A Moral Case for Veganism in Green Political Theory and Animal Advocacy

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Abstract

Veganism, a lifestyle consisting of the non-use or consumption of any animal products as far as is practicable, is an increasingly popular lifestyle, especially among younger and more progressive people. Its impact in political theory seems to be limited, however, despite seemingly fitting into both green political theory and animal advocacy. In this thesis I aspired to test to which extent veganism would hold up as an imperative in both these sub-topics of political theory, by examining whether the aims and rules of veganism follow logically when incorporated into different approaches of these two theories. I found that veganism is hard to justify as moral imperative under green political theory and ecologism, while being morally praiseworthy at best as a sound strategy to achieve the aims of environmentalism. Furthermore, it is also morally praiseworthy to achieve goals of the animal welfare approach, Singer's utilitarian animal advocacy, and Regan's animal right theory, which all aspire to minimize animal suffering, while being a moral imperative if one believes all sentient beings deserve a 'right' not to be property and be used exclusively as a resource. Finally, I discuss some assumptions and exceptions to keep in mind even when one does believe veganism ought to be a moral imperative, as well as highlighting opportunities for future research, and political and societal implications.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Veganism is on the rise, and it has been growing larger and larger over the last few years (Gheihman, 2021). Popularly defined as "a person who does not eat or use any animal products, such as meat, fish, eggs cheese or leather" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), it is becoming increasingly likely that you might encounter someone who follows a vegan lifestyle, especially in more left-wing and progressive circles (Martinelli & Berkmanienė, 2018). Perhaps you might even find yourself wondering *why* someone would choose to not use any animal products. Well, the choice to become vegan *can* be a highly political choice. Greenebaum (2012) for example distinguishes between three main types of vegans: health vegans, environmental vegans, and ethical vegans (from an animal advocacy point of view, specifically). Health vegans follow plant-based diets to lose weight or live more healthily in general, essentially doing it for themselves more than anything, and perhaps not even being strictly vegan, but rather following a vegan diet while still using animal products such as leather. Environmental vegans are concerned about the environmental impact of eating meat and feel that following a plant-based diet, as well as not using other animal products, is a good strategy to lessen their environmental impact. Ethical vegans adopt a vegan lifestyle for moral, ethical, or ecological reasons structured around a philosophy of animal advocacy, who believe in equality across species and reject speciesism (Singer, 1995), or a holistic philosophy of ecologism that rejects the industrialisation of animal products. Both the environmental and ethical reasons are, of course, highly political, as they revolve around ideas of how to live a good life. At first glance, then, it would seem likely that veganism should occupy a considerable place within contemporary debates in political theory. After all, one could rather easily unite it with some of green political theory's environmental aims, as well as animal advocacy aims.

Concerning green political theory, for example, veganism rejects the anthropocentric idea that human interests are somehow above the interests of non-human beings, by rejecting the coercion of animals into doing things they otherwise would not do, merely for our consumption. Of course, this in itself does not directly imply that humans should not eat meat or other animal products in extreme situations of life and death, but most humans in the First World certainly do not *need* to eat meat or use animal products to survive. Veganism also seems to have a holistic quality; a vegan diet is generally more climate friendly (Kortetmäki

and Oksanen, 2020), which means that it could be a helpful tool for reversing or keeping the negative influences of the Anthropocene in check. Furthermore, veganism could help keep certain species from going extinct because of our ever-expanding food necessities (for example, types of fish who have gone, or are on the brink of going, extinct). Of course, these arguments could be countered by the fact that vegans need other types of food, the production of which would still take up a considerable environmental, economic, and spatial toll, as well as the fact that animal populations could be 'boosted' by humans, through breeding or protection, while continuing to consume those animals. However, it does seem like vegan food production will most likely be the more sustainable option compared to the production of animal products (Saari et al, 2021).

Veganism would also be easily incorporated into animal advocacy. It rejects coercing animals into doing things they do not want to do in an attempt to minimize the suffering of animals. This does require some assumptions to be made, such as the assumption that the dairy and egg industries are exploitative, and the assumption that the animals used in these industries matter morally. If such assumptions ring true, however, supporting these industries would violate the aims of animal advocacy. Logically, this would be even more likely when speaking of unnecessarily killing for meat.

Without going into too much detail, it seems like veganism *should* at least be discussed in political theory. And yet, when I open some handbooks, including Goodin's (1992) *Green Political Theory* and Dobson's (2007) *Green Political Thought* on green political theory, as well as Wissenburg & Schlosberg's (2018) *Political Animals and Animal Politics* and Garner's (2013) *A Theory of Justice for Animal Rights* on animal rights theory, I only found *one* mention of veganism. Of course, these are not the most contemporary handbooks out there, but further academic research yields not much more in the way of vegan debates in political theory. As such, I aim to add to the political debates in both green political theory and animal advocacy, by further fleshing out the vegan frame and evaluating how exactly a vegan lifestyle would fit within the larger aims of both theories on a moral and political level. This in turn might lead to insights into the societal relevance of eating animal products, an explanation as to why veganism seems to be growing ever more popular, an approximation of whether and/or when it would be allowed to sway from a strict vegan lifestyle, and finally whether and how politics should play a role in enabling and/or encouraging citizens to consider vegan lifestyles. The research question that I ultimately aim to answer is:

To what extent would a vegan lifestyle be morally required (or praiseworthy), when incorporated into green and animal advocacy?

In order to do this, I will first give an overview of the two larger political debates within which the vegan debate is settled, and an overview of veganism itself. Specifically, I will first give an overview of green political theory, followed by an overview of animal advocacy. These two debates embed two of the three reasons for being vegan as stated by Greenebaum (2012), namely the environmental reason and the ethical (based on ethics of animal advocacy) reason, the third reason being health, which is mostly a personal reason and, certainly for this thesis, less interesting politically. Following these overviews, I will give some insight into veganism, its history, its conceptualization, and its relation to other diets. After this, I will examine some approaches to moral personhood, and argue for a right not to be property for any moral person. Hereafter, I will approach veganism through the frames discussed earlier, see whether and how veganism logically follows, and discuss some exceptions and assumptions that apply. Finally, I will share my conclusions as well as discuss some possibilities for further research.

Chapter 2: Current political surrounding veganism

Green political theory

Green political theory, as defined by Barry, focuses on the relation between humans and nature, incorporating environmentalism and issues such as pollution and resource management, ecologism as a full political ideology with views on non-resource and non-environmental concerns while also acknowledging the fact that the organisation of human social, economic and political relations are derived from the "metabolism between humans and nature" (Barry, 2014; p.2). Barry specifically chose this term so that he could incorporate both environmental *and* ecological political theory, arguing that environmentalist political theory was often only interested in 'single issue' green politics such as controlling pollution or resource management, whereas ecologist political theory lacked views on human-related issues such as political, economic, and social relations. Such differentiations had previously also been made by Baxter (2004), who argued for the difference between environmental justice as that which humanity owes itself, and ecological justice as that which we owe nature, which includes humanity. Both authors would then agree that ecologism is grander and more inclusive in scope, and less anthropocentric.

Looking back at the history of green political thinking, Barry describes a number of different origins, including: negative reactions to the Industrial Revolution, negative reactions to colonialism and imperialism, the emergence of the science of ecology, issues surrounding resource, pollution and energy foundations for lifestyles and realisable conceptions of 'the good life', and growing concern and awareness over the 'ecological crisis' starting in the 1960s and maturing in the 1980s and 1990s. The first real 'green thinking as ideology' can be found in the 1970s, according to Dobson, who claimed: "*The Limits to growth* report of 1972 is hard to beat as a symbol for the birth of ecologism in its fully contemporary guise" (Dobson, 2007; p. 25). By doing so, he goes against the point of view of a number of other authors (Heywood, 2017; Macridis, 1986; Vincent, 2006) who believed ecologism had its roots back in the nineteenth century. Specifically, Dobson argues that the scope of concerns had massively expanded in the 'modern age', essentially saying that humanity had become far more effective at impacting nature in negative ways when compared to the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Dobson makes a similar point to Barry by arguing that the more ad hoc past of environmental interest starting in the nineteenth century was generally based on single

issue approaches that dealt with environmental problems, the seriousness of which was not appreciated besides the impact the issues had on their immediate self-interest. Once more, what also lacked was the connection of environmental problems to grander aspects of social, political, and economic life. To sum it up, pre-1970 ideas and movements that had affinity with 'green' politics did indeed exist, but the first true green ideology originated in the 1970s, when Meadows et al. posed that a fundamental change in human behaviour and society would (need to) follow from what they called a "realization of the quantitative restraints of the world environment and the tragic consequences of an overshoot" (Meadows et al., 1974; p. 190).

What truly sets green political theory apart from other political ideologies, Dobson argues, is its focus on the relationship between humans and the non-human natural world (Dobson, 2007). Although some other political ideologies, including liberalism, conservatism, and socialism, have adopted (or at least tried to adopt) environmental or ecological elements, Dobson argues that none concerns itself primarily with said relationship, nor do they share the two principal and distinguishing themes of green ideology, namely the belief in limits to material growth and the opposition to anthropocentrism. This 'distinguishing' of green political theory as a distinct ideology is described by Barry as the 'first wave' of green political theory (2014). This distinctiveness includes what Goodin calls a focus on a 'green theory of value', which claims that "value-imparting properties are natural, rather than being somehow artefacts of human activities" (Goodin, 1992; p.25). Furthermore, value does not originate from the mental states of beings that use certain objects, but the value of objects is inherent to themselves. In other words, all natural objects have value in themselves, before and irrespective of the way they are used by human or non-human animals. It is the promotion and preservation of this natural value which is the centre of green political theory.

