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THE ETHICS OF EATING MEAT

Many people, like Jake Hillard and Lee Nierstheimer, eat whatever meat takes their fancy at the supermarket or in fast-food restaurants. Some, like Mary Ann Masarech and her daughters, make an effort to eat meat from humane and organic farms. Others, like the Farb family, eat no animal products at all. In this chapter we focus solely on the the impact these diets have on animals. What does ethics require of us with regard to eating animals and animal products? In this chapter, the ethics of what we eat become more philosophically complex.

Let's start with factory farming. We have seen how it inflicts prolonged suffering on sows who spend most of their lives in crates that are too narrow for them to turn around in; on caged hens; on chickens kept in unnaturally large flocks, bred to grow too fast, and transported and killed in appalling conditions; on dairy cows who are regularly made pregnant and separated from their calves; and on beef cattle kept in bare dirt feedlots. Though we like and respect Jake and Lee and take into account the time and economic pressures on families with children, we think that buying factory-farm products is not the right thing to do.

You don't have to be a vegetarian to reach this conclusion. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall is the author of *The River Cottage Meat Book*—a large, glossy book devoted to the cooking and eating of meat. Yet he writes: "The vast majority of our food animals are now raised under methods that are systematically abusive. For them, discomfort is the

norm, pain is routine, growth is abnormal, and diet is unnatural. Disease is widespread and stress is almost constant."[1] Fearnley-Whittingstall lives in England, where laws protecting animals are much stricter than in the United States. American-style crates for sows or veal calves are illegal in Britain, and caged hens have at least 50 percent more space than many American hens are granted. Even so, he considers these conditions abusive to animals. Michael Pollan, another meat eater, says that factory farms are designed on the principle that "animals are machines incapable of feeling pain" and that to support them requires "a willingness to avert your eyes" from the reality that animals can feel.[2]

Roger Scruton, a critic of animal rights and a vigorous defender of the traditional English sport of foxhunting in the years before parliament banned it, lives on a farm in Wiltshire, where he raises animals for his own table. His attitude to animal rights is perhaps best illustrated by the following incident, as reported by Sholto Byrnes, who visited him at his farm for an interview in *The Independent*:

> After a drink, we move through to begin lunch, components of which have been produced on the Scruton farm. "That's Singer," declares Roger, pointing at a plate of leftover sausages. Singer the pig, mischievously named after Peter Singer, the philosopher and animal-rights theorist, has been "ensausaged" personally by his former owner.[3]

Nevertheless, Scruton flatly rejects factory farming. "A true morality of animal welfare," he writes, "ought to begin from the premise that this way of treating animals is wrong."[4]

In America, those opposed to factory farming include Matthew Scully, a former speech writer in George W. Bush's White House and the author of *Dominion: The Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy*. Although "animal rights" tend to be associated with those on the left, Scully makes a case for many of the same goals using arguments congenial to the Christian right. In Scully's view, even though God has given us "dominion" over the animals, we should exercise that dominion with mercy—and factory farming fails to do so. Scully's writings have found support from other conservatives, like Pat Buchanan, editor of *The American Conservative*, which gave cover-story prominence to Scully's essay "Fear Factories: The Case for Compassionate Conser-

vatism—for Animals," and George F. Will, who used his *Newsweek* column to recommend Scully's book.[5]

No less a religious authority that Pope Benedict XVI has stated that human "dominion" over animals does not justify factory farming. When head of the Roman Catholic Church's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the future pope condemned the "industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds." This "degrading of living creatures to a commodity" seemed to him "to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible."[6]

On this issue we agree with Scully, Buchanan, Will, Pollan, Fearnley-Whittingstall, Scruton, and Pope Benedict XVI: no one should be supporting the vast system of animal abuse that today produces most animal products in developed nations.

UNSOUND DEFENSES OF FACTORY FARMING

What possible arguments can there be in defense of factory farming? We will review some of them and show why they are unconvincing. First, it is sometimes said that we have no duties to animals, because they are incapable of having duties toward us. This has been argued by those who believe that the basis of ethics is some kind of contract, such as "I'll refrain from harming you, if you refrain from harming me."[7] Animals cannot agree to a contract and thus fall outside the sphere of morality. But so, on this view, do babies and those with permanent, severe intellectual disabilities. Do we really have no duties to them either? An even bigger problem for the contract view of ethics is that it cannot ground duties to future generations. We could save ourselves a lot of money and effort by storing radioactive waste from nuclear-power plants in containers designed to last no more than, say, 150 years. If we only have duties to those who have duties towards us, why would that be wrong? There is an old joke that goes, "Why should I do anything for posterity? What did posterity ever do for me?" The problem with contract theorists is that they don't get the joke.

Second, when ethical issues are raised about eating meat, many people use what might be called "the Benjamin Franklin defense."

Franklin was for many years a vegetarian, until one day, while watching his friends fishing, he noticed that some of the fish they caught had eaten other fish. He then said to himself: "If you eat one another, I don't see why we may not eat you." The thought here may be that if a being treats others in a particular way, then humans are entitled to treat that being in an equivalent way. However, this does not follow as a matter of logic or ethics. Quite rightly, we do not normally take the behavior of animals as a model for how we may treat them. We would not, for example, justify tearing a cat to pieces because we had observed the cat tearing a mouse to pieces. Carnivorous fish don't have a choice about whether to kill other fish or not. They kill as a matter of instinct. Meanwhile, humans can choose to abstain from killing or eating fish and other animals.

Alternatively, the argument could be made that it is part of the natural order that there are predators and prey, and so it cannot be wrong for us to play our part in this order. But this "argument from nature" can justify all kinds of inequities, including the rule of men over women and leaving the weak and the sick to fall by the wayside. Even if the argument were sound, however, it would work only for those of us still living in a hunter-gatherer society, for there is nothing at all "natural" about our current ways of raising animals. As for Franklin's argument about the fish who had eaten other fish, this is a selective use of an argument we would reject in other contexts. Franklin was a sufficiently acute observer of his own nature to recognize how selective he was being, because he admits that he hit upon his justification for eating the fish only after they were in the frying pan and had begun to smell "admirably well."[8]

Third, we have said that the suffering inflicted on animals by factory farming, transportation, and slaughter is unnecessary because—as the Farbs and many other vegan families demonstrate—there are alternatives to meat and other animal products that allow people to be healthy and well-nourished. It might be argued that food from animals is a central part of the standard Western diet and important, if not always central, to what people eat in many other cultures as well. Because animal products are so significant to us, and because we could not buy them as cheaply as we can now without factory farming, factory farming is justifiable despite the suffering it inflicts on animals. But when cultural practices are harmful, they should not be allowed to go unchallenged.

Slavery was once part of the culture of the American South. Biases against women and against people of other races have been, and in some places still are, culturally significant. If a widespread cultural practice is wrong, we should try to change it.

