

# **Animals and Ecology : Towards a Better Integration**

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*"Agriculture has become agribusiness after all. So the creatures that have been under our "stewardship" the longest, that have been codified by habit for our use, that have always suffered a special place in our regard -- the farm animals -- have never been as cruelly kept or confined or slaughtered in such numbers in all of human history. .... The factory farm today is a crowded stinking bedlam, filled with suffering animals that are quite literally insane, sprayed with pesticides and fattened on a diet of growth stimulants, anti-biotics, and drugs. Two hundred and fifty thousand laying hens are confined within a single building. (The high mortality rate caused by overcrowding is economically acceptable ; nothing is more worthless than an individual chicken)". (Williams 1997).*

## 1: Ecological Animalism versus Ontological Veganism

Many thinking people have come to believe that there is something profoundly wrong in commodity culture's relationship to living things. That something is expressed perhaps most obviously in the factory farms that profit from distorting and instrumentalising animal lives. In numerous books and articles I have argued that these abuses are enabled and justified by a dominant human-centred ideology of mastery over an inferior sphere of animals and nature.<sup>1</sup> It is this ideology that is expressed in economies that treat commodity animals reductively as less than they are, as a mere human resource, little more than living meat or egg production units.

People aiming to clarify and deepen their experience of contemporary abuse of animals and nature face an important set of choices in philosophical theory. In particular, they have to choose whether to opt for theories of animal ethics and ontology that emphasise discontinuity and set human life apart from animals and ecology, or theories that emphasise human continuity with other life forms and situate both human and animal life within an ethically and ecologically conceived universe. I represent this choice in this paper by comparing two theories that challenge –in quite different ways – the dominant ideology of mastery. Ontological Veganism is a theory that advocates universal abstention from all use of animals as the only real alternative to mastery and the leading means of defending animals against its wrongs. But, I shall argue, another theory which also supports animal defense which I shall call Ecological Animalism, more thoroughly disrupts the ideology of mastery, and is significantly better than Ontological Veganism for environmental awareness, for human liberation, and for animal activism itself.

Ecological Animalism supports and celebrates animals and encourages a dialogical ethics of sharing and negotiation or partnership between humans and animals, while undertaking a re-evaluation of human identity that affirms inclusion in animal and ecological spheres. The theory I shall develop is a context-sensitive semi-vegetarian position, which advocates great reductions in first-world meat-eating and opposes reductive and disrespectful conceptions and treatments of animals, especially in factory farming. The dominant human mastery position that is deeply entrenched in western culture has constructed a great gulf or dualism between humans and nature, which I call human/nature dualism. Human/nature dualism conceives humans as inside culture but 'outside nature', and conceives non-humans as outside ethics and culture. The theory I advocate aims to disrupt this deep historical dualism by resituating humans in ecological terms at the same time as it resituates non-humans in ethical and cultural terms. It affirms an ecological universe of mutual use, and sees humans and animals as mutually available for respectful use in conditions of equality. Ecological Animalism uses the philosophical method of contextualising to allow us to express our care for both animals and ecology, and to acknowledge at the same time different cultures in different ecological contexts, differing nutritional situations and needs, and multiple forms of oppression.

The theory I shall recommend rejecting, Ontological Veganism, has numerous problems for both theory and activism on animal equality and ecology. It ties strategy, philosophy and personal commitment tightly to personal veganism, abstention from eating and using animals as a form of individual action. Ontological Veganism insists that neither humans or animals should ever be conceived as edible or even as usable, confirming the treatment of humans as 'outside nature' that is part of human/nature dualism, and blocking any reconception of animals and humans in fully ecological terms. Because it is indiscriminate in proscribing all forms of animal use as having the same moral status, it fails to provide philosophical guidance for animal activism that would prioritise action on factory farming over less abusive forms of farming. Its universalism makes it highly ethnocentric, universalising a privileged 'consumer' perspective, ignoring contexts other than contemporary western urban ones, or aiming to treat them as minor, deviant 'exceptions' to what it takes to be the ideal or norm. Although it claims to oppose the dominant mastery position, it remains subtly human-centred because it does not fully challenge human/nature dualism, but rather attempts to extend human status and privilege to a bigger class of 'semi-humans' who, like humans themselves, are conceived as above the non-conscious sphere and 'outside nature', beyond ecology and beyond use, especially use in the food chain. In doing so it stays within the system of human/nature dualism and denial that prevents the dominant culture from recognising its ecological embeddedness and places it increasingly at ecological risk.

