Received: 2 May 2020 | Revised: 6 September 2020 | Accepted: 15 October 2020
DOI: 10.1002/wcc.689

ADVANCED REVIEW

WILEY

Ethical consumerism: Veganism

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Funding information
Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung (Feodor Lynen Research Scholarship)

Edited by Anja Karnein, Domain Editor, and Mike Hulme, Editor-in-Chief

Abstract
In this article, we review an array of positions in the contemporary literature that concern the moral reasons for vegan consumerism. We situate veganism within the broader field of ethical consumerism, present a variety of motivations and justifications for veganism, and discuss criticisms of vegan consumerism. The arguments presented in the article ultimately pertain to the question of whether concerns for animals, human rights, or climate justice entail strong moral reasons to adopt a vegan lifestyle. Additionally, we address issues of particular relevance for political philosophy, such as whether organized vegan consumer campaigns are a politically legitimate means to strive for structural change. We hope to show that there are anthropocentric, as well as animal-centered, reasons that speak in favor of radically reformed human–animal relations, including diets that are at least predominantly plant-based.

This article is categorized under:
Climate, Nature, and Ethics > Ethics and Climate Change

KEYWORDS
animal ethics, climate ethics, climate justice, ethical consumption, veganism

1 | INTRODUCTION

With the term "veganism," most people associate a concern for the life and wellbeing of individual animals. Vegans try to avoid practices that cause harm to sentient beings of other species. This can be interpreted as a commitment to animal welfare or animal rights ethics. However, veganism can also be justified from an ecological perspective centered on anthropocentric considerations of justice or collective self-interest. Concerns for individual animals and for the environment converge, not least because animal husbandry has a comparatively large impact on human-induced climate change.

In this article, we focus on vegan consumerism as a means by which to minimize harm to animals, as well as to humans and the environment (for overviews, see Doggett, 2018; Jallinoja, Vinnari, & Niva, 2019; Katz & McPherson, 2020). Vegan consumerism can be roughly defined as an attempt to avoid buying animal products. Although this definition might appear to lead us directly to matters of personal lifestyle, we will entertain a broad understanding of vegan consumerism that includes attempts to influence political decision-making.

The use of animals is a legally authorized and institutionalized practice, which means that we must consider both responsibility within consumer interactions and responsibility to reform social institutions and structures. Reforming or eliminating practices that are harmful to animals would require collective action in order to create more just national

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and international laws and institutions (on the international legal dimension, see Peters, 2016). Likewise, slowing climate change requires institutional solutions and collectively binding decisions concerning different societal sectors, including agriculture. Normative theories of climate justice combine issues of distributive and intergenerational justice and seek to determine the fair share of burdens that states ought to bear in emission reduction, adaptation and victim compensation measures. They draw on criteria such as present and past emissions, and the differential capacities of states to mitigate climate change and to help those affected to adapt to climate change-related harms, especially poorer countries, which have contributed the least to the problem (see e.g., Caney, 2018; Juhola, 2019; Moellendorf, 2012). Governments arguably bear a primary responsibility to ensure climate justice and the morally appropriate treatment of animals, and are consequently obliged to strive for international coordination and cooperation.[1] We must therefore remain wary of deflection campaigns by industry lobbyists to shift moral responsibility from governments and companies to individuals (see e.g., Mann, 2020). However, countering such deflections and affirming the primacy of government action does not imply that consumers bear no responsibilities at all with regard to climate and animal justice. Governmental, corporate, and consumer responsibilities are complementary in principle, and each warrants an in-depth treatment. In this article, we discuss the responsibilities of individuals for the moral consideration of animals and climate justice—in consumer interactions, but also in their political roles as citizens.

We will review an array of positions in the contemporary literature that concern the moral reasons for vegan consumerism, with an emphasis on the question of whether concerns for animals, human rights, and/or climate justice entail weighty moral reasons (or perhaps even a duty) to adopt a vegan lifestyle. We will also address other questions regarding vegan consumerism, such as whether organized vegan consumer campaigns are a politically legitimate means to advance concern for animals and the environment. In doing so, we hope to show that there are anthropocentric as well as animal-centered reasons that speak in favor of radically reformed human–animal relations, including diets that are at least predominantly plant-based. The text is organized as follows. First, we situate veganism within the broader field of ethical consumerism. Second, we specify the variety of motivations and justifications for veganism. Last, we discuss established and potential criticisms of vegan consumerism.

