

# Conclusion

In this book I have argued that, in many situations, the human consumption of foods derived from animals fails to minimise negative GHIs, thus jeopardising the satisfaction of one or more of the following interests:

- 1/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animals, including those who die naturally or accidentally, which is based on a more general animalist interest.
- 2/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animals who are closely related to us, which is based on a more general evolutionist interest.
- 3/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where such consumption relies on the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon animals.
- 4/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where such consumption relies on the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon animals who are closely related to us.

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- 5/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where such consumption relies on the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon animals with relatively great capacities for richness of experience.
- 6/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where such consumption relies on actions that pose relatively high risks of inflicting accidental pain, suffering, and death upon animals.
- 7/ an interest in avoiding the consumption of animal products where such consumption relies on actions that jeopardise the integrity of nature.
- 8/ an interest in holistic health.

Those who agree that the first of these interests is sufficiently important so that it is not—in Caney (2008, 539)’s words—‘unreasonably demanding’ to protect it may adopt the view that we ought to adopt a *prima facie* duty not to consume animals. I have also argued that this interest, as well as all the others apart from 8/, may conflict with some other moral interests, for example with our interest in eating, and that in some situations these other interests ought to prevail (for example in a situation where one can choose between starvation or consuming an animal). This is why the duty to adopt moral veganism, derived from interests 1/ and 3/, must be qualified. In situations where the consumption of animals ought not to be avoided, I have argued that, *ceteris paribus*, we should try to abide by 2/.

Those who reject either the existence or the moral relevance of 1/ and 2/ may nevertheless adopt the view that, where it does not serve the best interests of the animals concerned, the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon animals is worse than the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon other organisms. On this basis, even those who do not agree that it is better not to consume animals who die naturally or accidentally might agree with 3/ and forgo the consumption of most animal products. Whereas I would not agree with their rejection of 1/ and 2/, even these putative opponents will come close to embracing qualified moral veganism, given that chapter two documents that most animal products that are consumed are derived not from animals who die naturally or accidentally, but from animals who are bred in order to provide flesh, milk, and eggs and who are disposed of when they either have fulfilled or no longer fulfil (to an accepted standard) these external purposes.

However, consistency demands that, in the absence of overriding moral considerations, those who reject 1/ and 2/ but not 3/ (out of a concern about the intentional infliction of pain, suffering, and death upon animals where this does not serve their best interests) will agree not only to consuming animals who die naturally or accidentally, but also to consuming animal products that are derived from animals on whom pain, suffering, or death is inflicted intentionally in situations where the consumption of any alternative foods that are available would inflict more intentional pain, suffering, and death upon animals. The same applies to those who reject 1/ and 2/ but support 4/ and 5/, with the qualification that the moral equation would be based not only on the

number of intentional injuries and deaths, but also on relative degrees of biological relatedness (4/) and of capacities for richness of experience (5/).

Vegans who reject 1/ and 2/ might retort that their diets are justified as they would only impose pain, suffering, and death upon animals accidentally, unless the imposition was in the animals' best interests. The problem with this view is that I argued (in sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3) that many vegan diets also rely on the intentional killing of animals (for example through the use of pesticides) and that we have good reason, for example to safeguard human food security, not to ban the intentional killing of animals, to protect the fruits and vegetables that are grown for human consumption, even if such intentional killing should only be committed where the animals jeopardise a significant proportion of our crops. Whereas we should always be mindful of other options, for example the option to move slugs and snails to other parts of our gardens or to create habitats that encourage the presence of predators who eat these animals, in some situations the intentional killing of animals may be justified where such a killing is not in their best interests.

Those who reject either the existence or the moral significance that I attributed to 3/ may nevertheless adopt 4/ and/or 5/ and attribute special moral significance to nonhuman animals who are closely related to us and/or to nonhuman animals who are thought to possess relatively developed capacities to enjoy rich experiences. Interest 4/ would explain why killing an adult chicken for food may be more troubling than killing a mature mussel, but interest 5/ would explain why killing a one-day-old chicken embryo may be less troubling than killing an adult mussel. My view is that both the criterion of relative biological relatedness and that of relative experiential complexity are important when it comes to determining the relative moral significance of different nonhuman animals, but that more deliberation is required on their relative importance.

The same applies for adjudicating the relative importance of 4/ or 5/ versus 6/. Whereas I have argued that the intentional killing of animals for food is more problematic than the accidental but foreseeable killing of animals, the fact that the former type of killing can be controlled implies that it can be performed relatively quickly, minimising concerns about the infliction of pain and suffering, which is an argument in its favour. A further argument in its favour is the fact that a much larger number of animals are killed in most arable farming processes than in the killing of one cow, for example, to provide the same quantity of food. Whereas these arguments do not alter my position, neither do I adopt the view that we should be allowed to risk imposing accidental but foreseeable deaths on *any* number of animals to avoid intentionally killing one animal for food.