Human/nature dualism is a western-based cultural formation going back thousands of years that sees the essentially human as part of a radically separate order of reason, mind, or consciousness, set apart from the lower order that comprises the body, the animal and the pre-human. Inferior orders of humanity, such as women, slaves and ethnic Others ('barbarians'), partake of this lower sphere to a greater degree, through their supposedly

lesser participation in reason and greater participation in lower 'animal' elements such as embodiment and emotionality. Human/nature dualism conceives the human as not only superior to but as different in kind from the non-human, which as a lower sphere exists as a mere resource for the higher human one. This ideology has been functional for western culture in enabling it to exploit nature with less constraint, but it also creates dangerous illusions in denying embeddedness in and dependency on nature, which we see in our denial of human inclusion in the food web and in our response to the ecological crisis.

Human/nature dualism is a double-sided affair, destroying the bridge between the human and the non-human from both ends, as it were, for just as the essentially human is disembodied, disembedded and discontinuous from the rest of nature, so nature and animals are seen as mindless bodies, excluded from the realms of ethics and culture. Re-imagining ourselves as ecologically embodied beings akin to rather than superior to other animals is a major challenge for western culture, as is recognising the elements of mind and culture present in animals and the non-human world. The double-sided character of human/nature dualism gives rise to two tasks which must be integrated. These are the tasks of situating human life in ecological terms and situating non-human life in ethical terms. Ecological Animalism takes up both of these tasks, whereas Ontological Veganism addresses only the second.

Conventional animalist and conventional ecological theories as they have evolved in the last four decades have each challenged only one side of this double dualist dynamic, and they have each challenged different sides, with the result that they have developed in highly conflictual and incompatible ways. Although each project has a kind of egalitarianism between the human and nonhuman in mind, their partial analyses place them on a collision course. The ecology movement has been situating humans as animals, embodied inside ecological systems of mutual use, of food and energy exchange, just as the animal defense movement has been trying to expand an extension to animals of the (dualistic) human privilege of being conceived as outside these systems. Many animal defense activists seem to believe that ecology can be ignored and that talk of the food web is an invention of hamburger companies, while the ecological side often retains the human-centred resource view of animals and scientific resistance to seeing animals as individuals with life stories of attachment, struggle and tragedy not unlike our own, refusing to apply ethical thinking to the nonhuman sphere. As I will show, a more double-sided understanding of and challenge to human/nature dualism can help us move on towards a synthesis, a more integrated and less conflictual theory of animals and ecology, if not yet a unified one.

## 2: Non-Use or Respectful Use ?

Human/nature dualism constructs a polarised set of alternatives in which the idea that humans are above embodiment and thus any form of bodily use is complemented at the opposite extreme by idea that nonhumans are only bodies and are totally instrumentalizable, forming a contrast based on radical exclusion. Human/animal discontinuity is constructed in part by denying overlap and continuity between humans

and animals, especially in relation to food : non-human animals can be our food, but we can never be their food. Factory farmed animals are conceived as reducible to food, whereas humans are beyond this and can never be food. Domination emerges in the pattern of usage in which humans are users who can never themselves be used, and which constructs commodity animals in highly reductionist terms.

Although, by definition, all ecologically embodied beings exist as food for some other beings, the human supremacist culture of the west makes a strong effort to deny human ecological embodiment by denying that we humans can be positioned in the food chain in the same way as other animals. Predators of humans have been execrated and largely eliminated. This denial that we ourselves are food for others is reflected in many aspects of our death and burial practices -- the strong coffin, conventionally buried well below the level of soil fauna activity, and the slab over the grave to prevent anything digging us up, keeps the western human body (at least sufficiently affluent ones) from becoming food for other species. Sanctity is interpreted as guarding ourselves jealously and keeping ourselves apart, refusing even to conceptualise ourselves as edible, and resisting giving something back, even to the worms and the land that nurtured us. Horror movies and stories reflect this deep-seated dread of becoming food for other forms of life : horror is the wormy corpse, vampires sucking blood and sci-fi monsters trying to eat humans ("Alien 1 and 2"). Horror and outrage usually greet stories of other species eating live or dead humans, and various levels of hysteria our nibbling by leeches, sandflies, and mosquitoes.

