves are (firstly) taken to be *about*, or aiming for, than that supposed by their interlocutors. Specifically, in engaging with sceptical interlocutors, the vegan may be inclined to regard the exchange at hand as geared primarily toward helping the vegan (i.e. oneself) to better understand the outer reaches, dimmer recesses, or hidden valleys of his/her own position (and, by extension, toward helping one’s non-vegan interlocutor to better understand veganism). Again, though there are certainly times when this is the case, there are at least as many others when the non-vegan instead regards the dialectic as firstly a matter of *testing the coherence* of his/her interlocutor’s view—that is to say, of assessing whether or not veganism can be *vindicated*, as an internally coherent, and thus philosophically defensible position.

If nothing else, this paper is an attempt to argue that this dialectical fixation upon the internal consistency of ethical veganism—and, in particular, its relation to an unargued, highly suspect notion of *what it takes* to adequately defend the position (as though nothing short of an exhaustive, ‘counterexample proof,’ *theory* of veganism could possibly suffice)—is deeply

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misguided. Part of the reason for this, I argue, is owing to a crucial distinction, albeit one that is increasingly obscured in this domain and hence can be quite difficult to mark: namely, that between *theory-building* on the one hand, and *argumentation* on the other. In slogan, there is all the difference in the world between a *theory of* veganism, and *arguments for* becoming vegan. The former refers to the task of philosophically elaborating upon, or spelling out, the finer details and subtler implications of the values, principles, and ideals that vegans affirm, the objective being to produce as comprehensive and systematic an account as possible; the latter, by contrast, concerns the comparatively more straightforward and, I argue, vastly more important task of simply endeavouring to persuade others to affirm these same values, principles, and ideals in the first place. One of the most important strategies in this regard, I would suggest, is to demonstrate that, in an important if almost entirely unnoticed sense, veganism, like knowledge, actually *is* antecedently vindicated, by virtue of its being the rational expression, in practice, of what Gary Francione and Anna Charlton rightly stress (2013, pp. 1-4) are *shared* ethical convictions. The challenge, of course, is to argumentatively encourage the broad realization of this fact.

With this distinction in view, I am now better able to state the sense in which my aim with this paper is not merely critical, but importantly constructive as well. Proponents of veganism and animal rights would do well to mark, and hold fast to, the distinction between theory and argument, for it is all too easy to confuse and conflate the two under pressure of having to defend one's view—that is, one's veganism—to sceptical interlocutors, and thus to find oneself drawn, unhelpfully, from argument to theory. The logic of vegan convictions—i.e. what vegans can, may, must, or simply ought to say about poten-

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tial hard cases at the margins of their view—is firstly a matter of concern for individual vegans. In fact, this underscores another important point about effective vegan advocacy, one that we have already considered, but which nonetheless deserves to be restated: in our willingness to play along with the conventional dialectical rhythm of (non-vegan) challenge and (vegan) response, there is a risk of indirectly lending credence to the view that there is, or could be, *a* single Vegan response to the question, or questions, at hand. Again, while I do not mean to deny that this *could* (in principle) turn out to be the case; I would stress that it seems unlikely. More to the point, to frankly admit as much—that is, to acknowledge openly that there surely are a number of questions and cases, the appropriate response to which is something that individual vegans will simply have to work out for themselves, in their own time and on their own terms—has the potential to paint a more attractive picture of life *as* a vegan than the alternative (which, it seems to me, would be to nourish the impression that, at least in its ideal form, veganism should be thought of as aspiring to perfect decision-procedure precision in all things). Not only is this a more *attractive* picture, I should add, it is arguably a more *accurate* picture as well, for the normative prescriptions of ethical veganism, I would argue, are as much, if not more so, a feature of our moral *perception* as they are the deliverances of moral *deliberation*. Viewed in this light, as firstly a way of *seeing*, or *apprehending*, one begins to see how it is that effective vegan advocacy need not take the form of trying to explain, or philosophically unpack, the general principles, or moral ‘rules,’ according to which vegans choose *correctly* in this or that context; rather, this can be much more a matter of inviting one’s interlocutor to entertain, in thought, an alternative conceptual framework, or perspective, within which one’s very conception of what non-human animals *are* may begin

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to transform. For assistance in unpacking this point, I turn to an especially sage passage from Stephanie Jenkins' important piece "Returning the Ethical and Political to Animal Studies" (2012). Here, having provided an insightful analysis of certain key themes from Judith Butler's recent work (in particular her concept of *framing*), Jenkins explains how these might be fruitfully applied to our present concern.