2 | ETHICAL CONSUMERISM: INTERACTIONAL AND POLITICAL

Ethical consumerism consists of changes to purchasing and consumption choices as a morally informed response to wrongs in the production and distribution of goods and services. It has a narrow interactional and a broader political component. The *interactional component* consists of consumer choices that are at least partly motivated by moral considerations. *Boycotters* intentionally renounce (or withdraw from) certain kinds of economic interaction. The boycottees can be individuals or organized groups; most typically companies whose products are boycotted. However, the boycottee can also be an industry sector, for example when investors divest from fossil fuel companies,[2] or when vegans avoid all products extracted from animals. In contrast, a *buycott* (compare Friedman 1999, p. 11, 2001) involves giving preference to products and services on the basis of moral considerations. Both boycotts and buycotts can be unilateral or organized. That is, consumers can individually decide to purchase or avoid a product for moral reasons and they can also join *organized* boycotts and buycotts. Environmental labeling initiatives, such as organic certification and the Forest Stewardship Council, or social labeling initiatives such as Fairtrade, are well-known examples of organized buycotts, which make certain morally relevant features of the production process transparent.[3] Examples for official vegan certification are the European Vegetarian Union's V-label, the Vegan Society's Vegan Trademark, and the Certified Vegan Logo from the American non-profit organization Vegan Action (Vegan Official Labels, 2020).

By participating in organized buycotts and boycotts, consumers typically seek to impact the demand for a product or service. Perhaps more importantly, they also take part in collective action, which can have far-reaching socio-political consequences, as exemplified by the Montgomery bus boycott led by Martin Luther King in 1955–1956, which ultimately resulted in the enactment of the Civil Rights Act in the United States in 1964.[4] Thus the *political component* of ethical consumerism is revealed when reflecting on what consumers can do to contribute to lasting social change. Consumer participation in these campaigns, which include boycotts of firms that sell animal products as well as vegan buycotts, supports the more narrowly understood practices of ethical consumption. What is more, by participating in such campaigns consumers often simultaneously aim at more broadly conceived reforms of the basic institutional infrastructure of consumption, such as legislation that prohibits certain kinds of animal treatment or places legal limits on greenhouse gas emissions for corporate polluters. As citizens, people can influence political decision-making through various means, from voting to civil disobedience. As consumers, they can take part in organized boycotts and buycotts,

which transmit to the political sphere when the goals and concerns of these campaigns or initiatives are publicly communicated and justified (see Stolle & Micheletti, 2013; see also Beck, 2010, 2019). As complements or alternatives, there are also integrity-based interpretations of ethical consumerism, and interpretations of boycotts as protest speech, social punishment, or social coercion (Friedman, 2001; Mills, 1996; Schwartz, 2010, chap. 4; Radzik, 2017).

Normative theorists have proposed various justifications for ethical consumerism that refer to its interactional or political component, or to both.[5] We will give a brief overview of the most common types of justifications, before turning to veganism specifically.

Consequentialists hold that whether a certain conduct is right or wrong is ultimately determined by the (likely) outcome of that conduct. From this point of view, the most important challenge to justifications of ethical consumption is the impotence objection (see Section 4.3), according to which uncoordinated individual consumer purchases will most likely not precipitate positive social change. In response to that objection, some authors have developed threshold arguments and probabilistic defenses of morally motivated consumer acts, as well as appeals to the indirect role-modeling effects of ethical consumerism (Herzog, 2016; Kagan, 2011; see Almassi, 2011 specifically for the case of vegetarianism). Others have given *deontological justifications*, such as the need to act from universalizable maxims (with respect to climate change, see Albertzart, 2019; Baatz, 2014) and to treat humans and maybe also animals never as mere means but always as ends in themselves (Korsgaard, 2018 has extended this Kantian argument to animals). Finally, *virtue ethical views* defend practices of ethical consumption as conducive to the cultivation of moral character, and to virtues such as benevolence, moderation, or simplicity (Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; in relation to animals, see Nobis, 2002).

