

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards an Islamic Basis for Veganism

Zinnira Shaikh

ABSTRACT

The issue of animal abuse has been ignored for far too long, especially by Muslim scholars. Our treatment of animals is inextricably linked to ecological imbalance and climate change. The unchecked abuse of the Earth and non-human animals has been justified with an anthropocentric worldview, based on the Kantian and Cartesian Enlightenment philosophy in the case of secular Western ethics, as well as on the anthropocentric readings of the Qur'an in the case of Islamic thought and practice. Unfortunately, Islamic discourse on animals has centered on a Shari'a-based approach, which is limited to handing out legal opinions on permissibility and prohibition. To fully address the issues that Shari'a-based approaches have failed to resolve, there is an urgent need to adopt an ethics-based approach that encourages constant moral improvement in our dealings with animals and the environment. This paper examines the ethics of meat-eating in a world that spells the death of not only animals but also forests, oceans, and the Earth. With a focus on the personal moral responsibility of Muslims towards the Earth and its inhabitants, this paper examines

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the discourse of veganism, based on sentience and moral consideration of animals, in the light of Islamic principles.

Keywords: animal welfare, veganism, vegetarianism, slaughter, meat, halal, haram, ethics

INTRODUCTION

With the rise of veganism around the globe, many Muslims are adopting this diet and way of life. Veganism preaches to reduce the suffering that we cause, and reminds us that animals are sentient creatures. In this regard, it is compatible with Islamic teachings of mercy towards animals. However, Islam allows the killing of animals for food, and seems to assume that animals are created for humans to benefit from. Given the rising number of Muslim vegans, there is a need to resolve these incompatibilities and rethink the way we believe Islam teaches us to treat animals. Few scholars have dealt with this issue; and from those that have, they only go as far as allowing veganism. I argue that Islamic thought does contain grounds on which veganism can be seen as a recommended practice, while justifying mass slaughter from an Islamic viewpoint is near impossible in this day and age. This will be done by applying the principles elaborated by Islamic scholars to our current circumstances.

VEGANISM AND THE RISING TIDE OF MUSLIM VEGANS

The Vegan Society defines veganism as “a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose... In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.”

Muslims, among others, are increasingly adopting veganism. Although exact statistics are not available, plenty of Facebook pages and groups cater exclusively to Muslim vegans. Numerous websites such as Islamic vegetarianism, Muslim Vegan, Green Muslim, and Animals in Islam help to answer questions about Islam and animals. The Animals in Islam website lists, among others, the following fatwas:

“A Muslim may be a vegetarian. However, he should not regard eating meat as prohibited.” – Mufti Ebrahim Desai

“One should not think that it is better to abstain from eating these foods, that doing so will be rewarded, or that being a vegetarian is closer to Allah than not, and so on. It is not permitted to draw closer to Allah in this way. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, who is the best of mankind and the closest to Allah, used to eat meat and honey and drink milk.” – Islam Online, Islam QA

VEGETARIANISM IN THE TRADITION AND ANTHROPOCENTRISM

In the Muslim tradition, Muslims who were vegetarians were often called *zanādiqa*. In classical times, the discourse on vegetarianism was theological in nature. It centered on

the mercy of God, His Justice, or predestination. However, the modern discourse is based on an animal advocacy perspective, which gives equal importance to the interests of both animals and humans. There is an increased interest in the welfare of animals and an increasing awareness that speciesism—prioritizing the interest of one’s own species over others’—is now regarded by many to be just as “morally untenable” by many ethicists as racism or sexism. This concern arises within the context of burgeoning animal abuses, mostly in biomedical research and “agribusiness” (Tlili 2012) which are mainly motivated by “scientific inquisitiveness and financial gain” (ibid.). However, some philosophers argue that they are rooted in religious beliefs about the inferiority of animals, based on the Qur’anic interpretation of humans as God’s vicegerents and on the Biblical notion of dominion (Tlili 2012, xi).

Tlili notes that responses to this allegation either unapologetically espouse the “speciesist religious attitudes” or apologetically point to the interpretations that protect animal interests. Yet, both these responses take the superiority of humans for granted. Tlili proposes a non-anthropocentric reading of the Qur’an, which presents animals as spiritual beings capable of ascending the ladder of spirituality. However, this non-anthropocentric view is far from being mainstream or even widely accepted. With this in mind, I argue that veganism can be seen as a recommended action based even on the “compassionate anthropocentrism” supported by mainstream Islam, especially in this day and age. Consequently, I argue that eating animal products is difficult, if not impossible, to justify from an Islamic perspective. My argument, like the contemporary Muslim vegan discourse, is based on encouraging kindness and compassion, while accepting anthropocentrism. Even if human interests are the most worthy of consideration, veganism still emerges as the most beneficial way. This argument uses mainstream understandings of *māqāṣid al sharī’a*, and environmental ethics. It is an argument that could not have been made before, because it takes into account modern ways of food production and other circumstances that did not exist until recently.

VEGETARIANISM ON THE BASIS OF ISLAMIC ETHICS

Before delving into modern practices of raising and slaughtering animals and the detrimental consequences they have in numerous ways, it should be noted that there is an argument to be made for veganism based on Islamic ethics that stands regardless of the consequences. This principled argument for veganism is made on the basis of compassion and mercy.

Islamic texts and practices have long recognized animals’ ability to feel maternal love and physical pain among other emotions. The Prophet SAW rebuked a man who had taken away the young ones of a bird, saying: “Who has hurt the feelings of this bird by taking its young? Return them to her” (Muslim). According to the story of the ants in the Qur’an, ants are also sentient creatures that want to avoid pain.

