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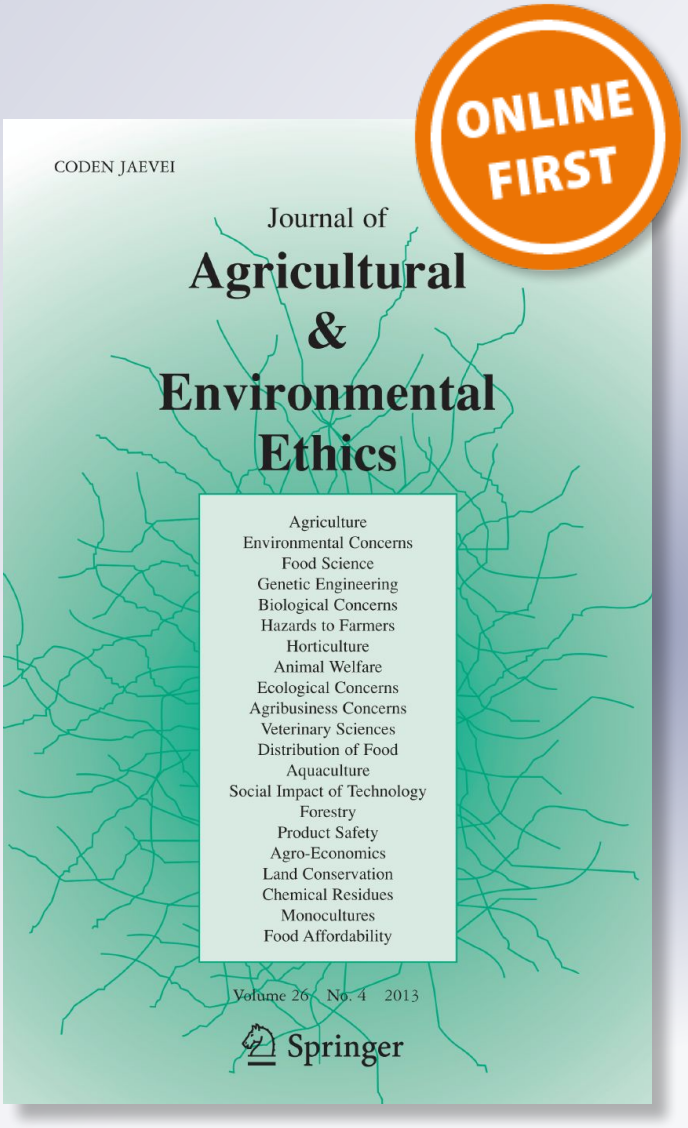

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ARTICLES

Veganism and Children: A Response to Marcus William Hunt

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Abstract

In this paper I respond to Marcus William Hunt's argument that vegan parents have pro tanto reasons for not raising their children on a vegan diet because such a diet is potentially harmful to children's physical and social well-being. In my rebuttal, first I show that in practice all vegan diets, with the exception of wacky diets, are beneficial to children's well-being (and adults as well); and that all animal-based diets are potentially unhealthful. Second, I show that vegan children are no more socially outcast than any other group. In other words, veganism does not harm the lives of children. Having considered several studies, I show that the moral reasons that vegan parents may have for raising their children on a vegan diet significantly outweigh the reasons for raising their children on an animal-based diet. Thus, I conclude that parents have a moral obligation to raise their children on a vegan diet.

Keywords Veganism · Children · Animal ethics · Nutrition · Social life

Introduction

Hunt (2019) argues that parents have pro tanto reasons for not raising their children on a vegan diet because "a vegan diet bears a risk of harm to both the physical and the social well-being of children." (p. 269). Hunt argues that the moral reasons that he suggests are as strong as those that vegans have for raising their children on a vegan diet. In this paper, I discuss Hunt's argument and show that (1) the assertion that a vegan diet bears any physical and social risk to children is a misconception, (2) the moral reasons that vegan parents may have for raising their children on a vegan diet outweigh the reasons for raising their children on an animal-based diet, and (3) vegan parents have strong reasons that generate a moral obligation to raise their children on a vegan diet.

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Hunt's argument is the following (I paraphrase):

1. Raising children on a vegan diet can harm children physically and socially.
2. Parents have good moral reasons to avoid harm to their children's physical and social well-being.
3. Therefore, parents have good reasons to not raise their children on a vegan diet.