In addition, the case for ethical consumerism is supported by accounts of the responsibility to promote more just social institutions and structures under non-ideal circumstances.[6] This responsibility can be defended with various arguments.[7] For example, one may point to the complicity of consumers in injustices.[8] This argument does not necessarily entail a duty to consume ethically, as citizens may fulfill their responsibility in other ways. However, if there is a realistic chance that participation in well-designed consumer campaigns will contribute to positive social and structural change, then it is one way among others to fulfill the responsibility to promote background justice (Beck, 2010, 2019). Thus, consumers have a political reason to join well-designed boycotts and to support labeling initiatives, additionally to those moral reasons provided by consequentialist, deontological, or virtue ethics defenses of the interactional component of ethical consumerism. We will now take a closer look at veganism as an example of morally motivated and politically relevant consumer behavior.

3 | VEGANISM

The Vegan Society (2020)[9] defines veganism as "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." The definition stresses lifestyle beyond diet, including clothing, furnishing, and personal care. In the following we use the term "animal products" as an abbreviation of all kinds of goods that vegans try to avoid. The definition's restrictive clause "as far as is possible and practicable" is crucial, however, because absolute avoidance of animal products is impossible, given their wide distribution—from tennis balls to medicines tested on animals. What is more, even in the process of farming vegan foods, countless animals such as rodents are inevitably killed. Therefore, Lori Gruen and Robert C. Jones argue that veganism is not an identity or a lifestyle that bestows "clean hands" upon consumers. Rather, it should be understood as a goal or aspiration (Gruen & Jones, 2015).

The above definition of veganism refers to the *moral motivation* of avoiding cruelty to animals, but there are also self-regarding rationales for a vegan lifestyle, such as expected health advantages. However, empirical evidence suggests that a concern for animal welfare is the primary motivation for vegans. Expected health benefits come second, and a presumed positive impact on the environment comes third. Moreover, a moral concern for animals makes it most likely that vegetarians follow their dietary choice consistently or even turn to veganism (Rosenfeld, 2018). In a quantitative study among German vegans, the most important motives for becoming vegan are reports from factory farming, followed by climate protection and health related considerations (Kerschke-Risch, 2015).

Factory farming obviously involves cruelty to animals, such as close confinement, surgical procedures without anesthesia, and physically draining levels of egg and milk production (Halteman, 2011). Still, there is no *necessary* connection between cruelty and animal products. It is theoretically possible to consume only meat from animals who die by

accident or from natural causes, for example. It is also possible to obtain products such as milk or eggs from living animals without harming or prematurely killing the "providers."

Thus, veganism is not the only viable way to show concern for animals through one's consumption choices, and many morally motivated consumers are content with more moderate restrictions of their consumption patterns, such as reducetarianism, pescetarianism, or vegetarianism. Reducetarians consume only small amounts of animal products, mostly from organic farming, but do not give up meat eating completely; pescatarians do not eat land animals and birds but consume fish and other seafood; vegetarians avoid meat or fish, but eat dairy or eggs.

However, vegans can give reasons for not being content with reducetarianism, pescetarianism, or vegetarianism. By merely reducing one's consumption of animal products, one is still contributing to practices that cause animal suffering and that could be avoided by a vegan diet. Fish are most likely capable of pain and other subjective sensations (see Braithwaite, 2010; Segner, 2012; as a counter position Key, 2016). Even organic livestock production does not necessarily exclude painful practices such as debeaking, dehorning, and castration without anesthesia (Chait, 2019). Perhaps most importantly, the vast majority of organically raised animals end their lives in conventional slaughterhouses where they face a serious risk of an agonizing death due to incomplete stunning, just as their fellow creatures from factory farms do (on slaughterhouses see Eisnitz, 1997; Pachirat, 2011).

Concerning vegetarianism, vegans argue that the theoretical possibility to extract milk or eggs without hurting or prematurely killing the animals should not obscure the rather different reality of mass milk and egg production. Take the example of dairy cows. The natural life expectancy of cows is about 20 years, but continuous impregnation, birth, and milk production leech the animals and ruin their productivity. Normally, after four lactations (about 5–6 years old), they end their lives in slaughterhouses (Compassion in World Farming, 2012). Almost all calves are separated from their mothers early after birth, which is a painful experience for both the mothers and their newborns.[10] Most male calves, if not killed immediately, are sent to fattening farms to become veal after a few weeks.