It's true that the alternatives to factory farming we've examined, whether Cyd Szymanski's eggs or Niman Ranch pork, are more expensive. Let's grant, too, that switching to a totally vegan diet is something that many people would find difficult, at least at first. But these assumptions are still insufficient to justify factory farming. The choice is not between business as usual and a vegan world. Without factory farming, families with limited means would be able to afford fewer animal products, but they would not have to stop buying them entirely. Nutritionists agree that most people in developed countries eat far more animal products than they need, and more than is good for their health. Spending the same amount of money and buying fewer animal products would therefore be a good thing, especially if those animal products came from animals free to walk around outside, which would make the meat less fatty, and if the reduced consumption in animal products were offset by increased consumption of fruit and vegetables. That is the recommendation of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and few people are more devoted to food than he is.

For perhaps a billion of the world's poorest people, hunger and malnutrition are still a problem. But factory farming isn't going to solve that problem, for in developing countries the industry caters to the growing urban middle class, not the poor, who cannot afford to buy its products. In developing countries, factory-farming products are chosen for their taste and status, not for the consumer's good health. The world's largest and most comprehensive study of diet and disease has shown that in rural China, good health and normal growth are achieved on a diet that includes only one-tenth as much animal-based food as Americans eat. Increases in the consumption of animal products above that very low base are correlated with an increase in the "diseases of affluence": heart disease, obesity, diabetes, and cancer.[9]

The great suffering inflicted on animals by factory farming is not outweighed by a possible loss in gastronomic satisfaction caused by the elimination of meat from animals raised on factory farms from the diet. The harder question is whether we should be vegan or at least vegetarian? To answer that question, we need to go beyond the rejection of

unjustified suffering and ask whether it is wrong to kill animals—without suffering—for our food. We need to ask what moral status animals have, and what ethical standards should govern our treatment of them.

ETHICS AND ANIMALS

The prevailing Western ethic assumes that human interests must always prevail over the comparable interests of members of other species. Since the rise of the modern animal movement in the 1970s, however, this ethic has been on the defensive. The argument is that, despite obvious differences between human and nonhuman animals, we share a capacity to suffer, and this means that they, like us, have interests. If we ignore or discount their interests simply on the grounds that they are not members of our species, the logic of our position is similar to that of the most blatant racists or sexists—those who think that to be white, or male, is to be inherently superior in moral status, irrespective of other characteristics or qualities.

The usual reply to this parallel between speciesism and racism or sexism is to acknowledge that it is a mistake to think that whites are superior to other races, or that males are superior to women, but then to argue that humans really are superior to non-human animals in their capacity to reason and the extent of their self-awareness, while claiming that these are morally relevant characteristics. However, some humans—infants, and those with severe intellectual disabilities—have less ability to reason and less self-awareness than some non-human animals. So we cannot justifiably use these criteria to draw a distinction between all humans on the one hand and all non-human animals on the other.

In the 18th century, Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver's Travels,* made a "modest proposal" to deal with the "surplus" of the children of impoverished women in Ireland. "I have been assured," he wrote, "that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled."[10] The proposal was, of course, a satire on British policy towards the Irish. But if we find this proposal shocking, our reaction shows that we do not really believe that the absence of an advanced ability to reason is sufficient to justify turning a sentient being into a piece of meat. Nor is it the potential of infants to develop these abilities that marks the cru-

cial moral distinction, because we would be equally shocked by anyone who proposed the same treatment for humans born with serious and irreversible intellectual disabilities. But if, within our own species, we don't regard differences in intelligence, reasoning ability, or self-awareness as grounds for permitting us to exploit the being with lower capacities for our own ends, how can we point to the same characteristics to justify exploiting members of other species? Our willingness to exploit non-human animals is not something that is based on sound moral distinctions. It is a sign of "speciesism," a prejudice that survives because it is convenient for the dominant group, in this case not whites or males, but humans.

If we wish to maintain the view that no conscious human beings, including those with profound, permanent intellectual disabilities, can be used in ways harmful to them solely as a means to another's end, then we are going to have to extend the boundaries of this principle beyond our own species to other animals who are conscious and able to be harmed.[11] Otherwise we are drawing a moral circle around our own species, even when the members of our own species protected by that moral boundary are not superior in any morally relevant characteristics to many nonhuman animals who fall outside the moral circle. If we fail to expand this circle, we will be unable to defend ourselves against racists and sexists who want to draw the boundaries more closely around themselves.

EQUAL CONSIDERATION FOR ANIMALS?

Those who defend our present treatment of animals often say that the animal-rights movement would have us give animals the same rights as humans. This is obviously absurd—animals can't have equal rights to an education, to vote, or to exercise free speech. The kind of parity that most animal advocates want to extend to animals is not equal rights, but equal consideration of comparable interests. If an animal feels pain, the pain matters as much as it does when a human feels pain. Granted, the mental capacities of different beings will affect how they experience pain, how they remember it, and whether they anticipate further pain—and these differences can be important. But the pain felt by a baby is a bad thing, even if the baby is no more self-aware than, say, a pig, and has

no greater capacities for memory or anticipation. Pain can be a useful warning of danger, so it is sometimes valuable, all things considered. But taken in themselves, unless there is some compensating benefit, we should consider similar experiences of pain to be equally undesirable, whatever the species of the being who feels the pain.

We have now progressed in our argument beyond the avoidance of "unnecessary" suffering to the principle of equal consideration of interests, which tells us to give the same weight to the interests of nonhuman animals as we give to the similar interests of human beings. Let's see whether this principle can help us to decide whether eating meat is unethical.

EATING MEAT: THE BEST DEFENSE

The most thoughtful defenses of eating meat come from those writers who are strongest in their condemnation of factory farming: Michael Pollan, Hugh Fearnsley-Whittingstall, and Roger Scruton. Pollan's *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* essay "An Animal's Place," begins with the line: "The first time I opened Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation,* I was dining alone at the Palm, trying to enjoy a ribeye steak cooked medium-rare." From there he goes on to describe factory farming and acknowledge that we cannot justify eating the food that this system produces. Pollan then juxtaposes his grim account of modern industral agriculture with a lyrical portrayal of Polyface Farm, spread over 550 acres of grass and forest in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley. Here, Pollan tells us, "Joel Salatin and his family raise six different food animals—cattle, pigs, chickens, rabbits, turkeys and sheep—in an intricate dance of symbiosis designed to allow each species, in Salatin's words, 'to fully express its physiological distinctiveness.'" We learn about Salatin's rotation method: first cows graze on the pasture, then laying hens feast on the grubs attracted by the cowpats, then sheep come and eat the weeds that the cows and hens don't like. There are pigs, too, rooting around in compost in a barn.