The question is, "do the offered moral reasons give vegan parents a justification to avoid raising their children on a vegan diet?" To answer this question first I would like to make an important observation. Hunt speaks generically about "a vegan diet." Veganism is not in principle a diet, but rather an ethical view according to which eating animal-based food, using animal byproducts, and other forms of animal exploitation should be shunned as much as possible. Since the only aspect in common to vegans is the avoidance of animal-based food, there isn't one specific approach to diet, but many. One problem in particular with Hunt's argument is that it purports to show that a vegan diet bears the risk of damaging vegan children's health; however, his argument lacks examples of vegan diets that bear such a risk. Hunt concedes that an appropriately planned vegan diet can meet all the nutritional requirements. His worry is that since not all vegans follow an appropriately planned vegan diet, those who don't run the risk of harming their children's health. The problem is that Hunt fails to provide concrete examples of vegan diets that satisfy nutritional requirements and those that do not. Thus the argument eventually collapses on itself.

Health Concerns

When a diet is referred to as vegan, it is not clear in what that diet consists. For example, drinking champagne for breakfast, eating French fries and vegan chocolate for lunch, and marshmallows, beer, and scotch for dinner is a vegan diet. Such a diet would likely lead to some health problems. However, what parent would raise a child on that sort of diet? Assume now that animal products were added to the aforementioned diet. Would it be any more healthful? It seems clear that it would not. Thus, it is clear that a poorly planned vegan diet may be just as bad as a poorly planned meat and dairy diet. In other words, animal products do not have magical power that make a diet healthful. Thus the suggestion that only vegans must be careful planning their diets is irrelevant because all people, regardless of their diet, must plan well what they eat. However, considering the overwhelming scientific evidence that consumption of animal-based food is unhealthful, perhaps even a poorly planned vegan diet (perhaps not as bad as the one previously described) is still more healthful than a diet that includes meat.

Hunt is worried about the appropriateness of vegan diets: "However, when we shift from talking about the in principle appropriateness of well planned vegan diets to talking about the actual dietary practices of vegans" we see that premise 1 is true or plausibly true (p. 271). Hunt implies that following a well-planned vegan diet is quite difficult or that a well-planned vegan diet requires special planning.

Let's now look at why Hunt worries about a poorly planned vegan diet. He writes, "Vegan diets that are poorly planned are widely acknowledged to be liable to deficiencies of vitamins A, B12, D, iodine, calcium, iron, and various fatty acids such as eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) (Amit 2010), as well as creatine and taurine (Cofnas 2018)." (p. 271). These assertions are inaccurate. Going over all the micronutrients mentioned here is quite a task; thus, I will try to briefly describe what is inaccurate about Hunt's reading of the science. Take vitamin A for example. First of all, in determining the amount of a specific nutrient, it must be taken into account the question of absorption. For example, a U.S. Department of Agriculture article titled "B12 Deficiency May Be More Widespread Than Thought" states the following, "Nearly two-fifths [40%] of the U.S. population may be flirting with marginal vitamin B12 status… the researchers found no association between plasma B12 levels and meat, poultry, and fish intake …It's not because people aren't eating enough meat. The vitamin isn't getting absorbed." (McBride 2000).

Secondly, vitamin A is not found exclusively in animal products. It is found in optimal amounts in a variety of ordinary fruit and vegetables, such as potatoes, broccoli, cucumbers, apples, corn, bananas, and many more. In fact, it would be almost impossible to suffer from vitamin A deficiency on any vegan diet. The key point here is that premise two of Hunt's argument states that "Parents have pro tanto moral reason to not make their child bear a risk of harm to their well-being." In other words, the assumption is that parents concerned about the well-being of their children make sure not to raise their children on diets that can cause harm. Such parents, presumably, are informed enough to know the very basic rules of thumb of nutrition, which are very simple, i.e., consume fresh fruit and vegetables in abundance. There is a reason why the proverb goes, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" and not "a steak a day…"

No vegan parents concerned about the well-being of their children would raise their children on beer and fritters. By using the term "well-planned," Hunt suggests that vegans must plan their diets like astronauts must plan their space meals. A well-planned vegan diet does not consist of exotic or hard-to-come-by food. It is quite simple to follow a well-planned vegan diet because it is a diet rich of fruit, vegetables, grains, and legumes. Hunt seems to imply that meat eaters automatically get all essential nutrients, but vegan must be very careful. But then how do we explain that meat eaters suffer from vitamin A deficiency? It is quite clear from scientific evidence that vitamin A deficiency is in no way endemic among vegans. According to Higdon (2000),

> In developing countries, vitamin A deficiency and associated disorders predominantly affect children and women of reproductive age. Other individuals at risk of vitamin A deficiency are those with poor absorption of lipids due to impaired pancreatic or biliary secretion and those with inflammatory bowel diseases, such as Crohn's disease and celiac disease. (para. "Deficiency")

In other words, the scientific literature recognizes that vitamin A deficiency is prevalent among people in developing countries, and especially people who suffer

from certain diseases that prevent absorption of vitamin A. There is no evidence that vegans are more susceptible to vitamin A deficiency than meat eaters, unless they are malnourished; but in such a case, malnourishment is the culprit and not a vegan diet.