However, turning to a vegan lifestyle demands a conscious decision to forgo many conveniences. That raises the question of whether such a radical step is really required due to *valid moral reasons*. As anticipated in the introduction, it is possible to arrive at vegan conclusions from different moral starting points. Although animal welfare considerations provide the primary motives for veganism, anthropocentric arguments are still predominant in moral theory and everyday morals. Thus, we will consider such anthropocentric justifications first.

3.1 | Human rights and climate justice

Human rights claims are broadly accepted as strong moral grounds for excluding certain practices. And today's livestock farming has a negative net impact on human rights-related goods, such as food, water, and health, at least indirectly. Anthropogenic climate change also poses a dire threat to human rights, which is why we cover it in this section, too.

Conversion to veganism by a significant share of the world's population could contribute to a more just distribution of the above-mentioned human-rights related goods, and also make it easier to overcome world hunger, since animal agriculture is a comparatively inefficient way of creating nutritional energy. Almost a third of the world's grain and 75% of soy production is used for intensive livestock production, instead of feeding humans directly. A recent meta-analysis found that meat, aquaculture, eggs, and dairy use about 83% of the world's farmland yet provide only 37% of our protein and 18% of our calories (Poore & Nemecek, 2018). This, however, is not completely beyond scientific dispute. Mottet et al. (2017) found that 86% of the global livestock feed intake is made of materials not edible to humans and that meat production requires less cereals than usually reported.

Another disadvantage of the animal industry is high water usage. More than 840 million humans have no access to safe, affordable, and clean water, and the water footprint of animal products is particularly large relative to crop products (Mekonnen & Hoekstra, 2012). The production of livestock also causes water pollution, for example, by nitrates, pesticides, and antibiotics (UNESCO, 2017). The excessive use of antibiotics in animal husbandry indirectly endangers human health by contributing to antibiotic resistance (OECD, 2016).

Climate change endangers almost all goods relevant for human rights, and animal husbandry is one of its main drivers. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, industrial animal faming causes 14.5–18% of all greenhouse gas emissions caused by humans. This exceeds the contribution of the global transport sector (FAO, 2013). About 27% of the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from animal husbandry consist in carbon dioxide, 44% in methane, mostly emitted by cattle, and 29% in nitrous oxide, which is released through the fertilization with

manure and dung and the use of mineral fertilizers (FAO, 2013). Livestock farming also contributes indirectly to global warming as tropical rainforests are destroyed to create soy plantations for animal feedstuffs or pastures for cattle. Deforestation not only fosters the extinction of entire species, but it also releases large amounts of carbon dioxide (FAO, 2016).

Our dietary habits thus significantly influence the chance of limiting global warming. A study estimating the difference in dietary GHG emissions between self-selected meat-eaters, fish-eaters, vegetarians and vegans in the United Kingdom found that the mean "dietary GHG emissions for meat-eaters (results reported for women and then men) were 46% and 51% higher than for fish-eaters, 50% and 54% higher than for vegetarians and 99% and 102% higher than for vegans" (Scarborough et al., 2014). Harwatt, Sabaté, Eshel, Soret, and Ripple (2017) estimated for the United States that substituting beans for beef would achieve up to 74% of the reductions needed to meet the 2020 GHG reduction goal.

To be sure, the overall environmental impact of vegan diets, including their net-effects on land-use, transport emissions, and biodiversity, is difficult to determine in real-life contexts. For example, vegans who consume a large amount of soya products, imported fruit or water-hungry crops such as avocados, do not necessarily have a smaller ecological footprint than omnivores. A study among 151 Italian adults on the overall environmental impact of different dietary regimens observed a high inter-individual variability within each dietary group. Despite their general finding that omnivorous diets generate larger carbon, water and ecological footprints than vegetarian and vegan diets, the authors also recommend further studies considering, for example, the consumption of locally grown and seasonal products as well as the impact of different agricultural techniques (Rosi et al., 2017; see also Chai et al., 2019, for a systematic review based on 16 studies and 18 reviews).

In any case, anthropocentric reasoning regarding human rights and climate justice does not suffice to show that a vegan diet is morally required. All that can be shown is that such considerations support reducing our consumption of animal products, and transforming the methods of production (Hooley & Nobis, 2016). A radical reduction of the number of animals would suffice to reach our climate goals (Bajzêlj et al., 2014), and in particular, a moderate number of livestock could continue to be raised in grazing areas unsuitable for the cultivation of edible crops.[11]

3.2 | Animal ethics

Anthropocentric justifications are thus insufficient to show that veganism is *obligatory*. Consequently, in order to arrive at that more radical conclusion, vegans primarily rely on animal ethics. They try to show, first, that at least all sentient animals have a moral status, that is, they matter morally for their own sake, and second, that the already existing animal welfare regulations do not take this status seriously enough.

