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The animal lovers' paradox? On the ethics of 'pet food'

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The animal lovers' paradox is the fact that animal lovers – people who share their lives with nonhuman companions for whom they feel deep love and affection – typically contribute to more nonhuman animal (NHA) death and suffering than they would if they did not keep companions. This is because dogs and cats (upon whom this chapter will focus) will typically be fed large amounts of NHA flesh, and this flesh is the product of practices that inflict death and suffering as a matter of course. Paradoxically, it could be that the best thing that some people could do to reduce NHA death and suffering is to stop being animal lovers. This sounds deeply odd, and rightly so. This is not to say that individual animal lovers will *recognize* the oddness of their situation; it is possible that they feel love towards only certain NHAs. When the individual animal lover feels the conflict, they likely face the *vegetarian's dilemma*: the problem of reconciling “feeding one's [companion] an animal-based diet that may be perceived as best promoting their well-being with concerns over animal welfare [and animal *rights*] and environmental degradation threatened by such diets” (Rothgerber 2013, 77).

There has been some discussion of this issue both inside and outside academia. Despite this, academic animal ethics as a whole has been surprisingly quiet on the animal lovers' paradox and the vegetarian's dilemma. On the one hand, this is surprising, given that it is at the

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intersection of two key issues in animal ethics: the ethics of NHA-derived foods and the ethics of companionship. On the other, it is unsurprising, as it seems to throw up serious conflicts between our obligations to our companions and towards those NHAs killed for food.

Recent prominent works on animal ethics from a variety of directions have not addressed the issue. For example, Clare Palmer (2010) advocates a contextual animal ethics, in which we have different kinds of obligations to companions than to “wild” NHAs, but does not discuss companion diets, despite considering companions’ violence against “wild” animals. Palmer coauthored the recent *Companion Animal Ethics* (Sandøe, Corr and Palmer 2016) in which companion diet is addressed, but discussions focus upon health, resource use and environmental impact, rather than the problems with NHA-derived foodstuffs. Alasdair Cochrane (2012) defends an account of justice centered on the interest rights of sentient animals. Though he offers extensive discussions of the injustice of current food practices (2012, ch. 4) and of our obligations towards companions (2012, 129-37; cf. Cochrane 2014), he does not address the conflict between them that arises when we feed companions the flesh of other NHAs.¹ Gary Francione (2007; 2008), who supports the abolition of all use of NHAs, stresses the importance of veganism and, though claiming that we should stop producing more, argues we must care for existing companions. Despite this, and though he keeps vegan dogs (Francione 2007, vi), the issue is not addressed in his major works.

There is, then, a surprising lack of consideration in the animal ethics literature of the ethics of companion diets. One exception to this general trend is the work of Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka (2013), who draw a picture of a zoopolis, a mixed human/NHA state. On their picture, different NHAs are awarded different political rights based on their relationship with this state, though all sentient NHAs possess certain fundamental rights, such as the right not to be

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killed by humans. NHAs who are part of the mixed community, such as companions, are *citizens*, while those who live among but apart from society, such as garden birds, are *denizens*. “Wild” NHAs are *sovereign* over their own communities. Donaldson and Kymlicka are acutely aware of the problem sketched above:

Amongst our many duties to domesticated animals, we are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate nutrition. And here we encounter another dilemma: do we have an obligation to feed meat to our domesticated animals, particularly if this is part of their (so-called) natural diet? Must we turn some animals into meat in order to fulfil our duties to our domesticated animal co-citizens? (2013, 149)

Ultimately, “dog and cat members of mixed human-animal society do not have a right to food that involves the killing of other animals” (2013, 150). Readers may be surprised at the suggestion that companions not be fed flesh, and that they instead be fed a vegan diet, but more and more people are now exploring this option. In 2010, research on the ethical credentials of different “pet food” brands was published in *Ethical Consumer* (Brown 2010). Among other things, the report looked at which products contained NHA-derived ingredients and which were the product of animal testing – the latter being a dimension of the paradox I cannot explore here. The report recommended several vegan-friendly brands, including Ami and Benevo – companies that produce vegan foods for both dogs and cats (Brown 2010, 12).

