Sins of the Flesh

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A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought

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For my fellows on the path

The sinful lusts of the flesh.

– *The Catechism,* in *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549)

For they that are after the flesh [of animals] do mind the things of the flesh.

– Tertullian (c. 160-220)

... the lust of the belly.

– St. Basil of Caesarea (329-379)

... that humour that lusteth after flesh and blood.

– Roger Crab (1655)

... 'tis no easy task to preach to the Belly that has no ears.

– Alexander Pope, paraphrasing Cato (1713)

... blood lusts ... brutalize the person and harden the instincts of the heart.

– Alphonse de Lamartine (1848)

Contents

Acknowledgments

Two books have been especially influential in my preparation of this volume: *Deep Vegetarianism,* by Michael Allen Fox, and *Vegetarianism: A History* (the second edition of *The Heretic's Feast*), by Colin Spencer. Much as is my admiration for the authors of these two books and the works they have produced, and much as I shall, unavoidably, repeat some of their messages and analyses in these pages, although in very different words and with very different emphases, my justification for *Sins of the Flesh* is that I believe I have something to offer that takes us a little further along the adventurous road Fox and Spencer have trod.[1] And whereas I now and again reject specific interpretations of Spencer and Fox, I must stress that such disputes are often a matter of interpretation of available evidence, not simple matters of fact. I do not insist that my interpretations are right and theirs erroneous – where we differ – but on the basis of probabilities, I do find some interpretations more appropriate than others, and my interpretations do not always coincide with those of my forerunners. Perhaps I deviate from Spencer the most in that I find his book almost as much a fascinating history of food – which I would be quite incapable of writing – as a history of vegetarianism and almost as much a history of philosophical and historical-cultural attitudes in general as of attitudes that relate to vegetarianism and animal ethics in particular. My interest lies primarily in the ethical dimensions of vegetarianism, and it is on this aspect of vegetarianism that I concentrate in this book. Moreover, I view neither our prehistorical past, nor the experience of the East, nor the wisdom of Pythagoras, nor the asceticism of early Christianity in anything like the same manner as Spencer.

And there is considerably more disagreement besides. Still, I have benefited a good deal from Spencer's erudition and am grateful for it, although I regret that none of his copious notes are referenced with page numbers. In fact, notes without a page reference are of almost no value. I deviate from Fox in that his work relates more to the philosophy than to the history of vegetarianism, as I am sure he intended and would be the first to acknowledge with justifiable pride. Despite *Deep Vegetarianism*'s major orientation, however, there is also much of interest to the philosophical historian in its pages, even if, again, I do not always concur with his interpretations.

Although Daniel Dombrowski's *The Philosophy of Vegetarianism* played only a modest role in directly influencing the preparation of this book, other than for Chapter 4, when I first read the book a number of years ago, it had a significant impact on my thinking. It is an impact that I am sure still lingers and will have had an important subliminal effect on my approach. Moreover, despite the title of Dombrowski's book, there is much of significant historical merit, especially on pre-Socratic, classical, and Hellenistic Greece. A fourth book, Tristram Stuart's *Bloodless Revolution: A Cultural History of Vegetarianism from 1600 to the Present Time* appeared when the research for this volume was essentially complete and all but the final words of the text had been written. It treats mainly the period and events covered in some of the later chapters of this volume. Although it was a most enjoyable read, was most informative, and is superbly composed and researched, especially for the period from the mid-seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries, the book proved only tangentially relevant to my theme and approach. It is certainly a most valuable addition to the literature on vegetarian history and absolutely essential for serious scholars interested predominantly in the European (and primarily British) seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, Stuart and I have very different – even competing – stories to tell.

I am indebted to the research of Keith Thomas that he used in his groundbreaking *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800.* It was especially valuable for the third section of my eighth chapter. Although I taught the *philosophy* of Rousseau for over thirty years, my biographical comments on Rousseau's *history* in Chapter 9 have been informed largely by Maurice Cranston's superb three-volume biography on the life of the Franco-Swiss philosopher. I am also grateful to Karen and Michael Iacobbo, whose *Vegetarian America: A History* helped to fill significant lacunae in my knowledge of the American vegetarian experience that I needed for Chapter 13. I deemed it important for the sake of a measure of

completeness to include a chapter on American vegetarian history in this book. However, for those who require a more comprehensive examination, I can do no better than suggest they read the very informative and comprehensive book by the Iacobbos. My relatively few pages are no substitute for the detail of their nearly three hundred.

Long before I read Barbara Ehrenreich's *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War,* I had accepted the hypothesis promoted by Ehrenreich that early humans were much more prey than predator, a hypothesis now confirmed in abundant detail by the meticulous researches of Donna Hart and Robert W. Sussman in *Man the Hunted: Primates, Predators and Human Evolution*. Nonetheless, Ehrenreich's book stimulated me to recognize the importance of animal sacrifice in relation to predation and the significance of animal worship. I have learned much from her evidence and argument but have applied it in a field in which she had no interest per se (her concern was with the origins of warfare), and I have reached conclusions that I am confident she would not share. Nonetheless, I am indebted to her analysis, albeit indirectly.

Just as I had accepted the view of the human as prey long before I read Ehrenreich, so I had some reservations about the extent of vegetarianism and the ethical treatment of animals in Eastern religious traditions long before I had read the work of D.N. Jha, professor of history at the University of Delhi. Indeed, I mentioned at some length in my *Animals and Nature: Cultural Myths, Cultural Realities*, written some years before Jha's major work on the subject of Eastern animal worship was published, the manner in which I consider the religions of the Orient to have been misinterpreted, especially by Western scholars. Nonetheless, the abundant evidence provided by Professor Jha in *The Myth of the Holy Cow* gave me access to detailed material of which I was previously unaware. I have relied on this material in part for Chapter 2 of this book. Of course, my sources for that chapter are quite varied, but without Jha's meticulous research, I would have lacked the rigorous evidence to draw the conclusions that my previous research had prepared me to expect on further investigation. I could not have unearthed independently the myriad sources he brings to bear.

For my understanding of Pythagoras, I am indebted in considerable measure to Charles H. Kahn, whose book on *Pythagoras and the Pythagorean Way of Life* was as invaluable to me for my third chapter as it was in my preparation of a chapter of *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution*: *The Historical Status of Animals*. Even where my conclusions on Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans may sometimes differ markedly from those of

Kahn, they are inspired by him. For the same chapter, I have been very fortunate to have Jonathan Barnes's *Early Greek Philosophy* as a source book of some of the most significant statements of the pre-Socratics.

In *The Ethics of Diet* (1883), Howard Williams provided a remarkable account of a very large proportion of material relevant to the history of vegetarianism, as previous researchers have found, some acknowledging their indebtedness to Williams, others pretending it to have been a great deal less significant than it really was. The book is in fact a boon to all those interested in the historical record. I have availed myself of that material as appropriate in the preparation of this book. For the convenience of the reader, I have made reference to the readily available 2004 Illinois reprint edition, edited by Carol J. Adams (I have referred to the 1883 edition in some of my previous work), both where I have profited from Williams's compilations, including the large number of citations from the original contributors, and where I have reason to believe the reader will not have access to some of the scarcer historical material. Elsewhere, I have also sometimes referred the reader to readily available sources rather than the more obscure originals.

My greatest debt is owed to those who were role models on the vegetarian journey. There were several, but foremost among these was Stephanie Brown of Toronto. If it was watching a documentary film in Calgary in 1992 on "downer" animals in stockyards that proved the immediate occasion of my wife and myself pursuing the vegetarian course, it was Stephanie who was the most persuasive personal catalyst. Her gracious and considerate, yet unwavering, advocacy by example and word both pointed the path and facilitated the choice.

The constant commitment of my wife, Lorna Chamberlain, to the animal cause helped to make the vegetarian path far easier, more enjoyable, and smoother than it otherwise might have been. I am especially pleased to acknowledge my indebtedness to Steve Sapontzis, Daniel Dombrowski, and Jodey Castricano for their erudite and sympathetic appraisals of the manuscript. Their insightful critiques helped me to avoid some inadequacies in the original manuscript. Yet, at the same time, their reviews persuaded the publishers that the manuscript was worthy of publication. They agreed to the release of their names so that their exceptional assistance could be duly acknowledged. Valuable as their assistance was, any remaining inadequacies are, of course, entirely my own. As always, my editor at UBC Press, Randy Schmidt, has been very helpful, indulgent of my idiosyncrasies, and supportive of my efforts.

Sins of the Flesh

Introduction

BILL OF FARE TO THE FEAST:

THE WHATS AND WHYS OF VEGETARIANISM

On an early page of her celebrated 1963 novel, *The Group,* Mary McCarthy introduced her readers to "Pokey" Prothero, a young woman who was "interested only in animals and hunt dances" and whose ambition "was to become a vet." Nor was it only the dances following the hunt that enthralled her, for, on the following page, we read that "she had been away hunting for the weekend."[1] To many, there would appear to be an incongruence, a cognitive dissonance, between desiring a career as someone devoted to the health and care of animals, on the one hand, and participation in the wilful destruction of animal life, on the other. Mary McCarthy does not consider the dissonance worthy of a mention, any more than does the early utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, who maintained competing propositions about animal suffering and the inferior value of animal life simultaneously.[2] Similarly, the veterinarians William Karkeek and William Youatt, nineteenth-century authors on animal immortality and animal wellbeing respectively, were also avid proponents of, and occasional participants in, the hunt.[3] For the ethical vegetarian, there is an equal contradiction in the lives of those who claim to abominate cruelty to animals but who still go home to a roast-beef supper. Many say they love animals. But all that the evidence suggests is that they love to eat them. Indeed, for most vegetarians, the eschewing of animal flesh is a natural extension of the accordance to animals of the most elementary of rights, just as we would consider human rights necessarily to include respect for human life. Nonetheless, there is a 1965 book by Robin Borwick about donkeys entitled *People with Long Ears* that makes an equation between human and nonhuman animals that drives the less radical animal-welfare scientists and

others into apoplectic fits – metaphorically speaking at least. There seems to be a perception of glaring contradictions in such persons both between their protection of life and their causing of death, on the one side, and between the value they accord human animals and their lesser valuation of nonhuman animals, on the other, that requires a careful analysis. I propose to address in this book how this question of value has been approached historically and to investigate the path of ethical vegetarianism in human history.

Where Are Vegetarians to Be Found?

Initially, one must ask: "what is vegetarianism and how numerous are its adherents?" Reliable figures are hard to come by, and the existing data is subject to conflicting interpretations. But probably not much more than 3 or perhaps 4 percent of North Americans – some say 5, whereas others, such as the Vegetarian Resource Group, after having conducted a poll in 1994, suggest less than 1 percent – are moderately strict vegetarians, with a slightly higher proportion in Europe. It is perhaps more instructive and impressive to note that, already as of 1992, "as the *New York Times* reported, there are well over 10 million vegetarians in [the United States]. New York alone is supporting 35 vegetarian restaurants for about 100,000 strict vegetarians, and there are perhaps half a million who are part-time vegetarians."[4] Hilda Kean has stated that as of 1994, "at least 5 per cent of all Britons were vegetarian and 5,000 people a week were estimated to be moving to a meat-free diet."[5] If this was true then – and some even estimate the number to be as high as 7 percent – we would have good reason to believe that the figures would be slightly higher today. But we might also be inclined to wonder whether the higher figures are at least in part a product of wishful thinking.

The proportion of vegetarians who are vegan in the West is decidedly on the rise, and an at least quasi vegetarianism appeals to many more than in the past. And, of course, there are some omnivorous members of humane societies and other animal organizations who practise vegetarianism from shame when they are in the company of their more radical colleagues from the same organizations but return to a flesh diet when they are at home. There are also many vegetarians who are vegans manqués – wannabe vegans, if you will, or vegan "flexitarians" (see page 15) – those who are steadfastly vegetarian but vegan only when circumstances readily allow. Certainly, there are far fewer vegetarians in the Orient, including India, where animal sacrifice is still practised, than is commonly believed, especially by

vegetarians themselves. A majority of those who are vegetarian in India (vegetarians constitute around one-third of the total population) are female, although certain areas of the country, predominantly the south, but also Gujarat in the northwest, are historically vegetarian as a whole. According to Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby in *The Hindu World,* "the men of an estimated half of twentieth-century Hindu families (including those of several Brahman jatis) favor the eating of fish, chicken and mutton."[6] In fact, Indian men often claim the arduousness of their employment requires the strength purportedly derived from a flesh diet, a claim given encouragement by the young Gandhi, an encouragement he came later to regret. He thought initially that Indians could overcome their British masters by acquiring equivalent strength by eating the diet they ate. Later, on reading vegetarian advocacy literature in an English vegetarian restaurant, he was awakened to the ethical appeal of the fleshless diet. As James Gaffney has expressed it appositely: "Gandhi, who had renounced vegetarianism out of hostility to English colonialism, was restored to it by English liberalism."[7] As India becomes wealthier, we can expect, based on our experience of economic development elsewhere, that the proportion of vegetarians will decline, although not as rapidly as would be the case if there were no strong vegetarian cultural traditions.

In China, almost all vegetarians – excluding a few Buddhist monks (most Chinese Buddhist monks are not vegetarian) – are inhabitants of rural areas, and they are often vegetarians not by choice but by poverty, the vast majority of the rural population consuming 10 percent animal protein in their diet (in the United States it is about 50 percent). The figures for South Korea are very similar to those for China. With its ethic of unity and conformity, deviations from the dietary norm in South Korea are said to be frowned upon. On the other hand, it is reported that there are fifteen so-called "vegetarian" restaurants in Seoul alone, some of which offer more varied fare than purely vegetarian. But at least the availability of vegetarian dishes can be assured in those establishments. Westerners who arrive in Chinese cities as students and who are already vegetarian usually find it very difficult to remain true to their preferred diet. Even Chinese sleeper trains do not offer vegetarian meals. One fares little better in Japan, it would appear. According to Jan Dodd, "vegetarianism isn't widely practised, or a fully understood concept in Japan. You might ask for a vegetarian (saishoku) meal in a restaurant and still be served something with meat or fish."[8] Such is the ubiquity in urban China, Korea, and Japan of flesh and sauces derived therefrom, other than sometimes in the temples and the occasional vegetarian establishment. Nor are other Buddhist temples always

secure for a plant-based diet. Even the Dalai Lama, the exiled head of Tibetan Buddhism, apparently having unsuccessfully tried vegetarianism once before, claimed in April 2005 to have recently begun to try a vegetarian diet again. Buddhists, particularly Buddhist priests, may have the reputation of being vegetarian. Only sometimes are they so in fact.

What Is a Vegetarian?