There is still no philosophical consensus on the moral status of animals. The most important objections refer to some version of a mutuality argument according to which only those individuals have a moral status who are capable of respecting this status in other individuals as well. Thus, in order to be a moral patient, one must also be a moral agent. This requires capacities such as rationality and ability to contract (Carruthers, 2011), communication-oriented use of language (Habermas, 1993), and compliance with self-given moral laws (Kant, 1785/1998). Because animals lack these abilities, they do not deserve moral consideration for their own sake.

Animal ethicists contest the presumed strict reciprocal character of morals with two arguments. First, if only rational and/or morally reasonable persons could have a moral status, consequently even humans such as small children and seriously cognitively disabled adults would not matter morally for their own sake, but only insofar as mature persons show sympathy for their fate. This, however, is counterintuitive and incompatible with the social scope of human rights (Cavalieri, 2002; Machan, 2004; Regan, 1984 is critical of this "argument from marginal cases"). Second, even rational and reasonable persons do not restrict their moral claims to those "higher abilities" that enable them to morally reciprocate. They also expect consideration as embodied and social creatures, with corresponding physical and social needs (Korsgaard, 2011; Ladwig, 2020). But if we take characteristics such as the capacity to feel pain or to suffer from social isolation as morally relevant in our own case, it seems arbitrary to morally neglect it in the case of other animals. Some philosophers even argue that the moral status of sentient animals is the same as our own and, thus, we must accept animal rights equally alongside human rights (Cavalieri, 2002; Cochrane, 2013; Francione, 2008; Regan, 1984; for criticism, see Cohen, 2004).

But perhaps weaker assumptions are sufficient to arrive at, or at least come close to, vegan conclusions (Engel, 2000; Hooley & Nobis, 2016). In everyday morality as well as in law there is a growing consensus that sentient

animals matter morally for their own sake (Smith, 2016). Thus, harming animals requires justifying reasons that are proportionate to the losses we impose on them. Take article 1 of the German Animal Welfare Law. It states that "[n]o one may cause an animal pain, suffering or harm without good reason."[12] The requirement of "good reasons," however, is not restricted to morally valid considerations such as serious conflicts between the vital interests of humans and the comparably vital interests of animals. Instead, it allows purely economic considerations such as the mass production of animal products at low costs.

This could only qualify as a genuine moral concern if humans were existentially dependent upon such products. After all, countless animals are confined, hurt, and killed in order to sell and consume their products or their flesh. But there is broad consensus among nutritionists that vegetarian diets are appropriate for all humans during all stages of life and that also vegan diets are nutritionally adequate at least for healthy adults as long as these are supplemented with vitamin B12 in particular (see Craig, 2009 and the literature in Section 4.1). Thus, humans could give up at least a large part of animal products, particularly in affluent societies, and still be capable of leading good and healthy lives. And given that animals matter morally for their own sake, we should not harm them unnecessarily, for example, by purchasing and consuming animal products that we do not vitally need. This might be the strongest case for an obligation to adopt a vegan lifestyle, at least inasmuch as consumers can avoid animal products without a risk of serious harm for themselves.

4 | CRITICISMS OF VEGAN CONSUMERISM

These moral reasons notwithstanding, there are a number of objections to vegan consumer activism. First, it can be questioned whether veganism is a healthy and accessible option for all, including infants or pregnant women (Section 4.1). Second, one could criticize vegan consumer campaigns as lacking democratic legitimacy (Section 4.2). Even if one grants, however, that vegan consumer activism is permissible, one might still deny that it is appropriate or even obligatory given that it might be causally ineffective (Section 4.3) or clash with stable features of our collective way of life (Section 4.4).

4.1 | Are vegan diets healthy and accessible for all?