Regarding B12 deficiency, as discussed above the first point is absorption. That is, many meat eaters do not absorb B12 no matter how much meat and animal products they consume. Just as in the case of vitamin A, vitamin B12 deficiency is not endemic among vegans. Rooke (2013) writes,

> The Framingham Offspring study found that 39 percent of the general population may be in the low normal and deficient B12 blood level range, and it was not just vegetarians or older people. This study showed no difference in the B12 blood levels of younger and older adults. Most interestingly there was no difference between those [who] ate meat, poultry, or fish and those who did not eat those foods. The people with the highest B12 blood levels were those who were taking B12 supplements and eating B12 fortified cereals. (para. 2)

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that neither animals nor plants manufacture vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is the name commonly used to refer to a byproduct of bacteria. This is a very important point that is seldom acknowledged, that is, no animal or plant manufactures B12. As Dr. Rooke points out, "In order to maintain meat a source of B12 the meat industry now adds it to animal feed, 90% of B12 supplements produced in the world are fed to livestock." (para. 4). Consequently if farm animals are given B12 supplements, vegan parents who are concerned about B12 absorption, as well as the morality of killing animals, have good reasons to not raise their children on a diet that includes meat and animal products. The most sensible way to avoid B12 deficiency is to get B12 supplements, which are relatively inexpensive and most importantly not derived from animal source. In other words, if animals themselves require B12 in the form of supplements, what is the point of eating meat to get B12? Vegan parents can easily give their children B12 supplements just like farmers give B12 supplements to their animals. No middleman is needed.

With regard to vitamin D, the assertion that vegans run the risk of vitamin D deficiency is inaccurate. There are three points to be considered. First, as in the case of many other micro nutrients, some people for a variety of reasons cannot properly absorb vitamin D. Second, vitamin D synthesis occurs as a result of the sun's ultraviolet rays hitting cholesterol in the skin cells. In normal conditions, the body stores the vitamin for quite a long time (Wacker and Holick 2013). Third, upon review of pertinent literature, it is evident that there is "no association between s25(OH)D concentrations and vegetarian status in either our black or white cohorts. This would indicate that factors other than diet have a greater effect on s25(OH)D than vegetarian status." (Chan et al. 2009, p. 1689S).

Once again, there is scientific evidence that both meat eaters and vegans or vegetarians may have lower-than-recommended levels of vitamin D because most foods contain a lower-than-desirable amount of the vitamin. There is no evidence that vegans in particular are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. Most importantly, there is no evidence that any long-term vegans became ill or died as a result of low vitamin D. Vitamin D is critical for both vegetarians and meat eaters because it is not

easy to obtain, except from sun exposure. Therefore, many foods, such as cereal and juices, are fortified. At any rate, any conscientious vegan parents concerned about their children's having desirable levels of vitamin D can easily make sure that their children get adequate sun exposure or sunlamps exposure or use of supplements. Having considered that desired level of vitamin D can be obtained through exposure to sunlight, sunlamps, certain vegetables, fortified foods, and inexpensive supplementation, parents do not need to raise their children on a diet that includes animal products.

Regarding "iodine, calcium, iron, various fatty acids, creatine and taurine" rather than discussing them individually, it is sufficient to make the following four remarks. First, once again, people may be deficient in any of these micronutrients for a variety of reasons irrespective of whether they follow a vegan diet. Consider iodine. Animals do not manufacture iodine; only plants do. Sea vegetables are rich in iodine. Again, why the middleman? Also, there are other fruits and vegetables that contain reasonable amounts of iodine. Furthermore, one may obtain iodine from table salt and supplements. Most importantly, according to the National Institute of Health, the people who may not get enough iodine are "People who do not use iodized salt, pregnant women, people living in regions with iodine-deficient soils who eat mostly local foods, and people who get marginal amounts of iodine and who also eat foods containing goitrogens [such as cruciferous vegetables]" (NIH 2016). Note that vegans and vegetarians are not included in the list because there is no evidence that only vegans are at risk of not getting enough iodine.

Also, considering all the anti-vegan propaganda, and how popular veganism is nowadays, meat eaters cannot wait to prove vegans wrong. The fact is that no case of vegans, adults or children, dying or becoming ill as a result of following vegan diets has yet occurred. The explanation, in my view at any rate, is simple: it is almost impossible not to get the required nutrients from a vegan diet and thrive. One would have to be malnourished, and thus malnourishment would be the cause of health problems and not veganism.