The question of what constitutes a vegetarian receives a host of conflicting answers. An employee of the Vegetarian Society in England once told me that they would count as a vegetarian anyone who does not eat anything with a face. While not having a face may be an initial pointer to the uninitiated in determining what is acceptable and what is not, being faceless is not ipso facto an infallible indicator of what is ethically appropriate. What of clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, and the like? Are they not animal? Are they not sentient beings? The scientific jury is in general still out about their sentience, while admitting serious doubts. It was once common for at least some to doubt the sentience of many more complex (and faced) creatures, although Scottish animal scientists have now concluded that the expressionless fish feel pain and quite substantially so. Recent investigations have convinced Duke University researchers that "bird-brained" birds have well-developed, feeling mental systems. Furthermore, a study by British scientists published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* casts serious doubt on the anthropocentric assumption of numerous philosophers that thought is dependent on language. "We are kicking against the claim that it is language which allows you to do other high order intellectual functions," said Rosemary Varley, lead researcher from the University of Sheffield.[9] Assuming such scientists are right – for, to misrepresent Euripides slightly, one scientist's newly discovered meat soon becomes another scientist's atrophied poison – the time-honoured sports of shooting and angling are decidedly cruel pastimes, even if the fish, after being tormented with a hook in its mouth, is returned alive to the water. Nonetheless, much to the chagrin of vegetarians, a Norwegian 2005 study suggests that lobsters, and by implication less complex crustaceans, do not feel pain. The animal advocate remains dubious. No questions on vegetarianism and the principles behind its practice are ever as simple as they at first appear.

What of the consumption of eggs and dairy products? Although eggs, milk, and cheese are not flesh, they are derived from the confinement, and some would argue the perennial mistreatment, of animals, even if they are

so-called "free-run" or "free-range" animals – intentionally deceptive misnomers if ever there were any, at least in much of North America! For example, in the United States the Department of Agriculture designates "free-range" to mean that a bird has some, even if limited, access to the outdoors, however confined and in whatever proximity to others, while practices of beak trimming and other invasive procedures continue unabated. The life of a "free-range" turkey is four to six months. In the wild the bird can live for up to twenty years. What if they are raised according to the five freedoms that the more compassionate of omnivores regard as essential for what they call cruelty-free farming? These freedoms are: (1) animals should have freedom from thirst, hunger, and malnutrition through ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour; (2) animals should have freedom from thermal and physical discomfort through the provision of an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area; (3) animals should have freedom from pain, injury, and disease by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment; (4) animals should have freedom to express normal behaviour by the provision of sufficient space, proper facilities, and company of their own kind; (5) animals should have freedom from fear and distress by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.[10] Most vegetarians welcome these "five freedoms" for food animals enthusiastically but wonder, if the animals are entitled to such benevolent treatment, why they are not also entitled to their lives and to the elimination of their inordinately early death pangs. If there is a propensity to consider farm animals "stupid beasts," research conducted at the Babraham Institute of Cambridge should serve to dispel the myth. In fact, not only pigs, long renowned for their intelligence, but other food animals, too, are among the most perceptive and inquisitive of animals. Cattle, sheep, and the like are as worthy of protection as pets.

The proponents of the freedoms argue that a conversion of significant proportions of the population to vegetarianism in the near future is highly unlikely and that the "five freedoms" will ensure the animals a satisfactory life prior to their becoming food. It will also ensure that animal wellbeing will be a permanent feature of the minds of many. Nonetheless, any consequent success may encourage acceptance of the new status quo. One must not forget, as George Bernard Shaw wrote in the "Epistle Dedicatory" to *Man and Superman*, "the man whose consciousness does not correspond to that of the majority is a madman."[11] Still, the vegetarian and socialist Shaw's own life and values showed that although one must not venture too far from prevailing views in order to be regarded as worthy of being heard, one must also be something, if not too much, of a madman if one wishes

to effect changes in the values of society. Abstract ethics, however rational, can succeed only to the extent that they deviate not too greatly from society's deeply embraced norms. Yet the societal dietary norms are repugnant to ethical vegetarians. Vegetarians are thus forced to be both "man" and "superman" simultaneously. That is, they must play the wise madman and the mad wise man interchangeably, eccentric and *magus* together. And if one still wishes to proclaim the ethical principle unadorned, it is worthy to recall that numerous renowned luminaries – Pope, Gay, Mandeville, Goldsmith, Rousseau, Voltaire, Lamartine, Wagner, and Tennyson among them – have proclaimed the virtue of being vegetarian, while failing, by various degrees, or so it would appear, to practise what they preached. This principle without practice is reminiscent of several acquaintances who have said, "I *ought* to be a vegetarian," but who, despite the abstention from veal perhaps, continue in their omnivorous habits.

What, then, of animal by-products, such as skins that are transformed into leather? A case can be made, and often is by the opponents of vegetarianism, that animals raised for their hides to be used as leather are among the most cruelly treated of creatures. Such opponents insist that if vegetarians are to be consistent – and they are sometimes derided by the same voices for not being so – they must also reject the killing of animals for the use of their skins. And so they must. And very many do, a fact usually ignored by the cavillers. What the purveyors of such arguments also usually fail to recognize is that the argument applies to themselves just as strongly. If the way leather-producing animals are kept is manifestly cruel (and the cavillers are right to point out that it is, perhaps most notably for the production of specialty items such as doeskin gloves, crocodile shoes, alligator purses, or sealskin handbags), then, unless the opponents of vegetarianism wish to confess to fostering the abject cruelty they have correctly identified, they, too, must eschew the use of animal skins, including leather – for example, in certain clothing, belts, shoes, seats, briefcases, and the like. That anti-vegetarian omnivores do not recognize that the argument applies equally to themselves is a recognition that at least in some degree they hold the vegetarian to a higher degree of morality than they hold the flesh eater. Implicitly, they recognize the worthiness of the vegetarian's case and look for a ground on which they can claim that there are some limitations to the vegetarian's acknowledged moral superiority. As it is, the notion of the vegetarian who is not completely pure serves to provide a ready rationalization for the flesh eater. If it is satisfactory for the vegetarian to be a little less than perfect, so it seems to imply, then it is equally satisfactory for the flesh eater to be wholly imperfect. Omnivores must at the very least confess to the

cruelty even if they excuse the cruelty as what they consider a "necessary" and justifiable cruelty. And in the above-proclaimed moral infraction, the omnivore has conceded the practice of using animal hides for human ends is unnecessary.

The vegetarian is initially at a social disadvantage. The special dinner at family gatherings, on first dates, at communal festivities, at weddings and funerals, on anniversaries, at church and employer barbecues, and on religious occasions, or occasions that had an initial religious or pagan impetus, such as Easter or Christmas (and still do for many), performs a vital societal function. It is no less significant in seemingly quite secular rituals with a religious origin such as Thanksgiving, where even the festive food, the animal to be slaughtered, is prescribed. The ritual promotes the solidarity, the belongingness, of the group or pair. Even the founder of the Vegan Society in England, Donald Watson, on being asked what were his greatest difficulties, replied: "Well, I suppose it is the social – excommunicating myself from that part of life where people meet to eat." To be sure, some vegetarians insist they prefer their ethical principles over the value of communal gathering, but they do so at the expense of the social bond.

The ritual meal tells the recipients of the bounty that they are welcome, appreciated, respected, and desired people. In early society, a man's wealth and prestige were determined by how many cattle he owned. In the words of Mary Midgley: "meat-eating indicates success and prosperity, therefore hospitality."[12] Discussions about cuisine, recipes, and cooking constitute a major point of human contact and revolve, in the first instance, around flesh dishes. The vegetarian member of an omnivorous family, church, business, or even society may thereby become an outsider, failing to participate fully in the communal process. Among several other purposes, the meal reflects the generosity, the good taste, the wealth, and the prowess of the provider – even male sexual prowess, for there seems to be some correlation between meat and virility in the public mind. Moreover, in early human societies, meat was used by males as a part of self-display in sexual selection, with the implication of: "Look at me! I am especially brave. I am a great hunter and therefore a good provider. I have good genes and will provide the seed of good offspring." The vegetarian appears to be the weak cousin. Perhaps, because of such evolutionary impetus, it will always be supremely difficult to persuade pubescent males to abandon flesh. The grander the meal, the more luxurious the offering from the hunt, the more impressive is the gift. And this usually involves the provision of flesh – the most expensive and exorbitant food item, such specialty items as truffles excluded. And even the provision of such specialty items will lack the bravery,

strength, or status associated with the provision of flesh. Ineluctably, vegetarians will seem inadequately generous with their nonflesh offering or inadequately grateful for the donor's gift of flesh – and, in either case, inadequately attractive to potential partners. The vegetarian is likely to be viewed as an outsider. Moreover, the hero and the adventurer are unlikely to be depicted as vegetarians. Valour and the fleshless diet are not associated in the public perception.

The British philosopher Roger Scruton has argued very ably the importance of the human dining ritual and the vital civilizing distinction between feeding and eating, between *fressen* and *essen,* from the flesh eater's perspective.[13] If the vegetarian is to overcome the potential loss of the art of communal eating, on which so many aspects of societal life depend, it is of the greatest importance to maintain a concentrated emphasis on the social and integrative aspects of culinary events. Only then will vegetarians be able to escape the impending alienation of failing to participate in the communal dining process.

We may note also that the conventional conception of being "a man," of being "manly" or "masculine," involves the ideas of being courageous, robust, valorous, and warrior-like, of being "rational" rather than "emotional." By contrast, the popular "masculine" conception of a vegetarian is of one who is soft, unduly compassionate, and tender. These notions are all inherently incompatible with the traditional notion of "manliness." The male vegetarian is in considerable danger of being viewed by his fellows as unmanly, even cowardly and effete, perhaps somewhat effeminate. The relatively easy *moral* decision to become a vegetarian faces several, seemingly sometimes insuperable, *psychological* barriers. It is scarcely surprising that vegetarians are predominantly, if far from exclusively, female. Of course, many renowned male (as well as female) athletes and other celebrities are vegetarian or vegan, and many in the past have been so. But, strangely, this has had little effect on changing the public consciousness with regard to the masculinity of flesh eating.

By contrast, as early as 1885 in George Salmon's *Introduction to the New Testament,* referring to the early Christian era, we read that "even those who used animal food themselves came to think of the vegetarian as one who lived a higher form of life."[14] It is as true in the twenty-first century as in biblical times. Even those who have no inclination toward vegetarianism often share a mild sense of guilt that the vegetarian takes the high ground that they themselves have relinquished.

Nonetheless, especially when arrogantly, aggressively, pompously, or self-assertively expressed, vegetarian attitudes may make omnivores uncomfortable,

oppositional, and defensive. At its worst, the vegetarian mentality is paraded mournfully in the self-congratulatory terms of "woe is me. I am so misjudged and maligned by people who ought to know better and who ought to understand what I so readily understand." The expected response is found in the attitudes of numerous animal welfare scientists. More often than not, they deride the vegetarians' unusual practices and their paucity in numbers, as though the numerous millennia of the customary consumption of flesh and the numerical majority of the omnivores counted as some kind of moral argument in their own favour.[15] Of course, the greatest opposition to vegetarianism comes from those engaged in, or vicariously maintained by, the flesh industry. They often condemn vegetarian advocates on the grounds of the vegetarians' opposition to their very right to their livelihood while ignoring, for example, that the abolition of capital punishment in certain states deprived the public executioner of his employment in that capacity – rightly so, many imagine – and that legislation against drugs once legal and readily available over the counter, such as laudanum (opium), has rendered certain related occupations untenable. No one regrets that unprotected asbestos workers, gas lamplighters, and child chimney sweeps can no longer find employment in these capacities. Indeed, opposition to tobacco use has deprived many farmers of a decent livelihood. And although most would express great sympathy for such farmers, and believe it appropriate to provide financial compensation in their search for a new and viable crop or for a new form of employment, few would consider the farmers' financial woes a sufficient ground to make tobacco use once again acceptable. No one has a lawful right to a position whose practice the society condemns. Of course, no such condemnation exists at the present in the case of flesh consumption, but many vegetarians believe that it should exist and that its arrival is only a matter of time.

Human-Animal Hierarchy

It is in fact not at all unusual for the omnivore simply to bypass the vegetarian ethical appeal on the assumption that humans are in some special manner "superior" to other animals and hence entitled to ethical preference over animals. Often, a refusal to become a vegetarian arises not from a rejection of the claimed moral imperative but from its avoidance in the assumption of some kind of exclusive status. As Pangloss says in Voltaire's *Candide:* "Swine were intended to be eaten, therefore we eat pork all the year round."[16] And most of us give the matter no more rational consideration than did Dr.

Pangloss. If this was "the best of all possible worlds," as Pangloss naively imagines in apparent but misguided imitation of Leibniz, it was certainly not so for the pigs. The idea that animals "were intended" for human use stretches in philosophical discourse back to Xenophon and Aristotle. The ethical question is obviated by the parroting of the unfounded and irrelevant "intended" dictum. Many Christians and Jews – and their opponents – misinterpret the doctrine of "dominion" over animals as one that allows them to use animals for their own ends at will, when, in fact, the relevant biblical passage imposes a modest obligation toward animals upon them.[17] Nonetheless, human claims to preferential treatment are implicit in all such dicta – whether a matter of the "intended" or "dominion" justification.

Have centuries of habit reduced the potential persuasiveness of the vegetarian appeal in the same way that male and white supremacy once reigned unquestioned because they were considered normal? Today, at least among the educated in the West, sexism and racism are almost universally condemned. Frequent and strident opposition is now the norm. Will the same perhaps happen to vegetarianism? Is the necessary step simply the constant raising of the issue on the animals' behalf in many minds over long periods of time? Have we reached the potential for a greater era of benevolence? Much as we may consider such progress a forlorn hope, we should not forget that in the eighteenth century it was not unusual to encounter the view expressed in Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* by Mrs. Deborah Wilkins about Tom Jones's wayward mother that she was "one of those misbegotten wretches, whom I don't look upon as my fellow creatures."[18] Miss Bridget went further and described the unfortunate Jenny as "an impudent slut, a wanton harlot, a wicked jade, a vile strumpet."[19] If we acknowledge other animals as our fellow creatures, might we perhaps be on the road to consideration of the rights of all sentient beings just as we have learned to disparage the attitudes of a Deborah Wilkins or a Miss Bridget? Nonetheless, we frequently encounter the idea expressed by Émile Zola in *Nana* (1880) of the human "animal nature,"[20] acknowledging humans as animals but at the same time implying that while there are instinctive, unreflective, even lustful aspects of the human psyche, humans are not to be judged by the same criteria as other animals, for we also possess rational and ethical characteristics of which nonhuman animals are said to be incapable. In fact, quite in contrast to the disparagement of "animal nature," we find Zola three chapters later in *Nana* having Clarisse say of La Faloise that she was tempted to throw him out: "The idiot didn't like animals, and that put the finishing touch to him."[21] If the path to ethical consideration

of animal interests has been eased, the human is still treated as a being entitled to be judged by quite different ethical criteria from other animals. Despite Clarisse's care for animals and dismissal of those inconsiderate of animal interests, she continues to eat the animals! Indeed, paradoxically and quizzically, liking or loving or respecting animals seems for many people to bear very little relationship to not eating them. What other entity than an animal can be commonly thought an object of affection, even admiration, by an admirer who then duly goes home to eat one of his or her fellows – indeed, one of *our* fellow animals? Can anything other than evolutionary impulse, lust, habit, and now convenience have brought about such a state of affairs?

