



THE PALGRAVE MACMILLAN  
Animal Ethics Series



## CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON VEGANISM

Edited by Jodey Castricano  
and Rasmus R. Simonsen



# The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series

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In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ethics of our treatment of animals. Philosophers have led the way, and now a range of other scholars have followed from historians to social scientists. From being a marginal issue, animals have become an emerging issue in ethics and in multidisciplinary inquiry. This series will explore the challenges that Animal Ethics poses, both conceptually and practically, to traditional understandings of human-animal relations. Specifically, the Series will:

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Jodey Castricano • Rasmus R. Simonsen  
Editors

# Critical Perspectives on Veganism

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The Palgrave Macmillan Animal Ethics Series

ISBN 978-3-319-33418-9      ISBN 978-3-319-33419-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-33419-6

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016950059

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland

# Foreword

## The Rise of Veganism

Veganism is an ideology whose time has come. The vegan movement is arguably one of the fastest-growing social justice movements in the world today, and it is likely that this trajectory of growth will even accelerate as the movement gains greater traction.

But why now? Why is it that centuries after the inception of ethical vegetarianism, in just the past decade—and in some regions in the past two to five years—veganism has gone from an unknown, fringe vegetarian submovement to a way of life embraced by some of the world's top celebrities, businesspeople, politicians, and thought leaders? The reasons are, of course, diverse, including everything from shifts in agricultural practices (e.g., the corporatization of agribusiness and the subsequent consumer demand for democratization of, and transparency in, food production) to the obesity epidemic in the USA that has led to a radical reenvisioning of the role of food and nutrition in health and to the realization that animal foods are key causal factors of not only obesity, but of a range of preventable and treatable diseases. So, veganism as an alternative to some of the practical problems caused by animal agriculture has begun to become a realistic, and even commendable, option.

However, it is not only the practical dimensions of veganism that are to account for its current expansion. Perhaps even more important are the psychological, and thus, ethical dimensions of the ideology. And there are two key factors that have led to the shift in attitudes toward veganism: the *visibility* of farmed animal suffering and the *viability* of veganism as a personal and thus moral choice. Thanks to the advent of the Internet and to the efforts of vegan advocates, many people today are aware of the intensive and extensive suffering of farmed animals. And, due to the modernization of food production, unless one is geographically or economically unable to make her or his food choices freely, eating animals is no longer a necessity and is therefore a choice. When a behavior becomes a choice, it takes on a much more significant ethical dimension. Thus, when consumers become aware of the fact that they have a choice of what—or whom—they eat, they must grapple with an ethical dilemma that they didn't have previously.

One can see similar patterns in historical shifts from oppressive to liberatory attitudes and behaviors. It becomes difficult if not impossible to continue justifying the oppression of others (enslaved people of color, women, etc.) when doing so is no longer believed to be a matter of self-preservation. Indeed, virtually all cases for mass oppression rest on the argument that doing so is necessary for the preservation of the dominant group, the social order, and sometimes even the species. And as this argument is increasingly disabled, the oppressive ideology it upholds becomes increasingly challenged by the social justice movement that seeks to replace it.

Although oppressive ideologies are still an unfortunate part of social reality, we can see tremendous shifts of consciousness and genuine progress in transforming them. While sexism is still globally pervasive and deeply problematic, in many parts of the world women enjoy freedoms not even imaginable a 100 years ago. Though racism is no doubt still woven through the fabric of social life in virtually every region of the globe, race relations have been transformed in myriad ways, and there is a sustained, powerful, and highly successful global effort to abolish racial discrimination. When people become aware of oppression and feel empowered to act against it (e.g., they do not feel that their survival is threatened), history shows us that they rise up and say no to injustice and yes to compassion.

What, then, is the oppressive system, or ideology, that veganism challenges? *Carnism* is the ideology that conditions people to eat animals.

It is the counterpoint to veganism, just as patriarchy, for example, is the counterpoint to feminism. And, as with all ideologies, carnism is social and psychological in nature. Understanding carnism helps one understand not only why veganism—the ideology that seeks to, and no doubt one day will, replace carnism—is on the rise. It also helps one understand how to maintain and even bolster the growth of veganism. Exposing carnism for what it is, and demonstrating how veganism is an ethical alternative and imperative, helps ensure that carnism continues to follow the trajectory of other oppressive *isms* and is, eventually, abolished.