One may think, given their talk of “co-citizens” and “mixed ... society,” that Donaldson and Kymlicka’s conclusion is a quirk of their framework, and that, if we do not accept their

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system, we need not accept their conclusion. Here, I could argue that we *should* accept Donaldson and Kymlicka's framework; indeed, it is a very good one. However, it is perhaps more interesting to note that we can construct a very strong argument for vegan companions using premises that, within animal ethics, are not at all controversial. I will now set out this argument, before offering an explanation of the various premises and steps. I will then spend the remainder of the chapter exploring possible objections to this argument and offering some practical suggestions.

Premise 1: It is wrong for us to kill or inflict suffering upon sensitive nonhuman animals unless there is some reason of overriding importance.

Premise 2: The production of nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs almost always involves inflicting death and suffering upon sensitive nonhuman animals.

Premise 3: Without the consumption of nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs, there would be no production of nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs.

Interim conclusion: Given Premises 1-3, the consumption of nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs is generally wrong, unless there is some reason of overriding importance.

Premise 4: There is generally no reason of overriding importance justifying the consumption of nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs by our companions.

Conclusion: Given the interim conclusion and Premise 4, feeding nonhuman animal companions nonhuman animal-derived foodstuffs is generally wrong.

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Premise 1 is a normative claim uncontroversial within animal ethics. Some profess to hold the view that the death and suffering of NHAs is of no moral significance. Such people will not accept this argument. Importantly, though, it is highly unlikely that an animal lover would hold this view. What, precisely, counts as a reason “of overriding importance” is what I will spend much of the remainder of this chapter examining. Our answers will differ depending upon the ethical framework we adopt. While utilitarians, like Peter Singer (1995), would allow that the prevention of *greater* suffering is a reason of sufficient magnitude to override a general prescription against inflicting suffering, a more deontological thinker, like Tom Regan (1984), would not allow this. By contrast, in certain cases of self-defense, Regan might allow the infliction of death and suffering, while Singer might not. It is clear that neither greater suffering nor self-defense are in the offing in the current case, but other things might be.

Premise 2 is an empirical claim that would not be denied by anyone familiar with, first, modern farming methods, and, second, animal welfare science. There are enough honest descriptions and images of the kinds of suffering inherent in food production available in various media for me to spare readers the details, beyond noting that suffering and death are as much a part of egg and milk production as they are of flesh production. And, while philosophers and scientists have previously voraciously denied that NHAs experience pain, it is thankfully rare to encounter someone claiming this today. Premise 3, too, is an empirical claim that relies on the realities of the market. If, from tomorrow, there was no demand for NHA-derived foodstuffs, it would not be long before their production ceased. The interim conclusion does not unproblematically follow from premises 1-3. Questions abound about the effects of the behavior of a single individual on the market and the obligation to behave morally when those around us

do not. However, let us assume that these can be overcome.² Given all of the above, *our continued consumption of NHA-derived products is generally wrong*. We should note that there really are no “overriding” circumstances in most cases. According to both the American Dietetic Association and Dieticians of Canada (Craig and Mangels 2009; Mangels, Messina and Vesanto 2003), appropriately planned vegan diets are perfectly healthy for people at any stage of their life. Additionally, such diets are easily accessible to almost anyone in the industrialized west. It does not instantly follow that companions must be fed vegan diets, which is why an additional premise is necessary; however, if Premise 4 is correct, then the conclusion naturally follows: feeding companions NHA-derived foodstuffs is generally wrong.

For the remainder of this chapter, I will explore whether there is *generally* a reason of overriding significance that permits the feeding of NHA-derived foodstuffs to our companions. We could certainly construct contrived scenarios where there are reasons of overriding importance: For example, if you and your dog are trapped on an island with edible NHAs but no edible plants, you can surely kill the animals to feed yourself and your dog. However, extreme scenarios do not help us. Instead, I am going to explore four reasons we may think we *generally* have an overriding ethical reason to feed NHA-derived products to our companions. First, I will explore whether making our companions vegan is to force them to live an *undignified* life. Second, I will explore the idea that companion veganism is problematically *unnatural*. Third, I will explore the idea that it is unjustly *freedom-restricting*. Finally, I will consider the most important challenge: whether it is *unhealthy* for the companions to be fed a vegan diet, and what this might mean.

