

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

VEGETARIANISM AND THE IDEAL LIFE

In his book, *Rachel and Her Children*, Jonathan Kozol (1988) interviews some of the poor and homeless of New York City. Mr. Alessandro, an Italian American man, has lost his wife, his job, his home, and 45 pounds from hunger. He lives with his 73-year-old mother and his three children in a single room in the Martinique Hotel (54–59). Every day Mr. Alessandro looks for work and he looks for permanent housing on a welfare allowance too small ever to give him hope of leaving the hotel. His food stamp allowance for himself and the three children is \$50 per month (60). During the interview Kozol realizes that the children are quite literally starving. He gives Mr. Alessandro \$20 to buy food. There is no local supermarket, only a convenience store. Mr. Alessandro brings back “a box of Kellogg’s Special K, a gallon of juice, a half-gallon of milk, a loaf of bread, a dozen eggs, a package of sausages, a roll of toilet paper” (59). Rachel and her children live in the same hotel in a similar room:

When we moved here I was forced to sign a paper. Everybody has to do it. It’s a promise that you will not cook inside your room. So we lived on cold bologna (66).

Plenty of children livin’ here on nothin’ but bread and bologna. Peanut butter. Jelly. Drinkin’ water. You buy milk. I bought one gallon yesterday. Got *this* much left. They drink it fast. Orange juice, they drink it fast. End up drinkin’ Kool Aid (68).

These are America's urban poor. In 1987 in New York City alone, 700,000 of them were children (5). Most of these children live in households headed by women. They do not have a healthy diet. Their parents cannot cook fresh vegetables for them, even if they could buy them. Although many hotel residents break the rules and use hotplates, Kozol attests to the difficulty of cooking any kind of meal in these conditions. Many hotel residents do not even have refrigerators to keep food from spoiling.

Does Rachel do something wrong when she buys bologna and milk for her children to eat? Some philosophers and some feminists who argue for ethical vegetarianism based on the moral equality of animals would say yes. But, of course, most would agree that Rachel is to be excused. She cannot help doing such a wrongful act because her circumstances force her to it. We aren't supposed to blame her but forgive her.

Penny is an anemic pregnant American woman who has been faithfully taking her iron supplements while following a vegetarian diet. Her obstetrician advises that she should have a blood transfusion to bring up her hemoglobin (blood iron) level. Alternatively, she could try eating beef liver two or three times a week. She could do neither and forget about the anemia. What should she choose? If she chooses to eat liver after assessing the risks of contracting hepatitis or other blood-borne diseases, has she done something wrong?

Probably most moralists would leave the decision up to her, and even those arguing for the equal rights of animals would probably excuse her for choosing to try eating the liver. Circumstance and physiology make Penny and Rachel unable to live up to the ideal proposed by ethical vegetarianism—to live without killing animals or causing them any suffering. Many who strive to live as ethical vegetarians adopt the vegan diet and lifestyle, using no flesh, eggs, milk, or other animal products. This is the “vegan ideal” and those who adopt it on moral grounds believe that it is the best, most virtuous way to live (cf. Singer 1975, 181). Unfortunately, Penny, Rachel, Mr. Alessandro, his aging mother, and their children cannot live that way—yet. Part of the politics of the vegan ideal is that it should be possible for all people to adopt this lifestyle. Is this a worthy goal? If you believe, as I do, that the sufferings of animals are as morally important as those of humans, how can we not think so?

This book questions the vegan ideal and the goals of ethical vegetarianism by exposing unstated assumptions in the moral arguments for that position. I will argue that the ideal itself is discriminatory because a single definable class of persons is designated as better than—more *morally virtuous* than—all others simply because of its physiology and its power. I challenge all four major defenses of the claim that most humans ought to be vegetarians because animals have