In *Logic: Inductive and Deductive* (1909), William Minto of the University of Aberdeen argued that practical wisdom would be acquired by the rigorous pursuit of logical argument. He included a "chain of being" diagram, about which he said: "A table of higher and lower classes arranged in order has been known from of old as a *tree* of division or classification."[22] This was how he prefaced the chain of being diagram, which included categories of "Sensible" and "Insensible" leading upward to "Animal," which in turn lead to "Irrational" and "Rational," which then takes us on to "Man." Habit encourages us to treat the diagram as logically persuasive, perhaps even compelling. "Man" is at the helm, and therefore "sacred," in a secular way. But it is the centuries-long practice, not logic, that allows us to arrange the chain of being diagram as we customarily do, at least implicitly, and to regard animals as sensible but lacking substantial reason, as we are inclined, and thus to accept the validity of the logical procedure that allows us to use animals for human dietary ends, although it is one with dubious premises. What should be clear is that even if the model were logically satisfactory, it would not follow that animals provided suitable food for humans any more than that the purported greater sensibility and rationality of the classical Greeks over their neighbours justified their enslavement of many of them. Nor did the cannibalistic pride of the North West Coast Kwakiutl, based on their sense of superiority over others, justify the imperative of the lyrics of their Cannibal Dancer's song:

> I went all around the world to find food.
> I went all around the world to find human flesh.
> I went all around the world to find human heads.
> I went all around the world to find human corpses.[23]

Tradition may be persuasive but it is never morally compelling. And if the

proclaimed superiority does not justify the enslavement and the cannibalism, on what basis can human rational superiority over animals entitle the just person to use animals for food? Most of us grant animals certain minimal rights – the right to protection from unnecessary cruelty, for example. On what basis does depriving the animals of their lives constitute a part of "necessity"?

The Origins of the Term "Vegetarian"

Some, notably and initially Francis William Newman (an early member and later president of the Vegetarian Society, founded toward the end of the 1840s), argue the word "vegetarian" is not derived from "vegetable" but from the Latin word "vegetus," meaning "lively, vigorous, and active," factors that are proclaimed benefits of the abstention from flesh foods. It is a highly improbable, far-fetched conjecture. Yet the myth was at one time continued on the English Vegetarian Society's own website, even though there is no even moderately persuasive evidence for it. The term "vegetarian" was apparently first used in the late 1830s. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that "the general use of the word appears to have been largely due to the formation of the Vegetarian Society at Ramsgate in 1847," although this begs the question of its origins, for one has to wonder under what terms the about-to-be-formed society appealed to potential participants and how it came to name itself the Vegetarian Society. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records a usage of the term already in 1842 when *The Healthian* for April of that year referred to the inutility to "tell a healthy vegetarian that his diet is very uncongenial to the wants of his nature." Such usage suggests that the term "vegetarian" was already in use, that it was well enough understood, and that the practice of vegetarianism was sufficiently widespread that at least those who were interested in health would require no explanation of its meaning. Certainly, by 1848 the magazine *Punch* was using the term "vegetarian" as though it were a commonly understood concept. Still, there was no general agreement on the appropriate term, complaints about the misleading name – misleading in that a vegetarian diet is not restricted to vegetables – being common until well into the twentieth century.

As early as some time around late 1813 we find the radical poet Percy Bysshe Shelley writing a pamphlet unpublished during his lifetime that is now known as *On the Vegetable System of Diet*. However, this piece was untitled before rediscovery and publication in the early twentieth century. It was the editors of his pamphlet who gave it the title by which it is now

known, a pamphlet he had written earlier in the same year being entitled by Shelley himself *A Vindication of Natural Diet*. Nonetheless, even earlier, in 1811, John Frank Newton, who perhaps first introduced Shelley to vegetarianism, had written *Return to Nature, or a Defence of the Vegetable Regimen,* indicating quite clearly that the denial of flesh was already known by reference to vegetables. Earlier still, in *The Primeval Diet of Man* (1801) George Nicholson referred to the "superior effects of a vegetable diet."[24] Indeed, in 1762 Rousseau had already counted pastry and fruits as being a part of the vegetable regimen.[25] The move toward the term "vegetarian" was well under way long before the formation of the Vegetarian Society and long before Francis Newman invented the improbable notion of the "vegetus" origin. The puzzle remains, however. Vegetarians are so called despite the fact, as noted, that they eat a great deal more than just vegetable matter – fruit, grain, and nuts, for example. Certainly, for a very long time those who ate what is now called a vegetarian diet were said to partake of a Pythagorean diet, after the early Ionian Greek philosopher who is said by some to have introduced (or reintroduced, if prehistoric humans did not eat flesh) the practice to the West of declining to eat animal flesh. In the early twentieth century, dissatisfied with the use of the term "vegetarian," as were many others – it was a common topic of debate – George Bernard Shaw, who, as we have noted, was himself an avowed abominator of the consumption of flesh, recommended the adoption of the term "Shelleyism," but it did not take. We are left with the term "vegetarian," although the essence of being a vegetarian is of course not the practice of eating vegetables but the avoidance of consuming the flesh of sentient beings. The details of the origins of the term appear, as yet, to be lost in the mists of time. Perhaps the explanation is quite simply that there was no suitable term available and that, while "vegetarian" was inadequate, it seemed preferable to any alternative. Today, the term is so well recognized it would be inopportune to seek a more accurate alternative.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a vegetarian as: "One who lives wholly or principally upon vegetable foods; a person who on principle abstains from any form of animal food, or at least such as is obtained by the direct destruction of [sentient, animal] life." I have introduced the words "sentient" and "animal" into the sentence both because it is usually not life itself, but sentient animal life, that is at issue – except among those such as "fruitarians" (and some Jaina and Buddhists), who will not kill a living plant for their diet but will eat the fruits of the plant, as that does not harm the plant itself – and because few vegetarians would really have much concern about the destruction of, say, microbic animals, despite Shaw's quip in

Too True to Be Good about the rights of "a poor innocent microbe" and the practices of the Jaina, which we will discuss later. It is primarily sentient animals that are not to be harmed and hence not eaten. I restrict the term "sentience" to conscious beings. (To be conscious is to respond to one's surroundings in awareness of them; plants respond to their surroundings but have no awareness of them.) The word "vegetarian" has a variety of applications not *entirely* consistent with the implications of the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition, at least if the words "on principle" in the definition have ethical content. For example, Roman gladiators, it is said, lived on a vegetarian diet of barley and leeks. Moreover, "Roman legions," historians have it, "had conquered the world" on "coarse wheaten porridge."[26] They were vegetarians. We can be confident they did not adopt this nonflesh regimen as a matter of ethical principle to prevent the destruction of animal life. It is unlikely they acquired their diet from principle at all. Indeed, today, and historically, a proportion of vegetarians deny themselves flesh for none other than health reasons and many more for nothing other than economy.

Types of Vegetarians

We read, even in books by vegetarians about vegetarianism, of "ova-lacto vegetarians," "pollo-vegetarians," and "pesco-vegetarians." "Ova-lacto vegetarian" is a cumbersome name for what are the most common form of vegetarians, those who eschew the flesh of animals but still consume such products as eggs, milk, and cheese. There seems little point in calling them anything other than vegetarians, pure and simple. ("Lacto-vegetarians" eat dairy products but no eggs or flesh; "ova-vegetarians" eat eggs but no dairy or flesh.) "Pollo-vegetarians" are those who refrain from mammals but are willing to eat the flesh of birds, notably chickens. It is difficult to find any justification for such people being called vegetarians at all, not even quasi vegetarians, even if they do decline all red meat. Are we to acknowledge equally their beefo-porko-lambo vegetarian colleagues? The absurdity of the question proclaims its appropriate answer. "Pesco-vegetarians" are those who refuse the flesh of birds and mammals but continue to consume fish and other seafood. There is no real sense in which they are vegetarians if we consider that one of the primary purposes of vegetarianism is to recognize the value of animals' lives and to avoid animal suffering – according to the old saw that "a semivegetarian" makes as much sense as "a semivirgin." Mary Tyler Moore describes herself as "a vegetarian but not a vegan"

because she eats plenty of fish, reflecting a common confusion about vegetarian terminology.[27] She is plainly in error about the meanings of vegetarianism and veganism. At best, she could be described as "pesco-vegetarian."

Nonetheless, despite these quibbles, any form of "quasi vegetarianism" can be a useful starting point for those who acknowledge the justice of the vegetarian cause but need time to fully adjust to its stringent requirements. Today, vegetarian advocates are inclined to regard vegetarianism as a process whereby over time one comes to infringe increasingly less on the rights and wellbeing of animals. It is a process of which I am acutely aware. I must confess myself guilty that I was a flesh eater many years ago when I became chair of the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), renouncing flesh only two years after assuming the post and, even then, at first, continuing to consume some seafood on occasion. Thus, partial vegetarianism is treated by some vegetarian advocates as a sometimes appropriate initial step. The American Dialect Society deemed "flexitarian" the most useful new word of 2003, describing the term as applicable to "a vegetarian who occasionally eats meat." If we regard vegetarianism as a process, we should be wary of being too critical of such impurity. As the then twenty-six-year-old classical singer and actor Emily Klassen expressed her "flexitarian" mode: "I hope that one day I can be a bit more virtuous and not eat meat at all."[28] The vegetarian ethic is duly asserted while falling short of vegetarian practice. The path is proclaimed. Nonetheless, we should be concerned lest those who practise half-measures should become accustomed to the shortfall.

To refer to flesh eaters such as "pollo-vegetarians" and "pesco-vegetarians" as vegetarians at all seems, however, little different from regarding traditional Catholics who deny themselves meat on Fridays or Eastern Orthodox Christians who partake of vegan feast days on occasion (Orthodox monastics are often vegans) as some kind of vegetarian. Indeed, the traditional Catholic and Orthodox practices of such self-denial seem in part at least to justify vegetarians' beliefs, although the religious would explain the reason for such absence as penitence rather than avoidance of harm. If there are grounds for the denial of flesh on occasion, then there would appear to be some ground for considering the denial of flesh as in some manner in principle preferable to flesh consumption, even though it may not be thought a practicable regular habit because the spirit and flesh of humankind are weak. It would appear Saint Paul opposed the requirement of vegetarianism in the early Christian church not because it was not admirable but because, if it were stringently required, many potential converts to the new faith would be driven from Christianity by the hardship of its practice. A

good case can be made that the acceptance of flesh consumption in the Jewish biblical tradition arose as a concession to human frailty in environmentally deleterious circumstances following the flood.[29] Today, it is notable that many proudly proclaim they are vegetarians in part, even though they eat chicken or fish. This is an implicit acknowledgment of the virtue of the vegetarian case. Such people want to proclaim they approximate what they feel implicitly is the virtuous path. Moreover, to think of fish and poultry as of a very different order from the flesh of large animals is not without some cultural foundation. Thus, a case can be made that early Christian vegetarians would partake of fish, considering it a non-animal item because of its (apparent) lack of blood. Sometimes, supermarkets will have one section labelled "poultry" and another labelled "meat." And if one reads a contemporary Italian restaurant menu, one is likely to encounter, beyond "pasta," a section on "pollo" (chicken and maybe other poultry items) and one on "pesce" (fish and other seafood items, such as shrimp and scallops) before one reaches "carne" (flesh, meat proper, such as beef, veal, and pork), an item seen as of a quite different nature from "pollo" and "pesce."

Veganism came into formal name and practice in the English Midlands in the 1940s to identify those who not only reject all flesh and animal by-products from their diet, including honey, but also refuse to wear or use any products made from animals or involving harm to animals. Of these, many are vegan at home but find it impossible to procure a vegan diet when eating out; and sometimes a less rigid vegetarianism may be found to be necessary. Most vegans, of course, would frequent a restaurant only where they knew a vegan meal could be obtained. Today, it is often possible to find a restaurant with vegetarian options but far more difficult to find a vegan meal in many places. This is already a significant improvement, for not too long ago it was almost impossible to find a vegetarian meal when travelling or when a change of venue from home cooking was desired. Normal everyday celebrations outside the home provided insurmountable problems for the vegetarian, as is now sometimes the case for the vegan.

In addition to vegans, we encounter: vegetarian "raw fooders," who eat only uncooked nonflesh items, believing this to replicate the condition of original humanity (a few "raw fooders" also eat uncooked fish); "fruitarians," who refuse to kill either animals or plants and live from fruits, nuts, seeds, and a few vegetables, which are derived from plants but whose consumption, as we have noted, does not require the death of the host plant itself; "macrobiotic vegetarians," who live on whole grains, vegetation, and miso (a paste concocted from fermented grain and soybeans); and "natural

hygienists," who combine plant foods in a certain manner and who frequently fast. These latter groups each tend to think of themselves as the most complete vegetarians, endeavouring to ensure that their dietary practices do not exploit any member of the sentient realm in any manner and/or to replicate what they see as the pure and pristine human of some very early period in prehistory. There are also "locavores," who, in addition to being vegetarian or vegan, and sometimes neither, try to eat local, seasonal foods whenever possible.

Grounds for Vegetarianism

There are at least eight possible grounds for adopting a fleshless diet: (1) one is not able to afford the price of flesh – historically a common condition and in some parts of the world today a contemporary condition, facts that hint at the lie of those who claim flesh eating to be a precondition of human health, for those who cannot afford flesh but enjoy fruit and vegetables do not generally seem to suffer from the composition of their diet, although they may sometimes suffer from the paucity of it; (2) one refuses for religious or spiritual reasons to participate in any self-indulgence and practises instead self-denial and self-purity – a course pursued by some early ancients, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jaina alike; (3) one's habit-determining religion teaches that animal sacrifice is not a just means of appeasing the gods – an occasional, but sometimes contradicted, precept of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and a more rigorous and customary precept by New Testament times; (4) one may have determined that a plant-based diet constitutes a healthy regimen and a significantly healthier one than that enjoyed by animal eaters; (5) one may have reached the conclusion that the conditions under which animals are reared and fed are environmentally harmful and that one should eschew the eating of animal products for environmental protection; (6) one may not be opposed to the eating of animals per se, but animals are so ill-treated under modern farming conditions that their consumption is unacceptable; (7) one may be born into a religion or caste that practises vegetarianism and may continue this dietary habit merely because it is a part of one's denomination or caste identification – "cultural vegetarianism," if you will; and (8) one may be persuaded that the eating of animals is unethical in and of itself. Although all of these instances will find an occasional mention in this book, it is with those who have been convinced to live a vegetarian or vegan life on the eighth ground that I am primarily concerned. The reason given for the

rejection of flesh by 72 percent of vegetarians in a US 2005 poll was an ethical reason; four out of the first five reasons given by polled British vegetarians were ethical reasons. Vegetarianism has become predominantly a matter of ethical concern. To give the reader the flavour of arguments for vegetarianism as they have changed over time, wherever possible – and it is increasingly possible for some of the periods covered in the later chapters – I have included representative statements of their creed from the primary exponents of vegetarianism themselves.

Flesh

The reader may wonder why I have chosen to write frequently of "flesh" rather than "meat." The word "meat" in origin refers to anything used as nourishment, whether from animals or not, usually solid foods, although in principle including liquids. "Green meat" refers to grass as fodder or appropriate vegetables as food. "Meat" was also, and occasionally still is, used to refer to the edible part of fruits, eggs, nuts, and the like. There was certainly no indication in its usage that exclusively the flesh of animals was or is meant. It can be positively misleading when someone may say that they eat fish but no meat, for one may rightly talk of the meaty part of the fish. And fish are of course animals as much as are cows, at least according to the scientific criteria of Western culture. "Viand," too – the French word for meat is *viande*, derived from the Latin *vivenda,* meaning "living," but when it is without the "e," the word refers to victuals in general – has also had a lengthy usage in English, meaning all kinds of sustenance. "Flesh," by comparison, which derives from German and Scandinavian sources, is explicit, referring to that which covers the framework of bones and is enclosed by the skin of an animal – whether human or nonhuman. In the context of this book, "flesh" has a double referent: it is the lust of the human flesh for animal flesh and its rejection that we seek to understand. Nonetheless, as a concession to custom, I have sometimes mentioned "meat" where there is no doubt about the meaning.