Although Islam accepts that animals have emotions and interests of their own, we cannot deny the fact that it allows for the slaughtering of animals for food. However, when speaking of the annual ritual sacrifice, Allah reminds us “It is neither their meat nor their

blood that reaches Allah, but it is piety from you that reaches Him.” In arguing against veganism, many Muslim scholars often stick to the letter of the law, ignoring the spirit behind them, which is to gain piety.

In our day and age, when slaughter leads to innumerable global consequences for numerous stakeholders, it might be time to rethink the necessity of performing this action for the pleasure of Allah. In the same verse, Allah says “And give glad tidings to the Muhsinin (doers of good)” (Qur’an, 22:37).

The concept of *ihsān* is what the Messenger of Allah invoked when instructing us regarding slaughter, “Verily Allah has prescribed *ihsān* (kindness) for everything. So when you kill, you must make the killing in the best manner (with *ihsān*); when you slaughter, make your slaughter in the best manner. Let one of you sharpen his knife and give ease to his animal (in order to reduce his pain).” Arguably, not killing at all causes the least pain and therefore, can be seen as closer to *ihsān*. Moreover, the story of ritual slaughter in the Qur’an can be read metaphorically, according to Benthall (2003). He argues that the Qur’an can be interpreted to allow fruits and vegetables to be offered as sacrifice, and that Abraham’s story can be read symbolically, as in the Jewish tradition.

Although we are allowed to gain benefit from animals, there are principles that restrict this use. The Messenger of Allah said to his companions who were chatting in the marketplace while sitting on the backs of their camels: “Do not treat the backs of your animals as pulpits, for God Most High has made them subject to you only to convey you to a place which you could not otherwise have reached without much difficulty.” If we have only been allowed to benefit from animals in cases where not doing so would cause us much difficulty, it becomes nearly impossible to justify the killing of animals for food when vegan alternatives are more easily available and healthy, more accessible because they are cheaper, and more sustainable.

When it comes to slaughter, it is possible to minimize the pain caused further by not slaughtering at all. Indeed, this is seen as an act of mercy:

Mu’awiya ibn Qurra reported that his father said, “A man said, ‘Messenger of Allah, I was going to slaughter a sheep and then I felt sorry for it (or “sorry for the sheep I was going to slaughter”).’ He said twice, ‘Since you showed mercy to the sheep, Allah will show mercy to you’” (Al Adab Al Mufrad, 373).

In Islam, compassion for animals is not trivial. It can lead a person to heaven even if they have committed major sins, as in the case of the prostitute who gave water to a dog. Cruelty to animals can lead a person to hell even though they are otherwise pious, like the woman who starved her cat (Kemmerer 2011, 174–75).

How we treat animals is a reflection of the state of our guidance: proper treatment reflects proper guidance, improper treatment reflects misguidance. Any treatment of animals that violates the Sacred Law is not merely a legal or moral wrong; it desecrates the creation and profanes the Creator... it must not be forgotten that the wrongness is not merely legal and moral: it is also theological and spiritual. (Furber 2017, 9)

However, the fatwas on vegetarianism ignore these ethical aspects of compassion and mercy, and focus only on the halal and the haram. This Shari'a-based view evades the ethical concerns that Muslims should have, and the development of an ethical imperative formulated in view of the issues of our time. It also reduces Islamic rulings to mere prohibitions and permissions, and drains the soul out of Islam, which is essentially ethical:

Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "I was sent to perfect good character." (Muslim)

MĀQĀSĪD AL SHARĪĀ

While slaughtering and eating animals is permissible, the conditions in which animals are now bred and killed have no precedent in history. Moreover, the harms caused by mass slaughter of animals are also unprecedented. This calls for a renewed engagement with the sources and *ijtihad* on part of the scholars. *Ijtihad* is done with *māqāsid al sharīa* in mind. Llewellyn (2003) notes that the ultimate objective of the Shari'a is the welfare of all of God's creation, *māṣāliḥ al khalq*, not just humans. This should focus on the material and non-material dimensions, and the welfare of "human and non-human sentient beings must be considered" and "no species or generation may be excluded from consideration." With this in mind, I will examine the harms and benefits that have an impact on the creation of Allah, from animals, including fish, to the oceans, the air, the Earth, and of course to humans themselves.

In response to the objection that eating meat causes harm to animals, Furber says: "Scholars of the Sacred Law have answered this potential objection by pointing out that hunting and killing animals for meat is permissible out of the general need to nourish and sustain humanity, and—as the maxim states—'needs are given the status of necessity.'" Al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām explains that slaughtering animals for food is one of the cases where a harm or detriment (*mafsadah*) is combined with a benefit (*maṣlahah*) and—contrary to the general rule—the benefit has priority even though harms are involved. "Slaughtering is a detriment (*mafsadah*) for the animal but a benefit (*maṣlahah*) for humanity in that it keeps them alive, and the benefit of perpetuating human species has priority" (2017, 11).

As I will show, these benefits that the scholars have cited as justification for the killing of animals, are not only *not* achieved by eating animals, but by abstaining from doing so. Meat, dairy, eggs, and milk that we consume are causing major diseases (e.g. cancer, obesity, heart disease), thereby not providing the benefit of keeping us alive in the sense of providing nutrition. The "benefit of perpetuating human species" requires, at minimum, a viable home for humans to live in, but animal agriculture is one of the foremost causes of climate change that is leading to the destruction of our planet. Given this information, Furber should declare that animal products are no longer permissible since he says:

Killing animals and consuming their meat are permitted as a means for obtaining the objective of protecting human life and perpetuating the species (*ḥifz al-nafs*).

But a means ceases being permitted if it leads to the very opposite of its intended objective. So while the default is that killing animals and consuming their meat are permissible, they cease being permissible when it leads to harm and undermines the very objective for which they are permitted. (2017, 12)

FACTORY FARMING IN MODERN TIMES

Every year, more than 70 billion land animals are killed for food. Given the unimaginably large numbers, it is neither possible nor practicable for them to be raised in free-range farms, grazing on lush green grass. As a result, they are raised in “factory farms,” where thousands of them are confined in cramped spaces, fed antibiotics by kilogram to prevent infections that result from such proximity and lack of hygiene, and fed diets that often contain meat from their own species.