moral standing. Each of these views elevates and morally idealizes the vegan lifestyle as most virtuous, although to varying degrees. All four defenses contain a hidden assumption that having an adult male body and living in cultures where adequate food and supplementation are available are the norm. Those who present these defenses—Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Carol Adams, and Deane Curtin, in particular—falsely (and probably unwittingly) assume that there is no significant difference in the nutritional needs of males and females and children and the elderly. In order to make their moral arguments, these scholars must rely on conclusions drawn from nutritional studies done on adult males in industrialized countries. In addition, the scholars must ignore or dismiss studies and epidemiological evidence of the shortcomings of such diets for other age groups and for many women. I call this skewed assumption the “male physiological ideal.” The ideal pervades both nutritional science and moral argument: women, children, and others are referred to in the scientific literature as “nutritionally vulnerable” with respect to certain vitamins and minerals such as iron, calcium, vitamin D, and zinc. All current arguments for ethical vegetarianism treat such “nutritional vulnerability” as an *exception* rather than as a norm. The norm is defined by the adult male body, which is less “vulnerable” to the adverse health consequences of vegetarian diets. But, the very fact that the majority lives as a mere exception suggests that the ideal is skewed in favor of a group in power. The hidden assumption in the moral arguments is that *being less vulnerable is good*, simply because one is *stronger*, and *being vulnerable is bad* or, at least not as good, because one is *weaker*. But that is a bald argument for power rather than for justice, moral virtue, or caring. In the examination of each of the four defenses, I attempt to show that both the traditional moral theoretical ethics and current feminist contextualist ethics fail on grounds of arbitrariness; that is, the mere imposition of power through acceptance of a false belief. The false belief is that the adult male body is, for practical nutritional purposes, the same as that of the adult female, the adolescent, the child, or the elderly. It fails to recognize material differences among humans. If they wish to act rightly and yet accept this false belief, women, adolescents, children, the elderly, and others would be forced to suffer greater burdens than men, disadvantaging these groups with respect to health and economic power. If people in lower economic classes and nonindustrialized cultures accept this false belief and the attendant moral arguments, they will count it as morally obligatory to live in a way that is most compatible for adult males (age 20–50) living in industrialized societies. Thus, the power enjoyed by the most powerful will be perpetuated. I argue that this, in turn, perpetuates an unjust belief (or suspicion) that women and those who are less well off economically are *morally*

weaker because they are *physically* weaker or live in circumstances without an industrialized food system. Thus, morality becomes a club used for power rather than for justice. A truly virtuous person should be defined by his or her choices, acts, and moral character and not by her or his physical make-up.

The “vegan ideal,” as I am referring to it here, is a vision of human beings or the world to which some persons think we should all aspire. Those who endorse it currently believe it is a moral ideal, rather than a nonmoral, psychological, or aesthetic ideal. Continuous practice in the attempt to attain the vegan ideal results in possession of a character trait or a virtue that would be considered morally good in any human being regardless of gender, age, or ethnicity. The attitude may be similar to that seen in religious history; the most virtuous persons were regarded as saints. In Western society, many of our secular ethical ideals have their origins in religion. Ancient Greek and Stoic ethics were commingled with Judeo-Christian-Islamic dogma in late Roman and Medieval times (Jones 1969). The vision of the vegan or vegetarian life as most perfect arises from complex religious, cultural, and agricultural practices that we will not be able to explore in this book. But it is worth noting that all major world religions have vegetarian sects within them. Restrictions on meat consumption are often thought to improve the soul and promote rationalistic and mystical knowledge. Christian saints, both male and female, were revered for their ability to survive on a limited diet of bread (usually the host) and water—a vegan ideal (Bell 1985; Bynum 1987). In fact, bread and wine (both all-plant foods) are still the celebrated Christian sacred symbols of life and spirit. The idealization of food practice is associated with class distinctions and the search for hierarchical power. It separates “real” men from other men, women from men, the poor from the rich, the “dregs” of society from the “highest and most holy.”

The Western or Eurocentric concept of animal rights and the drive to place the lives and sufferings of animals on an equal footing with that of humans arises from a moral tradition spanning more than two millennia. This tradition began with the moral teachings of the ancient Greeks and continued through the Enlightenment and into the present day. After the French and American Revolutions, morality became more secularized in the Western world. Human beings envisioned a society where individuals could be free to worship as they chose, and philosophers such as Immanuel Kant in Prussia and Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in England developed secular ethical theories that were meant to bridge the common moral ground shared by all human beings. The utilitarians Bentham and Mill wished to set aside all “intuitive” moral rules and political restrictions unless such rules could be shown to cause more good than suffering or harm. From the political writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke,

and others, as well as from Kant's duty-based moral theory, the idea of human rights arose. Rights gained popular appeal because they afforded protections for ordinary people against the oppressive power of the state and society. Governmental leaders could no longer rule by fiat or by inheritance but were held accountable to the people. The vision of a community of equals—of fraternity (but, alas, not yet of sorority)—gripped the imaginations of leaders who lived then and of many who live now. The rights of the powerless and vulnerable would thereafter cry to be respected. In the last years of the eighteenth century and throughout of nineteenth, feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft argued for the rights of women, abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Sarah and Angelina Grimké argued against slavery, and anti-vivisectionists such as Henry Salt and Frances Power Cobbe argued for the rights of animals.¹

Today, Tom Regan (1983) and Peter Singer (1975, 1981) use the traditional secular moral theories developed in the Kantian and utilitarian traditions, respectively. Animals can suffer and be “subjects-of-a-life” and so must be counted as members of the moral community. As a practical outcome, both argue explicitly for a rule of moral vegetarianism. People who follow the rule are moral; those who do not are immoral. By direct implication, persons who *consistently* follow such rules are said to be virtuous; those who ignore or fail to obey valid moral rules are said to be vicious.² Following rules requires people to make choices and to act in accordance with their moral beliefs. In that way, people are judged for what they do rather than on the basis of their sex, race, or class.