Dignity

Conceptions of NHA *dignity* may be appealing due to the thought that it is wrong, for instance, to dress a bear in a tutu and have her ride a unicycle *beyond* the fact that it is unpleasant for the bear. Indeed, we may feel that there is something wrong *even if* the bear does not mind and lives a fulfilled, happy life. A dignity-based argument against companion veganism would claim that companions are treated in an undignified way if fed vegan diets. Precisely *why* depends on the particular conception of NHA dignity, of which there are numerous conflicting accounts. For example, Elizabeth Anderson claims that “[t]he dignity of an animal, whether human or nonhuman, is what is required to make it [sic] decent for human society, for the particular, species-specific ways in which humans relate to them” (2005, 283). Lori Gruen’s account, on the other hand, is almost the polar opposite. She says that “[m]aking other animals ‘decent for human society’ is precisely what it means to deny them their dignity;” instead, “we dignify the wildness [of NHAs] when we respect their behaviors as meaningful to them and recognize that their lives are theirs to live” (2011, 154-5).

It is not clear how either of these accounts could oppose veganism for companions; in making companions vegan, we precisely make them “decent” for NHA-respecting society, while, as they are not “wild,” the extent to which companions could have “wild dignity” is unclear. Tying carnivorous diets to dignity is thus a problem with these “relational” approaches to NHA dignity, but it is even more so with “individualist” accounts of NHA dignity, which tie dignity to some kind of trans-specific capacity.³ Take Michael Meyer’s account (2001), according to which all sentient beings possess “simple dignity.” Simple dignity, though, is more about moral standing than about particular kinds of treatment, so it seems that simple dignity and vegan diets have no clear relationship, diminishing its usefulness to the opponent of companion veganism.

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Martha Nussbaum's (2006) account is a paradigm example of the "species-based" approach to dignity. She says that a NHA's dignified existence

would seem at least to include the following: adequate opportunities for nutrition and physical activity; freedom from pain, squalor and cruelty; freedom to act in ways that are characteristic of the species [...]; freedom from fear and opportunities for rewarding interactions with other creatures of the same species, and of different species; a chance to enjoy the light and air in tranquility. (2006, 326)

This is placed within Nussbaum's capabilities approach, according to which justice is about endorsing various key capabilities. Capabilities are inherently species-dependent (resting upon a controversial Aristotelian notion of "species"), and so whether a companion has an important capability tied to flesh-eating, meaning it would be disrespectful to endorse veganism for that companion, depends on how we understand that companion's species. If a dog is understood as a member of the species *Canis lupus*, along with wolves, then perhaps she has an important flesh-eating capability. If dogs are members of the species *C. familiaris*, then this possibility is less plausible: the species has arisen in tandem with humans, and so human norms would define that species's norms. The same is true of cats, whom we may understand as members of *Felis silvestris*, along with wildcats, or as members of *F. catus*. However, *even if* we consider dogs and cats to be members of *Canis lupus* and *Felis silvestris* respectively, veganism need not be undignified. Nussbaum argues that

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Some capabilities are actually bad, and should be inhibited by law [...] No constitution protects capabilities *qua* capabilities. There must be prior evaluation, deciding which are good, and, among the good, which are most central, most clearly involved defining the minimum conditions for a life with [...] dignity. (2006, 166)⁴

The mere fact some NHA has the *capacity* to x does not mean that she could not have a dignified life without x. As I have argued, we do have good reason to believe that companions eating flesh is “actually bad,” and so it is *not* the kind of capability we should promote. Nussbaum openly endorses this kind of picture; she argues that the natural is not always good (2006, 400), and indicates that NHAs’ “harm-causing capabilities” are probably “not among those that should be protected by political and social principles” (2006, 369). By way of example, she points to a zoo that, rather than providing her/him with prey, provides a tiger with a ball on a rope (2006, 370-1). “Wherever predatory animals are living under direct human support and control,” she suggests, “these solutions seem to be the most ethically sound” (2006, 371). Though vegan companions are not mentioned, it seems to be the same kind of problem, and so warrants the same kind of solution. Ultimately, Nussbaum’s account offers no support for the suggestion that we feed flesh to our companions, while her own words seemingly oppose the practice.

