Peter Singer. *Why Vegan? Eating Ethically*. W.W. Norton & Company. 96 pp. $15.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781631498565)

Why Vegan? Eating Ethically is a retrospective collection of nine essays written from 1973 to 2020 by the well-known Australian philosopher and ethicist Peter Singer. The intent of the book seems to be to offer various answers to the question of why one is a vegan as opposed to trying to convince a non-vegan to adopt this ethical philosophy. At the same time, the focus is definitely on animals. Associated topics like human health, climate change, and social responsibility to workers in the meat industry are brought up but rather briefly. As shown by this short collection, veganism has moved from an outlier to an established commitment to animal welfare with meaningful ethical, philosophical, and legal implications for non-human animals, human beings, and our shared planet.

Singer's Introduction includes an admission that he says might come as a surprise to his readers, which is that he occasionally eats shellfish and eggs and so does not in fact follow a vegan diet himself. This admission may be problematic since veganism is generally understood to be a lifestyle and ethical belief system that seeks to lessen human harm to animals as much as possible. This commitment includes eschewing the use of animal products and animal derived products not only for food but also for clothing, personal products, and processing for other products (as is the case, for example, with some refined white cane sugar and alcoholic beverages). Contemporary vegans might also question the ethics of companion species, using animal manure for fertilizer, and even whether products like intensively cultivated palm oil are truly vegan because of resulting environmental degradation and habitat destruction that do not fit vegan beliefs. Conversely, vegans acknowledge there is no possibility of avoiding *all* harm: common products use animals invisibly, and even growing plant crops necessitates harm through land usage, tilling and harvesting, and pesticides.

Singer's approach is not really surprising considering his basic ethical position. He holds to an ethics of animal welfare derived from utilitarianism and based on the sentience of the animal. On this basis, Singer has no reason not to eat animals that lack sentience, such as some shellfish. To this, he adds the eggs of free-range chickens on the assumption that the hens 'don't seem to object to their eggs being taken away' and that even the culling of live male chicks is 'a compromise I'm willing to make' (x). Thus, it should be noted that Singer, as he acknowledges, is an animal rights advocate only in the popular sense; he does not ascribe actual rights to animals, as would a thinker like Tom Regan. Given these food choices, Singer identifies himself as a 'flexible vegan' (xi). One is reminded of Carol J. Adams' cogent argument for a feminist-vegan critical theory in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990, 2016). Along with Adams' focus on the language around meat eating, she also calls attention to how the term 'vegetarian' has become diluted by the dominant culture. She argues that 'vegan' does not (or should not) allow the dilution seen in terms like 'lacto-ovo vegetarian' that allow for a diet featuring some animal products, most often feminized proteins like milk and eggs. Singer's idea of flexible veganism is testing that assertion.

The book's first essay chronologically is Singer's review in *The New York Review of Books* (5 April 1973) of *Animals, Men and Morals* (1971), a collection of essays on animal rights by members

of the Oxford Group. (The fourth chapter is Singer's personal account of how he came to know the members of the Oxford Group while he was a graduate student at Oxford, how he became a vegetarian, and how this led to his review of their essay collection and then writing his own *Animal Liberation.*) Singer's review discusses the book with an emphasis on the use of animals for food (especially factory farming) and experimentation. He seeks to fill in some gaps in the book by, for example, giving a philosophical argument justifying the belief that animals do in fact feel pain and that this pain must be taken into account in how animals are treated. It is also in this review essay that he first discusses Richard Ryder's concept of speciesism that relates the oppression of animals to that of women and ethnic minorities.