Oppenlander, who conducted thirty-five years of research and numerous visits to farms across the world, exposes the world of factory farms and every other type of existing farm in his book *Food Choice and Sustainability*. He lists the numerous problems concerning the way animals, birds (e.g. chickens), and even fish are raised and killed. Chickens raised for their meat, also known as broilers, are hybridized to grow at rapid rates and confined in cramped spaces to keep their activity levels low (2013, 372). Egg-laying hens are kept in cages which are so small that they can barely spread their wings, let alone move. They live in these spaces for fifty-two weeks, “laying eggs around the clock until they are so wasted that they are then slaughtered for low-grade food or simply trashed” (Oppenlander 2013, 368). Oppenlander speculates that these hens are the “most legally unprotected farm animal with some of the cruelest conditions that we have ever imposed on another living being” (2013, 369). Even though exposure of these conditions has led people to call for cage-free eggs, Oppenlander shows that the definition of “cage free” is so lax that it could mean a space as big as a laptop screen. Nevertheless, male chicks laid by these hens are ground up alive or suffocated to death as they will not lay eggs (2013, 370). Chickens, otherwise social creatures, develop cannibalistic tendencies and become violent. As a precautionary measure, they are debeaked and their wings are clipped without anesthesia (Oppenlander 2013, 372).

Dairy cows live a much more miserable life, in which they are continually and forcibly impregnated and separated from their calves so that their milk output can be maximized. Regardless of whether the cows live in grass-fed, pasture-raised, organic, or factory farms, what Oppenlander calls the “behind-the-scenes process” is the same:

“That dairy product had to come from a cow, which needed to go through a pregnancy, have a baby cow, which was taken from its mother within the first few hours of birth (and then that baby cow was slaughtered for veal), while the mother went on to develop mastitis by living in repetitive cycles of coerced reproduction and abuse of her body and spirit.” (2013, 368)

He argues that there is no difference between ovo-lacto vegetarians and meat eaters

since there is no difference in “the impact of global depletion caused by raising animals to eat from that of raising animals in order for us to eat their products, such as dairy and eggs” (2013, 365).

When it comes to fish, who have also been shown to be sentient creatures, their large-scale killing (up to 2 trillion per year) has led to ecological damage and loss of biodiversity since bykill is used to extract the target fish from the ocean, and the other life forms that depend on those fish for food (Oppenlander 2013, 352).

THE “HALAL BUBBLE”

Despite facts about factory farming being easily accessible, most scholars continue to cling to the idea of this slaughter, and the resulting meat, as halal. Instead of encouraging Muslims not to participate in this, they continue to find justifications or even encourage improvements in the method of raising animals instead. Of these scholars, Furber (2017) appears best acquainted with all the specifics of factory farming. Here, I examine how the rulings he extracts from hadith are not put into practice. Later, I will show why it is impossible to put these rulings into practice in the status quo, and the only option for Muslims is to abstain.

In his paper “Rights and duties pertaining to kept animals: a case study in Islamic law and ethics,” Furber (2017) quotes a hadith that mentions the rules regarding milking:

Sawādah ibn Rabī (may Allah be pleased with him) said that “I came to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and give him peace) and he ordered a group of camels for me. He said to me, ‘Order your sons to trim their nails for the udders of their camels and livestock. Tell them to leave its young with it so they don’t reach [the end of] a year emaciated.’” (al-Bukhārī, al-Tārīkh al-kabīr (Hyderabad: Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-‘Uthmāniyyah, n.d.), 4:184.2418; see also al-Bayhaqī, Ma’rifat al-sunan, 15635)

Due to the huge scale on which dairy farming now takes place, it is impractical to have humans (with well-trimmed nails) milk cows. Rather, cows are milked using machines that can cause lesions in the cows’ teats, which can also lead to infections, including mastitis. Journals of bovine research and dairy sciences have numerous papers related to mastitis (Barkema et al. 2015). Not only is the disease harmful and painful to the cows that suffer from it, it also affects humans who drink their milk—“mastitis has a serious zoonotic potential associated with shedding of bacteria and their toxins in the milk” (Abebe et al. 2016).

Clearly, the milk that we drink is a product of torture and separation of cows from their calves, which the Prophet explicitly forbade. Can it then be considered halal? Moreover, it is far from being *ṭayyab*, since it is linked to health issues, which will be elaborated later.

Importantly, scientific research and economic benefits are found to be strongly linked. All articles that mention mastitis almost immediately state its economic impact and its associated losses. They rarely, however, discuss the pain associated with it and the cost to the animal itself. Moreover, they adopt stances whereby they assume that dairy farming is

inevitable and irreplaceable, so they suggest improvements instead of advocating against it altogether. Although subtle, this is an ethical evaluation in itself, which considers efficiency and economic benefit as enough justification for the abuse of animals.

However, these studies mention the desires of “consumers.” When Barkema et al. (2015) speak about animal welfare, they seem to think it is significant not because of its inherent value but because consumers are concerned about it. This shows that not only is the “scientific data” on animal affairs highly value-laden, but also these values prioritize profit-making over ethics. When they pay attention to ethics, it is because “consumers” are concerned about it and their decisions impact the profit that companies make. This realization alone shows us the importance of the individual choices we make as consumers, and the message we send regarding our own ethics in doing so. Given that companies and even the scientific community accept that they want to cater to consumers, do we, as consumers, not have the responsibility to be ethical and make sure our food choices reflect this?