The "who" of ethics is prior to the "what" in the sense that injunctions against violence do not protect those whose lives are not recognized as valuable. As Butler in her analysis of racism indicates, moral outrage, indifference, and guilt in the face of violence are not rational, cognitive acts but rather are conditioned, habituated, and affective responses. Our ability to be responsive to others, a prerequisite for responsibility, is found in conditioned, bodily responses. Individuals who are not moved by nonhuman animals, who do not perceive their lives as grievable, will not perceive or recognize the atrocities committed against them as violence. For this reason, the process of becoming vegan is a transformation in one's worldview. The moral community is seen, smelled, touched, heard, and tasted differently. The smell of bacon may no longer recall childhood memories but instead becomes a perception of death and destruction. A vegan ethics of non-violence acknowledges the making-killable of animal others as a violent act, and it necessitates the symbolic and practical rejection of such violence.

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In vegan ethics, ethical action is no longer limited to individual actions in isolated scenarios that demand utilitarian calculation, such as “Do I eat the bacon or not?” Rather, the concern becomes how to reconceptualise the frames through which animals are perceived to make violence against animals be perceived as violence. Because these frames are rooted in affective and embodied habits, ethico-political strategies must work at the level of perception and the senses. Veganism, from this perspective, can be seen as a practice of expanding the realm of grievable life or as a precautionary principle of moral standing in action. 508-509)

Before concluding, I should like to briefly address what some may observe appears to be a rather unfortunate trade-off that comes with the sort of line I have been advocating, particularly with regards to the analogy I draw with epistemology. Although we remain, on my view, able to say, confidently, that we surely do *know* a great many things, we shall, it seems, also have to accept that we almost certainly do not now, and perhaps never will, entirely *understand* just what this amounts to. It would seem, then, that since I am likewise suggesting that (a) whether or not there is a singular, knowable-at-the-limit, full theoretical response to the analytic question for veganism, this is certainly not something that we possess now; and (b), in view of (a), we would be better off allowing that there can be reasonable disagreement concerning a number of non-obvious cases and contentious questions, I must also accept, by parity, that vegans likewise do not now, and perhaps never will, *entirely* understand their own veganism. Isn't this a problem? Again, I do not believe so. The sense in which this is not, in fact, even half the awkward admission it might at first appear to be, is simply a matter of the ordinary conviction, or, if you like, the

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common-sense confidence, with which we are able to say that we surely *do* understand our own veganism *well enough*—in particular, well enough to engage critically, thoughtfully, and patiently with others on the basis of shared norms of reasoning, yes; but also (again, as Francione and Charlton rightly stress) *shared ethical convictions*—convictions whose *minimal* expression, in practice, requires us to withdraw, so much as possible, all of our support for industries, traditions, and practices predicated on the exploitation, suffering, and death of non-human selves. To put the point by way of analogy, my veganism is every bit as epistemically secure and morally defensible as, say, my anti-racism and anti-sexism, despite my not subscribing to any particular, fully worked-out, substantive theory of moral egalitarianism. Now, if the absence of a singular philosophical commitment, on my part, to this or that theory pertaining to *these* topics is regarded, by some, as furnishing grounds for concluding that, in the end, I must likewise accept that I do not *entirely* understand my own anti-racism or anti-sexism...there is really very little that I can say. It is telling, of course, to note that this is not an objection (or even an observation) that advocates of racial and gender equality are ever likely to encounter.

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