I have suggested that key accounts of NHA dignity do not support the claim that we should feed companions flesh, but, in so doing, have taken for granted that accounts of NHA dignity can be useful at all. This idea is controversial (Cochrane 2010; Zuolo 2015). It is possible, first, that dignity does not *add* anything to existing discussions (Macklin 2003), and

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that accounts of dignity are reducible to other concepts. If so, accounts of NHA dignity fail the requirement that they are non-redundant (Zuolo 2015, 3). Furthermore, accounts like Meyer's, although serving to confer moral worth or standing on individual NHAs, do not offer guidance for action (Zuolo 2015, 3), and so offer little to the present question. Issues of space mean that exploration of problems with dignity is impossible, but it is worth noting a final worry often raised: namely, that appeals to "dignity" are pure rhetoric, and that the term is used merely to justify whatever it is that is being defended. This idea is put eloquently by Singer, who writes that "[p]hilosophers frequently introduce ideas of dignity ... at the point at which other reasons appear to be lacking, but this is hardly good enough. Fine phrases are the last resource of those who have run out of arguments" (1974, 113; cf. Macklin 2003). So, not only is it unclear how a dignity argument could ground opposition to vegan diets for companions, but there is an open question about the value of dignity arguments (especially in animal ethics) in the first place.

Naturalness

The idea that something is "natural" is found in some accounts of dignity, but it can be separated from them. A naturalness argument against feeding vegan diets to companions would look something like this:

Premise 1: Companions are naturally flesh eaters.

Interim conclusion: To allow them to be flesh eaters would promote the natural.

Premise 2: Promoting the natural is (*prima facie*) good.

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Conclusion: Allowing companions to be flesh eaters is (*prima facie*) good.

There are at least two contentious elements here; the first is the identification of the “natural,” and the second is the claim that the “natural” is good.

The good of naturalness is sometimes articulated in environmental ethics, but it is controversial. There are many “natural” things that we consider to be very bad, including suffering, starvation and disease. Further, the claim that something is “natural” is often a smokescreen for oppression. Examples abound: racism and sexual abuse are called “natural;” homosexuality and gender equality are declared “unnatural.” However, even if these problems can be overcome, it is difficult to see how the defender of flesh foods for companions can invoke naturalness without throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as it is hard to frame an account of “naturalness” in which companions *themselves* are not unnatural. On the view of the environmental ethicists John Rodman, Holmes Rolston III and (previously) J. Baird Callicott, for example, companions are problematic *precisely* because they are *unnatural*, or have been *denaturalized*, and so have become “living artifacts” (cited in Cochrane 2014, 158). Even if we have doubts about the claims of these thinkers, it would be oddly selective to defend companion flesh-eating on the grounds of naturalness without also *criticizing* practically every element of the institution of companionship. Consequently, even if we are to promote naturalness, there is no easy way to use this to oppose companion veganism: if arguments about naturalness apply, they likely apply in ways bad for companionship.

Even if we can overcome *these* problems, the argument is incomplete. The “goodness” of the “natural” diet would have to be compared with the badness of its consequences. Even if some

(bizarre) person believed naturalness the *only* good, it remains unclear that they should oppose vegan companions; depending on their account of naturalness, it could be that a vegan dog is “less unnatural” than animal agriculture, and, given that animal agriculture results in catastrophic levels of land use, harmful emissions and chemical pollution, the institution is contributing on an enormous scale to the *destruction* of nature. It is probable that more “naturalness” will be promoted if the world were to convert to vegan diets for companions.

Perhaps a more reasonable challenge grounded in naturalness would take the following form:⁵ Companions have natural inclinations towards flesh (or, would naturally seek out flesh), and we have an obligation not to interfere with (or, more strongly, to promote) their natural inclinations/actions. I do think this argument is more compelling than the previous, but that is because it is essentially a freedom-based argument with added naturalness considerations; while “naturalness” does not add much to the argument, it does *detract* from it, insofar as it raises problems. Specifically, the proponent of this argument has the difficult tasks of identifying the “natural” (compounded by the above considerations about the unnaturalness of companions), defending the *value* of the natural, and finally weighing this value with the problems (including problems of unnaturalness and destruction of the natural) associated with feeding companions flesh. In all, I suggest that the proponent of this argument would do better to drop the “naturalness” claim and focus on freedom. Therefore, it is to that argument that I now turn.