Furber addresses the responsibility we have as Muslims in this regard:

The situation described above is at odds with the Sacred Law. Indeed, the Sacred Law requires that something be done to rectify the situation. I will show why this is so for individuals who keep animals, trade in their products, and consume them.... Muslims in general should be concerned with how the animals whose products they consume are raised—and that these concerns are not limited to individuals who keep and raise animals. (Furber 2017, 8)

Regarding the profit motive that drives cruelty to animals, Furber says:

Animal welfare is not something that can be ignored for the sake of reducing expenses and increasing profits merely for the sake of economic efficiency. This places many of intensive animal farming practices at odds with the Sacred Law. For example: it is unlawful to separate a mother from its young. This does not change just because there is a market for a particular type of meat cut that depends upon separating a mother from her young. (Furber 2017, 18)

However, for Furber, “completely eliminating the consumption of animal products is neither a viable or desirable option for Muslims, since animal sacrifice is involved in several religious rites and occasions. Additionally, moderate consumption of meat is a Prophetic norm (Sunnah). So one really cannot make a case that the Sacred Law calls for vegetarianism or that it is in line with the Sunnah. Instead, something must be done to ensure that our consumption is within the limits set by religious norms and sound medical advice, and that the animals we consume are raised according to the Sacred Law.” I will later show that it is impossible to ensure the kind of consumption Furber talks about, and will argue the case for veganism from an Islamic perspective.

(LACK OF) SCHOLARLY RESPONSES TO FACTORY FARMING

Unfortunately, the majority of scholars have refused to engage with the new questions regarding slaughter. Instead, they content themselves with parroting the beautiful verses

and hadith of the Prophet regarding the treatment of animals, completely disregarding the new context and concerns of this day and age. Contemporary scholar Llewellyn seems somewhat aware of the practices of factory farming and its harms. However, he claims that all farming causes destruction and that our lives, in essence, require the death of other creatures. He then suggests that we can “redeem” the death of those creatures by taking God’s name in slaughtering and eating them, to show gratitude. The act of slaughter then becomes an offering of sacrifice and not desecration (Foltz 2006, 87). It seems ludicrous to argue that taking God’s name, while engaging in an act that causes the destruction of His Earth and the creatures that bow down in worship to Him, is enough to make it a moral act. Taking God’s name is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition to make the act of slaughter ethical. Llewellyn ignores the effects of buying and slaughtering meat and therefore escapes the moral repercussions. Similarly, Qaradawi claims that animal rights were recognized in Islam hundreds of years before their recognition in the West, and that these rights must be enforced by the state (Foltz 2006, 88). Beyond this, he does not say how this can be applied in this day and age.

Fortunately, some scholars have begun to deal with these questions and advocate *ijtihad* for a rethinking of human–animal relations and the position of humans as vicegerents of Allah. Basheer Ahmad Masri, a twentieth-century Indian scholar, points out that the cruelty towards animals is “being justified in the name of human needs and spurious science,” even though these needs are “non-essential, fanciful, wasteful, and for which alternative humane products are readily available” (Foltz 2006, 89). He declares that “to kill animals to satisfy the thirst for inessentials is a contradiction in terms within the Islamic tradition” (ibid).

WEIGHING THE HARMS AND BENEFITS

In addition to the biggest cost of all, namely the torture and abuse of animals elaborated above, and from an Islamic perspective, the violation of their rights, there are also other far-reaching consequences of animal agriculture. These include environmental degradation, harm to humans’ physical and mental health, food security issues, and other economic costs. Each of these will be explored in turn, with Islamic principles outlined above in mind.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL COST OF LIVESTOCK FARMING

“Corruption of the earth, including destruction of the environment is forbidden in the Qur’an, as are wasteful overconsumption and extravagance” (Llewellyn 2003, 199). Llewellyn argues that “this clearly demands that all natural resources be used frugally and efficiently, and that pollution be prevented, reduced, and cleaned up.” In light of these Islamic principles, let us review the environmental impact of animal farming on the environment.

The environmental impact of eating animal products such as meat and dairy is the highest compared to other human activities. Most strikingly, “impacts of the lowest-

impact animal products typically exceed those of vegetable substitutes, providing new evidence for the importance of dietary change” (Poore and Nemecek 2018, 987).

Animal agriculture is associated with higher greenhouse gas emissions compared to plant agriculture. Livestock is responsible for “at least 32,564 million tons of CO₂ per year, or 51 per cent of annual worldwide greenhouse gas emissions” (Goodland and Anhang 2009, 11). Moreover, the production of animals as food is also calorically and nutritionally inefficient. Animal products such as meat and dairy use 83% of the world’s farmland yet provide a meager 18% of the total calories and 37% of the total protein. Avoiding these products could lead to a 75% reduction in farmland use, and help the Earth recover from deforestation (Goodland and Anhang 2009).

THE IMPACT ON HUMAN HEALTH

Meat and other animal products are often viewed as necessary for the survival of humans. Some products like milk are considered healthy and required for optimal growth. The meat and dairy industries have invested a large amount of time and money into perpetuating these myths by funding studies in nutrition, lobbying major governments, and employing advertising tactics. As a result, vegan diets are assumed to be incomplete and lacking. Indeed, this reason has also been discussed in an article “The Prophet and Mercy to Animals” on a website hosted by the Muslim World League, which states: “We cannot say that a vegetarian diet is enough for all its inhabitants. There is no evidence that it was enough for them at any time. Then doctors spoke about the importance of animal and fish protein, and there are no approved medical theories showing that man can obtain all his nutritional needs from plants” (Abdul Wahab, n.d.). This claim can be refuted by the hadith of the Prophet:

A’isha reported Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

“A family which has dates will not be hungry.” (Sahih Muslim, 2046)