If Regan and Singer are correct, virtuous people would be vegetarians at least, and vegans ideally because veganism is said to respect life and incur the least animal suffering. Regan and Singer both endorse the “vegan ideal.”³ In their view, attempting to realize the ideal is *morally required* of good people. A good person does not choose veganism as a simple act of kindness toward animals, because charity is not required in any strong sense. On their view *justice* requires the pursuit of the vegan ideal. Following a simple moral rule forbidding the killing of nonthreatening animals is required for all truly good people—people of integrity, virtue, and high moral character—people who wish to be charitable *and* just.

Many feminists have joined Regan and Singer in efforts to awaken people to moral concern for animals. Carol Adams (1990, 1991, 1993, 1994), Josephine Donovan (1990), Greta Gaard (1993), Marti Kheel (1985) and many others have championed the rights of animals as essential to feminism. For these writers and others, the vegan ideal is a feminist ideal.⁴ Ideals underlie many of our psychological motivations, and history and culture can be changed by the

ideals we adopt. So, having the right ideals and knowing why we believe them to be right is extremely important.

Writers in feminist ethics question rule-centered, rationalistic traditional moral theory and its psychology of moral development, arguing that these serve to legitimate the actions of the class in power—largely white males. For example, Carol Gilligan (1982) argues that women experience a different moral development. Gilligan claims that women prefer a moral language of care, responsibilities, and relationships among people, whereas males usually prefer to speak a language of rules, rights, and justice. Other feminists such as Virginia Held (1987, 1993, 1995) and Sara Ruddick (1989) argue for caring, empathy, and maternal thinking as ways of knowing and foundations for feminist ethical thought. Nel Noddings (1984) focuses on caring as a relational experience to build a unique *feminine* (versus feminist) ethics. In fact, each feminist thinker has added her or his own particular ideas to the nascent field of feminist ethics. Virtually all of these thinkers reject the traditional rights and utilitarian theoretical approaches, however (Tong 1993). Why so? Rights are explicated in terms of interests that are supposedly common to all persons and so are impersonal and universal, rather than particular and contextual. Feminists usually object that interests are too abstract. Focussing on interests instead of people and their relationships tends to decontextualize moral problems. Traditional moral theories such as rights or utilitarianism tend to view individuals in isolation or as “atoms” rather than people in relation. In most cases they also emphasize the ascendancy of reason over empathy, sentiment, or emotion in knowing right from wrong.⁵ Such rationalistic arguments center on justification of universal rules and on justifications for exceptions to them with primary attention given to the demands of the individual. Some feminists argue that, at their worst, these moral justifications become a part of civil and criminal law, which then become a club that may be held over the vulnerable, to ignore, attack, or destroy relationship rather than to uphold it (Littleton 1987; MacKinnon 1985, 1989). The contemporary feminists discussed here and later would agree that all moral decision making must be judged in concrete context and with respect to relationships rather than in abstraction as if individuals act in isolation.

The foregoing gives you a brief outline of the history and rationale for adopting ethical vegetarianism. Now think about the situations and contexts of Rachel and Penny. Is it merely their environments that disadvantage them? I will argue that their “context” involves being female, being mothers, and that they do not need to be excused or forgiven for not being vegetarians. Instead, we need to rethink the ideal assumed in ethical vegetarianism.

In the next section I discuss the various meanings of “vegetarianism,” and in the following section, I explain what I will cover in the book and what I will leave out. Finally, I give an overview of the main arguments of this book.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMS AND STUDIES OF VEGETARIANS

One important element of being ethical is being consistent in our beliefs and our decision making. Although no two situations are exactly alike, often enough resemblance exists across cases that we can say it would be wrong to treat them differently. If scientists and ethicists are to have an adequate understanding of nutrition, then, they need consistent criteria for deciding whom to call a vegetarian and whom to call an omnivore. Without these criteria, the data would become confounded and meaningless. The same is true of trying to do the right thing. Although we cannot expect to be perfect or obtain “laboratory conditions” in comparing contexts, we need to adopt the same meanings of the words we use and try to develop some understanding of the kinds of factors that will or will not count in making a defensible decision. For example, it is defensible to hire the person with the best skills but indefensible to hire a person with no skills applicable to a job simply because the boss “takes a shine” to him or her, and we shouldn’t change the meaning of “skills” from one person to the next. So, in our case about vegetarianism, we need to know what counts as a vegetarian. Those arguing for ethical vegetarianism suppose that vegetarian diets are healthy for virtually all persons, which is a claim that relies on modern nutritional research for its accuracy. Therefore, those making ethical arguments should adopt the same definitions that nutritional scientists used in conducting their health studies. Below I define the meanings of various “vegetarianisms” by quoting the definitions used by nutritional researchers. I also compare these with the common usages found by social scientists.