Themes of the Book

There are several themes in this book. The overarching theme is that, despite the occasional presence of ascetic and cultural vegetarianism, full ethical consideration for animals resulting in the eschewing of flesh did not

arise until after the Aristotelian period in Greece. It was then repeated in Rome before disappearing until its revival at the turn of the nineteenth century. There are a number of partial exceptions to this, as with certain early Jewish and Christian vegetarian sects; with Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Tryon, George Cheyne, and David Hartley; with aspects of Eastern thought; and in a few other minor but engaging instances. A subsidiary theme is that the human species was probably quasi-vegetarian and perhaps even fruitarian in origin. Further, the vast majority of the frequent eighteenth century advocates of vegetarianism preached without practising. It took the general questioning of authority and fundamental change in expectations encouraged by the culture of the French revolutionary era to bring about a vegetarianism usually practised by those who preached it. A further argument, exemplified at points throughout the book, is that historically there has been a paradoxical incongruence between the development of sensibilities to animals and the declination to consume their flesh.

A society may best be understood less by how it answers questions and more by what questions it perennially fails to ask itself. Whether we should consume flesh is rarely pondered. Customarily, we have treated what is done traditionally as a compelling criterion of what we ought to do. For the vast majority of persons, custom and virtue are, from a practical perspective, almost synonymous. There is a propensity to believe that what is normal – or what has become normal – is what is right. It takes an event of the enormity of the French Revolution to persuade inquisitive voices to ask the relevant questions and consider it morally imperative to act upon the answers.

According to Plato, Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living.[30] Few humans have examined their omnivorous practices with any degree of rigour. It should not be forgotten, however, that some very honourable and intelligent people have examined their diet and reached very different conclusions from those formulated by the historical figures examined in this book. Often, the ecologically minded will argue a certain amount of flesh eating and predation is necessary to maintain an appropriate species balance and to allow for the use of barren land otherwise unproductive in farming. But the flesh eaters' arguments are customarily derived from the proclaimed superiority of humans over their fellow creatures. Paradoxically, this might be a reason for not eating animals rather than eating them. Would we expect Sir Isaac Newton to feel entitled to eat an intellectually handicapped person? No. We would expect Newton to have sympathy for those so inferior to him in intelligence, following the dictum of theologian and church father Clement of Alexandria about "training men to gentleness by their conduct toward those beneath them."[31] Would we

expect a victorious side in hockey to eat their vanquished foe? Of course not. Despite the fact that the victors killed the vanquished in the Mayan ball game (they did not eat them), we are inclined to think of the practice as a cathartic ritual not to be repeated in more "civilized" climes. And although the word "cannibalism" derives from the Caribes, who practised it on those "inferiors" they had defeated, no one today proposes to reintroduce the practice – a practice still known in medieval Europe and, even later, in times of famine.[32] Should we, then, practise such rituals on "inferior" animals? To know the attitudes with which this question was answered in the negative is what this book is all about.

Purported Vegetarians

Some avid vegetarians will be disappointed not to find much discussion of their favourite "vegetarians" in these pages or mention of some of the most famous "vegetarian" quotations from these and other authors. The unfortunate reality is that the Internet is replete with entirely invented "quotations" from some of those authors who were vegetarian but presumably did not say what the inventor wanted them to have said. Numerous websites, even those of a reputed national vegetarian association, also contain lists of vegetarians that include a number who, quite simply, were not vegetarians at all. In some cases, the relevant statement was made by one vegetarian and then applied mistakenly to another historical figure. Perhaps the purported vegetarians are included in the lists because they have impressive names and their inclusion gives greater prestige to the cause. Perhaps sometimes a person of one surname is confused with another of the same surname. Perhaps easily misread statements in books on vegetarianism have led to the assumption that some historical figures were vegetarian who were not. Perhaps the logic of statements made by these actors on the world stage *ought* to have led to vegetarian practices, but the logic was not followed and they continued to consume flesh. In reality, the frequent errors serve only as an embarrassment to vegetarians who care for honesty and accuracy.

There are numerous inaccurate "quotations" to be found – from Albert Einstein, for example, who became a vegetarian toward the very end of his life. And numerous lists of vegetarians include both Henry David Thoreau and Charles Darwin, neither of whom gave up flesh or claimed to do so. To make the matter worse, these gross errors have crept into print in the writings of quite reputable authors. One such modern list from an author I respect, as well as a historical conference presentation that made the same

error, included Sir Isaac Newton, who was concerned to eliminate excessive cruelty from the stockyards and the kitchen but not to eliminate their associations with flesh. In fact, Newton ate a very limited amount of food, with little flesh, and he was often claimed by eighteenth-century vegetarians as one of theirs. He certainly appears to have preferred vegetables, and he perhaps went without meat for periods of time. Perhaps Newton's recognition that animals were entitled to earnest ethical consideration was extended further than warranted. But he wasn't a vegetarian. Or, at least, there is no convincing evidence that he was – and, thus, no good grounds for claiming him as one. Another spurious website list produced by a Monterey, California, physician practising holistic medicine included Jeremy Bentham, William Blake, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Darwin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Milton, Isaac Newton, Plato, Socrates, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, H.G. Wells, William Wordsworth, Oliver Goldsmith, Martin Luther, Alexander Pope, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Voltaire – for not one of whom is there any convincing evidence of their vegetarianism and for most of whom there is incontrovertible evidence they were not vegetarian. Some, including H.G. Wells, were decidedly antivegetarian. Another list named Shakespeare, the economic and social theorist Adam Smith (an advocate but not a practitioner), and that avid hunter Prince Charles as "famous vegetarians." There is no evidence to support the vegetarianism of any one of them – and a great deal to indicate otherwise. By comparison, the content of the International Vegetarian Union (IVU) webpages is most impressive. The union is both even-handed and impeccably concerned to report the historical reality. Nonetheless, even here readers are often misled into thinking that omnivorous animal advocates – listed under "history of vegetarianism"! – either also advocated vegetarianism or practised it. Frequently, they did neither. To be sure, the IVU adds a disclaimer acknowledging that some of those listed might not have been vegetarians at all. But an impression of their vegetarianism is left nonetheless. And why would they be listed as vegetarians if there was no convincing evidence that they were vegetarians?

Relationship to My Previous Writings

Having already written extensively on the history of animal ethics and the development of attitudes to animals in general, I was interested in applying my findings to the specific matter of ethical vegetarianism, a topic close to my heart. But that would mean revisiting and reiterating aspects of my

previous work to provide the context in which vegetarian thought could be placed, as well as restating some of the details mentioned elsewhere. Consequently, especially, but not solely, in parts of the first half of the book, above all in the first half of Chapter 8, I have recapitulated, and sometimes substantially so, some of what I have previously written elsewhere. Not to have done so would have left gaps in the story and its framework. The narrative would not have read as a continuous whole. Accordingly, where appropriate, I have borrowed occasional ideas, passages, and quotations from my *Animals and Nature: Cultural Myths, Cultural Realities, Awe for the Tiger, Love for the Lamb: A Chronicle of Sensibility to Animals,* and *Brute Souls, Happy Beasts, and Evolution: The Historical Status of Animals*. Where these have been borrowed, they have been reoriented to a different audience and to questions relevant to the development of vegetarian thought. My sincere apologies are due to those who may have read some of my previous work and thus to whom I may be unnecessarily repeating myself on occasion. I trust that the entirely new remainder of the book will make up for the repetition they endure. Vegetarianism is a topic I have touched upon but, despite my abiding interest, have never entered into in any depth before, other than in my edition of George Nicholson's *Primeval Diet of Man*. However, much of what I have written over the past two decades is tangentially relevant to vegetarian history. Thus, I do not feel I come to the matter entirely anew.

Manner of Approach

A half-century and more ago the academic norm was to attempt to produce objective and impartial argument, to be "value-free." In recent decades the majority of social scientists, historians, and philosophers have moved away from such an approach. Today, the far greater likelihood is to encounter an emphasis on rights, compassion, and justice rather than on impartiality. There is an intermediate position that may be said to encompass both traditions. Compassion may be said to be an appropriate concept that should guide our ends. Impartiality, or detachment, however, remains of great importance as a vehicle. It is vital that one's compassion and predilections should not influence how one reads the evidence. Nor should compassion control the direction that the analysis should take or the evidence that is investigated. When one discusses events of the past, the task is to write not as an advocate, although an advocate one is, but as a historian of ideas. Put another way, it is vital that our research not be influenced by wishful

thinking, as so often happens in the field of animal ethics. It remains as true today as in the heyday of "scientism" that our values should not predetermine the weighing or selection of the material. It is with this precept in mind that this book has been written. In the words of Tacitus in *The Annals* (bk. 1, ch. 1), history should be written *sine ira et studio* – with neither bitterness nor partiality. A further apology is in order. Although gender-neutral language is distinctly preferable, the requirements of historical analysis sometimes enjoin the use of "he" and "man" if one is not to misrepresent the thoughts of those of earlier eras about whom one is writing.

1

The Human in Prehistory

Human Origins

Most paleontological accounts of the earliest humans depict them as flesh eaters. If these paleontologists are right – on the balance of possibilities, there is a reasonable chance they may well be – it is one of the most astonishing facts of human history, one that cries out for explanation, that most societies, including our own, possess or possessed primal memories, or myths, of a time when we were not flesh eaters at all and of the circumstances in which flesh eating began.

Whether it is from the account in Genesis, or from the tales of the Makritare of the Orinoco, or from the legends of the Cheyenne, we learn of a time when no animals were consumed in the societal diet. Do these legends tell us something about human origins? And if so, if humans were originally vegetarian or even vegan, what would, then, have occasioned their introduction to an omnivorous diet? Why do we all share very similar dietary legends? Is it an implicit recognition of our primordial nature? Was it the fact, when humans left the original homeland of East Africa and year-round vegetation was no longer available, almost 2 million years ago, that humans first turned to the eating of flesh? Such an explanation of the change to flesh eating, if change it is, must at the very least be incomplete because the inhabitants of the African homeland were also omnivores, and the fossil evidence indicates a continued period of the human as both predator and prey there as well as in the new habitats. Perhaps a lightning-induced forest fire destroyed all the immediate vegetation, and the corpses

of the animals burnt in the fire were the only source of food. The merit of such an explanation is that it would allow us to begin to understand how humans came not only to eat flesh but also to eat cooked flesh. That raw flesh is, on the whole, too tough for our teeth to tear and chew suggests prima facie an original vegetarian or at least quasi-vegetarian lifestyle to be a distinct possibility for the human species. After all, the earliest humans not only lacked fire but also had no sophisticated tools with which to kill or capture animals, nor the speed with which to entrap mammals or flying birds. Nonetheless, it should be noted that we tend to cook vegetable food as well. If the cooking of flesh is a strange artifice, so, presumably, is the cooking of other foodstuffs. Although it would not be as difficult as to chew raw flesh, the chewing of some uncooked vegetables would also prove troublesome. That would suggest that we were perhaps fruit eaters before we used fire and cooked many of our comestibles.

The classical Greek vegetarian Dicaerchus believed the first person sated with the produce of the oak tree took the step to war with the animals and with other humans.[1] Theophrastus, also a vegetarian pupil of Aristotle, and his successor as head of the Lyceum, thought that animal consumption had begun as a consequence of the destruction of crops in war. If so, it is notable that there was no general attempt to return to a vegetarian diet once the crops had recovered. In his "Essay on Flesh-Eating," the Greco-Roman Plutarch (c. AD 46-120) speculated that before there was adequate agriculture, the infertility of savage earth provoked original humans to kill animals for food. Humans of his own era, he added, had no such excuse. "Nature," he tells us in the same essay, "firmly forbids humans to feast on flesh." But he has rather more to say on the abject horror of the first person's handling of flesh as food and eating it than on the causes that invoked it. The seventeenth-century Pythagorean Thomas Tryon declared flesh to have occasioned violence among men and appears to believe the eating of flesh arose from the quarrelsome nature of human beings. George Nicholson, at the turn of the nineteenth century, proclaimed the eating of animal flesh to have begun in ancient times in order to prevent the cannibalism that he believed had become common as a result of famine.[2] In 1811, John Frank Newton cited Pliny on blaming the origin of flesh eating on Hyperbius, son of Mars, who killed the first animal, and on Prometheus, who slew the first ox – and discovered fire, on which presumably to roast the slaughtered ox. Keith Thomas has observed that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century biblical "commentators argued as to whether meat-eating had been permitted [after the flood] because man's physical constitution had degenerated and therefore required new forms of nutriment, or because the

cultivation of the soil to which he was condemned required a more robust food, or because the roots and herbs on which he had fed in Eden had lost their former goodness."[3] By contrast, the most common modern paleontological view is that the beginning of flesh eating requires no explanation, for we have always been omnivores.

Perhaps, when adequate vegetation and fruit were scarce, scavenging the marrow of, say, a leopard's prey introduced humans to animal fare. Usually, the leopard, or some other powerful carnivore, would drag its prey, sometimes a hominid, into the fork of a tree to escape competition from other predators, such as lions, and the successful predator would usually consume about two-thirds of the prey. The remnants of the flesh would be devoured by eagerly waiting hyenas, jackals, vultures, and the like, perhaps even by the competing lions. With the flesh now torn away and no easy pickings to be had, the weaker human's manual dexterity would allow for the breaking of the bones and the extraction of the marrow. In fact, Raymond Dart, the South African paleontologist who discovered the early hominid Taung child in 1924, first believed that australopithecines were in essence scavengers of animals, before Dart developed fully the now unconvincing idea of "man the butcher" (my term, his analysis) by the 1950s. Even the scavenger thesis is now doubted. Perhaps instead, on a particular occasion of scarcity and extreme hunger, anything edible would have seemed acceptable, and a habit begun in scarcity was then repeated in abundance. One other possibility, one bearing the ring of truth, is that, as the African climate became more arid several million years ago, the equatorial forests went into a decline, and the transitional zones between forest and savannah became, it would appear from the fossil record, the primary human area of habitation. From a primarily fruit diet, humans would have had to turn to more variegated fare, including leaves, vegetables, tubers, insects, lizards, and small mammals. In other words, environmental change would have brought about a change in diet. Thereafter, as human technology improved through increase in brain size, we would have learned to co-operate effectively with other humans and to entrap larger animals – and the period of "man the hunter" would have begun, with an ever-present conflict in the human unconscious mind between the vegetarian of Eden and the omnivore of Arcadia (see pages 35 to 44 on the Golden Age). Of course, in the Edenic period, humans would not have thought of themselves as vegetarian – a thoroughly modern concept – as though diet were simply a matter of conscious choice, but would have felt more comfortable, more at ease, more human, more "natural" with a fleshless diet. Perhaps there is a smattering of truth in all these hypotheses. Whatever the origins of flesh

eating – assuming there were any origins – it is clear that any hypothesis must, at least for the time being, remain largely speculative and unverifiable. And one must remember always that, so far as is known, no other species has undertaken a complete change of diet unless environmental circumstances have prevented the continuation of the original state.