Upon death the human essence is seen as departing for a disembodied, non-earthly realm, rather than nurturing those earth others who have nurtured us. This concept of human identity positions humans outside and above the food web, not as part of the feast in a chain of reciprocity but as external manipulators and masters separate from it. Death becomes a site for apartness, domination and individual salvation, rather than for sharing and for nurturing a community of life. Being food for other animals shakes our image of human mastery. As eaters of others who can never ourselves be eaten in turn by them or even conceive ourselves in edible terms, we take, but do not give, justifying this one way arrangement by the traditional western view of human rights to use earth others as validated by an order of rational meritocracy in which humans emerge on top. Humans are not even to be conceptualised as edible, not only by other humans, but by other species.

But humans are food, food for sharks, lions, tigers, bears and crocodiles, food for crows, snakes, vultures, pigs, rats and goannas, and for a huge variety of smaller creatures and microorganisms. An Ecological Animalism would acknowledge this and affirm principles emphasising human-animal mutuality, equality and reciprocity in the food web ; all living creatures are food, and also much more than food. In a good human life we must gain our food in such a way as to acknowledge our kinship with those whom we make our food, which does not forget the more than food that every one of us is, and which position us reciprocally as food for others. This kind of account does not need to erect a moral dualism or rigid hierarchy to decide which beings are beneath moral consideration and are thus available to be ontologised as edible, and does not need to treat non-animal life

as lesser. Its stance of respect and gratitude provides a strong basis for opposing factory farming and for minimising the use of sensitive beings for food.

A more egalitarian vision of ecological embodiment as involving not apartness but mutual and respectful use has been articulated by many ecological thinkers and indigenous philosophies. Thus Francis Cook, elaborating the ecological philosophy of Hua-Yen Buddhism, writes “I depend upon [other] things in a number of ways, one of which is to use them for my own benefit. For I could not exist for a day if I could not use them. Therefore, in a world in which I must destroy and consume in order to continue to exist, I must use what is necessary with gratitude and respect.... I must be prepared to accept that I am made for the use of the other no less than it is made for my use ... that this is the tiger’s world as well as mine, and I am for the use of hungry tigers as much as carrots are for my use”.<sup>ii</sup> A corollary of accepting that one is for the use of the other is willingness to share one’s region with predators of humans and to support the restoration to their original range of the many endangered species of large animals human dominance is eliminating from the face of the earth.

Ontological Veganism’s treatment of use and instrumentalism could hardly be a greater contrast ; it extends vegetarianism, prohibiting animal use as food, to veganism, prohibiting any kind of use. For Ontological Vegans all the problems of animal reduction, of denial of animal communicativity, individuality and basic needs in factory farming stem from a simple cause -- ontologising them as edible. It is a curious and paradoxical feature of Ontological Veganism that it basically shares the taboo on envisaging the human in edible terms, and that its strategy for greater equality is the extensionist one of attempting to extend this taboo to a wider class of beings. The paradox is that it was precisely in order to give expression to such a radical separation between humans and other animals that the taboo on conceiving humans as edible was developed in the first place.

Carol Adams in various books and articles (1990; 1993; 1994) provides a very useful and thorough account of the commodity concept of meat as a reductionist form and of associated food concepts and practices as sites of domination.<sup>iii</sup> However, Adams goes on to present the reductions and degradations of animals she describes so convincingly as the outcome of ontologising them as edible (Adams 1993 p 103). But saying that seeing earth others as edible is responsible for their degraded treatment as "meat" is much like saying that ontologising human others as sexual beings is responsible for rape or sexual abuse. Ontologising others as sexual beings is not correctly identified as the salient condition for rape or sexual abuse ; rather it is the identification of sexuality with domination. Similarly, it is the identification of food practices with human domination and mastery that underlies the abusive use of food animals. The complete exclusion of use denies ecological embodiment and the important alternative of respectful use.