As already mentioned, it is quite easy to meet optimal amounts of these critical micronutrients through a simple vegan diet and, in some cases, supplementation. Hunt seems unnecessarily preoccupied with the notion of appropriately planned diet: "There is a lack of information about the extent to which vegan parents appropriately plan their children's diets." (p. 271). But how complicated is to follow an appropriate vegan diet? Virtually all nutritionists and nutrition experts will recommend the same principle, that is, eat plenty of fresh fruit, legumes, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and whole grains, and avoid processed and refined foods (Mayo Clinic 2018, Planning a healthy vegetarian diet). This principle does not apply only to vegans, but also to meat eaters. Any diet lacking in fresh fruit and vegetables will lead to health problems. The addition of meat and animals products will not make the situation better.

Hunt mentions taurine and creatine as potential dangers for vegans. This is a rather perplexing assertion in light of the fact that taurine and creatine are naturally synthesized in the body. Cats need meat because their bodies do not make Taurine, but humans do not. Taurine is known as a conditionally essential amino acid and creatine is a non-essential amino acid; the body can synthesize both taurine and creatine (Lourenco and Camilo 2002; Greenhaff 1997). Consequently,

it is not necessary to eat a meat-based diet to ensure proper levels of taurine and creatine. Therefore, Taurine and creatine are in no way potential dangers for vegans.

Finally, as a general remark on a diet's potential harm to children's well-being, it must be considered that health sciences are now positive about the harm that animal-based diets can cause and the benefit of vegan diets. I will list the most salient examples:

The Cancer Council of New South Wales states, "There is now a clear body of evidence that bowel cancer is more common among those who eat the most red and processed meat. Processed meat consumption has also been strongly linked to a higher risk of stomach cancer." (Cancer Council n.d., Meat and Cancer).

According to Favid (2014), a visiting scientist at Harvard School of Public Health, "One serving a day increment in red meat intake during adolescence was associated with a 22% higher risk of premenopausal breast cancer and each serving per day increment during early adulthood was associated with a 13% higher risk of breast cancer overall." (para. 2).

According to the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, "Milk and other dairy products are the top source of saturated fat in the American diet, contributing to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and Alzheimer's disease. Studies have also linked dairy to an increased risk of breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers." (Health Concerns About Dairy n.d., para. 1).

A study published in *The Journal of Nutrition* concludes, "this study showed that higher intakes of fish were significantly associated with higher incidence rates of breast cancer." (Stripp et al. 2003, p. 3664).

According to Turner-McGrievy et al. (2017), "Both clinical trials and observational research indicate an advantage to adoption of PBDs [Plant-Based Diets] for preventing overweight and obesity and promoting weight loss." and "More than two-thirds (69%) of U.S. adults are overweight." (p. 369).

According to Daniel et al. (2011) "Given the plausible epidemiologic evidence for red and processed meat intake in cancer and chronic disease risk, understanding the trends and determinants of meat consumption in the U.S., where meat is consumed at more than three times the global average, should be particularly pertinent to researchers and other public health professionals aiming to reduce the global burden of chronic disease." (p. 1).

According to Orlich et al. (2013) "Vegetarian diets are associated with lower all-cause mortality and with some reductions in cause-specific mortality…These favorable associations should be considered carefully by those offering dietary guidance…Vegetarian dietary patterns have been associated with reductions in risk for several chronic diseases, such as hypertension, metabolic syndrome, diabetes mellitus, and ischemic heart disease (IHD)." (pp. 1230–1231).

According to a recent study, "Among US adults, higher consumption of dietary cholesterol or eggs was significantly associated with higher risk of incident CVD [cardiovascular disease] and all-cause mortality in a dose–response manner. These results should be considered in the development of dietary guidelines and updates." (Zhong et al. 2019).

Furthermore, many Americans fail to reach required micronutrient intake. About 75–80% of the US population do not consume adequate intake of fruit and vegetables (Fulgoni et al. 2011, 2012).