Given Singer's format, perhaps the strongest essay is chapter five, 'A Vegetarian Philosophy' (1998). It takes as its starting place a famous and lengthy 1997 British libel case regarding claims that McDonald's fostered animal cruelty (the so-called 'McLibel Trial'). On the basis of the evidence offered at that trial, Singer concludes that the industry practices of intensively raising animals for meat were deemed to be cruel. However, Singer's central, forceful argument is that the 'divisibility of responsibility' (60) also pertains to the consumer who does not personally mistreat the animal that is processed into food. Humans are not justified in participating in a system that relies on the suffering of other sentient creatures for the sake of a luxury that treats animals as 'mere things, to be exploited for our convenience in whatever way makes them most cheaply available to us' (62). Singer further emphasizes the unsustainability of wasting so much vegetable protein to produce animal protein (a ratio of 8 or 10 kilos of plant protein to produce 1 kilo of animal protein) as well as the resulting arable land wasted, fossil fuels used, and pollution produced. This situation is untenable given our planet's growing human population, and part of the answer is ending the meat industry and obtaining our protein from a plant-based whole foods diet. Unexpectedly yet appropriately, Singer ends the essay with a simple and flavorful vegan recipe for red lentil dal that is high in protein and fiber.

Chapter 3 considers the claim that it is okay to eat chicken based on the assumption that it is humanely raised and slaughtered. Singer argues that such beliefs are simply naive given the cruel realities of factory farming as typified by battery cages, chicken barns, the negative effects of selective breeding, and the efforts of the industry to produce more meat more cheaply and more rapidly. (Singer's sixth chapter takes up a similar argument highlighting the sentience and suffering of wild caught fish, the lack of humane slaughter requirements, and the inefficiencies of fish farms.) Although this is a relatively recent essay (2006), undercover videos from inside slaughterhouses taken since then have shed an even more provocative light on the otherwise hidden cruelties of the killing process and spawned a new genre of animal rights documentaries that push consumers to consider the intense and pervasive suffering that goes into meat-based meals. Singer states that the primary issue is not killing the animal *per se* but rather the suffering that the animal endures through its life up until slaughter. To this must be added other ethical concerns for farmers who are themselves manipulated and cheated by big agribusinesses as well as slaughterhouse workers, many of whom are undocumented immigrants who work in a dangerous industry for low pay and yet during the COVID-19 lockdowns were deemed to be essential laborers and so were compelled to continue working.

There are some peculiarities about certain of the essays chosen for this collection. For example, the first essay is the 1975 Introduction to Singer's classic *Animal Liberation,* but its lack of a specific argument makes it seem out of place in introducing a very different collection. This Introduction is not reprinted with the revised edition of the original book, and it is striking that Singer, in *Why Vegan?,* notes his choice to edit out what he calls 'one expression now deemed too offensive to print' (xi) from this specific text; this edit in fact draws attention to the unnecessary use of a racial epithet that was certainly as offensive and unnecessary in 1975 as it is now. It would be valuable to include instead an excerpt from one of *Animal Liberation*'s chapters or even the hopeful 2009 Introduction, which reflects upon the many recent victories of the animal welfare movement in changing legislation and social values for the better.

These essays or excerpts are mostly short, and occasionally this brevity leaves readers wanting a more prolonged argument and discussion. In a 2018 essay, for example, Singer raises the ethical problems recently presented by 'cultured meat,' but this chapter is only a few pages long and does not present a sustained treatment. As raising animals for food produces 15% of total greenhouse gas emissions and contributes massively towards climate change, Singer implies that 'cultured meat' could be seen as 'clean meat' akin to clean energy. Many vegans, however, would also be troubled by Singer's apparent approval of meat companies like Tyson and Cargill investing in the production of cultured meat, given that purchasing such products from a meat company inherently also supports an industry that continues factory farming billions of sentient animals.

A further issue is that the book's marketing inclines a reader to assume that this volume is a treatise that responds specifically and authoritatively to the urgencies of our current moment. As the book's jacket and website both prominently claim, 'In a world reeling from a global pandemic, never has a treatise on veganism—from our foremost philosopher on animal rights—been more relevant or necessary.' Yet new material in this book is limited to Singer's six-page general introduction and a four-page chapter cowritten with Paola Cavalieri about the wet markets from which the pandemic most likely began. However, this short book does highlight that this is indeed an apropos moment for a fresh and cohesive argument for ethical veganism in light of COVID-19, climate change, inefficient land use, human health, and the unwarranted cruelty of wet markets and factory farming towards non-human animals.

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