Thus Carol Adams argues that any use of the animal other (for food or anything else) involves instrumentalising them (1993, 200), stating that “the ontologising of animals as edible bodies creates them as instruments of human beings” (1994, 103). Instrumentalism is widely recognised (although often unclearly conceptualised) as a feature of oppressive

conceptual frameworks, but instrumentalism is misdefined by Adams as involving any making use of the other, rather than reductive treatment of the other as *no more than* something of use, a means to an end.<sup>iv</sup> This definition of instrumentalism as the same as use is not a viable way to define instrumentalism even in the human case -- since there are many cases where we can make use of one another for a variety of purposes without incurring any damaging charge of instrumentalism.<sup>v</sup> The circus performers who stand on one another's shoulders to reach the trapeze are not involved in any oppressively instrumental practices. Neither is someone who collects animal droppings to improve a vegetable garden. In both cases the other is used, but is also seen as more than something to be used, and hence not treated instrumentally. Rather instrumentalism has to be understood as involving a reductionist conception in which the other is subject to disrespectful or totalising forms of use and defined as no more than a means to some set of ends.

### 3: Discontinuity, Culture and Nature : Demonising and Exceptionalising Predation

By affirming that we ourselves are subject to use and that all uses of others must involve respect for individual and species life, an Ecological Animalism can affirm continuity of life-forms, including humans. An Ontological Veganism that occludes the possibility of respectful use and treats food as degraded, must assume that only things that are not morally considerable can be eaten. It is then tied to an exclusionary imperative, requiring a cut-off point to delineate a class beneath ethical consideration, on pain of having nothing left to eat. Such positions retain the radical discontinuity of Cartesian dualism, repositioning the boundary of ethical consideration at a different point (higher animals possessing 'consciousness'), but still insisting on an outsider class of sensitive living creatures virtually reduced to machine status and conceived as 'beyond ethics'. It is a paradox that, although it claims to increase our sensitivity and ethical responsiveness to the extended class of almost-humans, such a position also serves to reduce our sensitivity to the vast majority of living organisms which remain in the excluded class beyond consideration.

Ontological Veganism's subtle endorsement of human/nature dualism and discontinuity also emerges in its treatment of predation and its account of the nature/culture relationship. Predation is often demonised as bringing unnecessary pain and suffering to an otherwise peaceful vegan world of female gathering, and in the human case is seen as an instrumental male practice of domination directed at animals and women. But if instrumentalism is not the same as simply making use of something, and even less thinking of making use of it (ontologising it as edible), predation is not necessarily an instrumental practice, especially if it finds effective ways to recognise that the other is more than "meat". Ecologically, predation is presented as an unfortunate exception and animals, like women, as always victims : fewer than 20% of animals, Adams tells us, are predators, (Adams 1993, 200) – a claim that again draws on a strong discontinuity between plants and animals. In this way it is suggested that predation is unnatural and fundamentally eliminable. But percentage tallies of carnivorous species are no guide to the importance of predation in an ecosystem or its potential eliminability.

An Ecological Animalist could say that it is not predation as such that is the problem but what certain social systems make of predation. Thus I would agree that hunting is a harmful, unnecessary and highly gendered practice within some social contexts, but reject any general demonisation of hunting or predation, which would raise serious problems about indigenous cultures and about flow-on from humans to animals. Any attempt to condemn predation in general, ontological terms will inevitably rub off onto predatory animals (including both carnivorous and omnivorous animals), and any attempt to separate predation completely from human identity will also serve to reinforce once again the western tradition's hyperseparation of our nature from that of animals, and its treatment of indigenous cultures as animal-like. This is another paradox, since it is one of the aims of the vegan theory to affirm our kinship and solidarity with animals, but here its demonisation of predation has the opposite effect, of implying that the world would be a better place without predatory animals. Ontological Vegans hope to avoid this paradox, but their attempts to do so, I shall argue, are unsuccessful and reveal clearly that their worldview rests on a dualistic account of human identity.