Freedom

An argument often heard in defense of *human* consumption of flesh is that people should be free to choose what they consume. We recognize this argument for what it is in some

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contexts; we do not think that people should be free to choose to consume *human* flesh, for instance. Many animal lovers also oppose the freedom to eat dogs and cats; the outrage at the annual Yulin Dog Meat Festival in China is illustrative. (The irony that many of the most vocal opponents of the festival are non-vegans has not been lost on some commentators.) It cannot be the case, then, that the promotion of companion freedom or autonomy necessitates that the companions be permitted to eat whatever they like. Nonetheless, a freedom-based argument could be made to support flesh-based diets for companions. One could appeal either to the freedom of the *companions* to eat what they would prefer, or perhaps to the freedom of the *guardians* to feed to their companions what is convenient. Donaldson and Kymlicka consider but dismiss the former. “We have made a point of enabling animal agency,” they write, “...[s]o why, in the case of diet, are we advocating that meat should not be among the choices offered to them? Because the liberty of citizens is always constrained by respect for the liberties of others” (2013, 150). They are surely right, and the point stands whether or not we share the authors’ conception of citizenship. It is perverse to suggest that companions’ interest in having food that they prefer (if they do prefer NHA-derived foods), or guardians’ interest in feeding easily accessible food to their companions, should outweigh the interest that sensitive NHAs have in not having suffering inflicted upon them and not being killed. These are some of the most central interests a being can possess.

It is worth remembering that the majority of companions in the west are not given much freedom concerning their choice of diet, and are simply fed the canned food that their guardians have chosen. However, it is perfectly consistent to imagine a companion having considerable choice while remaining vegan. There are multiple vegan “pet food” brands available, as well as plenty of tried-and-tested recipes posted online. And there is no reason to rely wholly on

processed or cooked foodstuffs. Donaldson and Kymlicka illustrate the way that companion choice can be promoted while still working within the confines of veganism:

It's true that humans need to ensure that dogs meet their nutritional needs, and that they don't overeat, or eat foods that will poison them. But this still leaves a large area in which dogs can express their food preferences and make their own choices. Through trial and error (and choice amongst options), it became perfectly clear to us that our dog Codie's favourite foods included fennel, kale stems, and carrots. And peas were so prized he simply helped himself from the veggie garden. Fruit really wasn't of interest. On the other hand, his buddy Rolly was mad for bananas. Dogs have individual preferences, and (to varying degrees) the competence to make choices based on their preferences. (2013, 109)

Codie, clearly, is given far greater choice when it comes to food than the vast majority of companions. The promotion of companion autonomy should not be understood as in conflict with the demand that companions be fed a vegan diet.

Health

I now move on to the most pressing challenge companion veganism. It might be said that while we do have an obligation to abstain from inflicting suffering upon and killing sensitive NHAs, this obligation is overridden by the fact that our companions require the flesh of NHAs to

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be healthy. There is received wisdom in the area (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2013, 143; Rothgerber 2014) that while dogs can thrive on vegan diets, cats may not be able to. Indeed, it is not hard to find authoritative-sounding statements endorsing this claim. For example, on the popular website WebMD, Roxanne Hawn quotes Cailin Heinze (a veterinary nutritionist) as saying that “[f]or cats, [a vegan diet is] really inappropriate. It goes against their physiology and isn’t something I would recommend at all. For dogs ... vegan diets can be done, but they need to be done very, very carefully” (Hawn 2011). Hawn also quotes the guardian of cats fed a vegan diet, who explains that her cats are happy and healthy (2011). It is not hard to find anecdotal evidence of vegan cats thriving on the one hand and angry condemnation of guardians of vegan cats on the other. Here is not the place to solve this particular dispute, especially as the scientific literature seems equivocal. In a review of the evidence, Katheryn Michel concluded that the nutritional adequacy of some commercially available vegan cat foods has been “called into question,” but did not claim that vegan diets are necessarily unsuitable (2006, 1275-7). By contrast, a study (Wakefield, Shofer and Michel 2006) examining individual cats found that vegetarian diets (including vegan diets) did not have the adverse health effects expected. Lorelei Wakefield, the veterinarian who was the lead author of the latter study, runs VegetarianCats.com, a website with information about vegetarian and vegan diets for companions. She is of the view that a plant-based diet for cats is possible, having raised vegan cats, but can be difficult, especially if the cats have pre-existing health problems.