This also includes a greater recognition of the holism or interconnectedness of nature, including humanity. It goes against forms of thought that 'splits things up' and studies individual beings or objects in isolation, claiming that "greater recognition of mutual dependence and influence will encourage a sensitivity in our dealings with the 'natural' world" (Dobson, 2007; p. 30). Barry describes this as bringing humanity 'down to earth': "We are not just *like* animals, we *are* an animal species, ecologically embedded in nature, and we exist in a web-like relation to other species, rather than being at the top of some 'great chain of being'" (Barry, 2014; p. 2-3). That said, humans as a natural species do have their

own species-specific characteristics, needs and modes of flourishing, as do all other species. Barry describes this as a stress on the 'embodiedness' of humans as ethically and politically significant, something he claims most other political theories lack. What it essentially boils down to, is a wish to extend the 'moral community' past just humans, and even past just (non-human) animals, to include the natural world as morally significant.

The second wave of green political thought aimed to place itself vis-à-vis other schools of thought in political theory such as liberalism, socialism, and conservatism, while also interacting with key political concepts such as democracy, justice, the state, and citizenship (Barry, 2014). Dobson goes over some of the examples of 'second wave' political thought and describes how political theorists of different ideological backgrounds tried to incorporate green thinking into their ideology (Dobson, 2007). For example, Dobson describes how liberalism has tried to incorporate green political thought, and quotes Wissenburg who claims that "*some* liberals have taken on a shade of green" (Wissenburg, 2006; p. 23). Some arguments in favour of a 'green liberalism' include liberalism's tolerance for competing views of the 'good life' and the argument that sustainability might help offer a wider range of options from which to choose what the 'good life' *might* look like in the future (Dobson, 2003). However, these and other arguments do not hold up according to Dobson, who argues that liberalism's focus on the means of achieving the 'good life', through individual freedom that is, is essentially incompatible with green political theory as an end-oriented and more collectivist (including nature) conception of political and social life (Dobson, 2007).

Besides this 'green liberalism', attempts have also been made to construe a form of 'green conservatism'. This followed from arguments by Gray (2013), who claimed there were a number of 'common grounds' between green political theory and conservatist political theory. Specifically, Gray highlights that both ideologies believe that individuals can only flourish in the contexts of forms of common life. Dobson notes, however, the difference between the two, particularly that conservatism seems to value historical and cultural contexts as expressed through tradition, while greens argue that the value of nature is inherent to itself and not based on tradition (Dobson, 2007). A similar argument is seen when examining Gray's argument considering intergenerational relations. Gray argues that both conservatists and greens value a certain intergenerational responsibility. Again, Dobson notes the differences, specifically that conservatists are primarily focussed on the conserving and preserving of the past, while the greens are mostly interested in conserving nature as a whole,

for future generations (Dobson focusses on the lives of 'future people' here, but I assume this could also include future generations of non-human animals and perhaps even other organisms). Finally, Dobson disagrees with Gray's argument that both conservatism and green political theory believes that the human condition as well as human nature are set in stone. As Dobson argues: "It is perfectly possible to believe that the human condition is fixed, while human nature is not, and this is indeed what political ecologists believe" (Dobson, 2007; p. 164). More specifically, green political theorists would argue that human beings are capable of transformation and that they *can* abandon the 'instrumental relationship with the natural environment'.

Socialism and green political theory are also often in conflict: although both ideologies see and critique capitalism and the wastefulness of overproduction, overconsumption and its inegalitarian outcomes (Ryle, 1988), the reason behind their critique differs. First of all, where socialism argues that capitalism is the source of 'the ills of contemporary society', green political thought considers the source to be industrialism (Dobson, 2007). One reason for this is that the greens argue that even in socialist societies of the past the environmental records were anything but favourable. Socialists, however, would argue that these societies were not socialist in an ideal form (Miliband, 1994), and were instead greatly influenced by capitalism. Another disagreement can be found in the locus each ideology places their focus. Particularly, socialism places its primary focus on human (social and economic) justice, while green political theory places its primary focus on ecological justice. This leads to differences in priorities, as well as differences in underlying opinions about limits to growth; where socialists will prefer to tackle the environmental problems that are most immediate to human safety first, greens will prefer not to see human safety as a priority over the entirety of the natural ecological biosphere, and while (some) socialists believe that there are no set limits to production (as long as it is according to the needs of humanity), greens once more argue that humanity *is* able to set limits to production (see the changing of human nature argument from earlier).

Dobson also pays attention to the tension between environmentalism and ecologism. So far, I have mostly spoken about green political theory, which is a mix of both, though largely highlighting ecologism as an ideology over environmentalism as a shallower, more human-centred approach. Arguably, many of the critiques and/or differences discussed between green political thought and other ideologies might come down to what Dobson describes as major political parties (and ideologies) 'stitching a green stripe into their flags'

(Dobson, 2007). These green stripes are generally environmental stripes, rather than ecological stripes. And though Dobson made clear the differences between environmentalism and ecologism, he does argue (as does Barry) that the two are mutually dependent on each other, in what he sees as a 'constructive tension'. According to Dobson, we have to see "ecologism as the Utopian picture that all political movements need if they are to operate effectively", and that "the Utopian vision provides the indispensable fundamentalist well of inspiration from which green activists, even the most reformist and respectable, need continually draw" (Dobson, 2007; p. 190). There is, however, the danger of the 'constructive tension' falling apart: radical ecologists might feel that giving support to certain measurements that decrease unsustainability still do nothing to support sustainability. He gives the example of the use of chlorofluorocarbons in aerosols which was going to have to be brought back from 75 percent to five or ten percent (Dobson, 2007). An improvement as far as the more reformist environmentalists are concerned, but radical ecologists would argue that this does nothing to criticize the (still unsustainable) use of aerosols in general. In his conclusion, Dobson recognizes this radical view, but echoes his earlier claim by saying that the reformists need the radicals, and the radicals need the reformists. Reformist environmentalism provides radical ecologism with a platform to voice their ideology, and radical ecologism provides environmentalism with an ideology. The key appears to be a balance between the two.

A recent trend within green political theory, and part of the third wave, is an approach called green republicanism. This strand of thinking is based upon a critique of dealing with climate change caused by the Anthropocene (Fremaux & Barry, 2019), the current geological epoch which argues that humanity has left an undeniable and irreversible mark on the climates and ecosystems of the Earth through either epistocracy or technocracy, defined by Wissenburg as "the rule of those with superior knowledge of politics" and "the rule of those most skilled in a practice" (Wissenburg, 2021; p.781). Instead of climate governance being a (global) epistocracy or technocracy, Wissenburg argues for a system based upon constitutional republican guidelines. These guidelines are: 1) taking responsibility for the Anthropocene, 2) avoiding utopian engineering while embracing piecemeal engineering, 3) supporting liberal sovereignty for states, 4) organizing opposition, 5) creating global agonistic checks and balances, 6) adopting negotiation procedures that promote reflexive rationality, and last but not least, 7) working with realistic expectations (Wissenburg, 2021). These guidelines are supposed to allow for epistemic and ontological pluralism, while also

providing a way to still reach decisions regarding climate governance through agonistic debate, or perhaps deliberation (Cannavò, 2016). An example of the advantages of green republicanism is pointed out by Barry, who argues that green republicanism must challenge the 'ideology of growth', as he argues it limits freedom by turning people into slaves of economic growth (Barry, 2021). To link that back to Wissenburg, the ideology of growth and its proponents essentially turn into an epistocracy, which green republicanism seeks to avoid. This idea of limiting economic growth is furthermore illustrative of the third wave of green political theory, which is characterized by a more interdisciplinary approach, for example by combining green political theory and economics.

Non-human animals also have their part in green political theory, although the details once more depend on who you ask. Ask an environmentalist, and they will see non-human animals particularly as entities that surround 'us', us being humans (Youatt, 2016). This is very similar to how they see nature as that which surrounds 'us'. This opens the door for placing humanity in a higher order of being and could lead to anthropocentric worldviews. Ecologists, on the other hand, see non-human animals as parts of larger ecosystems, *just like* 'us'. Animals here are just as much part of nature as any plant or human. This brings with it some interesting challenges, such as the legitimacy of human policy regarding nature, as it is, of course, difficult to truly incorporate non-human interests into any deliberative decision-making (Youatt, 2016). Attempts to remedy that problem were made, for example by having humans represent the interests of non-human animals or ecosystems, however one can never truly be sure whether their true interests were properly represented. Besides the anthropocentrism of so-called shallow environmentalism, and eco-centrism of so-called deep ecologism, there is another approach to relations between species, appropriately named 'interspecies'. This approach, taking the place of deep environmentalism or shallow ecologism, considers the ways in which actual relations between human and non-human species are related to ecological and political outcomes. It attempts to incorporate the nature of social relations across species into the boundaries of political life, challenging the 'anything-centric' views that tend to ignore such social relations (Youatt, 2016). For example, the interspecies approach asks questions concerning the sovereignty of wolves, as they not only have individual life projects, but also are part of close communities which perhaps should be recognized as political entities with community-specific interests. Another example highlights how bees and humans have complicated power-relations, as human beekeepers tend to make survival easier for bees by putting them in a food-rich environment,

however, one could also still argue that humans have a significant power-over relationship with bees (Youatt, 2016). For further reading on green political theory: *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Political Theory* (Gabrielson et al., 2016).