In everyday language, the term “vegetarian” is used with a great deal of variation, whereas “vegan” has a more precise meaning for food practice. A vegan eats no fish or animal flesh and avoids milk, eggs, and other animal products as well; sometimes vegans are referred to as “strict vegetarians.” Beardsworth and Keil (1991) did a sociological study of people in the United Kingdom who defined themselves as “vegetarians,” and they found that some people who occasionally eat meat (as well as fish and animal products) may define themselves as “vegetarian”—about five percent did so. Another twenty-five percent ate fish, eggs, and dairy products; thirty-four percent, “lactoovegetarians,” omitted the fish; twelve percent were “lactovegetarians,” omitting all

animal flesh and products except dairy; the remaining twenty-four percent were vegans.

Such self-definitions would not lend themselves well to the scientific study of the nutritional consequences of vegetarianism. Researchers need to establish a standard against which to judge the content of a diet that is given a particular name. They also need to know what people are actually eating in order to gauge the adequacy of the diet. In citing nutrition literature and using the term “vegetarian” and “vegan,” my intention is to match as closely as possible the categories experimental researchers have used for their subjects in determination of results. Johanna T. Dwyer, a world authority on vegetarian diets, especially in children, has done extensive research and publication in this area (Dwyer *et al.* 1978, 1980; Jacobs and Dwyer 1988; Dwyer 1988; Dwyer 1991; Dwyer 1993a,b; Dwyer and Loew 1994, among others). In “Vegetarianism in Children” (1993b), Dwyer gives the following definitions:

Vegans, or total vegetarians, consume no animal products. This is the rarest form of vegetarianism. . . . Lactovegetarian diets include plant foods, milk, and dairy products, but they exclude all meat, fish, poultry, and eggs. This type of vegetarianism is relatively rare (174).

Lactoovovegetarian diets add eggs to the lactovegetarian diet and are the most common form of vegetarianism. Dwyer (1993b) continues:

Semivegetarian diets include plant foods, milk and dairy products, eggs, and some fish and poultry. They are increasingly common, probably more so than any other form of vegetarianism, especially among young adults. Although many vegetarians do not believe that semivegetarian diets are truly vegetarian, those who eat them regard themselves as vegetarians. Red meat is avoided or eaten only occasionally, and other forms of flesh may also be limited or eaten only in small amounts (175).

When I use the term “vegetarians,” I will generally be referring to “lactoovovegetarians.” When I use the term “vegan,” I refer to those who eat virtually no animal flesh or product (or so little that nutritionists consider the nutrient contribution to be nil). “Semivegetarian diets,” where used in my own arguments, refers to the above definition and would not exclude small amounts of red meat.

These usages do not define exact eating patterns. Even within the vegan or largely vegan lifestyle, variation occurs in the eating pattern due to the reasons people have for adopting veganism. Jacobs and Dwyer (1988) report different

nutritional intakes for children in the vegan religious groups: Black Hebrews, Zen macrobiotics, and Rastafarians. Perhaps the largest group of lactoovo-vegetarians in the world are Hindus, and perhaps the most studied group are Seventh-Day Adventists in the United States. “New” vegetarians in the United States are people who have adopted vegan or vegetarian diets as adults for philosophical, ecological, religious, or health reasons. Several studies were done on “new” vegetarians in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The animal rights and welfare movements have precipitated new conversions to vegetarian and vegan diets. In Western countries, few people adopt vegetarian or vegan diets for economic reasons (Dwyer 1991, 1993a,b), but in developing nations many people are often vegetarians of necessity (Dwyer and Loew 1994). Foods of animal origin are not present, and the variety of plant foods that people can get is limited. Anemias and deficiencies are common in many areas of the Third World⁶ (Scrimshaw 1991). The simple addition of meat to the diets of people in “obligatory vegan” cultures would not solve their nutritional problems—a balance of foods is always needed that emphasizes grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables. But they often need food of any kind and moralizing about meat eating in other cultures is inconsistent with feminism.

Several kinds of studies have been done on those living in vegetarian cultures, such as Hindus, and on established and “new” vegetarians in Western countries. In each case, the researcher takes a profile of what the patient or subject actually eats. There are, generally, six kinds of reports seen in the literature: (1) clinical reports of people who have presented themselves to a doctor or hospital with a dietary deficiency (often these are women, infants, children, or elderly people); (2) reviews of relevant scientific studies of vegans or vegetarians; (3) retrospective studies in which a group of people (often very large) with and without a particular disease condition is asked to recall a dietary pattern to correlate specific nutrients with a disease or deficiency; (4) prospective studies in which normal people (controls and study group) are asked to give a profile of their diet, blood, urine and other samples or tests, and are followed to see whether disease processes related to diet develop; (5) “blind” and (6) “double-blind”⁷ studies in which an experimental group and a control group eat a specified diet and are then monitored and tested for specific results, such as blood pressure, calcium loss, and so forth.