The relevance of interest 7/ was considered (in sections 2.11 and 2.12) in relation to biotechnological projects that seek to alter animals through genetic engineering, as well as to develop in-vitro flesh. Whereas I contended that the latter ought to be developed to feed domesticated cats and that its development

may also minimise negative GHIs associated with the human consumption of animal products in a less-than-ideal world compared to other strategies that should be pursued, I also argued that both, but particularly the former, present a threat to 7/. We undermine the integrity of nature not only through these new biotechnological developments, but also through more conventional ways in which we interfere with nature, for instance through selective breeding. This is also why it is not because animals who are farmed or kept as companions might do well in some situations that their dependency on human beings does not present any moral concern. Some animals may fare better by living independently, but even their not doing so does not imply that freeing them from human domestication would necessarily be wrong, as interest 8/ should be our overriding concern, which is why we must give due consideration to 7/. As we must give some consideration to the moral interest of safeguarding the integrity of nature for our own health, the welfare of other animals should not be the only thing that we should think of when we contemplate weaning other animals off their dependency on humans. When we keep our focus on holistic health, it should also be clear that our psychological health is best served by not conceiving of other animals as sources of food where our physical health does not depend on doing so. Prioritising principle 8/, therefore, demands that we strike the right balance between all the morally relevant interests that should come into play when we consider our fundamental interest in eating.

Those who are not troubled by the way in which many human beings regard and treat other animals may be inspired to rethink by considering the following fictitious story. Imagine that human beings had already managed to build spaceships 100,000 years ago and that a group of them had decided to fly off to an imaginary planet that was not too dissimilar from how earth is now. Imagine that some had recently returned to earth. Though we recognised that these creatures were very similar to those who had never left, we were also aware that they were not quite the same, and that it was very difficult for us to communicate with them. This was not merely due to the fact that they spoke a different language that was very difficult for us to get to grips with, but also due to the fact that it became apparent to us that they were much smarter than we were. The 'supersmarts' were not only physically different from other humans by having—amongst other features—bigger ears and eyes, as well as smaller mouths, but they also possessed some curious talents, including the abilities to predict the future much more accurately than we could, to plan for the future in much greater detail, and to control their environment to a much greater extent. As they had many different interests from ours, they preferred to mix with other supersmarts, even if they also appreciated interacting with us. Attempts at interbreeding, however, had not been successful.

If some accounts that I engaged with in this book were accepted, it might be said that we ought to ascribe greater moral significance to the supersmarts than to members of our own species because of their greater capacities to have rich experiences (which I assume to come with their greater intelligence). In

this book I have argued that I do not agree with a moral theory that attributes differential moral significance merely on the basis of differences in capacities to enjoy rich experiences. Whereas I have no doubt that we ought to ascribe great moral significance to the supersmarts, I do not think that we ought to prefer the satisfaction of their interests to the satisfaction of those of members of our own species.

The question that is at least as troublesome, however, is what moral significance the supersmarts should bestow upon us. If they were to model their behaviour on what many human beings currently do with other animals, it may be expected that they would use us for their own purposes—which would perhaps include us being farmed—as well as compromise our vital interests in many ways, even to satisfy their own relatively trivial interests. It seems to me that those who object to being treated like this by the supersmarts likewise ought to object to animals who are closely related to us being used in similar ways by human beings, for what we might be to the supersmarts may not be much different from what these animals are to us. As all organisms that are alive today descend from a common ancestor, every speciesist should also be an animalist, and, as it would be rather bizarre for the supersmarts to adopt the view that there was a large gap in moral significance between them and us, so it is most strange indeed for human beings to act as if a large gap in moral significance ought to exist between us and other animals who are closely related to us.

Whereas many people may have similar values, or morally relevant interests, to mine about how we should relate to other animals, relatively few people adopt qualified moral veganism. This may be caused either by failures to act on one's deepest values or by the fact that some of these values or feelings are not one's deepest. If the latter applies, it may be difficult for people to be convinced by qualified moral veganism. Similarly, a person who was not moved by the virtue of consistency—if such a person were to exist—would not understand any moral argument that was based upon it. However, even people who do not appreciate that we may have duties towards other animals might still adopt the view that we have duties towards human beings. It is my view that interest 8/ can only be given the protection that it deserves if we also tend to the other listed interests, but even those who reject 1/ to 7/ may be swayed where they adopt an interest in human health conceived more narrowly than 8/. Indeed, as I argued in the first chapter, the fact that many omnivorous diets produce more negative GHIs than many vegan diets may be a cause for concern for those human beings who agree that some things, for example dietary gas emissions, can be classed as negative GHIs and that they may fail to minimise them due to their diet. Even people who do not care about other animals may therefore have good reasons to adopt vegan diets.