Animal advocacy

One of the aims of green political theory was described as 'extending the moral community beyond the species barrier'. Although the ultimate aims of green political theory might be grander (that is, to also include nature as morally significant), most animal advocacy has similar aims: to extend the moral community and include non-human animals. And though animal advocacy does not stop there, according to Wissenburg and Schlosberg (2014), the focus of the first generation of animal political philosophy was largely on changing the view of the larger public on the subject of animals.

In 1974 Feinberg questioned whether it was possible to ascribe rights to beings other than adult humans (Feinberg, 2017). Among others, he listed future generations, individual animals, and plants. Until these 'puzzling cases' were solved, he argued that the concept of rights was impossible to fully grasp. Then, how can we try to answer the question of who gets to have rights? Cochrane (2013) argues that two ideas must be combined. First, the idea that interests are the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for the possession of rights, and second, the idea that sentience is the necessary and sufficient condition for the possession of interests. This second idea is rather important, and also one I shall explore later in this thesis. Furthermore, it is one that has been around for a while. Famously, Bentham wrote: "The question is not, can they reason? Nor can they talk? But can they suffer?" (Bentham, 1996). Of course, Bentham did not yet believe animals' rights should be protected, but he was onto something. According to Proctor (2012), however, it was not until the 1960s, when Harrison (2013) wrote *Animal machines,* that the realities and suffering of animals truly became widely known, and subsequently, the idea that animals possessed sentience and the ability to suffer. Nowadays, most philosophers believe that animals do indeed possess sentience (Arias-Maldonado, 2014), and Wissenburg tops that by arguing: "I am not going to question, and I am going to uncritically embrace, the status of animals as moral patients or subjects…While of course there would be no dominion for an animal political theory if one cannot presume animals to have any moral status, I do believe this race is run" (Wissenburg, 2014; p. 30-31). Following Wissenburg, we can thus presume that animals do indeed have a moral status, and

furthermore that sentience ought to be enough to gain this status. But is that status enough? After all, “this type of animal ethics does seem to depend on a rather naïve political theory: just change their minds and the policy will follow” (Wissenburg & Schlosberg, 2014; p.5).

Garner (2013) is equally unimpressed with this ‘naïve political theory’, instead opting to examine whether animals could and perhaps should instead be recipients of justice, basing himself on the works of Rawls (2020), specifically *A Theory of Justice*. First, Garner argues that, even though contractarian theories have previously denied animals the status of recipient of justice, there is nothing to stop them from being regarded as such, pointing to the similarities between animals, future generations, and marginal humans (Garner, 2013). Secondly, Garner argues that animals would benefit massively from being regarded recipients of justice, since the discourse of justice is more likely to achieve results than the discourse around moral duties. “Excluding animals from a theory of justice amounts, at best, to the claim that we have very limited direct duties to some animals, and, at worst, that we only have indirect duties to them” (Garner, 2013; p. 153). Schlosberg (2014) also tried to make the case for expanding justice outside the realm of purely human relations. Specifically, he claims that, while “justice is, obviously, a human construct, and applicable only to human behaviour…that does not mean that justice is applicable to only our relations with other human beings” (Schlosberg, 2014; p.88). As humans have had an undeniable impact on the rest of the natural world, the Anthropocene, the relationship between humans and the rest of nature should be seen as a relationship of justice. What said justice entails, depends on which approach to animal advocacy you follow.

The animal welfare ethic claims that humans and animals differ in ways that are morally relevant and does so by arguing that “normal adult humans possess a greater interest in life and liberty than most animals” (Garner, 2013; p. 154). Garner agrees with this to a certain point but challenges the following claim that therefore *all* human interests are more important morally than *all* animal interests. Specifically, an animal’s interest in avoiding suffering is, according to Garner, equivalent to a human’s interest in avoiding suffering. The approach focused on animal welfare and protectionism, as opposed to animal rights (though a non-utilitarian argument can be made that the animals, in this approach, have a ‘right not to suffer’), has however been rather successful in the political sphere, as laws concerning the conditions under which animals were kept for human ends increased in both quality and quantity (Wissenburg & Schlosberg, 2014). That said, this approach also has its pitfalls. O’Sullivan (2011), for example, shows a bias in the way humans treat some animals vis-à-vis

other animals. Specifically, this ‘internal inconsistency’ shows how animals that are used as a profit-making resource are generally treated worse than those that are not, and animals whose suffering is less visible to the public are treated worse than those whose suffering is more visible.

Alternatively, there are also more radical theories of animal advocacy, specifically abolitionism as inspired by the deontologist ideas of Regan (1984) or the mix of deontology and utilitarianism of Francione (2004), which claim that animals ought to be valued for themselves and not because of their value to humans, practically giving them equal status (and for some, rights) to humans. These abolitionist approaches tend to go too far, claims Garner: “the claim that it is our use of animals per se, irrespective of what is done to them whilst they are being used, that is the problem with the current way we regard animals is mistaken” (Garner, 2013; p. 154). The reason he gives for this is that it would ask too much of human beings, and that it fails to consider the fact that humanity has used animals since forever. According to Garner, it would be nigh on impossible to expect people to suddenly stop ‘using’ animals altogether. Of course, that does not mean that animals should not receive anything in return. Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011), for example, argue for the extension of citizenship to animals, the extent and shape of which depend on their relation to humans and their species-specific needs. Domesticated animals would be given citizenship, for example, while wild animals would be granted something closer to sovereignty. Obviously, when animals are considered co-citizens, this would then mean that they must be treated as such, “woven together in relations of interdependency, mutuality, and responsibility” (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; p.255). In this way, the extension of citizenship to animals goes further than what Donaldson and Kymlicka call ‘classic ART’s’ (animal rights theories), which claim that it is humanity’s obligation to ‘let animals be’.

Another way of approaching animal advocacy might be found in the capabilities approach. The capabilities approach was originally developed to protect the dignity of humans by “supporting and enabling the use of the capabilities one requires to perform the ‘functionings’ that make for a decent life” (Wissenburg & Schlosberg, 2014; p. 4). This was later (controversially, according to Wissenburg & Schlosberg, 2014) translated into an animal version by Nussbaum (2020), thus creating a list of capabilities that would need to be supported and enabled to ensure that animals could live a ‘decent life’. These include life, bodily health, and bodily integrity, the last of which would include the regulation of harsh,

cruel and abusive treatment, and the ensuring of access to sources of pleasure. Once more, as in Donaldson and Kymlicka's argument, these capabilities would be species-specific.

An aspect that seems to be rather salient in animal advocacy is the recognition of different needs for different species. This is also one of three recommendations Wissenburg makes for the progression of animal advocacy, when he argues that "animals need to be construed as the distinct species of animal that they are, not as quasi-humans" (Wissenburg, 2014; p.40). In other words, we should not try to impose the same kind of rights and/or duties upon non-human animals as the rights and/or duties we impose on humans. One aspect of this is that animal advocacy should not be approached by exclusively looking at individual animals, something which the welfare approach *is* guilty of. After all, harm or suffering often (though not exclusively) applies to individuals, such as individual farm animals not having enough space to roam somewhat freely. Instead, rights should be defined and assigned following a human estimation of what the 'good life' looks like for different species (as opposed to the human good life), as well as the social relations that different species exhibit. This could in turn mean that in some cases it might be best to assign rights to a group of animals, a family of animals, or even still individual animals. So instead of using the welfare approach, which is closest to an environmentalist and anthropocentric approach when compared to green political theory, Wissenburg (2014) argues that animal advocacy should instead embrace an approach closer to ecologism, one that is somewhere between the absolutist, citizenship and capability approach to animal advocacy, and which more naturally looks at non-human animals and the way they would want to live their version of the 'good life', in their own ecosystem. For further reading on animal advocacy: *Animal Politics and Political Animals* (Wissenburg & Schlosberg, 2018).