In order to be morally recommended or even obligatory for all, vegan consumerism must be generally reasonable. This is clearly the case with products such as fur or leather, on condition that there are sufficient clothing alternatives available at affordable prices. But is a vegan diet really suitable for all? According to the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, well-planned vegetarian diets, including vegan ones, "are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes…" (Melina, Craig, & Levine, 2016). This position is shared by the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (2013), and the Portuguese National Programme for the Promotion of a Healthy Diet (2015). It is nevertheless not beyond professional dispute. For example, the German Nutrition Society (2016) does not recommend a vegan diet "during pregnancy or lactation, or for children or adolescents of any age."

The dispute seems to concern mainly two points. First, should we really be confident that all vegan parents and their children take sufficient care to plan a well-balanced vegan diet? Even though *most* vegans are particularly well-informed about nutritional matters and also take above average care of their and their relative's health (Bedford & Barr, 2005), there might be some of them that are unduly negligent. Second, because there are too few long-term studies on the health of vegans (Appleby & Key, 2016), some nutritionists are more reserved than others about declaring a vegan diet non-harmful for all sections of the population. Thus, even if the animal industry harms sentient animals, other humans and the environment, and even if it is a valid moral conclusion that we should, as far as possible *and reasonable*, avoid purchasing products from that industry, there might still be rational disagreement about whether or to what extent this entails vegan consumerism.

4.2 | Is vegan consumer activism democratically legitimate (and does it need to be)?

Individual purchasing choices, which reflect the diverse values, preferences, and tastes of consumers, do not generally face a high justificatory burden. Individuals are arguably at considerable liberty to engage in unilateral buycotts and

boycotts of products and services. The same cannot be said for organized consumer activism, however. Examples such as the boycott of Jewish stores in Nazi Germany show that organized boycotts can rest on unacceptable moral premises, can exercise immense social pressure on their targets and can do profound economic harm to them. It is therefore plausible to demand that organized consumer campaigns comply with certain normative criteria in order to be legitimate. The exact determination of these criteria, however, is a more controversial matter.

Waheed Hussain defends a "proto-legislative view," according to which "social change ethical consumerism" must not deprive other citizens of their basic liberties, must be based on a reasonable conception of the common good, must only deal with issues that have not been addressed in formal democratic processes, and must be guided in a manner that is appropriately representative and deliberative (Hussain, 2012). Vegan consumer campaigns that seek to abolish factory farming, or even all animal husbandry, would accordingly not be legitimate, as they aim at the institutionalized treatment of animals, which is not only addressed in formal democratic procedures but which may enjoy wide public support. However, the criteria put forward by the proto-legislative view are arguably too restrictive, and would not only disqualify vegan consumer activism, but a broad range of other consumer campaigns that appear perfectly legitimate, as well.

Other consumer ethicists thus advocate more relaxed principles for consumer campaigns. Barry and Macdonald (2018) demand that ethical consumerism should be reflective of power disparities, sensitive of the views of those they seek to influence and advance a reasonable conception of the common good. Beck (2019) argues that organized consumer boycotts should be proportional in the sense of targeting producers who engage in comparatively problematic malpractices, and that they must also be transparent in terms of disclosing accurate information about the identities and agenda of the campaigners and the malpractices that they target. Many consumer campaigns seek to inform formal legislative processes, and they arguably need not restrict themselves to issues that the latter has not yet addressed. The proto-legislative view seems to be based on an idealized conception of the political process, which masks the degree to which power imbalances and corporate interests unduly influence legislation (Barry & MacDonald, 2018). What is more, the two issue areas of intergenerational climate injustice and immoral treatment of animals show that consumer boycotts may legitimately address malpractices that could persist even if the political process were fully democratic (Beck, 2019). After all, neither future people nor animals can raise their own voices in the public space, and thus, their interests must be defended and represented by (other) citizens out of substantive moral considerations.[13]

4.3 | Is vegan consumption ineffective?

A common objection to the view that vegan consumerism is morally required is a variant of the so-called *impotence objection*, according to which the contribution of individual consumers to morally problematic states of affairs is negligible. From the perspective of the individual, a single choice or even a series of choices may seem to make "no difference," given that producers and service providers usually operate on large scales and are therefore unlikely to be responsive to the quantities involved in individual consumption patterns. This "causal impotence problem" equally applies to individual vegan consumer choices. After all, the markets for animal products are large and complex, and the suppliers do not produce on demand (in relation to vegetarianism, see e.g., Regan, 1980; for restatements, see Chartier, 2006; Garrett, 2007; Kagan, 2011).