Why does it matter what we were in origin? In one important sense, it does not matter at all. We have been continuously adapting ourselves to new circumstances in our evolutionary development for millions of years. And those adaptations have allowed us to continue to thrive on a new and ever-changing diet. In Aristotelian terms, it is what we are becoming, not what we were in origin, that is the human fulfilment. In another sense, we tend to feel intuitively that our original diet is likely to have been more in tune with the needs of our constitution than anything developed during the oppressions and general vicissitudes of human history – the traditional argument being that "nature" is preferable to "culture."

Perhaps most important, whether a flesh or tuber or fruit diet is more in accord with our dietary origins does not obviate the ethical requirement – a requirement that must stand until countered – not to harm other sentient creatures. It is not the responsibility of the vegetarian to show why other sentient beings should not be harmed – that is prima facie an essential part of all just treatment of others. It is the responsibility of the flesh eater to demonstrate why there should be an entitlement to the breach of the rule in the case of nonhuman animals. This must involve a demonstration of the justifiability of the slaughter of animals to fulfil an unnecessary human purpose, which in turn involves the demonstration of the worthiness of the human to have other animal lives sacrificed for its pleasure. And perhaps an important aspect of any such discussion involves talking always of eating animals rather than of eating meat. To talk of eating meat is to avoid the psychological impact of the ethical question.

Perhaps the discrepancy between the paleontological accounts of human omnivorousness and the societal vegetarian legends arises in part through a different understanding of "animal." Today, we tend to think of an animal as any living organism, whether as complex as a dolphin or as simple as a worm, that is distinguished from plants by feeding on organic matter. Moreover, animals are related to each other by biological descent and distinguished from plants in the same manner. They also usually possess specialized sense organs and nervous systems. Typically, they are self-directed and respond more rapidly to stimuli than do plants. By contrast, in hunter-gatherer societies there are no such "refinements" of understanding. "Animal" is the "higher food," which is caught by the male hunters. Everything

else, including small birds, eggs, lizards, and tiny mammals, is that which is gathered by the females and categorized separately as "lower food," as "vegetable."[4] The act of hunting with artificial weapons determines the classification of "animal." In biblical usage, blood is deemed the essence of human and animal life, an identification continued in Western culture for many centuries thereafter and not entirely extinguished now.[5] Perhaps this would account for the apparent exclusion of fish in early Christian culture from the notion of animal, for blood in the fish is not immediately apparent. This view is suggested in the writings of St. Augustine, who, knowing full well of the biblical fishing stories, still said Christ forbade flesh in his disciples' diet. In classical Greece, a prevailing distinction was not between mammals and fish but between land animals and sea animals, a distinction that persisted in later Catholic dietary laws, thus including whales, seals, and squid along with cod, mackerel, and bass. Habitat was the defining characteristic. Other Greeks thought of animals as being recognized by the fact that they breathed – air being taken into or expelled from the lungs – which would suggest that only certain complex beings counted as "animals." Likewise, Hindus, following the *Rig-Veda*, deemed *Atman* (breath or soul) the principle of animal life, which was apparently not shared by plants. The neo-Platonist Plotinus (c. AD 205-270) claimed animals feel pleasure and pain, whereas vegetables do not – a distinction that begged the question of the status of the least sentient members of the animal realm, those that almost two millennia later the pre-Darwin evolutionist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck would call the "apathiques" – the insentient. Begging the same question, at least by our scientific criteria of what constitutes an "animal," Plotinus's student Porphyry (c. AD 233-304) declared animals to be rational, whereas plants were not, a distinction repeated in the seventeenth century by Jean de La Fontaine, querying whether we should not allow animals at least this one distinction from other living matter.[6] The classification of "animal" has thus usually been a matter more of culture than of scientific taxonomy. Hence, the customary critique of those who oppose vegetarianism and animal rights that many small animals are insentient, lack reason, and are thus not worthy of ethical consideration entirely misses the point. It is, in the first instance, with the elimination of pain and suffering, not with the scientific concept of "animal," that the ethical vegetarian is concerned. Occasioning the demise of an animal microbe may be thought no breach of the vegetarian ethic.

Why do the paleontologists think of humans as primordial flesh eaters? Perhaps tendentiousness is present to a degree in the mind of the paleontologist because we have conceived of ourselves for millennia as primordial

hunters, because being the head of the food chain and the dominant creature on earth is a part of our self-image, an image that would have arisen as we became hunters. The paleontologist *may* be predisposed to find a flesh-eating ancestor. Yet as the seventeenth-century political philosopher Thomas Hobbes reminded us with his rhetorical question: "When a lion eats a man and a man eats an ox, why is the ox made more for the man than the man for the lion?"[7] In part, paleontologists find humans as omnivores in the distant past because they *expect* to find humans as omnivores – the ox, it would appear, is thought to be made more for the man than the man for the lion. The idea of head of the food chain seems to follow not from evidence but from imagination or assumption. Far from the human's being head of the food chain, in some parts of the world carnivorous animals remain a constant threat to human life, as they once were over the whole planet in great profusion. Sometimes, potential victims, as with the inhabitants of the Sundarban delta in India, wear a face mask on the backs of their heads so predators, in this case tigers, will think they have been spotted and thus abandon the chase. Elsewhere, predation is common; almost everywhere, predation was once common. Indeed, in light of the obvious error about our natural place in the food chain, why would we, whether paleontologists or not, ever *imagine* ourselves head of the food chain and the principal animal? Why should we not recognize, as any understanding of the general human prehistorical role and the contemporary role in parts of the world, especially Asia and Africa, would suggest, that the human lies somewhere in the middle of the food chain? The only possible answer lies in human conceit, prompted by our innermost psychological inheritance.

It should be noted there is no consistency in the paleontological accounts of the diet of the earliest humans. Or perhaps we should say the greatest consistency in such accounts is their variability over time. For example, until very recently the image of the Neanderthal was that of a snarling and grunting failed vegetarian species that died out, while flesh-eating *Homo sapiens* became master of the world. Flesh eating was thus seen to make us the most successful and the dominant animal. Increasingly, the picture today of the Neanderthal is changing to one of an intelligent and emotionally complex melodious creature who interbred with *Homo sapiens*. At one time, humanity's fruitarian origins were taken for granted, later likewise humanity's omnivorousness. In the past couple of centuries each generation has differed from the previous generation in its account of the circumstances of human origins. Very often, the flesh-eating accounts read like rationalizations of those who wish to find some "natural" justification for their diet and their conquering demeanour as hunters. Descriptions of

vegetarian origins read sometimes as convenient rationalizations of the accuracy of the sacred scriptures or of the virtue of denial or as a psychologically satisfying confirmation of our intrinsically vegetarian nature. Less ideologically oriented accounts include, on the one hand, Desmond Morris in *The Animal Contract* taking the traditional view that we were originally fruit eaters before we became flesh eaters and, on the other, Jared Diamond in *The Third Chimpanzee* taking the now more customary view that flesh eating has been a perennial human characteristic.[8] Certainly, we should read all accounts (including this account) with a degree of reservation, waiting for a time – if there ever will be one – when there is a great deal more convincing physical evidence than currently exists. What now exists as evidence is subject to a variety of competing but almost equally persuasive interpretations. As the vegetarian molecular biologist Randall Collura says, the "evidence presented ... has never been definitive, and I don't believe it ever will be."[9] We should certainly be very wary of the grandiose image of humankind built on scanty evidence and interpreted to elevate humanity without any great degree of reliability, other than the certainty of human hubris.

But let us not imagine that competing interpretations of human origins are of recent vintage. At the turn of the nineteenth century George Nicholson, originally a Bradford printer, wrote an intriguing book entitled *The Primeval Diet of Man,* based on a conception of the natural human as prey and as naturally vegetarian in contrast with the following century's glorification of the prehistorical human predator.[10] Nicholson quoted many of the purported historical authorities stretching back over two millennia who had maintained over the centuries – as, indeed, the biblical book of Genesis also proclaims – that humans were originally vegetarian, even vegan, in their dietary habits. Slowly, the idea of "man the hunter" came to supersede that of "man the vegetarian." Of course, it had long been proclaimed that "man the hunter" was the path taken over a few thousand years (biblical literalness predominated decidedly until the 1830s and lingered into the twentieth century, when all animal species, even the earth itself, were thought to be a mere few thousand years of age, six thousand being the compilation of Archbishop Ussher of Armagh). And, of course, it is now known that humans have been at least occasional small-animal eaters for a hundred thousand years and more. The question, however, that is constantly raised inquires about the *fons et origo* of humankind: are humans by *nature* and *origin* flesh, fruit, or vegetable eaters? Are we *by nature* and *origin* savannah hunters or tree-top fruit pickers in the same manner that a cat is a carnivore *by nature* and *origin*? The assumption throughout recorded

history appears to have been that whatever we were in our origins best expresses our fundamental moral nature. And the answer commonly accepted is in constant flux. Every quarter-century or so, the scientific community offers a very different interpretation of human nature and origins.

In our answers to questions of human origins, much will depend on what we consider "human" in our prehistory and what we count as "proto-human" (usually termed "hominid"). If we restrict the idea of "humanity" to the past hundred thousand years or so, it would appear certain we have always been flesh eaters, at least to a degree. However, if we seek "humanity" shortly after our evolutionary break from the other great apes, we probably ate flesh very rarely, if at all, perhaps the occasional insect or lizard but probably nothing as large as a rabbit. Indeed, answers to these questions of origin depend equally on what is meant by animal, which probably varied greatly from our current ideas based on scientific taxonomic differentiations among animals, vegetables, and fruit, distinctions that would have been completely alien to the mind processes of our early ancestors. Indeed, only in the eighteenth century did the Western mind become imbued with questions of classification in anything approaching a rigorous manner, notably with John Ray and his associates at the beginning of the century and with Carolus Linnaeus three decades later.

Those who consider humans by nature vegetarian often rely largely on the biology of humans for their evidence. Thus, it is said that whereas a natural herbivore has, for example, a long and complex intestine, a carnivore has a very short and simple one in order to excrete the poisonous effect of a flesh diet very quickly from the animal and to not allow the flesh to permeate the whole body. This begs the very question of the biological nature of humanity, for few have ever claimed the human to be a natural carnivore but, like pigs, to be natural omnivores (animals who are opportunistic feeders, capable of consuming a large variety of different foodstuffs, including both flesh and vegetable foods), many of whom have structures very similar to those of the vegetarian animals. Certainly, we do not possess the physical characteristics possessed by, say, carnivorous lions or tigers, but nor do omnivorous pigs share these characteristics. There is a great deal of variety in animal and human dietary behaviour and physical structure. The choice is not restricted to being herbivores (strict vegetarians), carnivores (flesh eaters), or omnivores. There are also frugivores (animals who eat fruit predominantly), gramnivores (animals who eat nuts and seeds primarily), folivores (those who exist mainly on leaves), and insectivores (who consume insects and small vertebrates along with fruit and vegetation). And the comparison of our bodily structure with those of the carnivores involves

more than the merely superficial but requires us to notice, for example, that cell types distinguish species from each other according to the diets they consume. In addition, plant eaters generally possess large chambers of food deposits. Horses, rhinoceroses, and colobine monkeys have posterior sacs, whereas cattle and deer ruminants have forward sacs. There are no such sacs, either posterior or anterior, in humans. Dogs (which are natural carnivores, although not so completely as cats) have intestines that resemble those of omnivores more than they resemble those of other carnivores, such as raccoons. The small canine teeth of humans are sometimes thought to indicate that the human lacks adequate teeth for a flesh diet, but the size of the cranium and relative smallness of the human jaw brought about by evolutionary developments of the brain may be more important than diet in determining the size and power of the teeth. Moreover, the predominantly vegetarian gorillas and gelada baboons have very large canines, which function as bark-tearing devices, defence weapons, and visual threats rather than being essential for food consumption. Generally speaking, the human seems prima facie very well equipped structurally as an omnivore rather than there being one sole legitimate interpretation of the human as a creature structurally suited to a wholly vegetarian diet. As Randall Collura expresses it, the "bottom line is that nothing about our anatomy or physiology dictates a vegetarian diet (or precludes one either)."[11]

Very often, those who claim the human to be in origin a fruitarian or a vegetarian compare humans to their closest relatives, the apes. There is, however, considerable variety among apes. The only frugivores appear to be gibbons and siamangs, and they are primarily rather than exclusively so. The orangutans are also fruit eaters, although they consume a large amount of general vegetation as well, but no substantial flesh. Gorillas eat vegetation in general, especially leaves, and again no substantial flesh. It was traditionally thought that our closest genetic and evolutionary relatives, the chimpanzees, were also almost entirely vegetarian, but it is now known that they consume animals occasionally, both mammals and insects, just as others of the great apes eat insects. However, chimpanzees eat mammal meat very infrequently, and flesh is a very small proportion of their diet. Baboons prey occasionally on antelope. What this suggests to us is that there would appear to be a general inclination toward fruit and vegetable food among the apes but that habitat and availability play significant roles in the specific kinds of food eaten. Certainly, the flesh-eating chimpanzees, not unlike the gibbons, would appear to differ from most of their great-ape relatives, and one is led to wonder from the accounts of chimpanzee meat eating whether it is an aspect of bravado and machismo rather than any real dietary preference,

whether the choice depends more on psychology than on biology. Thus, young male chimpanzees capture and kill small monkeys in an apparent attempt to impress females, who are offered a morsel of the prey, rather like human teenagers with marijuana, alcohol, or tobacco. The biblical idea of "the fruit of the forbidden tree" is not without merit in the case of the chimpanzees.[12] The human has many close relatives who have restricted fruit or vegetarian diets, but they do not include the very closest cousin.

When we look at the body structure of early humans and recognize that they lacked talons and claws, could not match a cheetah, a tiger, or even a rabbit for speed, and possessed far weaker and smaller teeth than a crocodile or a lion and less agility than a monkey or a squirrel, we soon realize how implausible it is to think of our human ancestors as specialized hunters, as has sometimes been thought. Investigating the fossil evidence – skulls, other bones, footprints – of *Australopithecus afarensis*, who lived between 5 and 2.5 million years ago, we are led to the speculative conclusion that they were bipedal, stood around four feet tall on average, weighed around eighty pounds, and had teeth pretty much like our own. Moreover, they did not have tools to cut flesh (the first tools were constructed about 2 to 2.5 million years ago), and they had no fire on which to cook flesh. The first solid evidence for controlled fire comes from significantly less than 1 million years ago, although some suggest the control of fire began "perhaps as far back as ... 1.8 million years ago."[13] No satisfactory flesh digestion, at least of the tougher portions of flesh, could have occurred before the control of fire. Indeed, we are led to wonder why fire was introduced for cooking if other animals were our natural diet. Would we not have expected to eat them raw? It is very difficult to conceive of humans, as we have already noted, as generally raw-flesh tearers and eaters other than of the very smallest of mammals, birds, and lizards. It is worth recalling that in zoology the Carnivora is an order of mammals – comprising the cats, dogs, bears, hyenas, weasels, civets, raccoons, and mongooses – that have powerful jaws and teeth adapted for tearing and eating flesh. The human does not fit at all as a primary flesh eater. Nor do humans escape the problem of the lack of carnivorous characteristics by conveniently designating them as omnivores instead. They are still expected to be consumers of significant quantities of flesh.