The context of veganism and ethical diets/lifestyles

As defined by The Vegan Society, veganism is "a philosophy and a way of living which seeks to exclude- as far as is possible and practicable- all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose" (Vegan Society, n.d. -a). However, meat-excluding diets have been around since long before The Vegan Society (Harper, 2012). For example, Greek philosopher Pythagoras is claimed to have extolled vegetarian diets and their health benefits, as well as teaching that the slaughtering animals 'brutalized the human soul'. At that time, a number of Asian religions including Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism already

had a long tradition of adhering to or promoting vegetarian diets through the lens of nonviolence, and possibly were a source of inspiration for Pythagoras (Clem & Barthel, 2021). It was during the Renaissance and Enlightenment that ideas surrounding vegetarian diets found some popularity again in Europe, as the rediscovery of ancient classical philosophy meant that philosophers once more dealt with issues such as the moral status of animals, with Descartes famously arguing animals were not sentient, while Locke argued for animals as intelligent feeling creatures (Vegetarian Society, n.d.). Then, in the 1800's, a vegetarian diet became popular among certain radical Christian groups in the United States and the United Kingdom, with The Vegetarian Society being formed in 1847 in England (Vegetarian Society, n.d.). Around this time, Dr William Lambe and Percy Bysshe Shelley were allegedly among the first Europeans to object to eggs and dairy on ethical grounds (Vegan Society, n.d. -b). In the 20th century, vegetarianism grew quickly, largely because of food-shortages and its appeal to counterculture, which followed from increasing awareness of the truth behind intensive factory farming introduced after the Second World War, but also through the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, who wrote extensively on vegetarianism (Vegetarian Society, n.d.). Veganism only truly took shape in 1944, however, when six so-called non-dairy vegetarians discussed their lifestyles and proposed to actively establish a new lifestyle: veganism. Following approximately the definition I cited earlier (it was somewhat amended and refined over the years), The Vegan Society was first registered in 1964 in the United Kingdom (Vegan Society, n.d. -b). Both vegetarianism and veganism then grew exponentially in the second half of the 20th century, following both an academic turn to the ethics of animal welfare (for example, through Peter Singer), and the ever-increasing awareness of environmental issues, of which vegetarianism and veganism were seen by an increasing amount of people to be part of the solution (Vegetarian Society, n.d.).

Veganism, at least in the contemporary West, evolved out of vegetarianism, but these are not the only ethical diets that exist. There are many different ethical diets, but I will name the largest and most interesting. The largest is an omnivorous diet, or diet including a wide range of food sources including animals, plants, and other organisms. Vegetarianism, which excludes eating meat. Pescetarianism, which follows vegetarian guidelines but includes sea-creatures. A vegan diet excludes all animal products, and lastly, there are even more radical diets, including fruitarianism, which is a diet that only consumes fruits, nuts, and some seeds.

What the diets all have in common, except perhaps some omnivores, and the non-mentioned carnivores, is the belief that causing unnecessary suffering, or cruelty, is morally

objectionable. As Regan argues: “It would be difficult to find anyone who is in favour of cruelty” (Regan, 1980; p.533). Cruelty, as Regan defines it, is ‘taking pleasure in causing another to suffer’. It is safe to say that Regan would agree that animals are included when he speaks of ‘another’, as ‘another’ seems to imply beings with moral status. That said, Regan also argues that ‘stopping cruelty’ is insufficient when it comes to stopping poor animal treatment. After all, not everyone feels pleasure in causing another to suffer, some seem to lack any kind of appropriate (pity or mercy, according to Regan) feelings (Regan, 1980). Furthermore, I might add that people can be unaware of causing any suffering. While these people might not always be morally wrong for not knowing, and therefore not cruel, perhaps they are morally wrong for not sufficiently researching before acting, for example buying ‘50%-off’ pork in their local supermarkets. Again, stopping cruelty is not enough to sufficiently increase animal well-being.

As for differentiating the ethical diets on the grounds of how they deal with cruelty, the questions of ‘who is caused to suffer’, ‘what exactly is suffering’ and ‘who matters morally’ seem to be the key. Assuming people have sufficient knowledge of food-production, omnivores would argue that exploiting and killing animals for food or resources causes no suffering at all, either because animals are not sentient and thus do not matter, or because they belief exploitation and killing is not cruel. Vegetarians would argue killing any animal for food would be cruel, while exploiting animals as resources for products like dairy, eggs, and leather is not cruel. Pescatarians would follow similar logic, though they argue sea-creatures do not matter morally, making it justifiable to kill and exploit them. Vegans go one step further than vegetarians, arguing that the exploitation of animals for animal products is also cruel. Lastly, fruitarians would add to vegans that killing and eating certain plants is cruel as well (essentially ascribing moral status to certain plants).

There are also non-ethical reasons to follow diets, of course. As I described in the introduction, one can follow diets for reasons of health, environmental reasons, or ethical reasons. Furthermore, one can follow, or refuse to follow, a diet because certain foods just taste too good, or certain products work too well. However, not much can be said about the reasons other than ethical. People who like the taste of meat or other animal products too much will not stop consuming or using animal products unless they find better alternatives, people who follow diets for health reasons will only keep following it if their diets truly are healthier, and people who follow diets for environmental reasons will only keep following it if their diets align with their environmental wishes. All of these reasons are strategic, rather

than being imperatives. And it is exactly this imperative which I aim to explore, through one of the main goals of both green political theory *and* animal advocacy: expanding the moral universe.

Chapter 3: Moral personhood and the ‘right’ not to be property

Things, persons, and the animal welfare position

My approach to answering whether and how veganism follows from political theory ultimately focuses on the animal ethics case, and more specifically the moral case for veganism. Ultimately, the goal of this approach is to effectively widen the moral universe to include any and all animals into personhood (giving them equal moral status to humans), making the use of animals as mere resources immoral and unjust, practically binding anyone who agrees with this approach to have to adopt a vegan lifestyle in order to live their lives according to a consistent moral compass.

In doing so, I follow Francione (2020), who paints the moral universe to include two categories: persons and things. Persons are entities that other persons can have moral obligations to, owing to them being inherently valuable: they matter, at the very least, to themselves. Perhaps important to mention here is that being a person in this definition does not equate to being human; much like apples and fruit, most, if not all, humans are persons, but not all persons are human. Things then are entities that do not have such intrinsic value. If they have value at all, it is extrinsic value: that value which persons accord to them. As such, Francione (2020) argues persons cannot have moral obligations to things, which he explains by giving the example of the Mona Lisa: “If we all came to the conclusion that the *Mona Lisa* were a terrible piece of art and decided to destroy it, we could do so without doing anything immoral to the painting itself.” (Francione, 2020; p.10-11). Of course, that is assuming the Mona Lisa is not sentient, but perhaps I am getting ahead of myself.

Until the nineteenth century, the common belief in the Western world was that animals were things and as such we had no moral obligations to them. Francione (2020) adds that we might still have legal obligations concerning animals, such as the obligation to not hurt your neighbour’s cattle, but that that is an obligation to your neighbour rather than to the cattle itself. This somewhat changed as in the nineteenth century people started to reject the notion of animals as things, instead assigning them a certain ‘quasi-person’ or ‘thing-plus’ status (Francione, 2010). People recognized that animals could suffer and wanted to minimize that suffering. Indeed, this was quite similar to the animal welfare position many people adhere to even today. Progress was made, and it seemed people were taking animal interests seriously, eventually leading to anticruelty laws concerning animals. This position, however,

does allow for these animals to be used and killed, as long as it is done painlessly. Bentham (1996) for example believed that animals live in the present and have no idea of what they would miss out on if their lives were taken, unlike humans. Furthermore, both Mill and Bentham (1987) argued that the supposedly superior mental faculties humans have over animals mean that, when balancing pain and pleasure, human interests should weigh heavier than animal interests, opening the door to ‘acceptable animal suffering’, as long as it benefited human’s sufficiently on balance.

This categorization of animals as ‘quasi-person’ or ‘thing-plus’ is directly related to the fact that animals are considered property, much like things. Whether they be cattle, pets or zoo animals, the majority of western society does not critically question the property status of animals. As long as we do not actively harm the animals we own, their lack of freedom and, often, untimely deaths are completely acceptable. This is underlined by the fact that in almost all cases of animal usage in the western world, it is wholly unnecessary, for example in achieving a healthy diet (Mayo Clinic, 2023). Many people do not think twice about their animal usage, however, regardless of how unnecessary it is. Francione (2020) takes it one step further and argues that we only protect the interests of animals (their interest in not suffering, specifically), when we ourselves benefit from it economically. Chickens, for example, are not protected under the Humane Slaughter Act in the United States, which requires that large animals slaughtered for food need to be stunned and unconscious when they are slaughtered, because chickens are far greater in number and much less valuable than larger animals, and it was therefore not considered economically efficient to protect them in the same way (Francione & Garner, 2010). Besides, mirroring the argument from the paragraph before, if there were ever to be any conflict between animal (property) and human (owner of property), humans would necessarily win out, as they are full persons and animals are not. Therefore, even in the best-case scenarios of the animal welfare position, in which animals are very well protected from what humans decide is inhumane, they never matter as much as humans do and are therefore never full persons.

Singer and Utilitarian animal personhood

The utilitarian approach, rather than believing that absolute and a priori moral rights are necessary, argues that the best way for a society to organize itself is by doing that which generates the most utility, generally by balancing pleasure and pain. This is generally done on

two levels: an intuitive level and a critical level (Hare et al., 1981). The intuitive level requires you to act *as if* persons do have certain rights as a general rule, as case-by-case calculations of utility would be too much work for every single decision one makes. The critical level is utilitarianism in its purer form, rejecting a priori rights. Peter Singer is one major animal advocate who falls into the utilitarian category. More specifically, he was considered a preference utilitarian for most of his works; he believed that what is morally just is what will best satisfy the preferences of all affected (Singer, 1975). In calculating the best outcome, interests of persons weigh heavier than interests non-persons. A person is defined as a rational and self-aware being that has a grasp over what it is to exist over a period of time (Singer, 2011). In other words, persons have intrinsic value, they have certain preferences (or interests), and importantly, they must have preferences for the future. One consequence of this definition is that not all humans are necessarily persons; for example, those humans who are severely cognitively disabled and have no preferences besides not suffering in this very moment are non-persons or quasi-persons and therefore weigh less heavily in creating utility (Kuhse & Singer, 1985).