## Understanding Carnism

Most people born into a prevailing animal-eating culture have inherited a certain paradoxical mentality. They know that the animals they eat are individuals, yet they'd rather not know it. They cringe when confronted with images of animal suffering, yet they dine on animals' bodies several times a day. They refuse to ingest certain animals, yet they thoroughly enjoy eating others. And in so doing, they experience no noticeable inconsistency.

The presence of ambivalent and contradictory attitudes toward eating animals is indicative of carnism. Oppressive ideologies such as carnism require, and enable, rational, humane people to partake in irrational, inhumane practices while failing to notice the inherent contradictions involved. Thus, eating animals is not simply a matter of “personal ethics.” Rather, it is the unavoidable consequence of a deeply entrenched, all-encompassing oppressive *ism*. Eating animals is an issue of social justice.

Most people, however, practice carnism unwittingly, as they are unaware that they have a choice when it comes to eating—or not eating—animals. This lack of awareness is the result of being socialized in an environment, in which the practice of eating animals is omnipresent and virtually always uncontested.

And carnism is not only widespread; it is also violent. It is organized around excessive and unnecessary violence toward sentient beings. Even the production of so-called “humane” or “happy” animal products, which form only a tiny percentage of animal foods today, involves brutality in various forms.



## Carnistic Defense Mechanisms

Like other oppressive ideologies, carnism runs counter to core human values. Therefore, it needs to disable people's natural empathy toward, and thus compassion for, animals so as to make it possible for them to support unnecessary violence toward nonhuman others without experiencing any moral discomfort in the process. To this end, carnism employs a set of social and psychological defense mechanisms that distort reality and dissociate people, psychologically and emotionally, from their actual experiences. Only then can most people partake in a violent system they most likely would otherwise oppose.

### Denial

The main defense of carnism is denial. Denying the existence of an oppressive system implies denying there is a problem in the first place; denying the existence of a problem absolves one from addressing it. Denial finds its expression in invisibility: the ideology itself remains invisible by remaining unnamed, and the victims of carnism are kept out of sight, and thus, conveniently out of mind. Although the body parts of slaughtered animals are essentially everywhere one turns, one hardly ever sees any of these animals alive. However, owing to the excellent work of vegan advocates, as well as the advent of the Internet, denial has been largely destabilized. Denying the existence of at least the most horrendous practices of animal agriculture therefore no longer seems to be a viable option. So, justification—another carnistic defense—has taken on a more central role in sustaining carnism.

### Justification

People learn to justify eating animals by learning to believe that the myths of meat, eggs, and dairy are the facts of meat, eggs, and dairy. In one way or another, these myths fall under the *Three Ns of Justification*: eating animals is *normal*, *natural*, and *necessary*. And of course these justifications are anything but new. Throughout human history, they have been used

to justify violent behaviors and beliefs (including war, slavery, misogyny, homophobia, etc.) in order to exploit disempowered groups of others. And these myths have been used to discredit progressive movements by depicting progressive ideologies as *abnormal*, *unnatural*, and *unnecessary*.

Eating animals is normal: The problem with this justification is that what is called “normal” simply reflects the beliefs and behaviors of the dominant culture, the *carnistic norm*. The mere existence of a dominant norm, however, does not justify it.

Eating animals is natural: The problem with this justification is that what is called “natural” simply reflects the dominant culture’s interpretation of history. This justification refers not to *human* history, but to *carnistic* history. The reference used is not our early fruit-eating ancestors, but their later flesh-eating descendants. Indeed, many practices that are today considered morally unacceptable, such as infanticide, murder, and rape, are probably as long-standing—and therefore arguably as natural—as eating animals. Yet, no one seriously invokes the longevity of these practices in order to justify them.