Health benefits are well-documented for some kinds of American and European vegetarian lifestyles: “Data are strong that vegetarians are at lesser risk for obesity, atonic constipation, lung cancer, and alcoholism. Evidence is good that risks for hypertension, coronary artery disease, type II diabetes, and gallstones are lower” (Dwyer 1988, 712).⁸ Vegetarians who have been studied always

adopt a set of practices in addition to diet that affects health risks and outcomes. The vegetarians most often studied usually limit or omit tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol. Often they are very health-conscious and include physical exercise in their lives. Very often, religious and spiritual beliefs are associated with vegetarianism. Yet, the data on relative benefits for adult males versus females and children that can reliably be ascribed to diet are mixed, with benefits in some cases favoring adult males. Some studies of vegetarian males appear to show benefits; some studies and reports on vegetarian and especially vegan women and children appear to show risks. These facts are documented in detail in chapter 4.

SOME ARGUMENTS NOT COVERED

This book is not intended to argue against all possible moral *reasons* for adopting vegetarianism. Instead, I aim to show that the decision to adopt vegetarianism involves contextual judgment that cannot appeal to a general moral rule commanding ethical vegetarianism nor can one command it as a virtue that devolves from a vegan ideal. If one chooses vegetarianism, as I did for several years, it will be from a variety of nonmoral reasons. Instead, I argue for a feminist aesthetic semivegetarianism because it is more consistently egalitarian in its consideration of all members of the moral community. And my view will accommodate differences among the species while working toward a functional view of equality. Feminist aesthetic vegetarianism will be quasi-ethical in that it is limited by an egalitarianism that balances a number of values and freedoms simultaneously. These arguments will be developed in chapter 7.

At least four other theory-based arguments are often given that socially conscious people in wealthy countries should be moral vegans or vegetarians.⁹ I shall not cover these arguments in depth here, but I will outline them and critique them briefly to distinguish them from the specific arguments that I intend to rebut. First, the *argument against factory farming*: People in wealthy countries eat an excessive amount of meat. This consumption means that huge numbers of animals are raised in “industrialized” conditions of short lives, cramped conditions, discomfort, and injury. And regardless of how good farming conditions of animals might be, their production is exploitive and/or taking their lives is wrong. Eating any meat at all underwrites these conditions, and a moral person would not participate in these practices. Second, the *argument from public health*: vegan and vegetarian diets have health advantages. Everyone, or most everyone, would be healthier if Americans were converted to these diets. And public policymakers are morally obligated to promote vegetarian diets to

minimize public health burdens that occur secondary to meat-consumption. Third, the *argument from global health*: vegetarian and vegan lifestyles are morally required to save the Earth because industrialized animal production is causing continuous environmental degradation such as decimation of rain forests in Central and South America, desertification in Africa, and degradation of publicly owned grazing lands in the American West. Fourth, the *argument from peace and nonviolence*: a good person should be committed to nonviolence and oppose killing whether or not discrimination against some classes of people occurs, and so animals should not be killed for food or any other reason. In the following subsections, I offer brief critiques of each of these arguments. In morality, we should make choices for the *right reasons*. While some of the reasons below are good reasons for many people to avoid meat eating, the first three are utilitarian arguments that do not consider the question of whether killing or using food animals is intrinsically evil or wrongful. The fourth argument considers all killing to be wrongful, but carries with it consequences that most morally good people would not wish to live with.

FACTORY FARMING

Most food animals in countries where meat consumption is high are raised in intensive agricultural housing or so-called “factory farms.” Animals may be penned in stalls so small that reclining or turning around is impossible (for example, swine stalls) or in conditions of crowding and darkness never seen in nature (for example, poultry batteries). Although improvements in conditions for farm animals have improved in recent years because of legislation, most animal rights and welfare advocates find confinement agriculture morally objectionable. Extreme confinement is inhumane and that judgment follows from a general proscription against cruelty. Many animal advocates and ethical vegetarians claim that giving up species equality and ethical vegetarianism will mean losing protections for animals and a continuation of cruelty to them. But the proscription against cruelty does not mean that we must grant equality or rights to other species. Even if such animals are not morally equal with humans, humans are still required not to cause them pain, distress, or frustration of their natural needs and behaviors. One need not support the vegan ideal to accomplish the goal of minimizing animal suffering. Free-range eggs and milk from pastured cows are available in some areas, and cattle, sheep, swine, and chickens can be raised humanely. To argue against factory farming, one need not embrace the “either/or” of veganism versus “animal-based” diets and excessive meat.