If we can recognize animal suffering in a factory farm, Pollan says, "animal happiness is unmistakeable too, and here I was seeing it in abundance." That happiness ends, of course, when the animals are killed, but for the rabbits and chickens, at least, that death is not pre-

ceded by the terrifying experience of being trucked off to a slaughterhouse. Salatin slaughters them on the farm. (He would like to slaughter the cattle, pigs, and sheep on the premises, too, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture will not let him.) Salatin's killing is done on Saturday mornings, and anyone is welcome to come along and watch. This leads Pollan to comment that if the walls of both factory farms and slaughterhouses were made of glass, industrial agriculture might be redeemed. Some people would become vegetarians, but others, forced to raise and kill animals in a place where they can be watched, would do it with more consideration for the animal, as well as for the eater. We would have "poultry farms where chickens still go outside" and "hog farms where pigs live as they did 50 years ago—in contact with the sun, the earth and the gaze of a farmer."

In the light of his experience at Polyface Farm, Pollan tells us that to see the domestication of animals as "a form of enslavement or even exploitation" is a mistake. It is, instead, "an instance of mutualism between species" and an evolutionary, not a political, development. Here Pollan may have been influenced by Stephen Budiansky's book *The Covenant of the Wild*.[12] Budiansky's argument is that domestication occurred when some species of animals began to hang around human settlements in order to eat waste or leftover food. Since the animals were edible—or perhaps gave milk and eggs that could be eaten—our ancestors encouraged them to stay around by providing food for them and protecting them from predators. The result has been the evolution of animal breeds that do well, in terms of species survival, by being domesticated. There would be far fewer chickens, pigs, and cattle in the world today if their ancestors had remained wild.

The entire story of domestication is speculative, but one thing is clear: Pollan describes it in a way that cannot be correct and uses it to suggest an ethical justification for our use of animals that it cannot support. He writes that "domestication happened when a small handful of especially opportunistic species discovered through Darwinian trial and error that they were more likely to survive and prosper in an alliance with humans than on their own." No mistake is more common, in accounts of evolutionary processes, than attributing purposiveness either to the process of evolution itself or to entities like genes or species, which are not capable of forming purposes at all. Species do not "discover" anything, through trial and error or in any other way. Individual ani-

mals survive and leave offspring, and others, with slightly different characteristics, do not. In this case, on Pollan's account, some animals were attracted to human settlements and were themselves sufficiently attractive to the humans to receive food and protection, while other animals were either not attracted to the human settlements or were not attractive to the humans. More of the offspring of those animals that were attracted and attractive survived and reproduced than was the case with those animals that were not attracted or not attractive.

Pollan then notes that "Cows, pigs, dogs, cats, and chickens have thrived, while their wild ancestors have languished" and that there are now only 10,000 wolves in North America, but 50 million dogs. From this he draws the conclusion that "From the animals' point of view, the bargain with humanity has been a great success, at least until our own time." But just as species are not capable of discovering anything, neither are they capable of making a bargain. Whether individual animals are capable of making a bargain is a separate question, but Pollan is surely not asserting that any individual animal ever consciously made a bargain with humans, to, for example, trade her eggs or milk, or even his or her flesh, for a year or two's food and protection from predators.

Talk of bargains between humans and animals cannot justify anything about how we treat animals today. There is, however, a better point that can be disentangled from Pollan's account of domestication. We can take Pollan to be arguing that since domestic animals have evolved to be what they now are through their symbiotic relationship with humans, their "characteristic form of life"—a phrase Pollan borrows from Aristotle—is one lived in domestication with humans, and that means—for chickens, pigs, cows, and sheep—a life on a farm or ranch. This is their nature, and the Good Life for them is one in which they can live, in accordance with their nature, on the Good Farm, until they are killed and eaten. The killing and eating is unavoidable, for without it neither farms, nor the animals on them, would exist at all.

Fearnley-Whittingstall's defense of meat-eating in *The River Cottage Meat Book* is in some respects strikingly similar to that of Pollan, but it reaches this last point more directly. Fearnley-Whittingstall refers to Budiansky's *Covenant of the Wild* when explaining how "consensual domestication" came about—but he is careful to note that this kind of cooperation between species has nothing to do with individual consent and does not carry the moral implications of individual consent. His

point is rather that the nature of farm animals has been shaped by their relationship with us, and they "can be healthy, contented, and even, at least in a sense that suits their species, fulfilled—for the duration of their short lives." Then he adds: "And I believe that these short, domesticated lives are, on balance, better than no lives at all." This gives us moral authority for eating them, but only if we buy from farmers who "embrace the notion of a contract with their meat animals" and "do all they can to uphold it, honourably, morally, and responsibly." *The River Cottage Meat Book* instructs its readers on how to find meat produced by the minority of farmers who do this.[13]

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BEST DEFENSE

Pollan's and Fearnley-Whittingstall's defenses of meat-eating are essentially variants on one that is familiar to philosophers who have studied earlier debates about meat-eating. The argument occurs, for instance, in *Social Rights and Duties,* a collection of essays and lectures published in 1896 by the British essayist—and father of the novelist Virgina Woolf—Leslie Stephen. Stephen writes: "Of all the arguments for Vegetarianism none is so weak as the argument from humanity. The pig has a stronger interest than anyone in the demand for bacon. If all the world were Jewish, there would be no pigs at all." Henry Salt, an early advocate of animal rights, thought there was a philosophical fallacy at the core of Stephen's argument: "A person who is already in existence," Salt writes, "may feel that he would rather have lived than not, but he must first have the *terra firma* of existence to argue from; the moment he begins to argue as if from the abyss of the non-existent, he talks nonsense, by predicating good or evil, happiness or unhappiness, of that of which we can predicate nothing."[14]

Salt has drawn our attention to a deep issue that the argument raises. We don't normally think of bringing people into existence as a way of benefiting them. When couples are uncertain about whether or not to have children, they tend to think of their own interests, or perhaps the interests of other existing people, rather than of the benefit they may be conferring on their future children by bringing them into existence—assuming that these children will come into existence in circumstances that make it likely that they will have good lives. But our ordinary way

of thinking about such questions might be mistaken. Ask yourself if it would be wrong to bring a child into existence, knowing that the child suffered from a genetic defect that would make her life both brief and utterly miserable for every moment of her existence? Most people will answer "yes." Now consider bringing into existence a being who will lead a thoroughly satisfying life. Is that a good thing to do, other things being equal? If you answer this in the negative, you need to explain why it is wrong to bring a miserable being into existence, but not good to bring a happy or fulfilled being into existence. Sound explanations for this are extraordinarily difficult to find.[15]

We will not attempt to resolve these challenging philosophical questions here. Instead, we'll accept that, as long as a pig has a good life and a quick death, it is a good thing (or at least not a bad thing) for the pig that he or she exists. The argument, then, is that eating meat from farms that give pigs good lives cannot be bad for the pigs, since if no one ate meat, these pigs would not exist. To eat them, however, we have to kill them first, so killing them must be justifiable.