Eating animals is necessary: The problem with this justification is that what is called “necessary” simply serves to sustain the dominant culture, the carnistic status quo. Depicting the practice of eating animals as a biological or nutritional necessity demoralizes a fundamentally moral issue. If a diet without animal products were nutritionally deficient, eating animals would pose a much smaller ethical challenge indeed. However, since there is now overwhelming evidence that a vegan diet is not only nutritionally sound but likely even healthier than a carnistic one, people who are economically and geographically able to make their food choices freely cannot logically defend their eating of animals based on the argument that eating animals is necessary.

Still, most people, including social reformers, have not (yet) rejected the Three Ns of carnism. The reason is that carnism is structural, that is to say that it is subtly integrated into the very structure of society and thus represents an institutionalized form of oppression. And institutionalization begets internalization; when an ideology is embraced and maintained by all major social institutions, it becomes internalized, forming an internal psychological system that reflects the external social system. So, even many of those who work toward progressive social

change have learned to look at the world through the carnistic lens, and they therefore fail to recognize carnism and its Three Ns of Justification for what they are.

## Neocarnism

As denial, the main defense of carnism, has become increasingly destabilized and justification has come to play a more prominent role in maintaining the system, each of the Three Ns has morphed into a new ideology. These new ideologies constitute *neocarnism*. Unlike traditional carnism, in which the consumption of animals is virtually entirely unexamined, neocarnisms incorporate ethical considerations of eating animals into their analyses. So, neocarnisms appeal in particular to consumers who have begun to critically reflect on the validity of eating animals. Unlike veganism, however, neocarnisms do not arrive at the conclusion that the solution is to *stop* eating animals; instead, they recommend changing *the way* one eats animals.

Neocarnism belongs to the category of “secondary carnistic defenses.” While “primary carnistic defenses” are pro-carnist, in that they aim to validate carnism, secondary defenses are anti-vegan, in that they aim to *invalidate* veganism. Neocarnisms seek to provide carnistic justifications to invalidate veganism primarily by invalidating three central elements of the vegan argument: animal welfare, environmental protection, and human health.

## Compassionate Carnism: Invalidating the Animal Welfare Argument

Compassionate carnism developed out of the idea that eating animals is normal; it supposedly addresses animal welfare concerns. While recognizing animal welfare as an issue, compassionate carnism rejects veganism as “extreme” and thus impractical. Instead, compassionate carnism suggests a more practical alternative: eating “humane” or “happy” animal products. So, to solve the dilemma between caring about animals and eating them, compassionate carnism recommends moderation—that one should not stray too far outside the carnistic norm. The problem

here is that although compassionate carnism might imply a step toward veganism, often the opposite is true, as eating “humane” animal products tends to soothe one’s conscience so that veganism is no longer a necessary alternative. Moreover, in reality, it would seem more difficult to avoid “inhumane” animal products with any consistency than to stop eating animals altogether.

## **Ecocarnism: Invalidating the Environmental Protection Argument**

Ecocarnism developed out of the idea that eating animals is natural; it supposedly addresses environmental concerns. Ecocarnism holds that the problem is not *animal* agriculture, but *industrial* agriculture. The ecocarnist solution is not to stop eating animals, but to only eat “sustainably” produced animal products. Ecocarnism tries to invalidate veganism in several ways. First, it portrays veganism as unnatural and unsustainable, focusing only on those processed vegan specialty foods whose production methods are environmentally problematic. Second, it denounces people’s aversion to killing animals as a modern aberration, portraying veganism as a movement of middle-class city-dwellers who are “soft” and “disconnected” from nature.

Both ecocarnist arguments are problematic. First, the fact is overlooked that many vegans do consciously support a sustainable whole foods diet. Besides, a vegan diet is more likely to be sustainable than one that includes animal products, even when one takes manufacturing and transportation of produce into account. Veganism is in fact the solution to plenty of sustainability issues. Second, the question arises as to why modern human sensitivity to killing should be seen as weakness rather than as a sign of moral progress and integrity.