Abandonment of the vegan or vegetarian moral position would not permit an exacerbation of animal cruelty. The potential for suffering, harm, and mortality remain at the center of moral concern, and humans have always been enjoined by their moral teachers to treat animals with care and respect (Regan 1986).

PUBLIC HEALTH

On this argument, if public health officials promoted vegan or vegetarian diets, the human population would be healthier. In the arena of public policy, considerations of benefits have merit and may bolster utilitarian arguments for the moral value of vegetarian diets even if animals are not counted as equals. Elected representatives and appointed bureaucrats are supposed to act for the good of the populace. Promoting vegan or vegetarian diets certainly might be an improvement over the high-fat, badly balanced omnivorous diets now consumed in the industrialized world. This argument appeals heavily to factual concerns and becomes a moral argument only when coupled with the duty of public officials to promote the public good. Some of the factual claims include: High-fat diets cause poorer health in a substantial portion of the population. Vegetarian diets are lower in fat than omnivorous diets.¹⁰ Value claims include the belief that health is better than disease and that public officials have duties to promote the good for their constituents. The argument is conditional: If public health officials want x (a healthier populace), then they ought to promote y (vegetarian diets). Because health is desirable and public officials must promote the public good, they are required to promote x , and so they must promote y . A substantial portion of this book is devoted to consideration of the facts (see chapter 4). But even if the factual claims were true, several flaws are apparent in the reasoning. For instance, showing that “meat-centered” diets are bad does not show that vegan diets are ideally healthful and environmentally sound. Semivegetarian diets can be quite low in fat for those groups who need such low-fat diets—but children need diets that have dense, higher caloric value. Low-fat diets may not be good for them. Adult men appear to benefit from vegetarian diets more than women and children in trade-offs for cardiac health, osteoporosis, and other risks. Semivegetarian diets are better for general adoption because they are healthful and pose little or no nutritional risk, and I will show that feminist aesthetic semivegetarianism is *fairer* because it is non-discriminatory and serves the values of community and equity better than the vegan ideal.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Some ecofeminists (for instance, Adams 1991) and American environmentalists believe that vegetarian and vegan lifestyles are morally required to save the Earth (Lewis 1994). They often cite Frances Moore Lappé (1971). Industrialized animal production is causing continuous destruction of rain forests in Central and South America, desertification in Africa, and degradation of publicly owned grazing lands in the American West. Raising too many animals on land that could be used to raise grain is a “protein factory in reverse” because cattle consume more protein than they produce. Does *environmental concern* require vegetarianism? Environmental vegetarians wish to force the industrialized food system to downscale, to reduce or virtually eliminate demand for beef and other meat whose production results in environmental degradation, and to reverse some of the political damage that has been done to indigenous cultures by Western economic exploitation (Gussow 1994).¹¹ These are pressing problems that need solutions soon. Unfortunately, they cannot be solved or ameliorated by eliminating food animal production. Ecofeminists underscore the need for sustainable food production, but animals are an integral part of all known sustainable food systems (Gussow 1994).

Crop production is no less industrialized than animal production, both here and abroad, and many of our fruits and vegetables are imported. Restructuring during “development” in many parts of Latin America, Africa, and Asia has impoverished many peasants who once fed themselves from their own garden plots. They were forced off the land to make way for large farms that now grow a single crop (called “monocropping”). Land has been concentrated into the hands of a few wealthy families, who hire the landless peasants, often at lower than subsistence wages. Monocropping in areas that once raised a variety of plants and animals cuts local availability of foods (see Lappé and Collins 1986). In some areas, malnutrition is a constant problem, and workers subsist, often unsuccessfully, by trying to take large amounts of vitamin supplements. These farming methods are unsustainable, exhaust the soil and resources, and impoverish whole classes of people. Women are often disproportionately burdened and disenfranchised (Shiva 1989).

A more sustainable, regenerative crop production is needed, and some cultures have sustained such systems for thousands of years. Joan Dye Gussow (1994) notes that these sustainable farming systems depend heavily on the integration of livestock with crops (see also Shiva 1989). In her tenth edition of *Diet for a Small Planet*, Lappé (1982) underscores this fact and argues for

reduced consumption but not abolition of animal production. Environmentalists will want to study the interrelation of domestic species, both plant and animal, with an open mind and avoid preconceived notions that food animal production is intrinsically bad and something to be “overcome” in a biocentrically organized, humane world.

PACIFISM AND NONVIOLENCE

Vegetarianism has been connected to peacefulness, and many feminist writers claim nonviolence as the highest stage of feminist ethical life (Gilligan 1977, 1982; Ruddick 1989; and others). Deane Curtin connects his contextual moral vegetarianism with nonviolence, but stops short of pacifism. Pacifism differs from a principle of nonviolence or peacefulness. A pacifist abjures killing in all forms virtually without exception. Although I know of no feminist vegetarian making such a radically pacifist claim, both the feminist and the traditionalist could justify ethical vegetarianism on pacifist grounds as a fallback position in the face of my arguments in this book. The tenet may be stated as follows: Even if some classes and cultures, women, infants, and old people would be discriminated against, the right of an animal to its own life is sacrosanct and linked to the important value of nonviolence. Even if the health of some humans is adversely affected, exceptions do not hold, and killing an animal for food or other uses is always wrong.