Pollan seems to feel some discomfort about his own argument, because he acknowledges that he has been using what is essentially a utilitarian argument for meat-eating and then recalls that "utilitarians can also justify killing retarded orphans. Killing just isn't the problem for them that it is for other people, including me." So he goes back to Joel Salatin and asks him how he can bring himself to kill a chicken. Salatin replies: "People have a soul. Animals don't. It's a bedrock belief of mine. Unlike us, animals are not created in God's image, so when they die, they just die." As Salatin's answer reminds us, religions often reflects the speciesism of the human beings who developed them. Pollan doesn't comment on Salatin's answer. If he has objections to killing that go beyond utilitarian arguments, he owes us an account of why these objections do not apply to animals.

Fearnley-Whittingstall has noticed that most meat eaters are protected from thinking about the fact that animals are killed in order to produce meat. He thinks this is wrong, and so he includes in his book a double-page series of color photographs that begins with him taking two of his beef cattle to slaughter, and then shows them being killed, bled out, skinned, disembowelled, and sawn in half. He reports that he watched the process itself and found it "somewhat shocking," although

he says that the process "does not seem to me to cause much suffering" and did not make him feel "angry, or sick, or guilty, or ashamed." It compares well, he argues, with almost any other form of death for either a wild or a farmed animal. But Fearnley-Whittingstall doesn't consider that his cattle, like all the animals we eat, died while still very young. They might have lived several more years before meeting one of these other forms of death, years in which they matured, experienced sexual intercourse, and, if they were females, cared for their children. We humans, after all, are prepared to pass up many rapid and humane forms of death in order to live a few more years, even if we are then likely to die of a disease that causes us to suffer before we die.

Scruton's background in philosophy leads him to put his defense of killing animals for food on a more philosophical basis than Pollan or Fearnley-Whittingstall. He writes: "Human beings are conscious of their lives as their own; they have ambitions, hopes, and aspirations." To be "cut short" before one's time is tragic, because "human beings are fulfilled by their achievements and not merely by their comforts." In contrast, animals like cattle do not look forward to future achievements, nor do they seek to achieve anything that will make their lives more fulfilling.[16] Scruton may be right about cattle, but his argument implies that it would be permissible to kill humans who, because of profound intellectual disabilities, are not conscious of their lives as their own and do not look forward to future achievements. Those who find this conclusion too shocking to accept cannot defend the killing of animals for meat on the grounds that animals lack the higher mental abilities that make it wrong to kill normal humans.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

Suppose, though, that some people do accept this disturbing conclusion and eat only humanely raised animals. Does that allow them an impregnable defense of their diet? Not quite. If there were no demand for bacon, nor for any other animal products, farms that now raise animals would convert to growing crops or else go out of business, and humans would replace animal protein with plant protein. Since, as we have seen, we can produce a specified amount of both protein and calories from a smaller area of land when we grow plant foods rather than animal foods,

this change would release significant areas of land from agriculture or would render unnecessary the appropriation of more land for agriculture. If that land were allowed to return to forest, or in the case of existing wild habitat allowed to remain undisturbed, the total number of animals leading lives unconfined by factory farming would increase—for birds and animals are much more abundant in forests than on either cropland or pasture. In North America, for example, there are squirrels, chipmunks, racoons, rabbits, mice, and deer, as well as blackbirds, crows, cardinals, pigeons, sparrows, and starlings—to name just a few. In other countries the species that inhabit forests vary, as do the densities of individual birds and animals, which are highest in tropical forests.

Gaverick Matheny and Kai Chan have attempted to calculate the overall net gain or loss of animal life that will result if people in developed countries should start to switch from their present heavily meat-based diet to one based on plant foods. By calculating the amount of land that could be allowed to return to forest or become some other kind of natural habitat and the number of wild birds and animals who would live on that land, they conclude that even when meat is obtained from grazing cattle living decent lives, the number of animals living free of close confinement will be greater when we obtain protein from plant foods rather than from grazing cattle. The same is true for raising pigs, even if the pigs derive half of their food from waste. In the case of eggs and poultry, with the farming methods like those used at Polyface Farm, the balance may favor continued farming, but this depends on how much grain they need to be fed, in addition to what they can eat on pasture.[17]

Conscientious omnivores might reply that there is no reason to believe that land freed from agricultural use by a switch to a plant-based diet actually would be allowed to revert to wild habitat that could then support the increased number and diversity of animal life. Perhaps it would be bought up for suburban or industrial development. That may be true in some cases in developed countries, especially if the land is near a metropolitan or industrial area. But we should consider the globalized market that now exists for meat. The land no longer needed to produce meat for us may still be used to raise animals whose meat would then be available for export and therefore could slow the rate of forest clearance in, say, Brazil.

There are, of course, exceptions, where animals are raised on land unsuitable for growing crops, and the meat produced is too expensive to

be exported. Raising lambs in the Welsh hills, for example, is a traditional form of husbandry that has existed for many centuries and makes use of land that could not otherwise produce food for humans. If the lives of the sheep are, on the whole, good ones, and they would not exist at all if the lambs were not killed and eaten, it can be argued that doing so has benefits, on the whole, for both human and animals.

Pollan also refers to a different argument for eating meat from grazing animals, which he owes to Steve Davis, an animal scientist at Oregon State University. According to Davis, we cannot avoid being responsible for killing animals, even if we are vegan. A tractor plowing a field to plant crops may crush field mice, and moles can be killed when their burrows are destroyed by the plow. Harvesting crops removes the ground cover in which small animals shelter, making it possible for predators to kill them. Applying pesticides can kill birds. Davis then tries to calculate the number of animals killed by growing crops and the number killed by rearing beef cattle on pasture and argues that twice as many animals die per acre when growing crops as in pasture-reared beef production. He then concludes that if we are trying to kill as few animals as possible, we will do better to eat beef—as long as it is fed entirely on grass and not fattened on grain—than to follow a vegan diet.[18] Davis has, however, made a gross error in his calculations: He assumes that an acre of land will feed the same number of people irrespective of whether it is used to raise grass-fed beef or to grow crops. In fact, an acre of land used for crops will feed about ten times as many people as an acre of land used for grass-fed beef. When that difference is fed into the calculations, Davis's argument is turned on its head, and proves that vegans are indirectly responsible for killing only about a fifth as many animals as those who eat grass-fed beef.[19]