Finally, as aptly stated by Grant (2017),

> We humans do not need meat. In fact, we are healthier without it, or at least with less of it in our diets. The Adventist Health Studies provide solid evidence that vegan, vegetarian, and low-meat diets are associated with statistically significant increases in quality of life and modest increases in longevity. The world that we inhabit would also be healthier without the commercial meat industry. Factory farms are a waste of resources, environmentally damaging, and ethically indefensible. It is time to accept that a plant-predominant diet is best for us individually, as a race, and as a planet." (p. 744)

In light of the foregoing scientific findings, it is evident that premise 1a of Hunt's argument (Raising children on a vegan diet can harm children physically) is implausible. I want to highlight two reasons. The first is that the studies that Hunt cites are inconclusive for the reason I explained above. Namely, research shows that micronutrient deficiencies are not endemic among vegans due to their diets. In fact, as the studies cited above (Fulgoni et al. 2011, 2012) indicates, many Americans do not obtain required micronutrients intake and 75–80% of the US population do not consume enough fruit and vegetables. These percentages are frightening, but what's important to understand is that they do not refer to vegans. The simple explanation is that a meat-based diet does not guarantee proper intake of micronutrients, or optimal health for that matter. Thus, Hunt's assertion that vegan diets in particular bear the risk of harming the health of children is quite inaccurate.

Consequently, on the grounds of overwhelming scientific evidence showing that consumption of meat and animal products can be unhealthful, while plant-based diets are healthful, parents who are committed to veganism on the basis of whichever ethical reasons have more than good reasons to raise their children on a vegan diet. The second reason is perhaps anecdotal, but nonetheless valid. Hunt seems to overstate his case. If the evidence that he presents suggests that a vegan diet can bare the risk of harming children (or adults for that matter), one would expect to see evidence of children who became ill or died as a result of a not-well-planned vegan diet. The fact is that there is no such evidence. Considering the importance and popularity of this discussion, if such evidence were available by now it would have gone viral. On the contrary, as stated above, there is important scientific evidence showing that vegans are healthier than meat eaters.

Social Concerns

Next we turn to premise 1b (Raising children on a vegan diet can harm children socially). According to Hunt, "By eating a vegan diet, in particular on those occasions where their peers are eating animal products (a playdate, school lunches, etc.), children are likely to be identified as vegans by their peers and to identify themselves as such." (p. 275). He describes the social interactions that vegans

experience in life as "mental whiplash." Namely, the probing and questioning and comments of others are uncomfortable for adults and even more uncomfortable for children. This seems a bit of an exaggeration, especially if it is considered that people follow disparate diets for ethical, health, or religious reasons. The point is that it would seem implausible that ethical vegan parents raised their children on an animal-based diet to avoid the risk of their children's being questioned about veganism. People, unfortunately, criticize or make uncomfortable comments about, or question, other people's religious beliefs, sexual orientation, diet, and more. It does not follow, however, that one should conform in order to avoid uncomfortable comments.

Furthermore, vegan children and non-vegan children alike have all sorts of diets: kosher, Halal, nuts-and-seeds free, dairy-free, paleo, gluten-free, and the list goes on. There is no particular reason to believe that vegan children would be the target of ridicule and scorn just because they are vegans. At any rate, ethical vegan parents may easily avoid possible issues by instructing their children not to announce that they are vegans and the reason why. If asked, one may answer in several different ways: I do not like/I am allergic to meat/dairy/I do not consume animal products according to my religious beliefs. There is no reason why a child who chooses to avoid eating animal flesh for ethical reasons should identify himself or herself as a vegan. At any rate, in this age of diversity, children may choose to identify themselves as vegans and announce it to their classmates and friends. This may be an opportunity for children and educators to teach others about veganism, animal ethics, and sustainability. Nowadays, school children are exposed to children who wear a hijab or a kippah or a turban, those who have two mothers or two fathers, those who cannot eat dairies or peanuts—the list is endless. Veganism is no more "strange" than anything else. Judging by the enormous interest in veganism, it seems unlikely that children will be retaliated against for being vegans. (Hancox 2018).

The next point, according to Hunt: "In omnivorous societies many cultural festivities (Christmas, Passover, Eid al-Adha, Halloween, birthdays) involve the consumption of food containing animal products." In addition to holidays, people socialize at events that involve food consumption, such as birthday parties and other events. Since vegan children participate in these events, their participation requires certain accommodations that aren't always possible. Here I want to make three points: first, as already mentioned, people have all sorts of diets. It seems unlikely that every single person at a social gathering eats everything that is served. Some people may be diabetic, have celiac disease, be kosher, and more, and consequently would require certain accommodations. A Jain child or a Muslim child or a celiac child would require accommodations. Second, as the expression goes, "birds of a feather flock together," it is likely that vegan parents frequent vegan friends and may tend to participate in social events that are vegan or vegan-friendly. Third, regarding religious celebrations, generally when religious people participate in religious gatherings they are not concerned about food, but rather about (among other things) worshipping God and enjoying each other's company. Christmas, Passover, and other dinner celebrations are typically events organized by families and close friends. While it is true that food is an important aspect of such celebrations, it is hard to imagine that close friends and family members would have any reservations about accommodating

children's dietary requirements. Furthermore, it is quite easy for vegan parents to prepare vegan food and bring it to the celebration.