The main move Ontological Vegans make to minimise the significance of predation and block the problematic transfer of their anti-predation stance from humans to animals is to argue that human predation is situated in culture while animal predation is situated in nature. (Adams 1993, 206; Moriarty and Woods 1997). Human participation in predation therefore cannot be justified as participation in integral natural process, as philosophers like Holmes Rolston have justified it. Against simple naturalism, Moriarty and Woods argue that (p 399) "meat eating and hunting are cultural activities, not natural activities". They claim that (p398) "our distinctively human evolutionary achievement -- culture-- has strongly separated us from nonhuman nature. We have found freedom from ecosystems ... [and] are no longer a part of ecosystems". (p 401). Because meat-eating is influenced by culture it can be considered to "involve no participation in the logic and biology of natural ecosystems" (p401). For Ontological Vegans, human hunting and meat-eating has an entirely different status from the "instinctual" predatory activity of nonhuman animals – so much so that they treat the term "predation" as inadmissible for the case of human hunting.

There are several further problems and paradoxes here. One paradox is that animal activists who have stressed our continuity with and similarity with animals in order to ground our obligation to extend ethics to them now stress their complete dissimilarity and membership of a separate order, as inhabitants of nature not culture, in order to avoid a flow-on to animals of demonising predation. Embracing the claim that humans "don't live in nature" in order to block the disquieting and problem-creating parallel between human hunting and animal predation introduces a cure which is worse than the disease and which is basically incompatible with any form of ecological consciousness. The claim that humans are not a part of natural ecosystems is on a collision course with most fundamental point of ecological understanding because it denies the fundamental ecological insight that human culture is embedded in ecological systems and dependent on nature. It also denies an important insight many students of animals have rightly stressed-- that culture, learning and choice is not unique to the human and that nonhuman

animals also have culture. In fact Woods and Moriarty's solution rests on a thoroughly dualistic and hyper-separated understanding of human identity and of the terms 'nature' and 'culture'. In order to attain the desired human-animal separation, nature must be "pure" nature, "strictly biological", and culture conceived as "pure" culture, no longer in or of nature : an activity is no longer natural if it shows any cultural influence, and culture is completely disembedded from nature, "held aloft on a cloud in the air".

Of course Ontological Vegans are right to object to any simple naturalisation of human hunting and meat-eating. On the kind of account I have given, both the claim that meat eating is in nature rather than culture and the counter-claim that it is in culture and therefore not in nature are wrong and are the product of indefensible hyper-separated ways of conceptualising both these categories that are characteristic of human/nature dualism. It is only if we employ these hyper-separated senses that the distinction between nature and culture can be used to block the flow-on problem that demonising human predation also demonises animal predation. On the sort of account I have given above, any form of human eating ( and many forms of nonhuman eating) is situated in both nature and culture -- in nature as a biologically necessary determinable and in a specific culture as a determinate form subject to individual and social choice and practice. Food, like most other human (and many nonhuman activities) is a thoroughly mixed activity, not one somehow throwing together bits of two separate realms, but one expressing through the logic of the determinate-determinable relationship one aspect of the "intricate texture" of the embedment of culture in nature. Both naturalising and culturalising conceptual schemes are inadequate to deal with the problem, both sides of this debate deny the way our lives weave together and criss-cross narratives of culture and nature, and the way our food choices are shaped and constrained both by our social and by our ecological context.

#### 4: Universalism and ethnocentrism.

Ontological Veganism assumes a universalism which is ethnocentric and fails to allow adequately for cultural diversity and for alternatives to consumer culture. Carol Adams' work, for example, follows a methodology that universalises a US consumer perspective and hopes to deal with other cultures as exceptions to the "general" rule. Universalism is supplemented by an exceptionalist methodology which dispenses excuses for those too frail to follow its absolute abstentionist prescriptions. Deviations from the norm or ideal "may occur at rare times", when justified by necessity (Adams 1994, 103). A methodology which deals with universal human activities such as eating in terms of US-centred cultural assumptions applicable at most to the privileged 20%, treating the bulk of the world's people as "deviations" or exceptions, is plainly highly ethnocentric.