Even if it is ethically acceptable to eat animals who have been well-cared for during their lifetimes and then killed without experiencing pain or distress, for those unable to raise their own animals, it is difficult to be sure that the meat you buy comes from such animals. No farm gets more publicity for its exemplary treatment of animals than Polyface Farm. Pollan is not the only one to praise it. The "Style" section of the *New York Times* raved about it and called Joel Salatin, its owner, the "High Priest of the Pasture." Salatin's son has said that his father "has achieved almost godlike status in some circles."[20] But is Polyface really such a good place for animals? Rabbits on the farm are kept in small

suspended wire cages. Chickens may be on grass, but instead of being free to roam, they are crowded into mobile wire pens.[21] A review of sustainable-poultry systems by the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service noted that with Salatin's pens "The confined space inside the pens makes bird welfare a concern" and that the crowding "can lead to pecking problems, because the birds lower in the pecking order cannot run away." Out of five sustainable-poultry systems investigated, the mobile wire pens were placed last for animal welfare, with a "poor to fair" rating.[22] Herman Beck-Chenoweth, author of *Free Range Poultry Production and Marketing* and a poultry producer himself, calls Salatin's way of raising chickens "a confinement system with a grass floor," adding that although it is "a big improvement over the broiler houses used by companies such as Tyson and Perdue . . . it is a confinement system just the same." [23]

There is also the question of slaughter. The U.S. Federal Meat Inspection Act does not permit Salatin to sell meat from animals that he kills on his farm, so his pigs and cattle are trucked off to conventional slaughterhouses. The crowded transport is likely to be very stressful for them, and it is impossible to know how humanely they are actually slaughtered. Because chickens and rabbits are not covered by the Meat Inspection Act, Salatin can kill them on the farm, sparing them the ordeal of transportation and the strange and sometimes frightening environment of the slaughterhouse. Nevertheless, an account of the killing of chickens at Polyface Farm isn't reassuring:

> Slaughter begins promptly at 8:30 a.m. The goal is to be completely finished by 10:30 a.m. O'Connor, the least skilled of the workers, manhandles the first of 30 crates of birds from a stack on a tractor-drawn trailer outside the pavilion. The birds were taken off of feed and crated about 12 hours earlier so that their craws would be clear for slaughter. He grabs the birds by their feet. Wings flap. Eight white chickens are up-ended in the galvanized metal 'killing cones' at the far end of the processing line. Razor-sharp boning knives flash in the early morning sun. The chickens' throats have been slit. Bright red blood flows down a metal trough and into a large plastic bucket. In a minute or so, the chickens are 'bled out.' They're moved on to the next station in the processing line. And a fresh batch of birds is inserted into the cones.[24]

As this account indicates, birds are crammed into crates with seven other birds—probably including some more aggressive birds they would normally keep away from—and they stay there for 12 hours. Then they are grabbed by the "least skilled of the workers," and passed on, upside down, to other workers who will cut their throats—without any prior stunning. It seems that at Polyface, as elsewhere, it is economics, more than concern for animals, that determines how the animals are treated.

If there are grounds for concern about a farm so often admired, many other supposedly "humane" farms are going to be worse. Not all, of course—we have described visits to some good ones in this book—at least, as far as we could tell from our brief visits. (We were not able to see how any of the animals from these farms were slaughtered.) In practice, as long as animals are commodities, raised for sale on a large scale in a competitive market situation, there will be conflicts between their interests and the economic interests of the producer, and the producer will always be under pressure to cut corners and reduce costs.

Psychological aspects of our choice of diet need to be considered too. Just as farmers who start by raising animals "humanely" may slide into practices more profitable but less humane, so individuals may slide as well. How humane is humane enough to eat? The line between what conscientious omnivores can justify eating and what they cannot justify eating is vague. Since we are all often tempted to take the easy way out, drawing a clear line against eating animal products may be the best way to ensure that one eats ethically—and sticks to it.

The impact we will have on others is even more important. Since factory farming inflicts a vast quantity of unjustifiable suffering on animals, persuading others to boycott it should be a high priority for anyone concerned about animals. In this respect, a broad brushstroke may be better than a more finely-tuned approach. Vegans and vegetarians draw clear lines by refusing to eat all, or some, animal products. Whenever they dine with others, that line is evident, and people are likely to ask them why they are not eating meat. That often leads to conversations that influence others, and so the good that we can do personally by boycotting factory farms can be multiplied by the number of others we influence to do the same. When conscientious omnivores eat meat, however, their dietary choices are less evident. On the plate, ham from a pig who led a happy life looks very much like ham from a factory-farmed pig. Thus the eating habits of the conscientious omnivore are

likely to reinforce the common view that animals are things for us to use and unlikely to influence others to reconsider what they eat.

Where does all this leave the diet of conscientious omnivores? Perhaps it's not, all things considered, the best possible diet, but the moral distance between the food choices made by conscientious omnivores and those made by most of the population is so great that it seems more appropriate to praise the conscientious omnivores for how far they have come, rather than to criticize them for not having gone further.

KILLING YOUR OWN

Farms are not the only source of meat. Fearnley-Whittingstall's *River Cottage Meat Book* includes hints on cooking pheasant, partridge, pigeon, mallard and teal ducks, geese, grouse, woodcock, snipe, rabbit, hare, and venison, with a reference to cooking "the odd squirrel" as well. It seems safe to say that many readers, including many who eat meat, will be repulsed by this list. Although only 4 percent of Americans say they are vegetarian, opinion polls show that at least three times as many are opposed to hunting, even for food.[25] In other countries, with less of a gun-owning culture, opposition to hunting is probably stronger still. Yet when compared with the factory-farmed chickens that most people eat in such vast numbers, the wild birds shot by hunters have a far better life and usually a much quicker death. Unlike factory-farmed pigs, wild boar grow up with their mothers and are able to move around freely. Wild deer never have to endure thirty-six hours crammed into trucks without rest, food, or water, on the way to the feedlot or to slaughter. Is meat from wild birds or animals really worse, ethically, than meat you buy in a supermarket?

In Fearnley-Whittingstall's opinion, "truly wild animals, dispatched efficiently by a good shot, provide us with meat that is perhaps the least ethically problematic of all."[26] He admits, however, that not all "game" meets this standard. First, a lot of it is not truly wild. In Britain, for instance, pheasants are hatched in incubators, and for the first few weeks of their lives are raised just like factory-farmed chickens, in big sheds. They are then moved to pens in woodland, where they are still fed on grain, before being released for the benefit of shooters who pay large sums for the "sport" of killing them. Fearnley-Whittingstall

thinks that this is still a good life for a pheasant and that shooting and eating them is ethically defensible. One might doubt that. Second, even though "most" birds and mammals shot by hunters are "dispatched efficiently," Fearnley-Whittingstall admits that "even the best shots will sometimes miss, and sometimes wound the birds and mammals they are trying to kill. The worst shots will do so frequently." These animals "will die of their injuries hours or even days after being shot. And there is no kidding ourselves that those hours or days will not be spent in some pain."