## **Biocarnism: Invalidating the Human Health Argument**

Biocarnism developed out of the idea that eating animals is necessary; it supposedly addresses human health concerns. Biocarnism rejects veganism by assuming that since eating animals is necessary for human health, this practice is exempt from ethical reflection. In so doing, biocarnism

refers to medical claims that allegedly demonstrate the unhealthy nature of veganism. It bases the case against veganism on the assumption that “man, the omnivorous hunter,” serves as the prototype for the human food consumer. The problem here is that biocarnism invokes *carnistic* history rather than *human* history for evidence of human physiology and nutritional needs; biocarnism looks not to our early fruit-eating ancestors, but to their later flesh-eating descendants, for confirmation of what is necessary for an optimal human diet. Moreover, biocarnism apparently ignores the official positions of various notable institutions, such as the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, according to which plant-based diets are nutritionally complete and may even be healthier than animal-based ones.

## Cognitive Distortions

Cognitive distortions comprise another set of carnistic defenses. Like other violent ideologies, carnism employs a set of cognitive defenses that aim to distort perceptions. These defenses work as psychological and emotional distancing mechanisms. Accordingly, carnism causes people to see farmed animals as objects, as *something* rather than *someone*. It also causes people to see animals as abstractions, as representatives of an abstract group without any individuality or personality and who have often been given numbers rather than names. And, finally, carnism places animals in rigid mental categories in order to enable people to harbor different feelings and behave in different ways toward different species: dogs and cats are friends and family; pigs and cows are food.

## Carnism and Intersection

Carnism is just one of the many violent ideologies that are an unfortunate part of the human legacy. And while the experiences of each group of victims, and every individual victim, are always different and somewhat unique, the respective ideologies that cause victimization are structurally

similar. Basically, the same mentality grounds these ideologies and enables all forms of violence: the mentality of domination and subjugation, of privilege and oppression; the mentality of might-makes-right; the mentality that justifies oppressing and exploiting vulnerable others simply because they are, after all, “only” savages, women, animals.

Many socially conscious individuals acknowledge the fact that the various, superficially different forms of oppression are in fact intersecting and are thus mutually reinforcing. This insight has important implications: bringing about social reform and transformation requires not merely liberating specific groups of victims, but challenging the very foundations of oppression; it requires getting to the root of the problem. Failing to address the foundation of the problem will inevitably allow for further atrocities in new and different forms, and the abolition of one form of oppression might even reinforce others: yesterday’s oppressed can easily become tomorrow’s oppressors—a mechanism plainly visible, for instance, when oppressed people demand not to be treated “like animals.” Thus, to realize a truly humane and just society, carnism must be included in the analysis of oppressive ideologies. This, however, requires a paradigm shift: the systemic and ideological nature of eating animals needs to be appreciated. Challenging carnism is not simply a matter of encouraging a shift of personal food choices, but it is an integral part of working toward genuine social justice.

Solidarity among those working against oppression is essential. The beneficiaries of oppression often employ a divide-and-conquer approach, pitting oppressed groups against one another to divert attention from the true matter at hand. When possible, those on the receiving end of oppression must attempt to thwart this strategy. All victims of oppression and exploitation ought to appreciate that they are united—not because their respective suffering is identical or somehow comparable, but because their suffering is owed to the very same systemic and institutionalized mentality. The same goes for those actively working to end the various forms of oppression and exploitation. Although one cannot take on all causes, it is crucial to value any cause that is dedicated to creating a more just and compassionate society. Only then may we create a better world for all creatures—human and animal alike.

## Food for Thought

If veganism is an ideology whose time has come, then Vegan Studies is a field of research whose time has come, too. As veganism is growing, so, too, is the need for critical reflection on theoretical and practical aspects of this ideology. New possibilities inevitably raise new questions and pose new challenges. Vegan Studies will no doubt play a central role in dealing with this development: it may help to better establish the vegan issue in academia, spread the professional discourse further, and attract new researchers to the field. Beyond academia, Vegan Studies can help to clarify and deepen the understanding of veganism and its theoretical underpinnings and practical implications; and it can help to establish veganism not merely as a fashionable lifestyle, but as an ideology and practice with fundamental ethical, political, and cultural ramifications.