In addition, Adams strives to assimilate all possible animal food practices to those of commodity culture in what seems to be an effort to deny that any cultural difference involving non-instrumental forms of eating animals can exist. Thus her discussion of the cultural context of the 'relational hunt' (a crude attempt to model non-instrumental indigenous food practices) criticises those who refuse to absolutise the vegan imperative,

declaring that “there is, in general, no need to be eating animals” (1994, 103).” She goes on to suggest that eating an animal after a successful hunt, like cannibalism in emergency situations, is sometimes necessary, but like cannibalism is morally repugnant, and should properly be marked by disgust. Clearly indigenous foraging cultures are among those that would fall far short of such an ideal.

Ontological Veganism is based around a mythical gender anthropology which valorises western women's alleged "gathering" roles in contrast to demonic "male" hunting. A cultural hegemony that falsifies the lives of indigenous men and women underlies the strong opposition it assumes between “male hunting” and “female gathering”, the sweeping assumption that "women" do not hunt and that female-led "gathering" societies were vegetarian or plant-based (Collard 1989 ; Kheel 1993, 1995; Adams 1994, 105, 107). The assumption is that active, aggressive men hunt large animals in what is envisaged as a precursor of warfare, while passive, peaceful women gather or nurture plants in a precursor of agriculture. This imaginary schema reads contemporary western meanings of gender and hunting back in a universal way into other cultures, times and places, assuming a gendered dualism of foraging activities in which the mixed forms encountered in many indigenous societies are denied and disappeared. Thus Adams urges us to base our alternative ideals not on hunting societies but on “gatherer societies that demonstrate humans can live well without depending on animals’ bodies as food”. (1994 , 105). But no such purely vegan “gatherer” societies have ever been recorded! Adams denies the undeniable evidence from contemporary indigenous women's foraging practices that they often include far more than collecting plants. Australian Aboriginal women's gathering contributes as much as 80% of tribal food, but women’s “gathering” has always involved killing a large variety of small to medium animals. This is not a matter of speculation about the past, but of well-confirmed present-day observation and indigenous experience.

In assuming that alternatives to animal food are always or “generally” available Adams universalises a context of consumer choice and availability of alternatives to animal food which ignores the construction of the lifeways of well-adapted indigenous cultures around the ecological constraints of their country, which do not therefore represent inessential features of ethnic cultures in the way she assumes.<sup>vi</sup> The successful human occupation of many places and ecological situations in the world has required the use of at least some of their animals for food and other purposes : the most obvious examples here are places like the high Arctic regions, where for much of the year few vegetable resources are available, but other indigenous "gathering-hunting" cultures are similarly placed -- for example Australian Aboriginal cultures, whose survival in harsh environments relies on the finely detailed knowledge and skilful exploitation of a very wide variety of seasonally available foods of all kinds, essential among which may be many highly-valued animal foods gathered by women and children.

This gives rise to another paradox : the superficially sensitive Ontological Vegan can implicitly assume an insensitive and ecologically destructive economic context. From the perspective of the “biosphere person” who draws on the whole planet for nutritional needs defined in the context of consumer choices in the global market, it is relatively

easy to be a vegan and animal food is an unnecessary evil. But the lifestyle of the biosphere person is, in the main, destructive and ecologically unaccountable. From the perspective of the more ecologically accountable “ecosystem person” who must provide for nutritional needs from within a small, localised group of ecosystems, however, it is very difficult or impossible to be vegan : in the highly constrained choice context of the ecosystem person some animal-based foods are indispensable to survival. Vegan approaches to food that rely implicitly upon the global marketplace are thus in conflict with ecological approaches that stress the importance of ecological accountability and of local adaptation.

A similarly ethnocentric and inadequately contextualised methodology is applied by Ontological Vegans to the issue of the ecological consequences of animal food.(Adams 1993, 214). The cultural hegemony and universalism openly espoused by leading vegan theorists assimilates all planetary meat-eating practices to those of North American grain-feeding and its alternatives, and is insensitive to the culturally variable ecological consequences involved in the use of other animals as food. Animal defence theorists stress the ecological and health benefits of eating lower down the food chain. (Robbins 1987, Adams 1993, 214, Waller 1997). These principles may be a useful general guide, but they are subject to many local contextual variations that are not recognised by Ontological Vegans. In some contexts, for instance that of the West Australian wheat belt, the ecological costs of land degradation (including costs to non-human animals) associated with grain production are so high that eating free-living, low-impact grazing animals like kangaroos must at least sometimes carry much lower animal and ecological costs than eating vegetarian grains. A vegan diet derived from this context could be in conflict with obligations to eat in the least harmful and ecologically costly way.