Given the impotence problem, some moral theorists argue that individual consumers have no moral obligation to avoid choices that yield problematic aggregate outcomes (see Johnson, 2003; Sinnott-Armstrong, 2005; in relation to meat purchase see Chartier, 2006). The costs of veganism for the individual consumer may even look unreasonably high in relation to its allegedly insignificant effect on the macro level. The causal impotence objection poses a challenge to consequentialist reasoning and to act-consequentialism in particular, which postulates that those individual acts are morally right which yield the best expected outcomes. However, some consequentialists have responded to this challenge by providing threshold arguments, according to which the expected or likely utility of (failing to) cross thresholds with their choice still gives individuals moral reason to either engage in or refrain from a consumer choice in question, even though they cannot be certain that they will make a difference with this particular choice.[14] This reasoning can be applied to negative thresholds, such as when diminished demand leads to the closure of a factory farm, but also to positive thresholds, such as when vegan products in high demand become part of or take up a larger share of the product portfolio of a supermarket chain. Additionally, consequentialists have sought to justify the interactional component of ethical consumerism with appeals to indirect consequences, most importantly through the role-modeling effects of individual consumer interactions (Almassi, 2011). In particular, vegans can serve as role models even for vegetarians or

reducetarians because of their consistent behavior and thus their credibility as ethically concerned consumers (Almassi, 2011).

The impotence objection is less challenging to virtue ethical reasoning, which is mostly concerned with the moral character expressed through consumer choices (Nobis, 2002), and to deontological reasoning, which requires agents to act according to universalizable maxims. This can lead to at least imperfect obligations to engage in or refrain from acts even when these acts would fail to "make a difference" in the causal sense just outlined (Albertzart, 2019; Baatz, 2014). Christine Korsgaard argues that we should be morally concerned about how we are related to particular animals if we consume their flesh or products that have been extracted from them without due regard to their good. If we decide to buy and consume such products, we treat individuals as mere means to our ends, and this is morally wrong irrespective of consequences and numbers (Korsgaard, 2018, p. 223). Hereth (2016) assumes that we should refrain from rewarding injustice and that we fail to do so if we purchase or consume the products of animals who have been wronged.

4.4 | Does vegan consumption clash with our collective way of life?

Finally, vegan consumer campaigns might also be insufficiently effective, because they meet with strong ideological and emotional resistance. According to Joy (2010), consuming animal products is considered as normal, natural, and necessary. This ideology begins to influence almost all of us from early childhood on, and it not only affects our thoughts and perceptions but also our emotions. Especially with experiences of eating, people associate formative memories such as visits to grandparents, holidays and festivals. For most people, it is difficult to recognize, and perhaps even harder to dissociate oneself from, a wrongdoing if it encompasses a collective way of life.

Thus, it might be more promising to motivate people to take the moderate steps of adopting vegetarianism or reducetarianism, instead of insisting on the move to veganism (see de Bakker & Dagevos, 2012 and, using the example of Finland, Vinnari, Mustonen, & Räsänen, 2010). After all, not a few morally motivated consumers began as reducetarians or vegetarians before finally turning to veganism. What is more, even if most of the world's population, in particular the growing middle classes and wealthy people, only significantly reduced their intake of animal products the aggregate positive effect would outweigh that of all current vegetarians and vegans. Perhaps it is also easier for many people to engage in political activism for more animal friendly laws and structures than to accept the personal consequences of vegan consumerism.

As mentioned above, the impact of vegan consumption depends not least on role-modeling effects (see Almassi, 2011; for empirical treatment, see Higgs, 2015). Perhaps the most important effect of that sort is signaling one's willingness to engage in collective action (for the general point, see Lawford-Smith, 2015). Vegan buycotts thus transmit to the political sphere, revealing the political component of ethical consumerism (Garner, 2010, pp. 154–162; Stallwood, 2008). But campaigns for political and social change are most likely to succeed if they are supported by large coalitions of more and less radical actors. Thus, vegans have good reasons to welcome other, more moderate fellow campaigners as long as they support urgent reforms. An obvious goal suitable for coalition building among actors ranging from small farmers and environmentalists to vegan activists would be the elimination of factory farming (Garner, 2010, p. 159; Pluhar, 2010).