We therefore welcome the publication of this collection of essays, as it promises to make a significant and important contribution to the field of Vegan Studies by critically examining ethical, political, and cultural aspects of veganism in various contexts. This volume includes an array of perspectives and recommendations that help readers see the problem more clearly and approach the solution more dynamically and effectively. The contributors to this volume offer unique, relevant, and important insights as to how to not only address carnism, but also to move beyond carnism toward an ethical vegan practice and psychology. We are thrilled to see how the concept of carnism serves as a starting point for very different fascinating and original approaches. This collection proves to be a helpful tool of analysis in this field of research, helping to illuminate, understand, and explicate various issues related to veganism.

We also appreciate that this anthology draws on insights from various academic fields, thus enabling interdisciplinary exchange, which is indispensable when approaching such a complex topic. And this collection of course provides an excellent overview of the various aspects and debates, highlighting some of the most important and pressing issues such as the broad spectrum of ethical and political positions in vegan discourse, ranging from more principled and ideological ones to more pragmatic and strategic ones; the multiplicity of cultural approaches that

can help to illuminate carnism and veganism in various aspects of life; the possible tension between total liberation and single-issue approaches; veganism and commercialization; veganism and its engagement with technological progress (such as in vitro animal products); veganism and intersectionality (interlocking issues of race, gender etc.); veganism and its engagement with religious and traditional practices; vegan identity; and the fundamental question which also underlies this anthology, namely, whether the trend toward normalization strengthens or detracts from the radical impetus of veganism as a politics.

By pulling together the growing body of research being done on veganism and its antithesis, carnism, this collection furthers critical debate and encourages rethinking on how one understands and practices veganism in the twenty-first century. Therefore, this volume can be an invaluable asset for those working in Vegan Studies and for everyone interested in the subject.

Moving beyond carnism and toward veganism will one day, we believe, be looked back upon as one of the greatest transformations in human history. It will be an expression of unparalleled moral, political, and cultural progress.

This anthology makes an important contribution to this end as it reflects an increasing worldwide sensitivity to the devastating effects of our established, dominant patterns of food consumption. And it adds a strong voice to the growing chorus of those calling for fundamental change. We hope it will persuade many people to critically assess and reconsider their attitudes and behaviors in terms of their impact on animals, themselves, other humans, and the planet. So, quite obviously, *Critical Perspectives on Veganism* is an anthology whose time has come.

Melanie Joy and Jens Tuider





## Series Editors' Preface

This is a new book series for a new field of inquiry: Animal Ethics.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the ethics of our treatment of animals. Philosophers have led the way, and now a range of other scholars have followed from historians to social scientists. From being a marginal issue, animals have become an emerging issue in ethics and in multidisciplinary inquiry.

In addition, a rethink of the status of animals has been fuelled by a range of scientific investigations which have revealed the complexity of animal sentience, cognition, and awareness. The ethical implications of this new knowledge have yet to be properly evaluated, but it is becoming clear that the old view that animals are mere things, tools, machines, or commodities cannot be sustained ethically.

But it is not only philosophy and science that are putting animals on the agenda. Increasingly, in Europe and the USA, animals are becoming a political issue as political parties vie for the “green” and “animal” vote. In turn, political scientists are beginning to look again at the history of political thought in relation to animals, and historians are beginning to revisit the political history of animal protection.

As animals grow as an issue of importance, so there have been more collaborative academic ventures leading to conference volumes, special journal issues, indeed new academic animal journals as well. Moreover, we have witnessed the growth of academic courses, as well as university

posts, in Animal Ethics, Animal Welfare, Animal Rights, Animal Law, Animals and Philosophy, Human–Animal Studies, Critical Animal Studies, Animals and Society, Animals in Literature, Animals and Religion—tangible signs that a new academic discipline is emerging.

“Animal Ethics” is the new term for the academic exploration of the moral status of the nonhuman: an exploration that explicitly involves a focus on what we owe animals morally, and which also helps us to understand the influences—social, legal, cultural, religious, and political—that legitimate animal abuse. This series explores the challenges that Animal Ethics poses, both conceptually and practically, to traditional understandings of human–animal relations.

The series is needed for three reasons: (i) to provide the texts that will service the new university courses on animals; (ii) to support the increasing number of students studying and academics researching in animal-related fields, and (iii) because there is currently no book series that is a focus for multidisciplinary research in the field.