If the Prophet said this at a time when dates—a plant food—were one of the staples in what was a very limited diet, how can we argue that the abundance of plant foods that we now have access to are not enough for “all its inhabitants”? In any case, the argument that a plant-based diet “was never enough for them at any time” is falsified. In another hadith, A’isha narrates:

“The Prophet died when we had satisfied our hunger with the two black things, i.e. dates and water.” (Sahih Bukhari, 5383)

Moreover, there are in fact “approved medical theories” that support vegan diets. According to the American Dietetic Association, “appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence and for athletes” (Oppenlander 2013, 259). However, Furber points out that “an individual’s permission to slaughter an

animal for food is contingent upon a general experiencing of need—even if the individual does not experience it himself. So the mere existence of a nutritionally equivalent vegetarian diet does not automatically render killing animals for food void” (2017, 12). He further states what is required to “limit” the eating of meat:

“There are, however, other things that might limit it—like eating a quantity of meat that exceeds the limits the Sacred Law places or eating a quality or quantity that is harmful... an increase of meat in the diet is correlated with numerous health risks. The Sacred Law prohibits us from inflicting harms—even to ourselves” (2017, 12).

Among the many thousands of peer-reviewed studies that have shown the health benefits of eating a plant-based or vegan diet, a long-term Harvard study found that when factors such as tendency to smoke and poor eating habits were factored out, an increase in daily intake of red meat was linked to an overall 12% higher risk of death (Oppenlander 2013, 258). Moreover, another study found that “with meat or dairy consumption, there is essentially a low-grade chronic inflammatory condition established throughout the circulatory system” (Oppenlander 2013, 258). Eating meat, eggs, and dairy has also been found to be the biggest causative factor to the development of heart disease (Oppenlander 2013, 259). The chemical residues, hormones, and pathogens in meat, dairy, eggs, and fish produce cancer-causing agents and human carcinogens such as dioxin-like compounds: “95 per cent of our exposure to these compounds comes from meat, dairy, fish, and shellfish” (ibid). Considering this information from a fiqh perspective, scholars, including Furber himself, may want to rethink the permissibility of eating these animal products, comparable to the change in the ruling of smoking after its impact on health became clear. In any case, this information shows us that these products are not *tayyab*, and that we should limit our consumption of them as far as possible, if not eliminate them completely. However, further evidence provided in this paper will show why even a little amount of animal food is harmful in many other ways, and those consequences require us to abstain from it completely.

Given that we live in a globalized world, the health costs of eating animals go beyond mere inflammation at the cellular level. In developed countries, “eating animals is one of the most significant risk factors found in nearly all of the most common diseases. It is, therefore, heavily implicated in rising healthcare costs, health insurance premiums, foods prices, and even labor costs for businesses. Those who eat animals are driving up all these costs while driving down productivity” (Oppenlander 2013, 262). In 2012, the US spent \$130 billion dollars on healthcare costs due to dietary choices related to livestock (Oppenlander 2013, 263). However, Oppenlander argues that the figure is as high as \$350 billion, since the rest of the \$3 trillion dollars were spent on diseases, including cancer, obesity, and heart disease, which are all linked to eating animals (2013, 263). He views these and the statistics on the resulting loss of productivity not as mere numbers, but as “patterns that tell a story about what we choose to eat as a society and what happens to us afterward—the stark and very real consequences.” From an Islamic perspective, we could also include “spiritual productivity” among the costs, as being sick or unhealthy prevents us from worshipping Allah as well as we otherwise could. By making choices that

effectively destroy our health, we are putting ourselves into *tahluka*, against which Allah warns us.

On the other hand, eating a plant-based diet provides health benefits such as 50% lower risk of coronary heart disease and hypertension, and 40% lower risk of cancer (Oppenlander 2013, 264). In terms of healthcare costs, this would save billions of the \$500 billion that were spent to treat hypertension in 2011 (Oppenlander 2013, 264). Since our body has rights over us, and since it is an *amāna* that we should take care of as best as possible, as Muslims, we owe it to ourselves to adopt a plant-based diet.

THE IMPACT ON SLAUGHTERHOUSE WORKERS

One of the arguments that Abdu Wahab (n.d.) presents is less of an argument and more of an *ad hominem* attack:

Further, those who speak about animal rights are from countries which kill people without caring, and they do not respect human rights. Therefore, is keeping animals more important than treating man with mercy?

There are multiple responses to this question. First, we should judge the argument based on its own merit and not on the actions of those making it and whether or not they fulfill other moral obligations. However, it can also be true in certain cases that treating an animal well is more important than treating man with mercy. This could be because the interests of those who are vulnerable, and cannot fight to protect their own interests, are more important (Llewellyn 2003).

However, the problem with this argument is that it assumes that mercy to animals and mercy to humans are incompatible, or even mutually exclusive, and since we can only choose one, we must choose humans over animals. This is untrue because it is rarely the case that treating an animal with mercy comes at the cost of treating humans with mercy. This is merely a case of “what-aboutism” which seeks to derail the conversation away from animal rights.

Nevertheless, animal rights, besides being intrinsically important from an Islamic perspective, are also linked to human rights. Humans who work in animal factories and slaughterhouses report higher rates of mental issues, such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), PITS (perpetration-induced traumatic stress), and pathological sadism.

PTSD is a chronic, long-lasting disorder “that follows traumatic events outside the realm of ordinary experience,” including “wars and other kinds of violence” (MacNair 2001, 273). A lesser-known disorder called perpetration-induced traumatic stress (PITS) is a form of post-traumatic stress disorder caused by “situations that would be traumatic if someone were a victim, but situations for which the person in question was a causal participant” (MacNair 2002). Sufferers of PITS are people who have created the traumatic situation. Focusing on Vietnam veterans, Nazis and others who committed genocide against humans, MacNair (2001, 274) notes that “the psychological consequences they report or that psychiatrists found through interview showed that the act of killing is associated with punishing results.”