Consider the following scenario Jason is a vegan child who is invited to his classmate Nashon's birthday party. Nashon's family is all about meat and dairies. At the party, Nashon's parents serve pepperoni pizza and cupcakes. Is Jason's social life ruined? Not at all. Jason's parents can easily arrange vegan pizza and cupcakes to be served—that's assuming that Jason likes pizza and cupcakes and goes to the party in order to eat them. Moreover, most likely, there will be children who will not be able to eat pepperoni pizza and cupcakes for a variety of reasons, children allergic to nuts, celiac children, kosher children, lactose intolerant children, diabetic children, children who require halal food, and the list goes on. Thus, there is no valid reason to assume that the social lives of vegan children in particular will suffer or that vegan children are destined to be social outcast.

Also, there is a lack of reliable studies to determine whether and to what extent vegan children's social lives may be affected by their being vegans. What is available is the testimony of vegan parents and personal experience. These generally do not count high in a scientific study. Nevertheless, they give a sense of whether an argument of the sort proposed by Hunt is valid. These reports confirm my predicted line of argument that a vegan life is not complicated or a daunting experience for children. Barwick (2016) is a vegan and an animal rights activist. She has interviewed a number of vegan parents about the social aspects of veganism on the lives of their children. Here are a few examples:

> Jesse, The Bronx, NYC: "Well, for us, like maybe the first one or two times when we went to parties when he was young we didn't know what to do, so it was a little bit hard. So what we've learned to do is we bring our own foods where we go. We pack his lunch with fruits, vegetables, maybe a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.
>
> And a lot of our friends and family have almost—we've turned the tables on them where they're not completely vegan but they'll, like my family, they'll cook vegan meals when we come over. At least have a certain plate or two vegan, and you know, we've rubbed off on a lot of people, so it hasn't been that hard. If we go to a birthday party, we'll bring him a little piece of vegan cake or something just so when they whip out the cake, we can have his piece ready or a cupcake, or something. It's all about preparation. It's not that difficult.
>
> Shantelle, Cambridge, MA: A lot of times, if you bring vegan cupcakes and people try them and say, "oh I really can't even tell the difference." It'll open up that door for conversation and it can encourage others to try that lifestyle, too.
>
> So, I always try to look at it as a challenge, but as a good challenge because it's an opportunity to educate someone else and show people that this lifestyle–you know–we don't miss anything in this lifestyle. We still have our cookies, we have snacks, we have cakes and ice cream. We have everything that everyone else has except we don't have the guilt.
>
> Theresa: We always bring our own food, and fortunately we have friends that are very accommodating and they prepare vegan food for us… And I have a few non-vegan friends that introduced me to vegan products that I didn't know

existed. But, yeah I try and make something really special like cupcakes or something mouth-watering. Usually the meat eaters eat it all and there's nothing left for us, though.
Kara: It's quite a good opportunity, actually, taking some really nice vegan treats to show people just how nice the food is that we eat, you know.
Raffaela, Lisbon, Portugal: It is not difficult at all because I always bring food with me for both of us. And whenever there is a special occasion, like a birthday party, I make sure that he has something that he really enjoys to eat like pretty cupcakes that I make, popcorn, chocolate cookies. He's always happy.
Martin, London, England: For my youngest son–you always speak to the parents at parties and I always make him aware of what sort of food will be there. So if he goes to a party and they're doing a birthday cake, he knows what ingredients are in there and he doesn't want it because of that. If he did want a cake later in the day we could go home and make him one. And a better one, as well.
Crystal, Virginia: I feed them first. I make sure they're full. And then, I pack them food. And then, when they go to parties I ask the host if there's anything I can bring. Like, if they have cakes and cupcakes, I will make my own vegan cupcakes and have them bring it so they can eat with the rest of the kids. Fruits and vegetables are not a hassle. You don't even have to cook it, just slice it up, wash it, we can eat it all day. So, that's what we do, especially with AJ. I just pack him some snacks and lunch and make sure he's fed. He doesn't complain.
Ellen, Maui, Hawaii: So if we start deciding to serve parties, serve food at our own parties that we have, with healthy, delicious food, it can become the norm. We are the first ones that can create change. We have to be the ones, if we want the world to change in any way, if we want it to be normal for our kids to eat delicious, healthy food, we have to be the ones to start it. (Barwick 2016)