Specifically, the series will:

- provide a range of key introductory and advanced texts that map out ethical positions on animals;
- publish pioneering work written by new, as well as accomplished, scholars, and
- produce texts from a variety of disciplines that are multidisciplinary in character or have multidisciplinary relevance.

The new Palgrave Macmillan Series on Animal Ethics is the result of a unique partnership between Palgrave Macmillan and the Ferrater Mora Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. The series is an integral part of the mission of the Centre to put animals on the intellectual agenda by facilitating academic research and publication. The series is also a natural complement to one of the Centre's other major projects, the *Journal of Animal Ethics*. The Centre is an independent “think tank” for the advancement of progressive thought about animals, and is the first Centre of its kind in the world. It aims to demonstrate rigorous intellectual enquiry and the highest standards of scholarship. It strives to be a world-class centre of academic excellence in its field.

We invite academics to visit the Centre's website [www.oxfordanimalethics.com](http://www.oxfordanimalethics.com) and to contact us with new book proposals for the series.

Andrew Linzey and Priscilla N. Cohn  
General Editors



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## Notes on Contributors

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**Jessica Carey** is a Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies at Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada. She received her doctorate in 2011 from McMaster University, and her dissertation analyzed cultural echoes of factory-farm practices in contemporary biopolitical discourse. Her ongoing research focuses on the biopolitics of human–animal relationships, food politics, and environmental discourse. She has published in various journals and anthologies on topics that include scientist Temple Grandin’s animal-oriented rhetoric, discourses of care in animal cloning, the cultural politics of popular food movements such as “nose-to-tail” eating, and human–dog ecologies in the Canadian novel *Wild Dogs*. Her chapter for this volume is her first foray into her new research on cultural memory and speciesism.

**Jodey Castricano** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, and a research fellow in the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics. Her primary areas of teaching/research are in posthumanist philosophy and critical animal studies with extended work in ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecotheory. She is the editor of *Animal Subjects: An Ethical Reader in a Posthuman World* and the contributing co-editor of the forthcoming *Animal Subjects 2.0* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2016).

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**Robert C. Jones** is currently Associate Professor of Philosophy at California State University. He is also a member of the Advisory Council of the National Museum of Animals and Society, and a speaker with the Northern California Animal Advocacy Coalition. Prof. Jones has published numerous articles and book chapters on animal ethics, animal cognition, food ethics, and research ethics, and has given nearly 40 talks on animal ethics at universities and conferences across the globe. A 2012 Summer Fellow with the Animals & Society Institute, Prof. Jones lives in Chico, a small agriculture community in Northern California, where he spends time arguing about animal rights with local ranchers.

**Melanie Joy** is a Harvard-educated psychologist, professor of psychology and sociology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston; celebrated speaker; and author of the award-winning book *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*, soon to be published in nine languages and a top book pick by television host Ellen DeGeneres. Dr. Joy was the eighth recipient of the Institute of Jainology's Ahimsa Award (past recipients include the Dalai Lama and Nelson Mandela), which she was presented with in the House of Commons in London. She also received the Empty Cages Prize, presented by Milan city councilors in Italy. Dr. Joy's work has been featured on stations and programs including National Public Radio, PBS, the BBC, Radio Canada, Germany's ARD (the world's second-largest public broadcaster), Luxembourg's RTL (Europe's second-largest media production company), ABC Australia, and Good Morning Croatia. Her work has also been highlighted in publications including *The New York Times*, Canada's *Le Soleil* and *The Huffington Post Quebec*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany's largest national subscription daily newspaper), *Spiegel Online*, Luxembourg's *Tageblatt*, Italy's *Di la Repubblica* and *Le Scienze*, Austria's renowned *Der Standard*, Belgium's *De Standaard*, Sweden's *Svenska Dagbladet*, and *Jana*

(Slovenia's leading women's magazine). Dr. Joy has given her critically acclaimed carnism presentation across the USA and in 16 other countries. She is also the author of *Strategic Action for Animals*, and she has written a number of articles on psychology, animal protection, and social justice. Dr. Joy is the founder and president of the Carnism Awareness & Action Network.

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