What also follows from Singer's definition of a person, is that animals *can* be persons, as long as they possess self-awareness and display future-oriented behaviour. As will be crucial later on in this thesis, mere sentience is not enough for Singer. Some animals Singer would include as persons are great apes, dolphins, and a number of particularly intelligent birds, but he did also argue that it can depend on how far one is prepared to go in extending the benefit of the doubt (Singer, 2011). That said, he does claim that there is a qualitative difference between these non-human persons and human persons, claiming that human persons are much more likely to be focused on the future than non-human persons, meaning that the premature death of a cow is generally not as much of a tragedy as is the death of a human, "because whether cows live one year or ten, there is nothing they hope to achieve." (Singer, 2011; p.104). He does claim to reject speciesism, however, and argues that killing a fully abled chimpanzee would, in all likelihood, be worse than killing a profoundly disabled human who is not and could never be a person (Singer, 2011), once more underlining the fact that the degree of self-awareness and future orientation is truly the most important factor in deciding how much an animal's preferences weigh when balancing pain and pleasure. In short, Singer believes that there are levels to the concept of 'person', much like the 'quasi-persons' of the animal welfare position, though now humans can also be 'quasi-persons'.

Singer, being a utilitarian, does not believe killing or exploiting animals for food or other products is necessarily wrong or unjustifiable, as he rejects a priori moral rights, meaning that there are situations imaginable in which killing or exploiting could technically lead to the most possible utility. Some situations Singer sketches are in situations of poverty where killing for food is absolutely necessary for survival, situations in which there are overpopulations of certain animals in an area causing imbalance for other species in an ecosystem, and situations regarding traditional hunter-gatherer societies (Singer, 2011). Crucially, the more self-aware a certain animal is, and thus the more of a person it is, the more dire the situation ought to be before killing it would be justifiable. For example, I imagine Singer would allow me to kill just about anything or anyone if my survival absolutely depended on it, as long as whatever or whoever I kill would likely be less self-aware and/or have less opportunities to fulfil future preferences in their lives than I would if I were to kill them. Following this, cannibalism *can* be considered a morally justifiable outcome in some extreme situations. Alternatively, if I wanted to kill something or someone because it is something I need to do in honour of cultural tradition, I imagine Singer would allow me to only kill those animals that are, according to him, significantly lower on the scale of personhood than myself, as the positive utility I gain from killing that animal or human must outweigh the negative utility or suffering I inflict upon said animal. Finally, if I need to kill an animal which has absolutely no self-awareness and is thus not a person but rather a thing, Singer argues it is (practically) always justifiable to kill this animal, as long as it is done painlessly, because any pleasure I gain from it will lead to positive utility on balance.

Through those examples it becomes clear that the use and exploitation of persons is acceptable to Singer as long as, on balance, more utility is created. That said, Singer does express some doubts about how thinking of animals purely as food will encourage disrespect and mistreatment, arguing against the consumption of factory-farmed animals even when they are not persons (Francione, 2020). Following this, Singer supports those people who take care only to eat animals of which they know have had 'pleasant existences', including social groups suited to their behavioural needs, and were killed painlessly (Singer, 2011). He extends this acceptable animal consumption into the realm of free-range egg production, despite the fact that male chicks of laying hens are killed, and that the hens are sent to slaughterhouses as soon as they stop laying eggs (Francione, 2020). Interestingly, Singer does not follow the egg-logic when talking about dairy products such as milk and cheese, arguing

we should try to avoid these as the mothers and babies are separated in order to produce these products, while male babies are killed (Singer, 1975).

Singer describes himself as a ‘flexible vegan’ who will eat dairy and eggs when traveling or eating at a friend’s house, which mirrors his position when it comes to public advocacy for veganism and his general stance on minimizing the suffering of animals; he argues that conscientious vegans can be characterized as fanatical, and should be careful not to appear too strict, as it can make veganism come across as ‘too difficult’ for new people to adhere to (Singer, 2011). Furthermore, Singer argues it can take away from the perceived goal of veganism, as adhering strictly to vegan lifestyles can make veganism seem like a religious dietary law rather than an ethical and political decision, making it that much harder to persuade others (Singer, 1975). From a linguistic point of view, the idea of a flexible vegan makes no sense of course. If a flexible vegan is someone who only eats animal products ‘some of the time’, I would argue most people on earth are flexible vegans, some more than others (and funnily enough, the most ‘flexible’ vegans are those that eat the most animal products). From a moral point of view, the flexible vegans would also have to eat meat if it was served to them while traveling or eating at a friend’s house, as eating meat and eating other animal products are essentially equal from a moral point of view (more on that later). Crucially however, Singer’s argument here is a strategic one rather than a moral one, as is generally the case with utilitarians. After all, it is all about the balance of gains and losses of utility, and Singer seems to argue that the idea of strict veganism would ultimately scare away more people from ‘animal friendly’ diets than the more beginner-friendly ‘flexible veganism’.

Ultimately, Singer’s position is somewhat similar to the animal welfare approach, though Singer is more vindictive of killing and exploiting non-human persons. Certainly, those that have higher levels of self-awareness and future orientation count much more than they did in the animal welfare approach and are thus better protected from use and exploitation. One could even argue that, on the intuitive level, Singer might accept that there is something close to a right not to kill or exploit non-human animals for meat or other animal products. On the critical level however, this approximation of a right disintegrates, as in situations of conflict between persons Singer has no issue in allowing one person to exploit or even kill the other, as long as it maximizes utility. Consequently, Singer’s standpoint of not treating non-human persons which are similar to human persons any differently falls

apart, as Singer (2011) himself admits that human persons are often qualitatively different and count more, which means they are not actually similar at all.

Regan and an animal rights approach to animal personhood

Opposite the utilitarian approach, which emphasises utility above all else, the animal rights approach argues that there are some interests which should always be protected, no matter if violating them could possibly lead to more utility on balance. One major proponent of this approach in the field of animal advocacy is Tom Regan, who argues that all animals that are persons ought to be treated in a respectful way, which importantly excludes treating them exclusively as a means to an end, or exclusively as resources based on considerations of consequences (Regan, 1984). All beings who have this right are dubbed 'subjects of life' by Regan, who further splits this category in two: moral agents and moral patients. Moral agents are beings that have inherent moral value. In other words, their value does not come from whether or how much others value them but exists regardless because they value themselves. Furthermore, moral agents necessarily must be able to be held responsible for their actions, which means that the category of moral agents is practically made up only of normally functioning adult humans. Moral patients are very similar to moral agents in that they also have inherent value, however they cannot be held accountable for their actions. Some examples of moral patients include young human children, some mentally disabled humans and most non-human animals. Again, both moral agents and moral patients are 'subjects of life', and on either is or is not a subject of life, with no degrees of 'subject of life-ness' (Regan, 1984). To be a subject of life, beings must have beliefs and desires, a sense of the future, ways to perceive their beliefs and desires, the ability to act upon them, a psychological identity over time, and an independent sense of individual welfare (Regan, 1984). In other words, subjects of life must be able to recognize whether their lives are going according to their own current and future interests.

Compared to Singer's self-aware, future-oriented beings, Regan's subjects of life are somewhat similar, and they are treated with similar levels of respect. Both Regan and Singer frown upon using these beings exclusively as resources, which is to say exploiting or killing them, with the main difference being that Regan would never do so to his subjects of life, while Singer ultimately would if the calculation of utility demanded him to. Furthermore, Regan also employs a 'benefit of the doubt' approach arguing that, considering what is at

stake for the animals (their suffering and, possibly, their lives), it would be best to include more rather than less animals (Regan, 1984). Specifically, in 1984 Regan included fully abled humans and other mammals above the age of one, while later arguing that birds, and perhaps even fish, should be included, as they also show evidence of having a psychological identity over time (Regan, 2004).

The biggest difference then, besides the overarching difference between a utilitarian and a rights approach, seems to be in the fact that Singer works with degrees of personhood, allowing beings with higher degrees of personhood to encroach on the interests of beings with lower degrees of personhood, while Regan uses an 'is or is not' approach as to which beings have a right to not being used exclusively as a means to an end, meaning that all subjects of life are equal and cannot violate each other's rights. And, although Regan seems willing to incorporate more animals into the moral universe than Singer, the animals that are not subjects of life essentially fall into a 'no-person's land' (Francione, 2020). Specifically, those animals that might be conscious, but seemingly lack any connection between one conscious experience and another, lack any inherent value in Regan's approach. Essentially, they are then no more than things, which makes it "radically unclear as to how they could have rights, and in particular, a right to respectful treatment" (Francione, 2020; p.47). In other words, some animals matter morally, and those who do not are only 'protected' (and I use that word lightly) by a warning from Regan that exploiting and killing those animals *might* encourage social and cultural attitudes that lead to the violating of the rights of those humans and animals that *are* subjects of life (Regan, 1984).