The traditional pacifist position has some plausible defenses that I shall not be able to discuss here. But the position is utterly self-sacrificial and is the only position consistent with according strict equality to the worth of animal lives. It appears to fit best into stage two of Gilligan's moral development scheme (1982). In that stage, a caring person (usually a woman) chooses from the “good of self-sacrifice.” At the higher stage three, the caring person comes to see that she herself has value and that no one should be sacrificed or hurt. According to feminists of this bent (but not all feminists by any stretch), this realization propels the person to an ideal of nonviolence.

I find the pacifist position untenable because the position can require parents to sacrifice the needs of their children in important circumstances. Also, the moral burden of being a pacifist will fall more heavily on parents than on the childless, for parents form bonds of responsibility for the child which cannot in good conscience be forsaken or forgotten at the moment of choice between the life of an animal and the health or life of their children. Like other absolutisms, pacifism will fail to recognize the nuances of context and circum-

stance. Pacifism requires subsuming the duties of caring and protecting one's child to an absolute prohibition on killing.

Self-sacrificial pacifism also undermines morality—it takes away an important reason we have for living morally in the first place. Among the usual rejoinders offered against being immoral is that each individual will benefit by living in a society where everyone follows moral rules or is relatively virtuous and responsible. If following those rules or adopting a virtue would require that you give up your life or sacrifice your child, then pure egoism or “immorality” is likely to be more persuasive. A self-sacrificial pacifism that discriminates against vulnerable classes of people and favors the strong seems particularly noxious because it follows a pattern of instituting moral codes that favor the privileged class, giving the illusion that others are “naturally immoral.”

OVERVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

The book presents an original argument challenging all the current arguments for ethical vegetarianism based on the rights or welfare of animals. I show that neither traditional moral theory nor current feminist ethics will sustain a moral command to ethical vegetarianism. From within moral rights theory and utilitarianism, the arguments for the interests of animals are plausible, and a rule of ethical vegetarianism appears to follow from accepting the tenets of either theory. But, I argue that such arguments are ultimately unsuccessful because they violate their own more central principles of universality, impartiality, and equality. This means that a moral rule requiring ethical vegetarianism discriminates against women, children, older persons, and those in nonindustrial or nonwesternized cultural settings. The vegan ideal also entrenches patriarchy.

Traditional moral theory relies on the Principle of Equality of all people, regardless of race, sex, age, or class. Although males and females differ in some respects, they share the attribute of being mortal and capacities for pain, unhappiness, happiness, and self-fulfillment. Arguments for the equality of nonhuman animals “expand the circle” of moral concern to other species. Peter Singer used the analogy of racism or sexism to condemn speciesism—the exclusion of animals from the domain of equality. But my argument shows that, if we believe that sexism is wrong, then we must *accept* speciesism—animals cannot be the equals of humans. But if we *reject* speciesism, then we must accept sexism and the belief that women cannot be the equal of men. This will mean that traditional moral arguments for the rights and welfare of animals are logically inconsistent and collapse on their own foundations. That being so, these traditional moral arguments for ethical vegetarianism cannot be integrated into a feminist ethic.

Moreover, specifically feminist arguments for ethical vegetarianism or the vegan ideal must also fail: the vegan ideal cannot be a feminist ideal. Although some feminists believe that any adequate feminist ethic must reject consuming meat and animal products, I will show that even the feminist arguments assume a male norm to which women are expected to accommodate themselves unfairly. Briefly, anyone committed to two basic beliefs that I call the “minimum conception of a feminist ethics” must reject ethical vegetarianism. These two beliefs are: First, no ethics can permit arbitrariness in its prescriptions and theories. Second, any specifically feminist ethic must affirm the value of the female body. Whatever else a feminist ethics is or will be, it must reject requiring women to live as if physiologically identical to men and assigning arbitrary moral burdens to women or other persons based on factors that cannot be changed by human choice. My arguments show that all formulations of ethical vegetarianism, whether traditionalist or feminist, violate this “minimum conception.”

The “vegan ideal” is not a *moral* ideal at all. Vegan diets may be adopted as a personal lifestyle, but a vegan moral ideal would idealize those of a particular age, sex, class, ethnicity, and culture; that is, adult (age 20–50), middle-class, mostly white males living in high-tech societies—the group with the most power in our world.

