

SCHWABE, CALVIN W., UNMENTIONABLE CUISINE
(CHARLOTTESVILLE: UNIVERSITY PRESS OF
VIRGINIA) 1979.

Most humans eat other animals. They are, however, highly selective in their choices of which species they will devour. Food fastidiousness is sometimes a greater obstacle to the upgrading of a culture's nutrition than is technological limitation. (You wouldn't expect Burger King to do well in India.) "UNMENTIONABLE CUISINE is a book about foods seldom eaten by Americans though standard fare for others. It is meant to be a practical guide to help us and our children prepare for the not too distant day when the world's growing food-population problem presses closer upon us and our overly restrictive eating habits become less tolerable." The author provides "a sampler of recipes for foods of animal origin which most of us do not now eat but which millions of other people do." In Peter Singer's ANIMAL LIBERATION we discovered that the provision of recipes is not incompatible with the presentation of philosophical arguments. Argument plays in Schwabe's book about the same role that recipes played in Singer's. In some 400 pages of recipes we learn how to prepare pork testicles in cream, uterus sausage, stewed cat, grilled rat Bordeaux style, baked bat, stuffed squid, fried silkworm pupae, crisp roasted termites, fish sperm crepes, smoked dog, lamb's brain tacos, and many other more or less exotic dishes.

Unfortunately for vegetarians, Schwabe focuses on foods of animal origin. On the central question of whether meat should be eaten, he touches only briefly. "While I have no quarrel with the personal preferences of philosophic vegetarians, it should be made clear that the consequences of lifetime strict vegetarianism--through the reproductive cycle--have never been scientifically assessed." Schwabe worries about vitamin B12 deficiency in infants nursed by vegetarian mothers, and alludes to "important practical difficulties in obtaining a dietary balance of essential amino acids solely from plant proteins." He argues that "herbivorous animals provide the only vehicle for exploitation of immense land areas for food production." That, however, is no argument for Americans to eat meat rather than grain, since the cows and chickens they eat are not in fact used to exploit nonarable land, but

are grown in factory farms, thereby wasting grain as Singer and others have argued. Schwabe says that "the excessive feeding of grains to ruminant livestock, as is now the American practice, is unnecessary" and that "meat-producing chickens can now be fed at an efficiency level such as to offer nearly a straight choice to the consumer of eating grains directly or in the form of meat." What that means in terms of the living conditions of chickens, Schwabe does not say, though in discussing dogmeat he presents himself as "a staunch advocate of humaneness in all relations of people to animals", where "humaneness means the husbanding of animals in ways that are healthful and do induce undue fear, stress, or pain." That the unmentionable animals Schwabe mentions could be made available in the American mass market without systematic lapses in "humaneness" must seem implausible to anyone familiar with the practices of factory farming. Still, Schwabe is quite right to attack the irrationality of food fastidiousness in this culture and others. If you are going to eat cows and pigs and chickens, why balk at snake and cat meat soup?

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