Given the conflicting comments from experts, this fourth challenge seems a serious one for my argument. Were cats unable to survive on a vegan diet, and assuming that they could not be provided flesh in a respectful way, it could be that we would have to explore whether there was some way we could balance our positive duties towards cats with our negative duties

towards other NHAs. One solution, unthinkable to some, would be companion cats' extinction. Though we may have good reasons to think cats' extinction would be a bad thing, we also have very good reasons to be opposed to continuing to feed flesh to cats. Another possible solution, though one perhaps equally problematic, is genetically modifying cats away from carnivory. The way forward seems unclear.

But let us take a step back. The issue of companion diet is more complicated than I have previously allowed. First, our obligations concerning dogs and cats may be different, given their different physiologies.⁶ Second, our obligations concerning companion diet have both *moral* and *political* dimensions. The moral dimension focuses on the actions of guardians, while the political dimension focuses on the actions of the state and society – for example, decisions about research funding. In the case of dogs, the moral and the political dimensions are close: we should want to see dogs converted to veganism. For individual animal lovers, this means careful research and a change in companion diet. For states, the obligation will, in the medium-term, mean the banning of flesh-based “pet food.” More immediately, it might mean information campaigns and subsidies on vegan dog foods, both of which could be funded by a tax on flesh-based dog foods.

With cats, individuals and states appear to have somewhat different obligations. Individual animal lovers should not want to risk their companions' health. For guardians who are confident that they can provide a suitable vegan diet for their cats, this is the right choice, but such individuals may be in a minority. The solution for others is *minimizing* the amount of animal protein fed to companions. Preferable to a wholly flesh-based diet would be feeding cats “half vegetarian biscuits and half organic wet meaty food” (Brown and Welch 2010). A mixed diet could be combined with the seeking out of the most ethically viable NHA-derived products

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for companions: organic, free-range, “happy” meat still involves the infliction of an early, gruesome death, but at least there is typically *less* suffering. Perhaps there are better possibilities: the eggs of rescued chickens might be viable, but such chickens would not exist in a world in which chickens were not kept for their eggs. Though perhaps unpleasant, “road kill” provides a source of flesh that would be wasted otherwise. “Dumpster-diving” provides another alternative; again, though, dumpster-diving (which is criminalized in some jurisdictions) is a possibility only so long as we live in a society where NHA-derived products remain a “normal” part of the human diet, and so will hopefully become less viable in time.

Political solutions would involve seeking out a just alternative to current cat diets, perhaps through research funding. Most obviously, veterinarians can learn more about cat physiology and diets and so come to understand how they might easily thrive on vegan diets. For example, taurine is a nutrient that cats typically acquire from animal flesh, but vegan taurine supplements are already available – further development in this area is easily conceivable. Animal welfare scientists might be able to discover that certain NHAs are actually unthinking, unfeeling entities, in which case they would not be covered by the typical approaches to animal ethics. If these NHAs could be used to feed our cats, then it seems that the dilemma could be averted. Research from animal ethicists and other normative theorists, too, could suggest creative solutions to the problem – both temporary and permanent. For example, in a world in which humans and dogs were vegan there would be much space on which we could develop the most humane possible forms of farming.⁷ I defend an alternative elsewhere (Milburn, forthcoming), suggesting that while the discovery of some nonsentient NHA that is suitable as a food source for cats would be ideal, in the meantime, we could be permitted to feed to cats those NHAs for whom sentience is *plausible*, but not *likely*, such as certain shellfish. Importantly, I argue that we

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may have different obligations concerning our cats' diets than our own; while we could feed certain shellfish to our cats, we would not be permitted to eat them ourselves. (Individual animal lovers, if they are confident that shellfish could provide a suitable food source for their companions but are not confident that a wholly vegan diet could, could follow this route.) The question of companion diets is not solely a scientific one, but something to which normative theorists could offer much.