Veganism does not necessarily minimise ecological costs and can be in conflict in some contexts with ecological eating. Yet vegan universalists employ a set of simplistic arguments which are designed to show that the vegan way must always and everywhere coincide with the way that is least costly ecologically. Both David Waller and Carol Adams quote as decisive and universally-applicable statistics drawn from the North American context comparing the ecological costs of meat and grain eating. This comparison is supposed to show grain is ecologically better and dispose of the problem of conflict between animal rights and ecological ethics. But these universalist comparisons assume that grain production for human use is always virtually free of ecological costs or costs to animal life (whereas it is in many arid land contexts highly damaging to the land and to biodiversity). They ignore the fact that in much of the world animals used for food are not grain-fed, and that the rangeland over which they graze is often not suitable for crop tillage agriculture.

### 5: Suitability for Activism

The appeal of Ontological Veganism largely depends on the false contrast it draws between veganism and commodity culture traditions of animal reduction and human/nature dualism, that is between no use at all and ruthless use based on domination and denial. But this is in effect a choice between alienation and domination. Adams'

ethnocentric ontological veganism succeeds in this false contrast because its conceptual framework obscures the distinction between meat and animal food, where meat is a determinate cultural construction in terms of domination, and animal food is a cultural determinable. Meat is the result of an instrumentalist-reductionist framework, but the concept of animal food allows us the means to resist the reductions and denials of meat by honouring the edible life form as much more than food, and certainly much more than meat. If we must all, including humans, be ontologised ecologically as edible, as participating in the food web as a condition of our embodiment, that does not mean we must all be ontologised reductively as meat. Food, unlike the reductive category of meat that does not recognise that we are all always more than food, is not a hyperseparated category and does not have to be a disrespectful category.

This distinction enables Ecological Animalism to stand with Ontological Veganism in affirming that no being, human or nonhuman, should be ontologised reductively as meat, and hence in opposing reductive commoditisation of animals. But unlike Ontological Veganism it can combine the rejection of commoditisation with the framework of ecology and cultural diversity by maintaining that all embodied beings are food and more than food, that is, with an ecological ontology. A careful contextualisation of food practices provides much better guidance for activism than a culturally hegemonic universalism. Ecological Animalism can provide a strong basis for opposing the "rationalised" commodity farming practices that reduce animals to living meat and are responsible for the great bulk and intensity of domestic animal misery in the modern west. It is of necessity more flexible, less dogmatic and universalist, but can still vindicate the major activist concerns of the animal defence movement. It would require us to avoid complicity in contemporary food practices that abuse animals, especially factory farming, and can agree there are plenty of good reasons for being a vegetarian in modern urban contexts where food sources are untraceable or treatment of animals known to be cruel or reductive. But for Ecological Animalism, vegetarianism would not represent any disgust at 'corpses' or ontological revulsion against our mutual condition as food, but rather protest at the unacceptable conditions of animal life and death in particular societies that reduce animals and commodify their flesh as 'meat', in terms that minimise their claims on us and on the earth.

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<sup>i</sup> See especially Plumwood 1993, 2000 and 2002.

<sup>ii</sup> Cook 1977.

<sup>iii</sup> For useful contributions on reductive treatments and vocabularies see also Midgley 1984, Noske 1989, Kheel 1993, 1995, Gaard 1993, Plumwood 1993, 2002, Adams and Donovan 1995, Warren 1990, 2000.

<sup>iv</sup> See Adams 1994 p 103.

<sup>v</sup> On Kant's basically confused treatment of this problem see my discussion in Plumwood 1993 ch6.

<sup>vi</sup> On the construction of Australian indigenous cultures around their ecological contexts, see Rose 1996.