It seems that these consequences of killing also follow if the victim is an animal. Most interestingly, it is the workers who slit the throat of animals who are at the risk of most injuries (Lebwohl 2016). Slitting the throat of animals is the Islamic way of slaughter; however, it appears that practicing this on a daily basis leads to immense psychological harms. In addition to facing imminent physical dangers and threats from the equipment at mechanized slaughterhouses, workers themselves dread the psychological consequences more (Dillard 2008, 391).

Furthermore, research has also shown more concrete and serious effects on the community, such as links to domestic and sexual violence, and even a rise in crime rates. Fitzgerald et al. (2009) conducted a study that controlled for other variables and found that an increase in slaughterhouse employment was strongly associated with an increase in overall crime, and disturbingly “disproportionate increases in violent crime and sexual crime” (quoted in Lebwohl 2016). Social theorists hypothesize that this constitutes “a progression from animal abuse to human violence” (Lebwohl 2016). As Lebwohl explains, “in slaughterhouses, the predisposition to abuse is not necessarily preexisting, but killing animals may serve a similar purpose in those without a predisposition as it does in those with one by acting as a first step that desensitizes workers to further violence aimed at humans.”

FOOD SECURITY AND GLOBAL HUNGER

Another objection to veganism from Abdul Wahab is that “many of those who speak about these things are from wealthy countries, which have many resources, but their view cannot be applied to low-resource countries or countries with famine. Allah’s law is valid for all of them.” This idea that veganism is a “first-world luxury” is based on gross misunderstanding. Plant-based food is not only more economically feasible and efficient, but also more energy efficient.

Resource Maximization

As we continue to farm animals in ways that damage the environment, we have a steadily growing population to feed. A global water shortage of 40% is predicted to occur in just eighteen years (Oppenlander 2013, xvi). One billion people worldwide “are affected by hunger,” and the number is expected to double in the next few years. The reason for this is not a lack of resources. Rather, “of the 2.5 billion tons of grain harvested in 2011, half was fed to animals in the meat and dairy industries; 77% of all coarse grain went to livestock” (Oppenlander 2013, Xvi). Food that could be fed to humans is instead fed to animals that will then be converted to meat and other animal products for rich people to consume. Oppenlander notes that food security concerns, hunger and poverty, among others, “can be eliminated or at least significantly minimised by a simple, collective change to a healthier, more peaceful, plant-based food choice.”

According to one report, “The crops fed to industrially reared animals worldwide could feed an extra four billion [people] on the planet” (Zee 2017). The narration of Umar RA seems to have foreshadowed our current reality, when he said to a man that claimed to

be such a carnivore that he could not stay without meat for two days in a row: “It would be better for you to roll up your tummy a little bit so that other people can eat” (Fatwas on Vegetarianism, n.d.).

Energy Efficiency and Economic Efficiency

According to Carlo M. Cipolla, an economic historian, “for man to make the maximum use for food of the solar energy trapped by plants, he should become herbivorous” (1978, 41). While plants convert solar energy to chemical energy that we can consume, raising animals for food results in the loss of most of the energy that they have absorbed from plant food in the maintenance and building of their own bodies (Cipolla 1978, 40).

Moreover, when it comes to land use for calories of energy, beef production has only 10% of the efficiency of corn production (Cipolla 1978, 40). This is “the fundamental reason why poor societies rely more on vegetable carbohydrates than animal proteins” (ibid. 41). In other words, “the conversion efficiency of plant into animal matter is ~10%; thus, there is a prima facie case that more people could be supported from the same amount of land if they were vegetarians” (Godfray et al. 2010, 816). Moreover, per capita consumption of meat and dairy in poor countries is lower than that in developed countries (Goodland and Anhang 2009). These facts show that the narrative of veganism being a “first-world luxury” is false; poor societies depend more on plant food than on animal sources, which are seldom accessible to them.

Various studies have found that the move to a vegan diet is a necessary part of the solution to the food crisis and climate change. The environmental toll of livestock production is so high that “even major progress in displacing nonrenewable energy would not obviate substantial action to reduce the huge amounts of livestock-related greenhouse gas emissions” (Goodland and Anhang 2009, 15). On the other hand, replacing animal products can lead to a quick reduction in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, while also reversing the food and water crises (Goodland and Anhang 2009, 15). Another study also found that sufficient mitigation of climate change cannot be achieved without moving to plant-based (or vegan) diets (Springmann et al. 2018).

WHY INDUSTRY REFORM IS NOT THE ANSWER

Some scholars have suggested that we reform practices of slaughter to make them more in line with Islamic principles. Unfortunately, given the large-scale demand for meat, this is nearly impossible. Hasan (2013) studied the operations of a small-scale butcher in the US, who tries to adhere to Islamic principles of treatment of animals in life and death, in order to provide truly “halal” meat. However, he faces many issues: from acquiring animals that have not been given meat in their feed to other logistical issues, all stemming from the fact that the industry is dominated by factory farming.

Dr Richard Oppenlander, in his book *Food Choice and Sustainability: Why Buying Local, Eating Less Meat, and Taking Baby Steps Won't Work* explores the impact of animal agriculture. Based on the analysis of the alternatives like organic farming, and thorough calculations, he shows how grass-fed farming, cage-free egg farming, and wild aquaculture

will still perpetuate or even worsen global depletion. He concludes that “we need to strive to achieve another level of sustainability by eliminating eating animals entirely” (Oppenlander 2013, 307). For instance, grass-fed livestock operations would use less grain and less fossil fuel, but would lead to higher greenhouse gas emissions, faster loss of biodiversity, and worsening world hunger (Oppenlander 2013, 79). This, of course, assumes that we have the land to raise animals in this way. In reality, there is not enough land on Earth to sustain large-scale grass-fed farming. Based on his own field research, Oppenlander shows that the land required to raise the same amount of animals in grass-fed farms as currently raised in factory farms, in the US alone, is larger than the whole land mass of the US. He also quotes the author of *Feeding the World* who notes that if we had to provide animal products for everyone on Earth the way we provide for people in the affluent world, “it would require 67% more agricultural land than the earth possesses” (Oppenlander 2013, 81). Furthermore, Oppenlander shows how a transition from meat and dairy farms to organic plant farming is not only feasible, but also profitable, which can lead to more jobs by replacing machines with workers, besides maximizing sustainable use of resources.