Furthermore, Francione (2020) points out that Regan's categorical 'one either is or is not a subject of life' approach is actually inconsistent, considering Regan's claims that humans have greater opportunities to satisfy their interests than non-humans, and therefore take precedence in extreme situations. In an example in which four fully abled humans and one fully abled dog are on a lifeboat capable of carrying only four, Regan argues the dog must always be thrown overboard. Not because it is the best swimmer, but because its death is a qualitatively lesser harm than any of the human's deaths (Regan, 1984). Though Regan argues these considerations only come into effect in extreme situations, it does betray his earlier standpoint of all subjects of life being equal morally. He essentially agrees with Singer that there are degrees to personhood, or subject of life-ness, which even means that non-human animals' rights *can* be violated in favour of humans' rights, even if the situations in which this will be allowed are fewer than with Singer's approach (Francione, 2020).

Francione and a sentience-based approach to personhood

What is clear from the two previous approaches is that they are somewhat similar in their approach to expand the moral universe with animals that are proven to have cognitive characteristics beyond mere sentience, specifically cognitive characteristics which are similar to or approaching human mental characteristics, an approach which Gary Francione (2020) calls the 'similar minds' approach. Francione finds four faults with this approach.

The first fault Francione finds is that any discussion about animal minds ignores the fact we humans have no idea what the minds of animals look like. Considering that most animals other than humans, and after human intervention chimpanzees (Savage-Rumbaugh, Rumbaugh & Boysen, 1978), do not use symbolic communication, it is clear that there are significant differences between human and non-human minds. Even when we try to attribute human-like emotions and thoughts to animals and their behaviour, we do so only because we do not know what their own mental states are like, and this is the closest we feel we can get. As an example, Nagel (1974) wondered what it was like to be a bat and concluded that it was something the human mind simply cannot imagine. Because the way in which bats live their lives and perceive the world is so different from our own, we may never understand their subjective experience of living, which makes any tests we come up with to test whether they have similar enough minds to ours arbitrary (Francione, 2020). There is little to no doubt left however that animals are at the very least sentient, and that animals are subjectively aware (Rowlands, 2019). To quote Francione: "We can know that there *is* something that it is like to be a bat, or a dog, or a horse, or a chicken. We just cannot know *what* it is." (Francione, 2020; p.52). This is closely related to the second issue, which is that even if we *did* pretend to understand non-human consciousness, there would likely still not be any consensus over which animals do and which do not qualify for personhood. Singer and Regan, who are both crucial proponents of animal advocacy, already disagree over which animals do and do not qualify for personhood, as Regan includes all mammals over one year old as clear cases, while Singer only includes non-human great apes, dolphins, elephants, and some birds as clear cases. If two (flexible) vegans cannot even agree, it is very unlikely humanity would ever come to any agreement over which animals possess sufficient cognitive abilities to be considered persons, until we make significant scientific advancements. The third issue is that even if we *did* agree on which animals have similar enough minds to ours, and thus would be

considered persons, Francione argues that these non-human persons would only get an approximate of the level of protection that is reserved for human persons (Francione, 2020). Again, this can be seen when comparing Singer's and Regan's approach, as both will always prioritize humans over non-humans in extreme situations, regardless of how sophisticated some animals' behaviour is, and Singer would prioritize humans even in some non-life or death situations, such as in the case of tradition, or even if he happens to be eating at a friend's house (Singer, 2011). What this shows us is that anything that merely approximates equality, either in the utilitarian way of counting equally for utility, or in the animal rights way where rights of equals cannot be violated, is not enough to protect animals from exploitation. Non-human animals will never be considered full persons, equal to humans, unless they have humanlike self-awareness and personal identities, and the fourth issue Francione points out is that these characteristics should not be necessary for personhood. "Cognitive characteristics beyond sentience are certainly relevant for some purposes but they are completely irrelevant to whether nonhumans are persons and whether we may treat them exclusively as resources." (Francione, 2020; p.53).

Going back to the criteria Singer and Regan used for personhood makes clear as to why they do not feel sentience alone is sufficient for personhood. Regan argues that those animals that are not subjects of life have no inherent value, as they cannot recognize their own current or future interests and welfare, meaning that using them as mere resource does not actually harm them unless you inflict pain upon them. Singer argues that animals which cannot see recognize themselves as entities with a necessarily do not have any preferences for the future, and therefore taking their future away or limiting future endeavours is not immoral. Francione, however, argues that speaking of sentient beings with no interest in their future makes no sense, arguing that an interest in the future is a necessary characteristic of sentience. Taking influence from Brigid Brophy, Francione describes how sentience is essentially an instrument for the pursuit of happiness, the avoiding of pain, which are themselves ultimately instruments for survival (Francione, 2020). Surviving is what sentience was 'made' to accomplish. Therefore, taking away a being's life is necessarily to take away something of value from that being, regardless of whether that being has a similar degree of self-awareness or future-orientation to humans. This becomes evident in the struggle that every animal puts up when they recognize their life is being taken away, something Singer even recognized, when he argued that lives should only be taken instantly and painlessly, to avoid this struggle (Singer, 2011). But the point is not to find a way around the struggle, the

point is to recognize the source of the struggle. And the point of the struggle is that every sentient being has *at least* one future interest it wishes to fulfil: that of being alive in the very next moment. Surely, this 'connection to a future self', as Singer and Regan would call it, ought to be enough for any being to have inherent value and be assigned personhood.

This becomes abundantly clear when we look at human personhood. Most people assume that any human person with a conscious experience has an interest in life that ought to be protected, regardless of whether they are as self-aware or future oriented as most 'normally functioning' humans are. Examples are humans with late-stage dementia, who have little or no memory of the past, and no ability to make executable plans for the future. Both Singer and Regan would argue that these humans are not persons. According to Singer, these humans do not count equally for utility, and according to Regan, they ought to be thrown overboard if that would save 'normally functioning' humans on account of them having more opportunities for future satisfaction. Outside of philosophical discussions, however, this is not how we treat humans with late-stage dementia, or other humans that are philosophically not considered persons. Francione (2020) gives the example of Mary, a math teacher, and Fred, a human with late-stage dementia. Both live seemingly happy lives, enjoying every second, even if Fred does not have any connection to their past or future life. It is not always necessary to treat the two equally in all situations: if a local university needs a math teacher, it would likely be wrong not to appoint Mary. However, if the local hospital is desperately in need of an organ donor for a heart transplant, and both humans are suitable donors, would it be morally acceptable to kill Fred and use their organs? It would certainly not be acceptable to most to kill Mary and use *their* organs. But if killing Fred would allow another normally functioning human to live a long and happy life, both Singer and Regan would argue that it would indeed be morally acceptable, as Fred has no psychological identity over time. Francione argues, however, that Fred should not be used merely as a resource, because we assume that Fred values their life, following from the fact that Fred is sentient. At the very least, unless they communicate otherwise, we assume that Fred wants to be alive and conscious in the next moment, even if they have no further plans that they can remember or execute in that next moment. In Regan's terminology, though Fred is no moral agent who can be held responsible for their actions, Fred is certainly a moral patient with inherent value.

Once we start requiring humans to have anything more than a conscious experience we necessarily end up in an arbitrary mess, argues Francione (2020). As Singer and Regan both put heavy importance on identities over time, Francione wonders whether there is any

difference between someone with a working memory of one second and someone with a working memory of one minute. What would be an appropriate cut-off be to determine whether someone matters morally? Singer argues that a person must at least have preferences which can survive periods of unconsciousness, stating that for beings whose preferences do not survive periods of unconsciousness "killing does not thwart any more desires than putting the being to sleep" (Singer, 2011; p.86). Of course, this neglects the ever-present desire of any sentient being to keep on living for at least the next moment, refuting his argument. Besides, if a human has certain desires for one hour, and new desires for another hour, is that not enough to believe this human has an interest in staying alive? What would this mean for people who have a hard time focussing and making future plans? Once more, any attempt to require any characteristics beside sentience from humans to be persons are arbitrary.

There are only two situations in which it is morally acceptable to kill someone, either when someone explicitly communicates that they do not wish to continue living (and even then people tend to hesitate, which is supported by the fact that assisted suicide and euthanasia are still illegal in many places around the world), or in extreme situations in which we are as close to certain as possible that a human being has no cognitive experience and will never (re)gain cognitive experience. Only in the second case can we treat those humans as a thing or resource rather than person, but even in such extreme cases it might be better to err on the side of caution considering what is at stake, and considering the uncertainty of technological advancements humanity might make in the future. In conclusion, when we look at whether humans are persons or not, the question is not what a human's life is worth to others, the question is what a human's life is worth to themselves (Francione, 2020).

Then why *do* we require extra cognitive characteristics, besides sentience, from non-human animals to be considered persons? The only fair and non-arbitrary way to assign personhood to beings is through sentience, as that is a characteristic shared by all persons, subjects of life or any other term for describing beings that matter morally, while also being a characteristic which distinguishes all sentient beings from everything else on this planet. By using anything other than sentience to assign personhood, we treat relevantly similar beings in dissimilar ways (Francione, 2020). This is not to say that all sentient beings are equal in every single way, as per the example of the math teacher and human with late-stage dementia, but it is the only non-arbitrary and intelligible criterion to decide which beings have inherent value and should thus not be used as a mere resource. "All sentient beings are equal in that they all have an interest in not suffering and in continuing to live. If we think

animals matter morally, we have no choice but to stop using them exclusively as resources, however supposedly "humanely" we may do so, because that is to treat them as things." (Francione, 2020; p.66).