What emerges from these testimonies is that it is not complicated at all to raise children on a vegan diet. Most important, vegan children's social lives are not harmed by their being vegans. Parents nowadays are very sensitive about children's dietary restrictions. At birthday parties, it is easy for hosts to prepare vegan food for their guests and for vegan parents to bring vegan food to the parties. As a parent points out, if the child wants a particular food, he or she knows that he or she can have it at home. Hunt is worried that some vegan parents are afraid of being identified as those who always bring their own snacks. (Hunt, p. 277). I want to make two points: one, as I mentioned a number of times, vegans are not the only ones who bring their own snacks. Children have many different food restrictions due to health conditions, religious, or ethical reasons. Second, it is peculiar to suggest that vegan parents should give up their deepest moral convictions and choose not to raise their children on a vegan diet just to avoid uncomfortable questions or avoid bringing snacks to birthday parties. It is like saying that there is pro tanto moral reason for Jain parents who live in the US to not raise their child as a Jain because Christianity is the prevalent religion and children may be questioned and ridiculed by others. A moral conviction such as ethical veganism should not be bargained with or given up for practical reasons.

Oddly Hunt writes, "a tofurky [sic] seems destined to be a somewhat inferior substitute for a turkey in terms of its cultural and aesthetic cache" (p. 277). This is just a biased assertion. Also, it evinces a naïve understanding of veganism. Not all vegans eat or like Tofurkey. For example, neither my children who have been vegans since they were born nor I eat Tofurkey. Children who choose to be vegans understand the moral reasons for veganism (Hussar and Harris 2010). Many people are in fact vegans because they cannot stand even the idea of a dead bird on a table. Thus, a vegan child may actually regard a real turkey as inferior to Tofurkey. Also, Hunt's argument exaggerates the importance of food and assumes that children (and adults) participate in events just to eat. However, religious and social events are meant as opportunities for friends and families to be together and enjoy each other's company. Similarly, children don't go to events with the specific goal to eat, but rather to spend time with their friends and play.

On the Equal Strength of (4) and Moral Reasons for Veganism

Lastly, Hunt's argument extends to (4): "This pro tanto moral reason is plausibly as strong as the pro tanto moral reason some vegan parents have, given their preferred moral framework, to raise their child on a vegan diet." and to conclusion (5): "that these parents may plausibly find it morally permissible to raise their child on a non-vegan diet." (pp. 281 and 287). Hunt is quite right that ultimately the question of raising children on a vegan diet or not rests on the fact that "Many vegans are non-philosophers. This means that in many cases they have no elaborate philosophical framework, such as Regan's, from which they derive moral reasons for being vegan." (p. 286). The problem is that (4) is not as plausible as the moral reasons that vegan parents have to raise their children on a vegan diet. Thus, (3) and (4) fail to support the conclusion (5), that parents have plausible reasons to find it morally permissible to not raise their children on a vegan diet. Even though most vegan parents are not philosophers with sophisticated moral theories in their arsenals, they have facts that generate moral reasons against feeding their children animal products.

Hunt suggests that non-philosopher vegan parents might rely upon the following principles:

> R1 "Do not harm or kill animals, except when necessary".
> R2 "Do not harm or kill animals, unless refraining from doing so causes you or yours a significant harm".
> R3 "Do not harm or kill animals for the sake of trivial pleasures, such as the gustatory".
> R4 "Do not harm or kill animals, unless they pose some harm to you". (p. 286)

However, according to Hunt "many such principles, such as R1-3, do not seem to generate moral reasons against feeding one's child animal products." (p. 287). Consider the following principles upon which non-philosopher vegan parents may rest their choice to be vegans:

(1) Intensive animal farming causes a great deal of unnecessary suffering to animals (Wicks 2011). Furthermore, intensive animal agriculture involves

unnecessarily violent practices. We do not wish to support those practices, and consequently we do not want our children to support those practices. We refuse to contribute to animal suffering; and consequently refuse to raise our children on an animal-based diet for the same reason. Therefore, we have a moral obligation to raise our children on a vegan diet.

(2) Animal agriculture is a leading cause of environmental degradation (Cameron and Cameron 2017; Koneswaran and Nierenberg 2008). We have a moral responsibility toward the environment to avoid environmental degradation so that future generations will have a healthy environment. Vegan diets are environmentally friendly, while animal-based diets have negative effects upon the environment (Tuomisto 2018). Consequently, we have a moral obligation to raise our children on a vegan diet.