The famous *Australopithecus,* Lucy, discovered in Ethiopia in 1974, had "an exceptionally long big-toe," Donna Hart and Robert Sussman tell us in *Man the Hunted,* "that was divergent like our modern human thumbs and could be used to grasp and climb trees."[14] Customary tree climbing suggests prima facie a fruit-eating lifestyle. Moreover, the evidence for systematic

organized hunting of anything other than small mammals suggests hunting began no more than sixty thousand years ago, at most ninety thousand. When we consider further that there were very many times more large predators in the distant prehistoric past than today and that those in existence were far larger than their modern counterparts – sabre tooth tigers, hyenas, crocodiles, lionesses, and the like, which would find a human to be a tasty supper – it is not unreasonable to assume, as the fossil record suggests, that the human was primarily a fruit, tuber, and nut eater who stayed well away whenever possible from the predatory carnivores. Moreover, the human did not possess the weapons necessary to kill any but the very smallest of animals and lacked the speed or stealth to catch all but the very slowest. Further, humans were without the social organization necessary to arrange a hunting expedition, and many early skeletons have been found with carnivore teeth indentations in their skulls, indicating humans' status as prey. It is perhaps likely that a few insects, and maybe small lizards and the like, were consumed along with the fruit and vegetation, but *Australopithecus afarensis* was probably an *almost* complete vegetarian, living certainly no less comfortably in the trees as on the savannah, as indicated by the long arms – hanging by them to pick fruit – and relatively short legs. Thick jaw bones and small incisors and canines compared to the molars, which are large, flat, and blunt, were characteristics of *Australopithecus afarensis.* Strikingly, there were no long shearing crests on the teeth required for the chewing of substantial flesh. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests an animal that ate leaves, fruits, seeds, and tubers predominantly. M. Teaford and P. Ungar conclude that "early hominids were not dentally preadapted to eat meat – they simply did not have the sharp, reciprocally concave shearing blades necessary to retain and cut such foods."[15] Nonetheless, sometimes when we look to modern hunter-gatherers, we often tend, sadly and prejudicially – "*they* are closer to human origins than *we* are," we imagine – to assume that their preferred flesh diet is likely to be similar to the diets of our early ancestors. It is certainly true that no aboriginal societies, or significant groups within such societies, are vegetarian, although it is estimated that the gatherings of the women constitute over two-thirds of the diet. The male hunters would not like it to be so. Yet their preference for flesh eating may be understood, like that of Western culture, as a part of their Arcadian rather than Edenic character, as will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

It has customarily been argued that it was in the organization of the hunt that humans began to learn to develop their skills and their minds, thus becoming the large-brained ape with far more reason and sagacity than other species. Yet it is just as likely that the brain evolved not in hunting but

in trying to outwit the predators. Indeed, co-operation and socialization would have developed in like manner not as mutual advantage in the hunt but as necessary steps to provide defence. Predators are often solitary animals, or they may act in pairs. Diurnal primates find it necessary to live in permanent social groups both to provide sufficient voices to sound a predatory alarm and for there to be more individuals to confuse their foes by scattering, or to mob them, if attacked. The most that can be said is that the evidence suggests a human who was originally prey and quasi-vegetarian as a distinct possibility, although this is a supposition without any *absolute* certainty. At the same time, with absolute certainty it can be said the relatively recent human is the only primate ever to have regularly eaten large animals – as large as a rabbit, that is. In fact, mainly through the paucity of large animals there, the European "discoverers" of the Caribbean islands were astonished to find the inhabitants living predominantly on worms, spiders, and other insects. They were insectivores. We can be sure that if early humans ate any flesh, it was not of the large-animal variety that we encounter in our grocery stores.

The Golden Age

The Golden Age is a period of human prehistory remembered or imagined in the legends of almost all societies. The idea of the Golden Age played a major role in Chinese and Indian thought. In India, the age is thought to have long disappeared, now replaced with the corrupt Iron Age of Kali. Still, today, the Pitjantjatjara aborigines of Australia revere *tjukurpa,* the mystical past and its legendary heroes. A similar conception is present in many contemporary foraging societies. Islam, too, holds to a conception of the highest of all humans as the *insan-I-kamil* – the primordial man of fully realized spiritual qualities. And the one-time doyenne of medieval studies Hélène Guerber acknowledged it also as a Western legend, albeit derivative. "Of all the romances of chivalry," she tells us:

> The most mystical and spiritual is undoubtedly the legend of the Holy Grail. Rooted in the mythology of all primitive races is the belief in a land of peace and happiness, a sort of earthly paradise, once possessed by man, but now lost, and only to be attained again by the virtuous. The legend of the Holy Grail, which some authorities declare was first known in Europe by the Moors and Christianized by the Spaniards, was soon introduced into France, where Robert de Borron and Chrestien de Troyes wrote lengthy poems about

> it. Other writers took up the theme, among them Walter Map, Archdeacon of Oxford, who connected with it the Arthurian legends. It soon became known in Germany, where in the hands of Gottfried von Strassburg, and especially of Wolfram von Eschenbach, it assumed its most perfect and popular form.[16]

The Anglo-Saxon word "aergod" means "as good as at the beginning." The thought persists in the writings of Aquinas. The idea of the original as somehow the best is to be found in most cultures.

Was there a Golden Age? Certainly not, if what we mean by that is the utopian ideal outlined by its historical promoters. Nonetheless, the question is answered less easily if what is meant is a time when cultural novelties were not always sought and a time before knowledge was desired as an end in itself. The conception of a prior Golden Age could well have arisen from a perception that not all arts, knowledge, and wisdom had proved beneficial to humankind and that something of inordinate value had been lost in the course of time. After all, the serpent, the symbol of the fall, was always portrayed as wise. And wisdom was associated with cunning and hence with deceit or evasion.

A modern expression of the return of the Golden Age and the victory of the virtuous is to be found in the rapturous chant of the Iranian people awaiting Ayatollah Khomeini's return from exile in 1979:

> The day the Imam returns
> No one will tell lies anymore
> No one will lock the doors of his house
> People will become brothers
> Sharing the bread of their joys together
> In justice and sincerity.[17]

As Francis Ween wrote of the endeavours of the Khomeini sycophants, "Iran goes back to a past that seems a lost paradise."[18] This lost paradise would appear to be an integral part of the human psyche, a desire to overcome what are seen as perennial, but not inevitable, human characteristics associated with our historical experience.

There is a decided possibility of the legend being a part of earlier Western oral myth, even if it first arrived in popular literary form only in the Middle Ages. In religious literary form the legend goes back at least to Genesis within the Judeo-Christian tradition and much earlier in other countries of the Middle East, in India, and in China. And it plays an important

role in classical philosophy. It has, as indicated, long been a part of popular literature, again exemplified through Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss in *Candide:* "Men ... must in some things have deviated from their original innocence; for they were not born wolves, and yet they worry one another like those beasts of prey."[19] Likewise, in *Madame Bovary,* Gustave Flaubert refers to "the cradle of human society" as the time of "the savage ages when men lived off acorns in the depths of the forest. Then they cast off their animal skins, garbed themselves in cloth, dug the ground and planted the vine. Was this an advance? Didn't their discovery entail more disadvantages than benefits?"[20] The acorn myth was already present in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (first century AD), where we read: "Ceres discovered corn; previously men had lived on acorns."[21]

Our image of the early human or hominid begins to change from that of the essential hunter when we come to recognize that the early human, and for that matter all other great apes, were in origin far more prey than predator species and that their behaviour corresponded to this predominant reality. In light of the distinct possibility that the earliest humans were vegetarian, or at least quasi-vegetarian, the primal memory of the Golden Age becomes readily comprehensible, especially when we understand that the legend consists of two competing elements or stages: the Edenic and the Arcadian – primal memories occasioned by different periods of human prehistory.[22] The first is a primal memory of our period as prey (see the next section of this chapter), whereas the second is a primal memory of the early stage of our predator period, and the two are ever in tension within the human psyche. These periods, or stages, may be understood as the vegetarian (prey) and omnivore (predator) stages, as depicted in the human journey from "man the hunted" to "man the hunter." The conception of the human as in essence hunted or hunter turns out to be a question not really about essence at all but about the human in different periods of prehistory and the impact these stages have left on the human mind. Each stage informs a part of the human psyche and is incompatible with the other part informed by the other stage. Being both hunted and hunter is a part of the human primal memory. In its pure form, as what Max Weber called an "ideal type" (although such types certainly never existed in their entirety in actuality), the Edenic is rural, simple, peaceful, altruistic, symbiotic, innocent, loving (agape), co-operative, compassionate, meek, tender, egalitarian, and vegetarian – in short, the Edenic world is the world of the angelic and saintly.

This is the Eden of Genesis before humans and animals became flesh eaters and before the fruit of the tree of knowledge was eaten, as so many

religions depict, the time of an essential difference from our present nature. It is viewed as the earliest stage of human prehistory, a period when, in the words of Elijah Buckner in *The Immortality of Animals* (1903), a view shared by the vegetarian founder of Methodism, John Wesley: "the earth, teeming with every variety of useful productions, was the great storehouse of the Almighty, from which all living things were commanded to help themselves. They were all vegetarians, for they were commanded by God to live on nothing else. There was no necessity to destroy one life to support another ... In this primeval innocence, there was surpassing beauty in every animate and inanimate object, and every living thing in the heavens above and all that moved in the waters below, were at peace."[23] Few would accept today such an account as prehistorical reality. Even more secular writers such as Virgil and Jean-Jacques Rousseau took humankind's originally simple and vegetarian past for granted. The first written expression of the Golden Age in Western literature came from Hesiod (eighth century BC) when he contrasted in *Works and Days* our present "age of iron," a degraded age of "toil and misery," of "constant distress," with the Golden Age, in which "all good things were theirs, and the grain-giving soil bore its fruits of its own accord in unstinted plenty, while they at their leisure harvested their fields in contentment and abundance."[24] "Every reference to a 'golden age' in Western literature and speech," M.L. West tells us, "derives directly or indirectly from ... Hesiod," although there was a previous passing reference to such an age (unnamed) in Homer's *Iliad* (bk. 1, 260-68).[25] The vegetarian emphasis was likewise expressed by Plato (c. 428-347 BC) in the *Statesman* (269-74) and by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC to AD 17): "content with foods produced without constraint [i.e., compulsion, force, killing], they gathered the fruit of the arbute tree and mountain berries and cornel berries and blackberries clinging to the bramble thickets, and acorns which had fallen from the broad tree of Jupiter."[26] Even earlier, the Pythagorean poet Empedocles (c. 490-430 BC) had told us that in such an age: "the altar did not reek of the unmixed blood of bulls, but this was the greatest abomination among men, to snatch out the life and eat the goodly limbs."[27] Moreover, in that bygone age, Empedocles says, "all [animals] were gentle and amenable to men, both beasts and birds; and kindness glowed."[28] He showed his preference for the sacrifice of costly perfumes rather than flesh. In fact, Empedocles commended the life of ancient humans, who, he believed, were peace-loving vegetarians who eschewed animal sacrifice to the gods until Strife entered the world and the perennial conflict began between Love and Strife that epitomized what he thought of as the modern world, with Strife ever in the ascendant.

The "ideal type" of Arcadia, by contrast with Eden but sharing some of its characteristics (again never fully achieved in actuality), is rural, simple, industrious, adventurous, loving (eros), loyal, courageous, strong, honourable, respectful, hierarchical, hunting-based, and omnivorous – in short, the world of Pan, King Arthur, and the "noble savage." According to the renowned anthropologist of religion Mircea Eliade, this desire for a return to the past, of which, I am postulating, both Eden and Arcadia are reflections, arises in an attempt to overcome the inevitable decay involved in the march of history, which removes us from the perfection of the creation of the gods.[29] If the origins provide security and change produces disharmony, then the creations of the gods are far superior to the civilizations developed by humankind. But they are different securities provided by the "origins." They are similar in that both Eden and Arcadia are in conflict with the cultured soul of the city and its technology, which delights in "progress," books, learning, the arts, and the finesse of civilization, as well as, of course, in science and luxury. But whereas Eden is an object of beauty, serenity, and reverence, Arcadia relates more to the awesome, the sublime, and the majestic. In Arcadia, it is the rugged laws of nature that are respected, whereas in Eden it is the individual lives of animals. It is even thought that in the ideal Eden carnivorous animals would be neither predators against us nor against the other vegetarian animals. Together, the ideas of Eden and Arcadia are in constant historical tension in the human mind and breast – hence the impossibility of connoting the ideal nature of humankind: there are competing ideals in constant tension within our minds. We do not endure moral relativism. We endure conflicting moral absolutes.

In the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh,* composed on twelve tablets about three thousand years ago, the path from Eden to Arcadia is exemplified. Here, Enkidu is a primitive human who lives in accord with the animals, sharing in common with them a vegetarian diet. The temple girl, Shamat, and the symbol of early civilization, Gilgamesh, escort Enkidu on an adventure to prove him capable of valour, lust, reason, and the robust virtues. When he returns to the animals temporarily, they no longer acknowledge him as one of their own, and he no longer possesses their speed and strength. Enkidu has arrived in Arcadia. He no longer sees himself as an animal in the way that other animals are animal.

Before Arcadia is reached, most societies have legends of a wholly vegetarian past, now lost in the mist of time. Thereafter, humans and certain other animals become flesh eaters. Thus, the Makritare of the Orinoco believe that, in the conclusion of the vegetarian stage, "Mantuwa, the Jaguar, approached and took a bite of the serpent flesh. That was the first

eating of meat. When the others saw the red blood flow, they all pressed in for a mouthful."[30] The elders of the Bassari of West Africa teach that before the time of flesh eating, the deity Unumbotte gave the people "seeds of all kinds" and said, "go plant these" so that "the people might live from their fruit." In remarkable similarity to Genesis, "Snake" tempts "Man and his wife" to eat forbidden fruit – flesh – instead.[31] They become aware of their differences from other animals, develop a separate language from that of the other creatures (that is, their interests diverge), and become flesh eaters. George Nicholson repeats one of the traditional interpretations of the origins of flesh eating, suggesting the practice arose after an animal sacrifice to the gods when a Phoenician priest picked a piece of burnt offering from the ground and licked his lips.[32]

The myth of the Golden Age is treated in modern literature as an ahistorical imagination. But we need to ask: how ahistorical is it, and what function does it perform? According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, "myth" is "1. a traditional story concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events. 2. a widely held but false belief – a fictional person or thing – an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing." Thus, a myth may be true or false. There are various kinds of myths. Some are myths that explain. Some are myths that instruct. Some are myths that instruct while providing a true or false historical explanation. And as Maynard Mack has it, "most myths are caramelized fragments of common sense."[33] Being accustomed to scientific explanation, we tend to forget how the explanations of science evolve, at least in part, from our own cultural stance. To be sure, the explanations offered by science may be more convincing explanations to us than those offered in the absence of scientific method, but the latter are very persuasive in the cultures in which they are developed. For earlier humans, explanations would have to be of the prescientific variety. To experience something of a mythic awakening, it is worth watching a magnificent, shimmering dawn and then imagining, in the absence of scientific explanation, in what terms the societal elders would have explained the shimmering dawn to the initiates and the difference between it and a dull and cloudy dawn. A bright, beautiful dawn may well be explained as the gods speeding across the heavens and lighting the day. A dull dawn may be explained as the gods being hindered in their progress by the enemies of life-giving light. The night, which the dawn is dispersing, is a time of darkness and danger. (It is difficult to discern when candles were invented, but it was probably not until Roman times. Their use did not become widespread until the later Middle Ages. Until then, the

primary diminution of the darkness of the night was the light of the moon. Flaming torches were notoriously unreliable.) The moon may thus have been worshipped as the provider of a measure of respite from the unseen terrors of the dark. And upon the fears of the night, the promise of the day, and the experience of mysterious events, a whole pantheon of gods – some threatening, some at least occasionally benevolent, including the life-giving Sun and the twilight-giving Moon – will have emerged.