As with farm animals, Fearnley-Whittingstall argues that part of the ethical justification for hunting is a kind of symbiotic contract between wild animals and us. This time the basis of the contract is that we manage the habitat in which they live. "There is barely a square metre of Britain left—and not much of the whole world, come to that—that is not made the way it is by our interference, or at the very least allowed to remain the way it is by our concerted effort not to interfere." Since human emissions of greenhouse gases have already affected our planet's climate to some extent, it is, strictly speaking, true that there is no part of the world unaffected by human action. But it is hard to see that this kind of interference creates a contract between wild animals and ourselves. And if we refrain from cutting down forests and using the cleared land for grazing cattle, does that mean that we have benefited wild animals in a way that entitles us to kill and eat them? That sounds like a more powerful nation saying to a weaker one: "We could kill you all and take your land, but since we have decided not to do so, we have benefited you and you should therefore work on our plantations." Unlike animals raised on farms, the animals killed by hunters would have existed quite independently of us, and their deaths mean that there are fewer animals enjoying their lives. The desire to cook a pigeon rather than some beans is not enough reason to end the pigeon's enjoyment of his or her life.

A better case for hunting can be made when the animals hunted are causing ecological problems. Rabbits introduced to Australia by European settlers have changed Australia's unique plant and animal life and threaten native species with whom they compete. Australian possums, taken to New Zealand for fur farming, have escaped and multiplied prodigiously in New Zealand's forests, which have evolved in the absence of leaf-eating mammals. If these animals are going to be

killed anyway to protect the environment, it is difficult to see any objection to eating meat taken from their bodies. There is a danger that the desire to hunt and eat the animals will make shooting them the preferred means for dealing with the environmental issue, when other less harmful means (like forms of sterilization) could be used. Whether hunting can, in limited circumstances, be justified depends on whether such other means are available, or could be developed.

DUMPSTER DIVING: THE ULTIMATE ETHICAL CHEAP EATS

It's about 7.30 p.m. on a mild Tuesday evening in Melbourne, Australia. We're in a small Toyota station wagon with Tim, Shane, G (Gareth), and Danya. They're all in their 20s, wearing old denim or waterproof jackets, except for G, who is wearing a jacket that might once have been more stylish and formal, but is now so worn that it would have suited Charlie Chaplin in *The Tramp*. The comical appearance is reinforced by the fact that G is tall and lanky, and this jacket was made for someone much smaller. We park in the Safeway parking lot, but avoid the customer entrance, heading instead to the delivery ramp. A dumpster bin stands at the side. The lid is chained and locked, but the chains have enough slack to allow you to raise the lids and insert an arm. G and Danya get their arms in and start bringing out loose potatoes, plastic wrapped packages of broccoli, a bunch of asparagus, plastic packs of flat Lebanese bread, and a small can of tuna. The tuna can is dented, the broccoli is looking a little tired, and some of the potatoes have a slight greenish tinge. We collect what we want, throw the rest back, replace the plastic bags and other trash that has come out accidentally, and leave the area at least as tidy as we found it.

We move around the corner to where there is another bin, this time unlocked. We throw the lid open to reveal boxes of strawberries. Tim says strawberries are not worth taking since they usually taste bad. Instead he picks out some tomatoes and capsicums, two large bottles of orange juice, loaves of whole meal bread, white rolls, packs of croissants, and maybe thirty packets of flat bread. Shane comes up with a long piece of fish. "Ah, Blue Grenadier!" he says, but he's laughing, because it smells really bad, and he throws it back. "There's some really skank

stuff down here," Danya warns. "Watch out for the orange plastic bags; they're full of bad meat." We pick up the pile of food we have collected but put back most of the bread, keeping just a few of the flat breads and one pack of croissants. "We don't need that much, and there might be others coming after us," Tim explains.

Shane and G have gone somewhere else and return with cartons full of small bottles of orange juice. But they sample one, and it's fizzy. They try another, same thing. It goes back in the dumpster. We head off to another group of supermarkets. Danya, who is sitting next to Shane, complains about the bad fish smell that still lingers on Shane's hands.

The next bin we visit is standing by the loading dock and isn't locked, so this time we climb up onto the dock and investigate the contents from above. Danya is delighted to find several cakes, still in clear plastic display boxes. It's her 21st birthday today, and she claims one as a birthday cake. She also finds a tray of chicken breasts and one of chicken drumsticks. "Are they cold?" Tim asks. Yes, they still feel cold. That means they haven't been out of refrigeration long, and that makes them acceptable. Two dozen eggs, still in their cartons, are another find worth taking. So too are a bag of sugar, some tins of tomatoes, a large pack of Chinese noodles, and a torn bag of pasta shells. "Does anyone drink Coke?" G asks. He's found a pack of 24 cans. Shane says yes, he'll have them. The carton is ripped, but the cans are intact, so he starts loading them into another cardboard box. G pulls out a chocolate cake covered in cream, removes the plastic packaging, takes a large bite, and pronounces it good. There are large packs of toilet paper. "That's good, we always need them," says Shane. There is even an electric toothbrush, still in its package.

While we are going through the bin, the roller door behind us starts moving, and an employee who looks about 16 comes out with a wheelie bin to empty into the dumpster. He doesn't look particularly surprised to see us there, but he says, "If security comes around you'll be in trouble." Tim nods assent and offers assistance in unloading the contents of the wheelie bin into the dumpster. The exchange is polite and friendly. We never see any security people, and this turns out to be the only encounter with anyone from one of the stores this evening. That's fairly typical. If they are asked to leave, they say, they just go.

We move on to another supermarket up the road. The bins here are chained down again, but the gap is wide enough for G to spot some

ANIMAL-FREE MEAT?

> "Skum-skimming wasn't hard to learn. You got up at dawn. You gulped a breakfast sliced not long ago from Chicken Little and washed it down with Coffiest. You put on your coveralls and took the cargo net up to your tier. In blazing noon from sunrise to sunset you walked your acres of shallow tanks crusted with algae. If you walked slowly, every thirty seconds or so you spotted a patch at maturity, bursting with yummy carbohydrates. You skimmed the patch with your skimmer and slung it down the well, where it would be baled, or processed into glucose to feed Chicken Little, who would be sliced and packed to feed people from Baffinland to Little America. Every hour you could drink from your canteen and take a salt tablet. Every two hours you could take five minutes. At sunset you turned in your coveralls and went to dinner—more slices from Chicken Little—and then you were on your own."[27]

That is Frederick Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth's fantasy, in *The Space Merchants*, of how we might one day produce our food. "Chicken Little" is a vast lump of meat, hundreds of feet across, growing in a culture that is fed on algae. The idea has attracted more eminent and realistic figures than science fiction writers. In 1932, Winston Churchill wrote: "Fifty years hence, we shall escape the absurdity of growing a whole chicken in order to eat the breast or wing, by growing these parts separately under a suitable medium."[28] Churchill was better at predicting Hitler's aggressive intentions than the future of food production, but it may be only his timing that was astray. Within the animal movement, there are some who hope that, just as the development of the internal combustion engine has eliminated the suffering of millions of horses and oxen previously used to transport people and heavy goods, so eventually the development of *in vitro* meat will eliminate the suffering of billions of animals now used for meat.

coffee he wants. It's too far down for even his long arm to reach, so for the first and only time tonight we see some real "dumpster diving" as G gets his upper body right into the bin, only his legs sticking out the top. The booty is eight 250-gram vacuum-sealed packets of an imported Italian Arabica coffee, just a couple of days past the expiration date.