The 'right' not to be property

If all animals are sentient, and sentience is the only requirement for personhood, what exactly does this mean for the way we treat animals? Francione argues that all persons ought to be protected by at least one basic right: the right not to be (treated as) property (Francione, 2020). For humans, much has been said about why slavery is morally wrong, and Francione argues that ultimately, when humans are slaves, when they are property, they are no more than things. They do not possess inherent value, instead all value they possess is value others assign to them. Therefore, in situations where the interests of slaves conflict with the interests of owners, the owners will always win out, and the slaves will not count equally. As such, if all humans were to count equally, there needs to be a right not to be property for all humans, which protects humans from being used exclusively as a resource. Crucially, following this logic even utilitarians ought to at least recognize an approximation of the right not to be property as necessary, certainly on the intuitive level, as they do agree that all who matter morally ought to count equally in the balance of utility. The property status of persons makes equal consideration practically impossible, which is arguably one of the reasons Bentham rejected the institution of slavery (Francione, 2020). All of this does not mean that persons cannot use each other as means to an end, it just means that it must be in the interest of all persons involved, out of their own free will.

Following this, if all sentient beings are persons and matter morally, then animals must also obtain this right not to be property. Some have argued that the property status actually benefits animals, as it imposes a moral obligation for the owner to protect their property, and simultaneously it is an incentive for others not to harm someone else's property (Sunstein, 2001). However, the property status also allows the owner to override any rights of the property in situations of conflict, since owner and property are not equal when it comes to the moral universe. Any protection the property status grants is therefore only guaranteed in situations where there is no conflict. Besides, if the animals were not property but persons, the protection under property laws would be unnecessary, as they would be sufficiently protected under the basic right not to be property. Furthermore, the personhood status of

animals does not mean that they must be protected from all suffering, as some suffering happens naturally to all beings. It merely means that animals ought to be protected from all and any suffering caused *by* their being used exclusively as resource, as long as their use as resource is unnecessary, and therefore morally objectionable.

Chapter 4: The case for veganism

In the previous chapters I gave an insight into different current debates and topics in political theory, including green political theory and animal advocacy. Furthermore, I gave some context surrounding the vegan lifestyle, dove deeper into moral personhood and the status of animals within the moral universe, and argued that sentience is the only fair characteristic to judge whether any being ought to be considered a person, or in other words, to have inherent value. Finally, I argued that any being that is considered a person ought to have the right, or should be treated *as if* they have the right (for the utilitarians among us), not to be property, in order to matter or count equally to all other persons, human or non-human. The question that remains: To what extent would a vegan diet be morally required (or praiseworthy), when incorporated into green political theory and animal advocacy?

Veganism and green political theory

Within green political theory, veganism is difficult to see as an imperative. In environmentalism specifically, veganism does not necessarily follow if a vegan lifestyle is scientifically proven to be worse for the environment than a non-vegan lifestyle. This is, of course, on account of environmentalism being a 'means to an end' focussed theory, as environmentalism is primarily concerned with that which humanity owes itself, rather than what it owes non-human animals or nature (Baxter, 2004). In other words, if veganism does not help in achieving environmentalist goals, veganism does not follow. Furthermore, as environmentalists view non-human animals and nature as 'that which surrounds us', this will allow humans to continue to put their own interests above those of non-human animals if the two are in conflict (Youatt, 2016). Essentially, a vegan lifestyle is not a moral imperative based solely on environmentalist political theory. If veganism *is* the best lifestyle to achieve environmentalist goals, however, one could argue that following a vegan lifestyle is at least praiseworthy. Veganism would, in all likelihood, still not be an imperative, however, as the strategic nature of environmentalist political theory also means that environmentalists would probably prefer not to be too radical, as environmentalists tend to reject radical changes as opposed to more reformist approaches. This follows a similar logic to Peter Singer, when he claimed that 'flexible veganism' would perhaps be superior to normal veganism from a

strategic standpoint, as it would encourage more people to make changes in their lifestyles (Singer, 2011).

In approaching veganism from wider green political theory, which takes more cues from ecologism, the case for veganism as an imperative is also unlikely. The main aims of green political theory are viewing the relationship between humans and the natural world in an interconnected and anti-anthropocentric way, assigning inherent value to nature instead of assigning value based on the pleasure it brings to humans through production or consumption, believing in the changeability of human nature, and limiting material growth by overcoming unnecessary and unlimited industrialism, which is one of the main aims of the third wave of green political theory (Dobson, 2007). All of these aims would coincide with the anti-anthropocentric and anti-animal-industrialisation aims of veganism. If we consider strict veganism, however, there is no reason humans are not allowed to kill and eat animals that live in the same ecosystems. There are some caveats, of course, for example that animals must not be valued only as a source of food (or other animal products), but that we must recognize that these animals have inherent value. Another caveat is that humans should not kill or exploit animals to such a degree that it essentially destroys ecosystems, which is tied to the aim of limiting unnecessary industrialism. Furthermore, an argument could be made that the only way to supply humans with enough food in the future, with ever-growing populations, might be in non-animal-based foods (Matassa et al, 2016). This is, however, speculative, and no real reason to consider veganism an imperative as of now. At most, it seems green political theorists *could* find veganism to be morally praiseworthy as an attempt to undermine unnecessary and unlimited animal-based industrialism, but even then, there would be no reason to object to a hunter in the woods, killing animals only for their own survival, and only to the degree that they *need* meat to be healthy. After all, if the (human) hunter is also part of the ecosystem, then why should they be the only animal not to be allowed to eat meat?

Veganism and animal advocacy

Within the framework of animal advocacy, veganism as a moral imperative is much more likely, though not according to all approaches within this framework. For example, considering the animal welfare approach, which focuses on minimizing suffering for animals, veganism is also mainly a strategic consideration. Because non-human animals are

considered something in between things and persons, meaning that they matter morally but not equally to humans, in case of any conflict between humans and non-human animals, the humans essentially have the ‘right’ or are allowed to inflict some suffering through the exploitation or even killing of animals (Francione, 2010). That said, *if* following a vegan lifestyle were proven to be the best way to minimize animal suffering, animal welfarists *would* be obligated to be vegan. However, due to reasons similar to environmental political theory, this is not necessarily the case, as framing veganism as moral imperative could make converting people’s lifestyles too difficult, and not the best way to minimize animal suffering (Singer, 2011).

Singer’s utilitarian approach to animal personhood is slightly more positive towards veganism: the use of animals considered by Singer to be persons exclusively as resources is all but prohibited, certainly on the intuitive level of utilitarian analysis, which means that the exploitation and killing of many of the animals that we currently use for producing animal products and meat would not be allowed (Singer, 2011). Furthermore, Singer opposes factory-farming in general. What follows is that Singer himself is what he calls a ‘flexible’ vegan, who rarely eats meat or uses animal products, even arguing that ‘veganism does solve more of the ethical problems than any other position’ (Singer, 2009). However, he does not believe strict veganism is a moral imperative. Since Singer is a utilitarian, veganism will again, much like with environmental political theory and the animal welfare approach, be demoted into a strategic status, in this case only being a moral imperative as long as it means the balance of utility is maximized. Where this is not the case, there is no reason to be vegan. Combine this with the fact that Singer argues some animals are not fully persons, and thus do not count equally in the balance of utility, and it opens the door to some exploitation or killing of animals being the best outcome, as long as it creates enough positive utility for humans. Finally, the ‘convincing of others’ argument I specified in earlier paragraphs also plays a large role for Singer, which means that he himself will even eat animal products if they are served to him when eating out, as not to make veganism seem like a ‘religious dietary law’, once more relegating veganism to morally praiseworthy at best, and possibly even suboptimal.

Following the trend of being slightly more vegan-friendly, Regan’s animal rights approach to animal personhood argues that animal persons are quite simply not allowed to be used exclusively as a resource, as he recognizes them to have inherent moral value and in turn accords them (almost) equal rights to human persons (Regan, 1984). The caveat here is

that Regan still does not recognize *all* animals to be persons, which means that some animals are not protected by this right not to be exploited or killed, and furthermore, despite arguing that some animals should be assigned full personhood, he still believes human persons matter more, as they have more opportunities to satisfy their interests. What it boils down to, however, is that veganism would also not be a moral imperative for Regan, for as long as there are animals which he does not consider to be full persons, and since he argues sentience alone is not enough to qualify as a full person, veganism once more remains morally praiseworthy at best. That said, Regan does argue that exploiting or killing non-person animals might corrupt people's minds into thinking that it is acceptable to do so to animals who *are* persons, making veganism slightly more praiseworthy than in Singer's approach.

It is in the sentience-based approach to personhood that veganism ultimately follows as a moral imperative. It builds on the previous approaches by agreeing that any unnecessary suffering of moral patients caused by moral agents ought to be minimized. However, unlike the previous approaches, it argues that the only way to fairly assign personhood is to assign personhood to *all* sentient beings, as being sentient means that one automatically has at least a single interest it wishes to fulfil, which is staying alive until at least the very next moment in time. Furthermore, if all sentient beings are persons, they ought to be equal morally. The only way to achieve that is by granting any sentient being the right (or something approximating a right) not to be property, and not to be used exclusively as a resource, as any being that is someone's property will necessarily count less than their owner in times of conflict between the two. What follows is that if all sentient beings, human and non-human, count equally or have equal moral value, and all sentient beings have a right not to be property, any forced production of animal products under human property is necessarily objectionable. Does that mean that veganism, defined as "a philosophy of living which seeks to exclude- as far as is possible and practicable- all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose" is necessarily a moral imperative? I would argue it is.