The conflict between the Edenic and Arcadian versions of the Golden Age myth will allow us to understand how it is that a myth may retain competing elements: a pride in the original human as being at one with the animals and an equal pride in having become flesh eaters. Thus, for example, in the Cheyenne creation myth, originally "every animal, big and small, every bird, big and small, every fish, and every insect could talk to the people and understand them. The people ... went naked and fed on honey and wild fruits; they were never hungry ... During the days they talked with the other animals, for they were all friends."[34] This was, of course, the Edenic stage in which pride is expressed. These conditions did not last, however, for the "Great Medicine taught" the Amerindians

> to catch and eat fish at a time when none of the other people knew about eating meat ... the Great Medicine blessed [the Amerindians] and gave them some medicine spirit to awaken their dormant minds. From that time on they seemed to possess intelligence and know what to do. The Great Medicine singled out one of the men and told him to teach people to band together, so that they all could work and clothe their naked bodies with skins of panther and bear and deer. The Great Medicine ... gave them corn to plant and buffalo for meat, and from that time on there were no more floods and no more famines.[35]

Human co-operation permitted hunting, and hence flesh eating and pelt acquisition, which, thus, according to the myth, ensured human survival. The utopian ideal of Eden was being replaced by the courageous and adventurous ideal of Arcadia. The pride in the Edenic stage did not disappear but existed alongside that of Arcadia, albeit in a weaker form. In the precarious earlier period, so the Cheyenne legend of the origins of the buffalo hunt tells us, it was initially the buffalo who was the meat eater, but eventually the human vanquished the buffalo in a contest and won the right to consume the buffalo instead. In other words, at first, nonhuman animals were the predators, and human animals were the prey. Later, as we shall see, the period of the human as prey was replaced by that of the

human as predator. The Cheyenne legends depict clearly the conflict between the "natural" ("original") and the cultural, the instinctive and the learned, the primitive and the developed – in short, the Edenic and the Arcadian, which have come to confound human ideals ever since. Aboriginals everywhere inhabit the world of Arcadia rather than Eden, which, paradoxically, may come later (or perhaps constitute a return) in human conscious development. For the aboriginal, as for the supposedly "civilized," the Arcadian is seen as the decidedly superior stage, one in which the human has changed from prey to predator, but the lingering pride in Eden is never quite lost.

What if there were no vegetarian stage in human prehistory, as, we must constantly remind ourselves, most paleontologists continue to believe? Even the ethical vegetarian scientist Randall Collura states that we "evolved eating a wide variety of diets containing both plants and animal food" and that "humans don't really have a natural diet."[36] In this circumstance, the Edenic vegetarian ideal must be seen as a deeply held moral value – the absolute, if difficult to attain, ethical ideal. If such is the case, the Golden Age does not in any manner represent historical reality; instead, the pervasiveness of the myth suggests that it was an intuited moral goal of humankind. It is what the human is conceived to be in ideal form – the Form, the Idea, of Plato's justice, if you will. It is human perfection; it is a primal moral memory, to express it in quasi-Wordsworthian and Jungian terms.[37] It is an expression of the sense of justice present in every human, however distorted culture may have rendered it. But it is also seen as an impractical ideal. Its alternative is viewed as the necessity of culture replacing nature in human consciousness. The addition of Arcadia alongside the perennial myth of Eden suggests a permanent contradiction in humanity's primal memories. Neither culture nor contradiction is a recent acquisition. We have to return to Eden to escape the contradictions, if they can ever be escaped at all. But the image of Arcadia is so deeply implanted in the human mind that any retrogression to Eden is a daunting task.

The moral imperative may be weakened given the "would it were so" nature of the myth of the Golden Age in that, according to the myth, natural carnivores become vegetarian when it is clearly incompatible with their biological constitution that they be so, even though it is worth noting that many well-intentioned, but *perhaps* misguided, vegetarians have attempted to render their carnivorous companion animals likewise vegetarian.[38] Of course, it would not have been possible that in the distant past carnivorous animals would have been vegetarian, as the myth requires. Or that herbivorous animals could have been carnivorous at one time, as suggested in the

Cheyenne legend. The use of the buffalo as predator in the myth, rather than the real predators from whom the Amerindians have suffered, provides a convenient justification for the slaying of the buffaloes in revenge. The myth is, in fact, a rejection of the cruel realities of carnivorous "nature" – namely, that there are carnivorous animals, notably carnivorous animals from whose teeth and claws humans traditionally have suffered. Nonetheless, it is equally clear that such a restriction on the myth would not necessarily have applied to omnivorous humans. It may well be that the human part of the moral or history is valid as history, whereas that of the carnivorous animals is merely a wish based on a utopian image of the eradication of competitive and aggressive nature, which humans prehistorically had to endure – a nature frequently deemed deplorable by such prominent historical figures as Leonardo da Vinci, Victor Hugo, Charles Darwin, Thomas Hardy, and George Bernard Shaw.[39] To refer to the words of Darwin alone, writing to J.D. Hooker in 1856: "What a book a Devil's Chaplain might write on the clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horridly cruel works of nature."[40] In short, vegetarian impulses constitute an attempt to replace the rancour of a world of natural conflict with the tranquility of the utopian peaceable kingdom, to overcome the morally wasteful and harmful in favour of the morally pristine. The Edenic primary premise may be expressed in the dicta of various traditions, such as the saying of the Christian desert father Abbot Moses that "a man ought to do no harm to any,"[41] the Judaic adage of *Bal Taschit* (do not destroy), and the Jain principle of *ahimsa* (nonharm). Despite the adages, Arcadian harm to others remained the norm. At the very least, the earliest time of the Golden Age presents itself as the essential human moral lesson. In the words of Porphyry expressing the vegetarian mandate: "We should imitate those that lived in the golden age, we should imitate those of that period who were free. For with them modesty, Nemesis and Justice associated, because they were satisfied with the fruits of the earth."[42] Randall Collura says that today, in contrast, the "first thing we need to do ... is to abandon the Garden of Eden mythology."[43] But do we? If one has serious doubts about the historicity of the Golden Age, as many will, the doubt does not eliminate the appeal. As the philosopher Daniel Dombrowski has pointed out, although "'once upon a time' stories of a contract between man and animal are merely stories, so are the 'once upon a time' stories between man and man. In that this condition has not bothered the history of social contract theory from Plato to Kant to Rawls, it should not bother us. That is, these stories of an ancient vegetarian past, even if not true, offer insights into the beliefs of the people who told them."[44]

What if neither the claimed historicity nor a manifestation of the intuited good appears convincing as an explanation for the persistence of the myth of the Golden Age? Then the myth would appear to stand as a symbol for that which humanity has striven throughout its history. For example, in Dostoevsky's *The Devils* (1871-72), Stavrogin has a "Golden Age" vision of a primeval earthly paradise of happiness and innocence, inspired by Claude Lorraine's painting *Acis and Galatea*: "A feeling of happiness, hitherto unknown to me, pierced my heart till it ached ... Here was the cradle of European civilization, here were the first scenes from mythology, man's paradise on earth. Here a beautiful race of men had lived. They rose and went to sleep happy and innocent; the woods were filled with their joyous songs, the great overflow of their untapped energies passed into love and unsophisticated gaiety. The sun shed its rays on these islands and that sea." Yet Dostoevsky is aware of the illusion, although it is an illusion that loses nothing by being an illusion. Stavrogin continues: "A wonderful dream, a sublime illusion! The most incredible dream that has ever been dreamed, but to which all of mankind has devoted all its powers during the whole of its existence, for which it has died on the cross and for which its prophets have been killed, without which nations will not live and cannot even die."[45] Whether history, intuition, or symbol of human goals, the Golden Age stands as a remarkable signpost of the finest ideals of humanity. It is a signpost whose clarion call resonates deeply in the human breast.

The Human as Prey

Myth depicts humans as vegetarian in origin. And myths usually have some historical, moral, or explanatory justification. But on what hard evidence, we must ask, should we believe the human animal to have been originally a predominantly vegetarian and prey creature rather than a natural predator? We have already met some significant hard evidence, but there is more. *Paranthropus boisei,* discovered by the Leakeys in Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, was said to be "robust" – referring not to overall stature but to the extremely large jaws and molars, suited to grinding hard, fibrous plant material. The teeth of australopithecines were also decidedly not those of a flesh eater. However, because intestines do not fossilize, it is impossible to discern whether the intestines of primitive humans resembled those of vegetarian animals most completely or not.

Few flesh-eating predators are also natural prey, although there are a significant number of exceptions. An adult animal usually belongs to one

category or the other. Thus, human flesh eating along with a tradition of being hunted must be seen as something of a rarity, even if the antitheses occur at different periods of human development. But it is a rarity borne out by evidence and argument. Holes in the skulls of some early hominid fossils match perfectly with big-cat fangs. Many human fossil bones bear the marks of being gnawed. Hans Kruuk, an authority on predators, argues that our horror, yet fascination, with man-eater tales is based on a hard-wired fear of our history of having been hunted, a fear developed over millions of years.[46] The horror, together with fascination, reflects that one meets danger with both anxiety and excitement: witness the attraction of horror films, an attraction scarcely explicable in the customary terms of "entertainment" or "pleasure." The strange reality – unfathomable in conventional terms – is that many people are excited by events that arouse fear. Paradoxically, fear may itself be fulfilling on occasion, as exemplified by the synchrony of terror and the sublime.

During the Raj, the British kept statistics on the numbers of humans lost to tiger predation. Between 1800 and 1900, they estimated some three hundred thousand humans had been killed.[47] In the summer of 1996 in Indian Uttar Pradesh, there were thirty-three fatal wolf attacks on children.[48] Ignorant, weak, and inexperienced human children are especially easy prey. Self-confident, aggressive carnivores can afford to live alone; weaker animals must live communally. And the human is a decidedly social animal, out of prehistoric need. As the protoanarchist William Godwin wrote: "There is nothing that the human heart more irresistibly seeks than an object to which to attach itself."[49]

As the number of large predators has declined in general through human population explosion, habitat destruction, effective hunting, urbanization, and "civilization," a few areas of the world have remained rife with predation. Nile crocodiles are still feared as creatures that dine on human flesh and that of other primates. In the already mentioned Sundarbans region of northern India and Bangladesh, tiger predation is a constant threat. In a four-month period of 1988, sixty-five people were killed there by tigers. Even in Canada, bears (grizzly, polar, and very occasionally, black) and mountain lions take a small toll.[50] In Australia, Florida, and California, humans are at risk from sharks. Predation was a constant threat in the past both more frequently than now and far more extensively in the areas affected. In the not so distant past, in his *Descriptive Sketches,* Wordsworth numbers bears, ravenous wolves, and bandits as objects of fear in his Swiss wanderings. At Dmanisi in the Republic of Georgia, paleontologists have discovered fossils from *Homo erectus* some 1.7 to 1.8 million years ago – perhaps the first

hominid to venture beyond the confines of Africa. The fossils give a clear indication of having been preyed upon. Indeed, Hart and Sussman report on a "Dmanisi skull [that] bears the signature set of holes into which sabre-toothed fangs fit with perfection."[51] Gnaw marks on one of the hominid lower jaws demonstrate that some of the Dmanisi population were eaten by large cats. And there are good grounds for the belief that the human brain still stores fear and threat memories, albeit unconscious memories, of those early ages. Cornell University's Colin Campbell, a reputed biochemist, stated to the *New York Times* that, far from being primordial hunters, "we're basically a vegetarian species and should be eating a wide variety of plant foods and minimizing our intake of animal foods."[52] The history of the human as prey would confirm Campbell's claim. Humans are more likely to have been primordial quasi-vegetarians whose later history has endowed the human psyche with a sense of being an essential omnivore.

Animal Sacrifice

"In the beginning no animal was sacrificed to the gods, nor was there any positive law to prevent this, for it was forbidden by the law of nature."[53] So said Porphyry. How, then, did animal sacrifice to the gods originate – the product of which was eaten primarily by the human sacrificers? Perhaps it should first be noted that there are many misleading suppositions made with regard to animals and worship. Worship is often thought an adoration of the object worshipped. In fact, adoration in worship arrives late in the history of prayer. In many instances, although by no means all, beings are worshipped because they are feared. Animals that are neither feared nor food are not customarily the object of prayer. Where sharks are a constant threat to human life, as in the South Pacific, they are worshipped (by the Tuamoton, for example) in the hope that the sharks will thereby spare the lives of the kith and kin of the worshippers. The Ainu of Hokkaido, Japan, prayed to the bear but treated the caged (although, of course, "worshipped") bear abominably. The object was to render the potentially harmful bear innocuous. Certainly, it is important to distinguish between reverence and awe derived from fear or terror and reverence and awe based on love, admiration, and wonder. The latter shows a respect for the being as an entity in itself, reflecting an evaluation of its appealing qualities; the former reflects the urgency to escape the consequences of the worshipped being's wrath, the desire of the worshipped animal being to have oneself as food. In some

instances, the worship will also reflect that we are in awe of the animal's powers. Animals were often themselves deities precisely because they were feared. Nonetheless, totemism was a common practice – a lingering remnant of Eden. Under totemic belief a tribe considers itself a descendent of a particular animal, to which it bears a special kinship relation. Only occasionally is a totemic animal sacrificed, and then as a special gift to a favoured god. Even under totemism, contrary to common interpretation, there is no "oneness with nature," for animals other than the totem animal are regularly sacrificed and eaten.

Certainly, in many incipient states and among hunter-gatherers, animals were usually worshipped, but we should not imagine that those worshipped benefited from the worship. Nowhere were animals worshipped more assiduously than in ancient Egypt – from crocodiles through snakes to baboons. Yet the "worship" was of no benefit to the animals. So many "worshipped" animals have been found in human graves in Egypt that they must have been acquired in the neighbouring lands specifically for the purpose of sacrifice. Let us avoid the easy error of imagining that treating animals well in myth, drawing pictures of them on cave walls, or making statuary of them meant that they were well treated or well respected, in the positive sense of that term. More often than not, they were killed for their divinity. Animals were useful symbols to help humans develop rules for living, and for saving, their own lives. Only rarely did the animals matter as ends in themselves.

