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Critical Perspectives on Veganism

Jodey Castricano and Rasmus R. Simonsen, eds, *Critical Perspectives on Veganism* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 400+xxx. Hardback. £63.00. ISBN: 978-3-319-33418-9.

Critical Perspectives on Veganism is an edited collection situated explicitly in the field of “vegan studies”. This is clear from both the foreword by Melanie Joy and Jens Tuider (v-xv) and the introduction from Jodey Castricano and Rasmus R. Simonsen (1-11). As a discipline, vegan studies was provocatively called for in *The Vegan Studies Project*, by Laura Wright; while the only mention of Wright in *Critical Perspectives on Veganism* is in the introduction (3), this is unsurprising, as Wright’s book was only published in 2015.

Vegan studies, of course, is about veganism. Despite this, veganism is not foregrounded in all of the book’s chapters. In some cases, this is less problematic. Juawana Grant and Brittini MacKenzie-Dale look to Lisa Simpson (*The Simpsons*) and Darlene Conner (*Roseanne*) as fictional vegetarian-(eco)feminist “killjoys” (307-29). The characters are vegetarians, not vegans, but the authors do a commendable job of grounding the significance of their analysis for *vegan* studies. In ““Are Vegetarians Good Fighters?: World War I and the Rise of Meatless Patriotism” (227-44), Adam D. Shprintzen relates an overlooked chapter in the history of vegetarianism to contemporary practices. Though not explicitly tied to veganism, the contribution is valuable.

“The Compassion Manifesto: An Ethics for Art + Design and Animals” (155-80), by Julie Andreyev, again says little about veganism. I can see the motivation for its inclusion, but was a little put off by Andreyev’s talk of “pollen-based minds” and “soil wisdom” (161). Francesco Buscemi explores the pro-meat attitudes of four celebrity chefs (331-48); the study is grounded in the idea of carnism, but I think the chapter could have been better tied to veganism.

It was, however, David L. Clark’s contribution, a reprint from Palgrave’s *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism* entitled “Hegel, Eating: Schelling and the Carnivorous Virility of Philosophy” (93-120), that I truly struggled to place. I am not sure what the paper was about at all, but there was certainly no mention of veganism. There was one passing mention of vegetarianism (115) – in relation to the diets of Hindu Brahmin – but by this point in the paper, I was so lost in Clark’s complex metaphors of philosophy as food and his unforgiving retellings of Schelling, Hegel and others that I could make little of it.

Is there, then, a central *tenet* of vegan studies as presented in *Critical Perspectives on Veganism*? The preface and introduction point strongly towards ideas of carnism, though references to carnism or Joy – with whom the theory originates – are present in only half of the chapters. There is also no central *methodology* uniting the contributions. Some are literary: Joshua Schuster’s compelling chapter analyses Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, and then moves into a critique of Derrida’s relationship to veganism, ultimately conceptualising vegans as “sovereign unsovereign” (203-23), and Parag Kumar Dekka looks at the place of veganism in the life and work of J. M. Coetzee (181-202). More empirical work is

found in Ophélie Véron's contribution; she uses social-scientific methodologies to explore the impact of French vegan food blogs (287-305). A. G. Holdier utilises analytic philosophy to convincingly argue that the interhuman harms caused by non-veganism are sufficient to ground the moral necessity of (pseudo-)veganism (41-66). Jeanette Rowley draws upon critical human rights theory, seeking to draw together human rights and veganism (67-92). This was another contribution with which I struggled; Rowley's conclusions felt under-supported, and her prose was often dense.

Even if *Critical Perspectives on Veganism* does not clearly offer a unifying theory or methodology for vegan studies, it does offer themes that – undoubtedly – belong in the discipline. I wish to draw attention to three: Vegan media, veganism and race, and species of veganism. Vegan media is the theme of Jessica Carey's chapter – a highlight – which contrasts the use of nostalgia in the marketing of non-vegan products and in Isa Chandra Moskowitz's vegan cookbooks (245-60). In their contribution, Alexis Priestley, Sarah K. Lingo and Peter Royal (very) critically engage with Thug Kitchen – the vegan blog and cookbook series. Thug Kitchen is criticised for “racist language” (365) and for problematic assumptions and challenges relating to class and socio-economic status, as well as for neglecting animal ethics (349-71).

Racial themes are present in many other chapters. Jennifer Polish closes the book, calling for a decolonized veganism. She argues that racist veganism is unethical, damaging to the vegan movement, and internally inconsistent (373-91). Margaret Robinson explores how Mi'kmaq philosophy and cultural practices (including consumption of moose) could develop to accommodate *in vitro* meat, offering some – to my mind – very speculative suggestions about the epigenetics of moose, meaning that the Mi'kmaq are perhaps “in [the] blood” of the moose (261-84).

The first chapter, Robert C. Jones's “Veganisms”, sets the tone for interrogating *different kinds* of veganism. Jones argues for a “revisionary political veganism”, which he contrasts with “identity veganism” and “boycott veganism” (15-39). Michael D. Sloane offers another face. He characterises “dark veganism”: “animal activism in operation through a close attention to scenes and sounds of animal suffering that directly or indirectly work toward achieving nonviolence across and between humans and animals” (127). Much of the chapter is given over to an analysis of Matthew Herbert's *One Pig*, an artistic project made up of sounds from the life and death of a pig (123-54).

In all, the contributions to *Critical Perspectives on Veganism* are a little too disparate (and a little too variable in quality) for the book to lay the foundations for a new academic discipline. My view of “vegan studies” remains ambivalent: If given the chance, I would indeed teach a course on the subject – and I can envisage some of this book's chapters on the reading list – but I remain unsure whether there truly is a literature sufficiently *unified* to be labelled a new discipline. I suspect and hope, however, that a clearer picture of vegan studies will emerge in time. Interest in vegan studies, like interest in veganism itself, is surely more than a flash in the pan.

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