(3) Scientific studies continue to show a significant link between animal-based food and various diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and more. Also they show that vegans and vegetarians are healthier and may live longer than people who consume animal products (Alshahrani et al. 2019; Stripp et al. 2003; Zhong et al. 2019; Le & Sabaté 2014; Song et al. 2016; Orlich et al. 2013). We find it easier to plan a healthful vegan diet than to risk that our children will suffer from diseases caused by an animal-based diet. Thus, we have a moral obligation to raise our children on a diet that does not bare the risk of chronic diseases.

The foregoig principles may not be philosophically rigorous, but they clearly generate strong moral reasons against raising children on an animal-based diet. These principles are very basic. Any layperson with a basic education understands the gravity of the issues that principles (1)–(3) raise. Animal suffering, environmental degradation, and chronic diseases, can be avoided by eating a vegan diet. Thus, considering Hunt's second premise, ("Parents have pro tanto moral reason to not make their child bear a risk of harm to their well-being.") it is more plausible for vegan parents to raise their children on a vegan diet because such a diet does not bear a risk to harm their children's well-being as well as the animals' and the environment's.

Consider also the following comments of vegan parents:

> Mandi Roberts: It wasn't until I was around 7, that I realized what animals actually went through. I remember talking about it as a child, but it was quickly swept under the carpet.
>
> Rebecca Coplon: My son was about 3 when he got the idea that chicken was, well, made of chicken, but about 4 when he put two and two together and realized he was EATING A CHICKEN! He's nearly 12 now. Even in Minecraft, he is a vegetarian, and resists killing the little digital beasts to get meat or leather.
>
> Erica Challis: At around 3, for our son. He stopped eating meat because it was made of animals, he said. At six, he still hasn't eaten meat since he was three.
>
> Subha Thankaraj: I was showing my 3 and half year old daughter the video of dairy product factory. She asked, "So, now do they give this milk to baby

> cow?" I replied, "No. It's transported to supermarkets and we buy it." Then, she asked "So, what do baby cows drink?"
>
> Germaine Cecil: When I was 7 I realized that animals had to be killed for me to eat…and the conditions of being force fed and so forth I stopped eating meat…I've been vegetarian ever since… (Quora 2018)

The foregoing comments are anecdotal, but nonetheless show something important, that is, children naturally understand that animals are not food. It also suggests that in most cases discussions about the origins of meat and animal products are avoided or played down by caregivers (Luke 1992). When children become aware of the origin of animal products, when they connect the dots, as it were, they feel empathy for the animals and choose not to eat them (Donovan 2006). The point is that children's moral awareness about the unjust treatment of farm animals gives vegan parents another good reason to raise their children on a vegan diet. As we have seen, one of the flaws in Hunt's argument is that premise (1), which consists in 1a and 1b, is false. Consequently, they fail to support (3), that parents have good reasons to not raise their children on a vegan diet. Premise (4), as we have seen is not true, that is, it is not plausible that the moral reasons for raising children on a vegan diet are equally strong as the moral reasons that vegan parents have to raise their children on an animal-based diet. Therefore, the conclusion (5), that vegan parents may plausibly find it morally permissible to raise their child on an animal-based diet does not follow.

Conclusion

Therefore, I have shown that vegan parents have valid reasons, on the basis of very practical moral frameworks, to conclude that it is not morally permissible to raise their children on animal-based diets. Vegan parents that are concerned with their children's well-being, have a moral obligation to raise them on a vegan diet because animal-based diets can lead to many diseases, optimal vegan diets do not require complicated planning, and a vegan diet in no way harms a child's social life. Most children go vegan because they are morally against animal suffering and exploitation; and consequently not eating a pepperoni pizza or a dairy-based cake at a party is not a problem for at least two reasons: one, those foods are made from the exploitation of animals. Thus, vegan children do not desire to eat them. Two, vegan children do not miss anything because they know that if they have the desire for those foods, they can have vegan pepperoni pizza and vegan cake. Also, vegan diets do not cause as much animal suffering as animal-based diets, and vegan diets are environmentally friendlier that meat-based diets (Deckers 2016). Furthermore, when children are informed about the origin of animal products, they show empathy for animals and choose not to eat them. Consequently, vegan parents who choose to not raise their children on a vegan diet would have to betray not only their moral commitments, but also potentially harm their children's health and ethical consideration regarding animals.

As a final remark, I want to make clear that Hunt offers an interesting argument. Hunt realizes that the question of whether vegan parents have an obligation to raise their children on a vegan diet is very complex, because ethical vegans may hold different moral positions. My rebuttal to his argument is not meant as a knockdown rejection to end the conversation there, but rather as an appropriate response from vegan parents, and to encourage further discussion regarding vegan diets and children's health and social lives.

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