5 | CONCLUSION

The arguments presented in this article ultimately concern the question of whether a commitment to animal ethics, human rights, and/or climate justice entails the duty to adopt a vegan lifestyle. The answer first of all depends upon the strength of the arguments from animal ethics, because anthropocentric arguments only support reducing the consumption of animal products, and transforming the methods of production. In animal ethics, different arguments justify the conclusion that we act immorally if we impose suffering or death on animals to extract products that we do not need for leading good and healthy lives. This brings us closer to vegan conclusions, although we might still doubt whether vegan diets are healthy and accessible options for all, including for poor people in developing countries and groups such as pregnant women even in affluent societies.

Second, we must consider the legitimacy and the effectiveness of vegan consumerism as a means to improve morally problematic states of affairs. But whereas proportionate and transparent vegan consumer campaigns can be a permissible method to strive for social and political reform, the impotence objection turns out to be more problematic. However,

it poses greater problems for consequentialists who argue that the moral value of a conduct is always ultimately determined by its (likely) consequences than for virtue ethicists and deontologists who hold that it is inherently wrong to support a wrongdoing.

Insofar as consequences matter, however, a larger number of vegetarians or reducetarians might make a greater difference than a comparatively small number of vegans. The latter should see their consumer behavior not least as a potential trigger for collective action. Thus, they should avoid giving the impression of a sectarian insistence in personal purity. Self-righteousness is not only a vice; it is an obstacle to political coalition-building on which morally required reforms ultimately depend.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Open access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared no conflicts of interest for this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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ENDNOTES

[1] It is often argued that state governments bear a "primary responsibility" to achieve goals that require collective action, although this should not be understood to mean that *only* states bear such a responsibility. For a discussion of different kinds of agents of justice and their relation to each other under non-ideal conditions, see O'Neill (2001) and Jacob, Ladwig, & Schmelzle, 2018.

[2] For a treatment of ethical questions concerning investment, see Kolers (2001).

[3] For a normative perspective on the Fairtrade certification system, see for example, Beck (2010).

[4] For empirical treatments of ethical consumerism, see Friedman (1999), Lewis and Potter (2011), and Stolle and Micheletti (2013).

[5] These views can be found in the literature on climate ethics, specifically in treatments of the question of whether there is an individual duty to reduce GHG emissions (for an overview, see Fragnière, 2016), and in texts that deal with individual consumer responsibility more generally (for an overview of these issues, see Schwartz, 2010).

[6] The distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory goes back to Rawls (1971, 1999). For an application to the treatment of animals, see Garner (2013) and Ladwig (2020).

[7] Rawls argued in favor of individual natural duties to promote and maintain just institutions (see 1971, 1993, 1999). Young (2011) stressed the transnational nature of the responsibility to rectify injustices to which we are socially connected, which include (but are not limited to) widespread labor rights violations in the supply chain of globally produced goods. Beck (2016) elaborates an account of global responsibility to promote human rights and fight poverty through institutional and structural reforms.

[8] On complicity in general see Kutz (2000) and Lepora and Goodin (2013); on complicity in structures, see Aragon and Jaggar (2018); in relation to climate change, see Eckersley (2016); regarding animal products, see Driver (2015).

[9] The Vegan Society is the oldest organization supporting veganism. It was founded in 1944 in Great Britain.

[10] The pain of separation seems to increase with the length of cohabitation. On the other hand, it is normally beneficial for both cows and their calves to closely cohabitate for a longer period of time, so an early separation deprives them of a worthwhile experience; see Wagner, Barth, Palme, Futschik, and Waiblinger (2012).

[11] However, this would require that no additional grazing land is created by deforestation. On the net impact of grazing systems on GHG emissions, see Garnett et al. (2017).

[12] https://www.animallaw.info/statute/germany-cruelty-german-animal-welfare-act

[13] On possible political representation of animals see Donaldson and Kymlicka (2011), Cochrane (2018), and Ladwig (2020).

[14] For different versions of this argument, see Singer (1980), Norcross (2004), Kagan (2011), Roser and Seidel (2016); see Almassi (2011) and Pinkert (2015) for different act-consequentialist defenses of ethical consumerism. However, see Nefsky (2018), for objections to defenses that involve threshold reasoning.

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How to cite this article: Beck V, Ladwig B. Ethical consumerism: Veganism. *WIREs Clim Change*. 2021;12:e689. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.689