In chapter three I argued that we must take seriously our duty to allow no more than those negative GHIs that are required to safeguard our interests in holistic health and that people with political power and governments that are serious about the duties that I have outlined in this book must act

appropriately. I distinguished three strategies that governments could adopt to curtail the negative GHIs associated with the consumption of animal products, including starting and supporting educational campaigns, changing financial systems to incentivise activities that produce positive GHIs and discourage those that produce negative GHIs, and creating legal reform to introduce a qualified ban on the consumption of animal products. The phrase 'vegan project' refers to the ambition to contribute to global legal reform to introduce such a qualified ban. I have argued in this book that a total ban on the consumption of animal products cannot be justified, but that it is ethical to prohibit the consumption of animal products for the majority of human beings in most situations. Importantly, I argued that even governments who are not prepared to adopt the view that we have any duties towards other animals might still be justified in passing legal reform to create a qualified ban on the basis of a duty to give some recognition to a narrowly conceived notion of a human right to health care.

I refuted three objections against the vegan project in section 3.5, arguing that it is not pointless to focus on a qualified ban, that adopting a qualified ban need not necessarily undermine human food security, and that such a ban would not alienate us from nature. Both existing law and—as I argued in chapter four—the values that many people already adopt could be mobilised in support of the vegan project.

Throughout this book I have assumed that carefully chosen vegan diets can be healthy, in a narrow sense, by being nutritionally adequate and that there is no reason to think that the majority of the human population would experience great difficulties in adopting such diets. Without these assumptions, it would be difficult to argue that vegan diets ought to be the default diets for the majority of the human population, as I do not wish to advocate diets that compromise people's nutritional needs. Whereas our duty to strive for holistic health demands that due consideration be given to the moral duties argued for in this book, in the appendix to this book I shall adopt a much narrower health focus by exploring how vegan diets might affect the nutritional status of those who adopt them. The treatment of this important matter has been reserved for the appendix as it may not appeal to many readers who may be interested in the moral argument but who may prefer not to delve into a detailed assessment of the highly complex nutritional literature. Even those who do not accept that any duties that we may have towards others include a duty to adopt qualified moral veganism may still be persuaded to adopt vegan diets by the argument that I shall make in the appendix: people who adopt vegan diets may be healthier than many others, and many people who adopt vegan diets may not find it too difficult to ensure that they are well-nourished. Nevertheless, to avoid deficiencies, many vegans may need to pay particular attention to ensuring that they consume foods or supplements that contain adequate amounts of vitamins B12 and D, iodine, and omega-3 fatty acids. In addition, vegans with specific dietary needs must tend to these needs. Young and old people, for example,

must eat sufficient foods that are relatively rich in calories and relatively easy to digest, such as cooked foods.

Whereas the appendix to this book does not undermine my enthusiasm for the vegan project, it does not remove the fact that our relationships with other animals can be very complex and that it may not always be easy for us to decide what is best for us to do. To use an example from another domain, I used to live in a house that I shared with my family as well as with mice for a number of years. We were not happy to share our living space with the mice, but neither were we happy to oust them from the place where they had chosen to live. We lived on the first floor and the second floor of the house, whereas the mice occupied the space between the two floors, as well as the loft. Both these spaces were inaccessible to us. Now and again, one mouse strayed, which resulted in their being trapped in a 'humane trap', but I was not so sure whether it really was humane for mice to be trapped in that way. This doubt was partly related to the problem of what to do with them afterwards. If we released them nearby, they might return, in which case they might again visit the places where we did not want them. If we released the mouse further away, we thought that there was a good chance not only that it would not be welcomed by the mouse in question, but also that it might cause significant pain and suffering and death to any offspring who might die whilst awaiting the return of their mother, for instance. We resisted trapping any mice other than those who strayed into unwanted territory, but we did pay a price for our reluctance. Occasionally, some died in places that could not be accessed by us, resulting in the stench of the decaying body filling the house for a duration of anywhere between two and six weeks. Sonic devices might have helped to deter mice from living inside our house, but we did not try this method, opting for a reasonably comfortable co-existence. However, in light of the fact that the efficacy of these sonic devices is questionable (Aflitto and DeGomez 2014), I can understand anyone who, in similar circumstances, would wish to trap mice—and I am not entirely convinced that 'humane' traps are better than lethal traps.

Many questions remain, yet I hope to have developed a theory on the duties that we may have in relation to the consumption of animal products that will also inspire people to question many other ways in which people engage with other animals. For now, I rest my case: yes, it might be kind to avoid eating animal products in many situations, as it really is kind to be kind to our kind.