We already have vegetarian burgers, sausages, bacon bits, and many other meat-like products. In China, when the spread of Buddhism led to abstention from meat during religious festivals, the Emperor's chefs devised ways of making gluten and tofu resemble various forms of meat and seafood, so that the Emperor could continue to dine on the classic dishes of Chinese cuisine. Today, this tradition is still practiced in Chinese vegetarian restaurants. Some vegetarians object to "fake meat" because it may leave the impression that meat dishes set the culinary benchmark, and some meat eaters don't like it because the taste and texture is not the same as that of meat. *In vitro* meat would not be fake meat, it would really be meat, with an identical taste and texture. In theory, growing meat in culture should be more efficient than producing entire animals, since as Churchill suggested, we should be able to grow pure boneless steak or chicken breast, without producing inedible bone, unhealthy fat, and undesirable internal organs. Cultured meat should also have less impact on the environment than factory farms because it would not produce any manure.

Scientists can already produce small amounts of muscle tissue in a laboratory. In 2001, a scientist from the University of Amsterdam, together with two Dutch businessmen, took out a patent on a process for producing meat by bathing muscle cells in a nutrient solution and inducing them to divide. Several scientists in the United States as well as the Netherlands are working on producing edible meat, but so far without success. It may eventually prove possible; the real question is, whether it will be possible for such meat to compete economically with meat from living animals.

One scientist has estimated that the current cost of producing muscle tissue in a laboratory equates to $5 million per kilogram! But only 50 years ago, the exorbitant cost of building a computer meant that few people imagined that they would ever become affordable to ordinary families. If, one day, cultured meat becomes an efficient way of producing food, we see no ethical objection to it. Granted, the original cells will have come from an animal, but since the cells can continue to divide indefinitely, that one animal could, in theory, produce enough cells to supply the entire world with meat. No animal will suffer in order to provide you with your meal.[29]

By now the back of the car is getting full and we are hungry, so we head home to cook. Home is an office-warehouse building that the group has been squatting in for about six months—apparently there is a legal dispute about who owns it, and the property had been vacant for years before they moved in. They've furnished it almost entirely with discarded

items and had electricity and gas put back on, so it's comfortable and very spacious. Tonight Tim does most of the cooking, with some advice and assistance from others. He chops up the asparagus, zucchini, broccoli, and fresh tomatoes and opens two tins of tomatoes as well. That all goes into a pot and gets cooked up. Meanwhile the pasta is boiling away, and when everything is ready we serve ourselves some pasta and add the sauce. If this were a restaurant they'd probably call it "Pasta Primavera." We wash it down with sparkling organic apple juice from New Zealand, in individual bottles. We've had better meals in restaurants, but we've had worse too.

Although some of the items we got were past their use-by date or had damaged packaging, with others there was no obvious reason why they had been thrown out. The expiration date on the eggs was still two weeks in the future and none were broken. The cans of Coke and the Chinese noodles weren't damaged or about to go bad. The toilet paper and electric toothbrush would have lasted indefinitely. "You find stuff and can't figure out why it has been thrown away," Tim says. "We got cartons of organic breakfast cereal and the use-by date was two months ahead." "And what about this organic apple juice?" we ask, holding up the bottle we've just enjoyed drinking. "That had a use-by date about a year ago," Tim says, and everyone laughs at our evident discomfort. "But don't worry, it's perfectly fine." And indeed it was. We experienced no after-effects, from that or any of the other ingredients in the meal. Nor have any of the others ever had any stomach problems from a dumpster meal.

After we've eaten, Danya goes out with a friend to celebrate her birthday, and the rest of us start talking about lifestyles and "dumpstering." G says he got started about two years ago when he was reading George Bataille, the French writer and thinker who died in 1962. In contrast to conventional economists, who start from the problem of scarcity and how best to overcome it, Bataille analyzed the prevailing social and economic order by seeing what it does with its excess. So the next time G passed a supermarket's dumpster, he looked in. "There were about a hundred bananas in there," he said. That got him really excited, and he has been dumpstering ever since. Now he gets all his meals from dumpstering, living from the excess of corporate capitalism. Some days are better than others, he says, but you can always find a meal. G is studying at university. In Australia, students without enough money to

live on are eligible for government financial support, but G feels no need for it and hasn't applied. "I can live without money."

Tim takes a slightly different view. He earns some money, but goes dumpstering in order to save for things he can't get free. "It's a question of priorities. Beyond wanting to save money, it's about how you want to spend it. Whether you want to be just a mindless consumer, or whether you want to put your money into useful stuff, and save money for things that are tools, like keeping a car on the road that I need, buying laptops, and digital-video players. It means that you are able to have access to resources that we couldn't otherwise afford."

Shane has been dumpstering for about five years. Dumpstering, he says, is empowering. "Think of the single mother who has to scrape together enough money to be able to buy a tin of baked beans and some white bread for herself and her kid. If she had the confidence to go around the back and walk up to the bin, she could get much better food for nothing. But she can't transcend the cultural shame. For us, it's culturally acceptable to do it, and we have the skills and the confidence as well. So although none of us has a high-paying job, we live a very comfortable lifestyle, much better than we could afford on what we earn if we had to pay for everything we use."

Tim says it's important to think about dumpstering in its political and economic context. "We have to get away from the simplistic idea that 'you're eating out of a bin, therefore you're a dero,'" he says, using Australian slang for a derelict, a homeless vagrant. "That's going to prevent the single mother from getting food out of the bin. We have the political analysis that enables us to rise above that way of thinking." Shane agrees: "What's better about dumpstering is that you're not buying into that whole process of consumption. Even buying organic food involves being part of the consumer economy. Dumpstering really does break the consumer chain."