“BENEFITS” OF EATING ANIMALS

Given that eating meat is merely permissible in Islam, and that in this day and age, we can not only survive but also thrive without it, the only reasons for eating meat are “personal choice” or cultural practice.

The most common argument or excuse given by those who eat animals is that it is a “personal choice.” In response to this, Oppenlander points out:

What you choose to eat does affect many things—our planet and its resources, the lives of many species of animals (domestic and wild), other humans indirectly (by way of global depletion, food availability, and economically), and your own health (which affects everyone else by way of health care costs and food availability. (2013, 278)

Indeed, when an action causes so much destruction, it requires justification to commit that action, not to abstain from it.

In this regard, the legislative principles of *‘ilm-al-muwāzānat* and *‘ilm-al-awlawiyāt* can be used, following Lewellyn who encourages their use in dealing with specific environmental issues, although he does not seem to know that animal agriculture is one of them:

When it is impossible to satisfy all immediate interests, the universal common good requires prioritization by weighing the welfare of the greatest number, the importance and urgency of various interests involved, the certainty or probability of benefit or injury, and the ability of those affected to secure their interests without assistance. (Lewellyn 2003, 195)

Moreover, one of the principles of Islamic law is that “priority is given to preserving the universal interest over particular interests” (Lewellyn 2003, 196). Arguably, the

universal common good is in the preservation of the Earth, which is home to all species. If we were to weigh the welfare of the greatest number, animal welfare would hold most importance, since they outnumber humans. Importantly, Lewellyn also notes that the ultimate objective of the Shari'a is the welfare of all of God's creatures (*maṣāliḥ al khalqī kāffatan*), and that the welfare of "human and non-human sentient beings must be considered" and "no species or generation may be excluded from consideration" (Lewellyn 2003, 193). Even if we were to consider an individual's "choice" to eat meat for the sake of pleasure, it would be difficult to justify it while overlooking the rights of all others and the harms it causes them. Moreover, the preservation of the Earth is of greater interest in terms of "the importance and urgency of various interests involved." Perhaps most crucially, the fact that animals are arguably the least able to "secure their interests without assistance," and are affected most by animal farming, leads to the conclusion that their interests outweigh any personal "interest" that a human may have in consuming their flesh, meat, eggs, or milk. Moreover, if Lewellyn's adoption of the precept from the laws of property, which he applies to environmental resources, is applied to animals, the verdict is quite clear: "Muslim jurists have ruled that a person invalidates his right if... in spite of bringing benefit to himself, its exercise results in either excessive damage to other individuals or general damage to society" (2003, 198).

However, we cannot ignore the fact that continuing to eat animals has one major benefit that most people value over all other harms—convenience. Even though veganism has "gone mainstream" and is no longer as difficult as it used to be to be a vegan, it is still not the most convenient choice to make. Continuing to be blind to the horrors of factory farming and the consequences of our choices is much easier than taking a stand against these practices which are mandated and enabled by the society we live in and the lifestyle that is seen as part of our culture and even religion. For Muslim vegans, it can mean bearing attacks on their religiosity or even having their faith questioned. Although it might be convenient to continue to participate in the cycle, the price of this convenience is too high.

The social aspect of the justification of animal abuse is listed by Oppenlander as one of the two reasons why as a society we lack compassion for animals. The other reason is our lack of exposure to farm animals, and therefore our inability to perceive their sentience, which leads to lack of compassion towards them.

In the introduction of the edited anthology *Call to Compassion: Religious Perspectives on Animal Advocacy*, Lisa Kemmerer notes that "in our daily lives, we often act without thinking, behave without conviction, and live without intent. Our spiritual lives too often take a backseat to convention, habit, convenience, and the mindless ritual of day-to-day life" (Kemmerer 2011, 2–3). Indeed, Islam places great importance on thinking and considering, and warns against following conventions blindly.

Oppenlander captures the essence of why most people eat meat:

Ultimately, however, there may be only two main reasons for eating meat in a grass-fed, local, and organic fashion (or any meat, for that matter). For most, I believe it is because there is lack of awareness—being comfortably unaware. For

the others who choose to consume grass-fed meat, it might be similar to cigarette smokers who grope to find logic in the illogical, who have exhausted all attempts to justify the habit – it’s simply because they want to. In the end, there is no good reason to eat animals. Massive amounts of land on earth are consumed and compromised because we choose to eat animals. Nothing truly beneficial or sustainable will come of raising and eating animals in any agricultural format. (2013, 87)

It is interesting that Oppenlander compares meat eaters to cigarette smokers. Even though he says that it is “simply because they want to,” perhaps part of the reason is also that they have to, owing to their addiction to it. This is also reminiscent of the saying of Umar RA: “Beware of meat, because it has an addiction like the addiction of wine.” In this case, Muslims should be more encouraged to give up their addictions, since these ultimately mean that our *nafs* is in control of us, and not the other way around, as it should be:

Have you seen him who takes his own lust (vain desires) as his *ilah* (god), and Allah knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and put a cover on his sight. Who then will guide him after Allah? Will you not then remember? (Qur’an, 45:23, Mohsin Khan’s translation)

Given that we live in a capitalist and globalized world, we cannot escape the repercussions and consequences that our actions directly have on beings around the world and on the world itself. However, the majority of us live our lives “comfortably unaware” of the harm our lifestyle is causing. Oppenlander points out that “we all tend to live within our own microcosm, unaware of what might be happening elsewhere in the world. This is particularly true with our direct or indirect use of resources. Awareness of the choices we make on a daily basis and adopting proper decisions will ultimately facilitate movement in the right direction” (Oppenlander 2013, xxiii). From his in-depth and vast study of the unsustainable nature of animal agriculture, Oppenlander concludes that “we must come to grips with the magnitude and urgency of the problem.” The logic of “eating ‘less meat’ and taking ‘baby steps’ needs to be thrown out the window with the animal products it supports... we are not babies and are quite capable of creating positive change in the world” (Oppenlander 2013, xxiii).