Nor should we confuse positive symbols with benevolent treatment. In India, the cobra is still worshipped in places. Before the religious ceremony involving worship of the cobras, their mouths are sewn shut. In 1994 the Indian government released dozens of such tortured – yet "worshipped" – cobras back into the wild, after the sutures had been removed, of course. In the *Euthyphro,* Plato has Socrates proclaim that "where reverence is, there is fear."[54] Likewise, the Greek poet Stasinus as well as Thomas Hobbes emphasized the connection between fear and reverence. None of this should persuade us to ignore saying no. 17 of the *Pancatantra:* "In blind darkness are we sunk when we offer sacrifices with beasts. A higher religious duty than harmlessness (*ahimsa)* has never been nor shall be." But the *ahimsa* of the *Pancatantra* is followed no more faithfully, other than as rote, than are the New Testament admonitions to pursue peace and turn the other cheek. Bulls, goats, and sheep are slaughtered in ritual sacrifice in India still today. In the Hindu Kaharingan region of the Dayaks of Borneo, the *tiwah* – the funerary ritual – involves the sacrifice of animals to protect human lives from evil spirits. The Toraja of the highlands of Sulawesi in Indonesia sacrifice as

many as 250 buffaloes on the death of an important person. These "sacred" animals are bred for the specific purpose of their sacrifice. Being "sacred" and being thus "worshipped" is of absolutely no benefit to the animals.

In the Great War of 1914 to 1919 – to take but one of myriad potential examples – the soldiers of the Allied forces, and equally their enemies, imagined themselves on the side of God and justice. They did not imagine themselves full of rage or hatred toward their foe, at least not in the early years of the war. Instead, they thought of themselves as noble. They had a strong sense of solidarity with their compatriots, an attitude that the war fostered; they were patriots, they belonged, and they revelled in their belongingness. Likewise, hunters see themselves engaged not in enmity with the prey but in solidarity with their fellow hunters. They "cherish the noble art of venerie," as Walter Scott wrote in *The Talisman*. They share the sense of being part of a body, of being subsumed, lost almost, within a greater whole – hence the blood-smearing ritual of the foxhunt, which integrates the novice recipient of the blood into the fraternity. The comradeship of the hunters gives them a sense they are pursuing a just end, even though the object of their enterprise involves the killing of another being – an innocent being, a "respected" being, but one who is on "the other side," just as, at first in the First World War, the Germans and Austrians were "respected" but on "the other side." Despite the "respect," they were killed if the opportunity arose. Certainly, hunters feel without any doubt as they slaughter their prey that the animal is deeply "respected." With undoubted exaggeration, but nonetheless meaningfully from the perspective of the hunter, we are often told that "traditional hunters typically view the animals they hunt as their equals. They exercise no power over them."[55] This is, of course, because the aboriginal has few artificial weapons with which to wield extraordinary power. But there is little equality in that the human predators are rarely successfully hunted by the prey. In fact, the ethical vegetarian deems the claimed respect a malevolent subterfuge if death or harm of the prey is intended, but it would be churlish to deny that hunters *feel,* persuade themselves they possess, a sense of respect toward the object of the chase, however much it is anathema and unconvincing to the ethical vegetarian. War and hunting are useful analogies for understanding some aspects of the human-animal relationship, especially with regard to animal sacrifice to the gods and to flesh eating.

Rituals of societal blood sacrifice – both human and animal – celebrate and reenact the transition from prey to predator, from hunted to hunter, from Eden to Arcadia. Animal sacrifice, with roles reversed, reenacts the predation of animals on humans. Now it is the animal that is prey. Being

hunted by predators must have played a supreme role in human evolution. In moving from prey to predator, one lives in constant tension, often ambivalence, retaining sometimes admiration, often respect, and usually fear for nonhuman animals in the prey stage alongside the sacrificial, vivisecting, flesh-eating habits of the predator stage. Violence is not a *necessary* part of the primordial human psyche, but it is expressed in the traditional glorification of the warrior and the hunter that is a consequence of our transition from prey to predator, from Eden to Arcadia.

Only the horrors of war's excesses in the past century have dimmed the glorification of war. As long as war was fought on a restricted battlefield between limited numbers of soldiers, with the vast majority of the population involved no more than peripherally, war and warrior could be readily glorified. And sport – all sport is an imitation of war and the chase – has come to be war and hunting's modern replacement to the extent that real war can be avoided. Hunting today and animal sacrifice to the gods are traditionally substitutes for war; they are blood sacrifices in the tradition of war in which the victim is viewed as "only an animal," on the one hand, but as a worthy fellow creature, on the other. The animal has to be worthy as an admirable object for sacrifice if the gods are to be truly respected.

As Barbara Ehrenreich explains in *Blood Rites,* "blood sacrifice is not just 'a' religious ritual; it is the central ritual of the religions of all ancient and traditional civilizations ... it is probably through ritual killing that humans approached the experience of the transcendent."[56] Today, it is in part through the killing involved in hunting that the animal becomes "sacred" and is thought by hunters to be "respected" – its blood, the symbol of life, is sought. Among the ancient Greeks, no important decisions or important events could occur without sacrifice – without blood – and ancient Greece was merely an "advanced" representative of the norm. It was, oddly, as shown in the rituals of numerous societies from Papua to Hawaii to Australia, less death than blood that was required. Yet often blood is seen as the essence of life. And loss of blood leads to loss of life.

Ancient Greeks, Hebrews, Canaanites, Maya, and more were all obsessed with sacrifice. The gods demanded sacrifice. Sacrificing the animal to the gods was in part to thank the gods for past mercies and in part to persuade them to act benevolently by turning the tide of history in the supplicant's favour, but most of all the purpose of sacrifice was to propitiate the gods, to avert their wrath. Threatening forces must be thwarted, and those forces include, or once included, predatory animals. The threat from the large carnivorous animals must be thwarted through worship. Sacrifice is society's sanction of violence, which the transition from prey to predator

seems to demand as a signal of the new-found power of humankind. René Girard in *Violence and the Sacred* argues convincingly that war and sacrifice serve ultimately the same end – the suppression of internecine conflict and the direction of conflict outward instead.[57] The primary function of war and sacrifice is communal – the compact of warriors, the bonding of sacrificers, the camaraderie of hunters. Communal prayer encourages the integration and the sense of oneness. And if this is so, then there are countless millennia of hardwired tendencies in the human psyche, especially the male psyche, because it is from the males that the warrior and hunter caste is mainly drawn, fighting to withstand the logic and the ethics of the vegetarian argument. Thus it is that for most flesh eaters, animal consumption seems an essential part of being human, or at least "civilized," despite the strength of the vegetarian's ethical argument. Indeed, omnivorousness often seems almost impervious to the ethical argument.

War and sacrifice must be seen as vindications of the superiority in some manner of one's tribe or nation or religion if the sacrifices are to be justified to oneself, if acts of aggression and oppression are to be countenanced as acceptable. One must think of one's nation as especially protected by a particular god if one is to justify preferential consideration for one's own compatriots. And, likewise, humans must see themselves as in some manner superior to other species, and not subject to the same ethical criteria, if animals are to be treated as subservient to human ends. If vegetarians are to succeed in their task, they need not mere successful ethical argument but must replace the warriors' and hunters' subliminal need for blood, the promptings of our evolutionary history, with some other fulfilling passion – war with hockey or soccer, even chess; hunting with archery, javelin throwing, or billiards and, ultimately, with the fully satisfying meal, equally acceptable and ritually meaningful to all members of the community and absent of the now customary flesh component. The meal must be communal and integrational, an especially difficult task when the vegetarian is in a decided minority.

Animal sacrifice came to replace human sacrifice, to be directed toward more socially acceptable goals, as the idea of the value of all human life came to predominate. It is now commonly recognized that human sacrifice has been widespread throughout much of human history – in both tribes and urban civilizations. It is mentioned in the Indian sacred Vedas and was practised by the Aztecs and Maya. Britain, Mexico, and Carthaginia are among the lands where human sacrifice appears to have been commonplace. But at some point, almost everywhere, human sacrifice was replaced

by animal sacrifice. The sacrifice of animals instead of humans was deemed worthy of pleasing the gods. As Girard has recognized, the sacrificial victim must be seen primarily as a scapegoat – one who is blamed for the sins of others. The victim was sacrificed to excuse some iniquity or to avoid some calamity, such as an alien invasion, an epidemic, or an internecine conflict. Indeed, the very term "scapegoat" is derived from the Yom Kippur practice of transferring the sins of the faithful onto the goat – from the human culprit to the goat substitute, which is to be sacrificed in the human's stead. And the harmless goat stands as the representative of all animal life, including the dangerous predators. If the beasts that once killed humans almost at will, and for whom considerable "respect" was still felt, were to become sustenance, then the ultimate revenge was achieved. What is perhaps an example of the fear of the potential reversal of roles once again is expressed in the Hindu *Kausitaki Brahmana* and *Satapatha Brahmana* when, in the legend of Bhrgu, a visitor to the yonder world sees an animal eating a human in revenge for his having been eaten by a human on earth, just as the human in reality has wreaked revenge on the animal.[58] The famous adage of the military theorist Carl von Clausewitz is appropriate: "War is not an independent phenomenon but is the continuation of politics by other means." Sacrifice is the politics of revenge – a reversal of traditional politics – against the once feared but now dominated enemy. And the domination is practised primarily not on the dangerous predators but on the harmless animals whom it is so much easier to dominate.

In the story of Cain and Abel, God is said to prefer Abel's flesh offerings (deemed valuable and apposite!) over the "fruit of the soil" offerings (deemed insufficiently grateful and unfitting) from Cain. Thus, flesh rather than fruit becomes the diet of the gods. Of course, in reality, humans consume most of the sacrificed animal and not just in the lands of the Bible. Thus the formal meal comes into existence – as a part of one's ceremonial duty to the gods. Flesh could be consumed only if it had been sacrificed according to the prescribed ritual and for the appropriate divine recipients. Animals must thus undergo a ritual death and be consumed in the temple according to the usually observed rites, without which the practice is seen as a serious moral transgression akin to murder. Eden has not quite disappeared, for, in many instances, the value of the animal's life is recognized and the animal is apologized to for its treatment. The same apologetic practice continues today among many Inuit, a practice that suggests an awareness that the killing and eating are wrongs in themselves that require some external justification, usually in the form of a religious or mythical permission.

Girard goes so far as to say that the awe-inspiring nature of the ritual would be lessened significantly if it did not include the element of transgression. What should be clear is that animal sacrifice is recognized as a substitute for human sacrifice. Human sacrifice is an evil in itself, which reverential circumstance once excused. Animal sacrifice remains a transgression, but it is a lesser transgression than the taking of human life. For the vegetarian, it is apparent that now that the then presumed need for animal sacrifice and hence animal eating has disappeared, meat eating is as readily dispensable as sacrifice itself. Nonetheless, the very real difficulty for the vegetarian is to determine in what communal and integrative manner the nonflesh substitute might be made communally and socially satisfying to the omnivore.

Humans differ from natural carnivores and from other omnivores in that our flesh consumption depends on religion and ritual to authorize its practice. After millions of years of evolution, the trauma of being hunted was replaced by the trauma of being the hunter, and religion and ritual served to assuage the trauma. Especially when confronted with danger, when there is an external threat, we move closer together in common cause and solidarity, even in war (hunting and sacrifice) against the predatory enemy. And the vehicle of the solidarity was initially the common belonging expressed in a religion.

It is a human propensity derived from our evolutionary history to side with the weak (ourselves) against the strong (predatory animals) and to rejoice in our legends (animal-related myths and others) of the victory of the naturally weak over the naturally strong. As Ehrenreich expresses it, "The transformation from prey to predator in which the weak rise up against the strong is the central 'story' in the early human narrative."[59] And what greater victory can we have in devouring the erstwhile and now vanquished foe than by eating what once ate us? It is what, like it or not, makes most humans feel "human" as the once dominated but now dominant animal – head of the food chain, as humans imagine themselves to be.

Throughout human prehistory and human history, *Homo sapiens* has been developing a moral conscience, although never sufficient entirely to overcome human evolutionary impulses. Vegetarians usually believe they have adopted a necessary stage in human ethical development, but the human is far more the rationalizing animal than the ethical animal, far more the product of evolutionarily developed genes than of the philosophical imagination. The human as predator plays a greater subliminal role than the human as moralist in the human psyche. If the vegetarian ideal is consistent with Edenic morality, it is not consistent with the morality of Arcadia and later stages of human history. And this fact persuades most

people, albeit subliminally. It is a sufficient justification for their dietary habits. The vegetarian has many of the nonrational elements of human psychology to overcome, an almost insuperable task. Thus it is that the ethical task of the vegetarian is an arduous one – to overcome the lust for animal flesh that is a constituent part of the Arcadian human primal memory.

Yet it must not be forgotten that the once pervasive lust of the human for the flesh of fellow humans – cannibalism – has been overcome. Symbolically, partaking of the blood and body of Christ in the Eucharist, a practice of several Christian denominations, is reflective of this aspect of our prehistory. Humans once thought they acquired the virtues of conquered humans by eating them and later thought they acquired the courage and guile of nonhuman animals by eating them. We no longer, in general, possess these beliefs – although most still tend to imagine a flesh diet makes us stronger and healthier, a remnant of our Arcadian history. And thus the task of the vegetarian, although still immensely difficult because of the continuing influence of the evolutionary forces, is eased. Because we no longer fear animals, we no longer look on them as superiors or even equals. In the West, we are often sentimental about some of them and treat them through "love" and sentimentality as decidedly inferior creatures, as our "toys." Where predation is still a reality, no such pampering or sentimental affection can be enjoyed. Where predation is no longer a reality, pampering and sentimental affection still ascribe lower status to the nonhuman animal. Both being prey and treating animals sentimentally reflect that, as a species, we have never come to acknowledge humans as animals in quite the same way we acknowledge other species as animals. Recognition of humans and other species as animals in the same manner is perhaps the *sine qua non* of ultimate vegetarian success. Although at least quasi-vegetarian origins are not a *proven* part of human prehistory, the evidence and argument is undoubtedly persuasive, perhaps compelling.

Despite the apparent vegetarian aspects of human prehistory, it is not until the Indian experiences of around the millennium before the time of Christ, rapidly followed by, or perhaps contemporaneous with, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, that we encounter explicit vegetarian practices.

2

Eastern Religions and Practice

India and the Exodus

Perhaps more misleading pious prose and wishful thinking have been expressed about the purported pervasive vegetarianism and respect for animals of Indian religious and philosophical traditions than about any other aspect of historical vegetarianism. It is certainly true that India has provided far more of the impetus to vegetarianism than has any other single country, but to listen to some accounts, by Western vegetarians in particular, of the doctrines of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism is often to hear a very distorted story. Indeed, in the words of the renowned doyen of the anthropology of religion Mircea Eliade, in his profound study *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom,* "the analysis of a foreign culture principally reveals what was sought in it or what the seeker was already prepared to discover."[1] The result has been a host of misinformation. Nonetheless, India's vegetarianism had an abiding impact on many travellers to the subcontinent from the late sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries and on administrators of the British Raj. And via the travellers and the administrators, in time naturalists, essayists, poets, and philosophers were awakened to the vegetarian appeal. At the very least, many were impressed that the Indian experience demonstrated that humans did not require flesh to live a healthy life, a fact they could have learned just as easily from the poor of their own countries or from the slaves on the West Indies plantations, who were in most instances served the same fodder as the working animals. It was an important awakening because the more common prior view, even