I believe that feminists should not moralize about food practice, even though it remains appropriate to condemn cruelty and to encourage moderation and semivegetarianism for that reason. This book shows you why I have come to believe that, at most, semivegetarian diets should be taught and that moral vegetarianism is inconsistent with feminism and is, in fact, at odds with the central assertions of feminism.

Chapter 2 reviews two of four major defenses of the claim that all or most humans ought to be vegetarians because animals have moral standing. I explain why traditional moral theory requires the equal consideration of nonhuman animals as well as ethical vegetarianism by summarizing the arguments of Tom Regan (1983) and Peter Singer (1975, 1990). Readers familiar with these arguments could easily skip these pages. Traditional virtue theory is also explained to distinguish it from rule-centered traditional ethics and to link it with some versions of contextual feminist ethics that will be discussed in the next chapter.

In chapter 3, I briefly review the recent arguments of some feminists and ecofeminists that feminism requires vegetarianism and probably veganism. Not all ecofeminists accept the logical connection of veganism and feminism, so I will attempt to give the most general tenets of ecofeminism first. Then I show how most of those who do link vegetarianism and feminism implicitly or explicitly depend upon the traditional moral arguments set out by Tom Regan,

Peter Singer, and others. Included in the discussion is the work of Carol Adams, Josephine Donovan, Marti Kheel, Deane Curtin, and others.

All four of the views in chapters 2 and 3 idealize the ethical vegetarian life as most virtuous, although Curtin's view is quite moderate. A "male physiological ideal" is assumed, however. That is, the adult male body is the moral norm. Chapter 4 presents the argument that all four defenses contain this hidden assumption. These four defenses also assume that living in cultures where adequate food and supplementation are available is not merely a health norm, but a moral norm as well. Regan, Singer, Adams, and Curtin rely on equality as sameness in the nutritional needs of males and females, children and the elderly. In making their moral arguments, these scholars must rely nutritional studies of adult males in industrialized countries. But they must ignore or dismiss studies and epidemiological evidence of the shortcomings of such diets for other age groups and for many women. The scientific norm is defined by the adult male body, which is less "vulnerable" to the adverse health consequences of vegetarian diets. If one argues for ethical vegetarianism based on the moral standing of animals, these moral arguments collapse because the claim is that *being less vulnerable is good*, simply because one is *stronger*, and *being vulnerable is bad* or, at least not as good, because one is *weaker*. A good moral argument should argue for justice, moral virtue, or caring rather than for simple physical force or power.

In later chapters, I will show why both traditional ethical defenses and feminist contextualist defenses fail. The supposed duty to be vegetarian relies on the false idea that the adult male body is, for practical nutritional purposes, the same as that of the adult female, the adolescent, the child, or the older person. It fails to recognize material differences among humans. If they wish to act rightly and yet accept this false belief, women, adolescents, children, the elderly, and others would be forced to suffer greater burdens than men, disadvantaging these groups with respect to health and economic power. That, in turn, perpetuates another false and unjust belief (or suspicion) that women and those who are less well off economically are *morally* weaker because they are *physically* weaker or live in circumstances without an industrialized food system. Here we see an example of how the powerful perpetuate their position through the structure of ethics itself.

In order to make the "male physiological norm" visible, a substantial portion of chapter 4 is devoted to discussion of the special nutritional needs of women, children, and the elderly. A cultural ideal of wealth and power is also embedded in ethical vegetarianism. To adumbrate this objectionable assumption, I also discuss various situations of nutritional vulnerability found in our

own culture and in other cultures. The extended discussion of nutrition is intended to aid the concerned person who may be responsible for aging parents or young children. In my experience, those who are interested in the questions posed here want to understand the facts and are sincerely concerned to fulfill their moral responsibilities. Those who do not doubt the facts could easily skip the more scientific portions of chapter 4.

Those who may have questions and concerns about possible bias in the studies cited, mistakes in the reasoning, or conflicting nutritional information will find a discussion of these issues in the chapter 5.

In chapter 6, I discuss the ideas of equality and difference by review of some of recent feminist writings on the meaning of equality when gender differences require different rather than similar treatment. The assumed male norm becomes even more problematic in an ethic where species are unequal and one species cares for and uses the other. A feminist contextual ethics will be inadequate to ground an ethical vegetarian ideal because traditional patriarchal ideals and norms must be assumed in order to praise ethical vegetarianism. Thus, the ideal conflicts with the aims of ecofeminism and with the central claims of feminism in general.

In chapter 7, I elaborate my own view—that of *feminist aesthetic semivegetarianism*. I conclude that no justification or explanation whatever need be given by any *semivegetarian* regarding her eating habits. Nor should we praise or blame anyone for moderate meat and animal product consumption.

This book is a continuation of my attempt to make sense of my own beliefs about feminism, ethical vegetarianism, animal suffering, parenting, and the conflicting responsibilities that accepting these beliefs and responsibilities entails. I hope it will assist you in the same quest.