Concluding remarks

I began this chapter with the observation that there is an oddity in the fact that in being an animal lover – someone who shares their life with a nonhuman animal companion – one often contributes to more NHA death and suffering than one would otherwise. This “animal lovers’ paradox” is closely related to the vegetarian’s dilemma, a term that refers to the conflict veg(etari)ans feel when it comes to the possibility of feeding flesh to their companions. I presented an argument in favor of feeding vegan diets to our companions, before exploring four possible challenges. Arguments from NHA *dignity* face the problems of stating precisely what is *meant* by dignity, and of clarifying why a vegan diet is undignified. In addition, we may have reasons not to endorse dignity arguments at all. Arguments from *naturalness* face problems in explaining why naturalness is good, and encounter problems when it comes to companions in the first place. Further, *even if* naturalness is good and a vegan diet is unnatural, the badness (including *destruction* of the natural) of companion carnivory surely outweighs the goodness. The challenge from NHA *freedom* pits two animal ethics ideals against each other, but companions’ interest in having a wider variety of food choices cannot override the fundamental

interests other NHAs have in not being killed or made to suffer, and, further, a vegan diet is not incompatible with a high degree of dietary freedom for companions anyway.

The final challenge considered was the most important. The fact that it may not be *healthy* for companions (especially cats) to be fed a solely vegan diet leads to important distinctions that need to be made. With dogs, our *moral* and *political* obligations seem to fit neatly together; these companions should be converted to vegan diets. With cats, however, our moral and political obligations seem to diverge.⁸ While individual animal lovers should seek to *limit* the death and suffering in their cats' diets, completely eliminating it may not always be possible. However, as a political community, we should be funding research into how the suffering and death currently entailed by cats' diets can be removed entirely. With further research, good will and wider awareness, we can hope that all members of our community – humans and companions – can come to survive and flourish in ways that are respectful of the fundamental interests of sensitive nonhuman animals.

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¹ In private correspondence, Cochrane has told me that companion diet is an issue to which he has given considerable thought. Like me, he considers it an important ethico-political issue, and not simply a question for veterinary nutrition.

² Readers unhappy with this assumption should consider a world in which many products are made with slave labor. (Note that I am not making a claim about the comparative badness of slavery and animal agriculture.) We may worry about the effect that we as an individual can have on the institution of slave labor, and we might be surrounded by family and friends who happily consume the products of slavery – perhaps they talk about how it is “natural,” “normal,” “necessary” or “nice” to use slaves (cf. Piazza et al. 2015). Nonetheless, we would surely have an obligation to avoid the products of slavery, especially if it was easy for us to do so, and given that our abstention could convince *others* to refrain.

One might object that this thought experiment would only have an effect upon the current question if we held that the consumption of NHA-derived foods was just as bad as human slavery. However, the fact that we would and should continue to abstain from the products of slavery in the imagined case shows us that the stated concerns are not overridingly significant; the burden of proof would be on the person who objected to veganism to illustrate why these counterarguments were convincing for veganism but not slavery.

³ I have borrowed the tripartite split of NHA dignity accounts into *relational*, *individualist* and *species-based* from Federico Zuolo (2015). Hybrid positions are possible; Anderson’s account is a hybrid species-based/relational account, for example.

⁴ Nussbaum talks of human dignity, but there is no reason to think that NHA dignity is any different.

⁵ With thanks to Anne Barnhill for this point.

⁶ This is not a speciesist claim. Physiological differences are, here, morally relevant.

⁷ With thanks to Chris Thompson for this observation.

⁸ This divergence is not unique to the current problem. In the UK, all medicines are tested on NHAs, so vegans face a dilemma when ill. Refusing medication cannot be the answer, but neither can we ignore the ethical demands upon us. As individuals, the best solution may be to accept medication tested on NHAs, but nonetheless demand that it does not contain NHA-derived ingredients – to *minimize* impact. As with companion diets, though, our moral and political obligations diverge in interesting ways; even if we are reliant on the products of vivisection, we retain an obligation to oppose it politically and socially.