Personal Responsibility as Muslims

Given that we live in a world dominated and characterized by capitalist economics, we must recognize our role in it as consumers and the power and responsibility that we hold, by creating demand for what producers will choose to supply. Norm Phelps explains what it means to consume animals in the status quo:

When we buy meat at a supermarket or restaurant, we place an order for an animal to be killed. Someone must slaughter an animal if we are to eat meat. Therefore, if we purchase meat, we create the need for an animal to be killed. The fact that the

animal was killed ‘on spec’, so to speak, and the order was placed long after the animal was killed, is merely a quirk of modern marketing. Morally, this delay changes nothing. ‘Food’ animals are killed specifically for those who buy meat; if no one buys meat, no one will kill animals for consumption. (Kemmerer and Nocella 2011, 70)

As consumers, especially Muslim consumers, we cannot then absolve ourselves of all responsibility by shifting the blame onto the producers for engaging in these unethical and cruel practices. As consumers who support their practices with our money and choices, we cannot claim to be innocent ourselves, since we perpetuate the cycle and encourage it. Moreover, Poore and Nemecek note that “producers have limits on how far they can reduce impacts” (2018, 987). In the end, “the demand for meat is at the heart of most of these issues” (Furber 2017, 9). This should encourage consumers to take personal responsibility, and not to encourage the production of “goods” that are environmentally unsustainable by boycotting them. This is the only way to send a clear message to the producers that their practices will not be rewarded or supported, but punished.

Furber is perhaps the only scholar, besides Masri, to explicitly declare that participating in factory farming and buying its products is unlawful:

Intensive factory farming exists as it does because consumers demand cheap animal products and companies seek to maximize their profits and minimize their costs. Whoever places an order with an intensive factory farm for animals does so knowing that those abuses are an inevitable consequence of this order, and that the money he provides in exchange for his order helps fund those abuses. A legal maxim states ‘whatever is unlawful to perform is unlawful to request.’ Ordering animals from a farm where abuse is inevitable is, in effect, a request to abuse animals and, thus, unlawful. The individual who places the order has committed the unlawful act of requesting perpetration of an unlawful act. One must keep in mind that another maxim states that ‘acceptance of a thing is acceptance of its consequences.’ (2017, 19–20)

However, he refrains from saying that the meat is haram:

While the meat might be halal to eat, once one has knowledge of the situation, it is wrong for one to be complacent about the situation and to do absolutely nothing to change it. And all of these unlawful acts have consequences in this life, the Afterlife, or them both. (2017, 25)

Even though there are compelling arguments for veganism, some of which I have presented, the reality is that scholars have not classified the meat as haram. Ultimately, this is an ethical choice that, as Muslims, only we can make and impose upon ourselves. If we do not make the decision to change our ways by overcoming the desires of the *nafs*, and fight the social and cultural pressures that reward us for being unaware and inconsiderate, the environmental, scientific, medical, and psychological evidence, with all its profundity, is of no significance. Even if we recognize that our actions are causing immense harm, as

long as we lack the moral integrity, will, and courage that it takes to change these actions which we have been conditioned into since birth, no logical argument can help. We will continue to find excuses instead of trying to reform.

The psychological and social aspects of eating animals prevent most people from adopting a vegan diet, even when they are convinced by the logical reasons. Donald J. Barnes, who previously gave electric shocks to monkeys in the name of research for the US Air Force, coined the term “conditioned ethical blindness” to refer to our failure to even see or realize the unethical nature of our treatment of certain animals. Society continues to reward cruelty to these animals, and the behavior becomes so entrenched that we fail to see any problem with it. He notes that “values based upon an unpopular ethic are a luxury that many people cannot afford to conceptualize, let alone to embrace. I was being stirred by some disquieting thoughts and feelings, to be sure, but I didn’t understand them” (Barnes 1985, 167). He describes the process of realization that led to change as “in retrospect, I realize that I held tightly to my conditioned beliefs, releasing them only as they were pruned from me by logic and evidence of their inappropriateness... Change requires the reconceptualization of many, if not all, of our habits. I didn’t change my views quickly, nor did I change them without struggle or resentment” (1985, 167).

CONCLUSION

There is a dire need for *ijtihad* regarding the practice of slaughter for food in Islam, given that the consequences of eating meat and other animal products are unparalleled in history. The benefits upon which the permissibility of meat is premised largely do not accrue today. I have argued that given our responsibility to conserve the environment, among others, we can no longer justify meat-eating Islamically. Scholars need to realize the harms that this practice is causing, and encourage all Muslims to do the same. As Muslim consumers, we need to realize our moral responsibility and stop being complicit in and funding the practices which lead to the destruction of Allah’s creation. Eating animals is no longer a matter of personal preference, or of convenience, since it is directly causing and worsening climate change and food security, both of which present existential threats to humanity, among other species. Continuing to be unaware of the consequences of our actions may seem “comfortable,” but with every passing minute, and every animal slaughtered, it is leading to our own destruction.

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