"But the people who buy organic could say that they're changing the system," we interject. "By giving money to organic farmers, they're encouraging farmers to grow more organics. What you're doing isn't changing the system, you're just living off a glitch in the system." That provokes Shane and Tim to a critique of the extent to which organic farming has become part of the system of agriculture and marketing, rather than a real alternative to it. Shane acknowledges that some forms of community-supported farming and organic cooperatives could be a

real alternative, but in his view, the "local yuppie organic store" certainly isn't. Dumpstering is much more radical. "It's an act of withdrawal—a withdrawal from the whole process of industrial food production and marketing."

G comes back into the discussion, saying that dumpstering has "an ethical dimension . . . We're saving food that would otherwise totally go to waste—perfectly good food. We're recycling it." Tim adds: "It's got to be the lowest-impact form of food consumption." Then he goes on to say that because you don't need much money, you can spend your time doing something socially useful, rather than getting a meaningless job to earn money to buy food. To judge by the leaflets and notices stuck on boards in the house, people living there are spending time on campaigns for indigenous Australians, against duck shooting, for environmental protection, and against the war in Iraq.

Apart from all that, this way of getting food just seems to be a lot of fun. "It's a daily victory against the system," Tim says. "Every day you come home and think 'I've won.' It may be only a small victory, but I've won." Shane talks about the "rush" of finding great stuff, and G mentions the communal aspect of dumpstered meals: "There's a really good alternative economy in terms of the way you can share and distribute your food as well. Every meal you can share with a couple of people, and there's never any hassle or concern about where the food is coming from. You know it is from this resource that is kind of . . . unending. It's a permanent gift." G also relishes the challenge of getting a few things and working out what you're going to cook with them. That sparks a lot of reminiscing about the good things they've found, and, amidst laughter, they discuss the great and the not-so-good meals they've made entirely from dumpstered food.

Our evening of dumpstering in Melbourne could have been replicated in any large city in the U.S., Canada, or much of Europe. Nobody knows how many people do it, but at the time of writing, www.Meetup.com listed 1,888 people interested in dumpstering, and the New York City group alone had 199 members.[30] We had imagined that dumpstering would retrieve only old or blemished food and were astonished by the non-perishable items in perfect condition we found in dumpster bins; later we discovered that our gleanings were typical of what is thrown out in many countries. A New York dumpster diver recounts finding dumpsters full of expensive packages of gourmet nuts and dried fruit, luxury

chocolates, three or four 50-pound bags of bagels regularly thrown out by a single deli, and large quantities of non-perishable food like rice pilaf mixes and instant soups.

Some of this waste is easily explained. Bakeries, donut stores, delis, and salad bars often advertise that they bake fresh, or get freshly made food every day, and they also like to keep their racks and salad bowls full, so that customers don't get the impression that they are buying the dregs after other customers have picked them over. This combination ensures that at the end of the day a lot of perfectly good food gets thrown out. A small fraction of it may be donated to food banks or shelters for homeless people, but most of it is simply put in the bin, probably because the stores are worried about undermining their own sales—if the word gets around that you can get something for free at 10 p.m., fewer people will buy it at 8 p.m. But the reasons for trashing non-perishable goods are more mysterious. On some products, stores get lower prices for ordering large quantities, so it can be cheaper for them to order more and put what they don't sell in the trash than to buy only what they can sell. Perhaps more importantly, shelf space is a limited resource, and stores regularly clear out shelves for new deliveries. The store may have a long-term contract with a supplier to provide a specified quantity of a product each week. If an item has not sold as well as expected, the old stock will be dumped, even if it is not out of date, to make way for the new stock.

Many dumpster divers began as vegans but became convinced that boycotting animal products is not radical enough. Even products that contain no animal ingredients can hurt animals, when land is cleared to grow crops or when oil companies go into wilderness areas to provide the fuel needed to truck the goods around the country. Some of them began calling themselves "freegans," a term that is a deliberate play on "vegans." An anonymous vegan has said that being a freegan means that "you are boycotting EVERYTHING! . . . That should help you get to sleep at night."[31] While freegans are more radical than vegans in refusing to purchase any kind of food at all, they are also more flexible, in that they see no ethical objection to eating animal products that have been thrown out. They want to avoid giving their money to those who exploit animals. Once a product has been dumped, whether it gets eaten or turned into landfill can make no difference to the producer. Some freegans still don't like the idea of dining on a corpse, and—although

they are prepared to eat food from dumpsters—they know about fecal contamination on meat and see health risks in eating anything that has passed through a slaughterhouse. But their reasoning is impeccably consequentialist: If you oppose the abuse of animals, but enjoy eating meat, cheese, or eggs—get it from a dumpster.

Freeganism is not only about free food. Behind it lies a view about how to live one's life, one that rejects the priorities set by the consumer society and the lifestyle that results from accepting those priorities. Because most people see their status as linked to wealth and what they can buy, they are locked into working, often in unsatisfying jobs, to earn the money they need to enhance their status. Freegans reject that idea of status and do not even need to earn money to satisfy their basic needs. They point out that we all have far more consumer goods than people did in the 1950s—when most people had smaller homes, and no one had DVDs, microwave ovens, cell phones, or personal computers—and yet surveys show that we are no happier now than we were then. Freegans see happiness as something that comes from doing things, rather than having things. If they work at all, it will be because they see the work they are doing as worthwhile in itself. To a far greater extent than people who pay for everything they consume, freegans' time is, as Tim said, their own, to enjoy or to use for working for what they believe in. They are thus doubly free—free from subordination to the consumer ethos and free from the need to work to satisfy their needs. They think that an alternative, less exploitative economic system is possible, but they are under no illusion that taking food from dumpsters will in itself bring that system about. Instead they see dumpster diving both as a way of detaching themselves from the present system and, at the same time, as part of a broader life of resistance to that system.[32]

Dumpster diving may not be an option many consumers are likely to explore, but there's still a lesson to draw. Many of agriculture's ill effects on laborers, animals, and the environment could be reduced if we ate what would otherwise be wasted. According to Dr Timothy Jones, an archaeologist at the University of Arizona who led a U.S. government-funded study of food waste, more than 40 percent of the food grown in the United States is lost or thrown away—that's about $100 billion of wasted food a year. At least half of this food, Jones says, could have been safely consumed. Waste could also be reduced by having better storage facilities. Some of the waste is completely pointless and reflects nothing

more than a casual disregard for what went into producing the food, from the suffering of the animals, to the labor of the workers, to the natural resources consumed and the pollution generated. Jones examined what stores, restaurants, and individuals throw out and found that 14 percent of household garbage was perfectly good food that was in its original packaging and not out of date. About a third of this edible food was dry-packaged goods, and canned goods that keep for a long time made up another 19 percent. Jones speculated that discounts for bulk purchases lead people to buy more food than they want to keep, but he admits to some bafflement, remarking: "I just don't understand this."[33] As consumers, we have direct control over our own waste. We'd do well to follow the advice our mothers gave us: Eat your leftovers.