Is vegetarianism not enough, however, to stop the exploitation and killing of animals? In other words, is it not possible to produce certain products such as eggs, dairy, and wool in a way that does not violate animals' rights not to be used exclusively as a resource? I argue it is not. One of the main aims of the sentience-based approach to animal advocacy, and in turn veganism, is to prevent *any* suffering incidental to being property, as the unnecessary use of animals exclusively as a resource, as well as their being property, is not treating them as

equals, which they *do* deserve. We would not find forcefully impregnating human women and taking away their babies, all for milk production, to be morally justifiable, nor would we find it morally justifiable to keep a group of humans in a field, cutting of their hair and selling it to make sweaters out of it, making profit off of them as if we own them. It would be morally objectionable if these people were to be our property, as they matter just as much as all other humans do morally, and we would find any suffering they undergo, no matter how little, during our exploitation of them to be morally reprehensible. And since I argue non-human animals ought to have equal moral status to humans, it would also follow that vegetarianism is morally reprehensible.

Then what about currently living domesticated animals, which would die if the entire world were to reject animal property in an instant? I would argue that, according to the sentience-based approach, and thus veganism, we have a responsibility to let them live out their lives, and care for them as much as is necessary. This might lead to some situations in which sheep, for example, need to be sheared, as domesticated sheep grow more wool than is comfortable and ideal for them. Obviously, once this wool is sheared, it would be completely irrelevant to the sheep themselves whether we throw it away or use it, besides possibly normalizing the use of wool, though that is currently already the case in large parts of the world. In a similar vein, any pets that are up for adoption *could* morally be adopted, as doing so would increase their quality of life drastically over being put in a shelter, where they would also be property but live comparingly worse lives with more suffering and less pleasure. That said, it would certainly be best to not encourage the procreation of any animals that cannot survive without human help, because these animals would necessarily *never* be equal to humans morally, as humans essentially decide whether and how they live or die. To either let them learn to survive on their own, or go extinct slowly but surely would be the only justifiable ways of fixing this moral inequality.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to examine whether and to what extent a vegan lifestyle would logically follow inside the frameworks of green political theory and animal advocacy. In my attempt to do so, I gave overviews on current debates of green political theory, animal advocacy, as well as some extra context into the history and concept of veganism. After that, I delved deeper into different approaches to moral personhood, and ultimately argued for a 'right not to be property' for any sentient being. Finally, I answered my research question, which read: *To what extent would a vegan lifestyle be morally required (or praiseworthy), when incorporated into green and animal advocacy?*

I concluded that inside green political theory, it is rather difficult to see veganism as morally required, with it being morally praiseworthy as a sound strategy to achieve environmentalist goals at best, and quite simply not necessarily following from an ecological ideology. From an animal advocacy frame, it appears that veganism is also often a strategy to achieve certain goals rather than an imperative, especially following an animal welfare approach which prioritizes minimizing animal suffering over the moral status of animals. Singer's utilitarian approach in turn prioritizes utility over the moral status of (some) animals, making veganism once more not an imperative but rather praiseworthy in most situations. Regan's animal rights approach accords personhood to most animals, but not all, which also stops veganism being a moral imperative, though he does argue that non-person animal use should be handled extremely carefully to not normalize the use of animals that *are* persons. Finally, from a sentience-based approach, veganism *does* seemingly follow as a moral imperative, certainly more than in any other approach, though there are a number of assumptions that still need to be made, most of which are already included in the definition of veganism, and exceptions such as the consumption of animals that died through no fault of our own. In short, veganism follows as a moral imperative *if* one can survive without using animal products, *if* one believes all sentient beings to have equal moral status, *if* one agrees that all moral persons have a 'right' not to be property, and *if* one wishes not to normalize the consumption and use of dead 'things', that is, animals (including humans) that died through no fault of our own.

As I said, there are some assumptions necessary. A first point in need of addressing lies in the definition of veganism, which states that it is only applicable when 'possible and

practicable'. I think this is extremely important to note, as not everyone has the same means for survival that I and others in the Western world have. While I am writing this thesis from the comfort of my own home, surrounded by many grocery stores and restaurants, there are many people who struggle to supply themselves and their families with food, and it would be blatantly unfair to expect them to care about why they morally should not eat or use animal products. Bluntly put, in situations of survival, all is fair. One could even argue that it holds up in situations less severe than life or death, for example situations of extreme poverty. It would be highly noble if a poor family chose to only consume vegan food and other vegan products, which are often more expensive than animal products, but it would be unfair to expect a family to prioritize veganism over a proper education, for example. Of course, here lie possibilities for governments to subsidize vegan products, making them cheaper than animal products, but this responsibility lies not with the individual.

Similarly, what about the hunter in the woods, as mentioned earlier? Well, if the hunter has no means of surviving off of anything other than the animals they hunt, it would be hard to object to their lifestyle. If the hunter *could* survive without killing or exploiting animals, however, they probably *should*, if they believe in the equal moral status of animals. But what if the hunter hunts animals because of cultural reasons? I argue that cultural reasons are not enough to warrant the use of animals exclusively as resource, as culture holds no inherent value, but is something that changes over time and is only valuable insofar as humans assign value to it. Essentially, the idea of a culture is not sentient, it does not wish to continue living, as it is not an actual living thing. Certainly, humans value culture plenty, and utilitarians like Singer would argue that humans could get so much value from it that animal exploitation and killing *could* in certain situations create the most utility, but I argue that no amount of value humans assign to their culture should ever override animals' rights not to be property or to be used exclusively as resource. If one *would* allow it, that would seemingly open the door to *literally anything* being morally acceptable on cultural grounds, which is not a situation I think is desirable or justifiable.

A second point that needs addressing is whether dead animals *can* morally be eaten or otherwise used. An interesting question, and I think the answer is yes, as a dead animal is no longer sentient, and therefore no longer a moral person with inherent value. However, to do so might normalize the idea of eating or using animal products, which is quite the opposite of what the moral imperative aims to achieve, so it should be done with extreme caution. After all, humans are extremely impressionable and easily jealous, and if one person happens to

find roadkill and eat it, the people around them are bound to also want to eat meat (I am vegan myself, and even I recognize that meat is extremely appetizing), and when people want something, they will go to great lengths to get it. I do not wish to imply all vegans are quick to let go of their moral compass, but I do want to prevent people from taking unnecessary road trips through densely populated natural parks in hopes of 'accidentally' stumbling upon deer. And do not forget that if dead animals are allowed to be consumed, the same would go for dead humans, as they would also be considered things rather than persons.

Finally, what if scientists were to find that plants and all other living things also are sentient? The simple answer would be that eating them would also be morally objectionable, except if it is absolutely necessary for survival. In this case, if we truly wanted to be morally consistent, we would all resort to being fruitarians, which is to only eat what naturally falls, or would fall, from plants. Of course, planting more and more fruit trees, while cutting down trees that do not produce enough fruits, would also likely be exploitation of those trees. Besides, if the entire world started depending on eating fruit, and possibly nuts, I imagine a lot more people *would* struggle to survive, in which case it would arguably be better to eat *one* animal instead of hundreds of plants, as both would be considered persons and thus count equally. Anyway, this is quite beyond the scope of this thesis.

As becomes clear, there are certain exceptions and assumptions necessary for veganism to follow as a moral imperative even in the most vegan-friendly approach, and I am sure there are others that I have missed, or that there are certain aspects that could do with more careful analysis, all of which could prove interesting for future research. Furthermore, for approaches such as the environmental, as well as a Singer and Regan's approach to animal advocacy, the question of the extent of veganism as a moral imperative essentially depends on how well it helps achieve the respective aims of said approaches: if veganism is indubitably, scientifically, proven to be the most environmentally friendly diet, the case for a vegan imperative becomes stronger. Similarly, if scientific (biology, I assume) research somehow manages to prove that *all* animals have more complicated conscience than we assume now, veganism can become as near to moral imperative even to Singer's and Regan's approach as I argue it is for the sentience-based approach.

As for the main aims of this thesis, however, I feel have sufficiently answered my research question, and I hope this thesis can help gain insight into the importance of veganism, not only in political theory, but also for veganism 'in the real world'. Regardless of

whether people agree with the sentience-approach, I feel veganism is at the very least a strategic way for people to minimize both their environmental impact, and the societal support for factory-farming, something many people have already felt negatively towards for some time (Williams, 2008). And let us not forget that some of the biggest reasons people do not follow vegan lifestyles are because they simply cannot afford it, find it too expensive, or are not aware of the suffering animals undergo for their pleasure (Bryant, 2019). Politics ought to play a role here, as I hinted towards earlier, in subsidizing vegan products, increasing awareness on the suffering of animals, and educating people on the morality of using animals exclusively as resources. Perhaps then veganism will be better understood, and in turn, more readily adopted by society.

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