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# **McVeg\*n: A Critical Analysis of Vegetarianism, Business Ethics and Animals as Food**

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**Abstract:** In this chapter I consider the growth of vegetarianism and veganism as an additional source of profit for the food industry and as an additional source of revenue for charitable funds. Since 2004 the fast-food global corporation McDonald's has been licensed to use the United Kingdom Vegetarian Society Vegetarian Approved trademark on an increasing range of its products. The Vegetarian Approved trademark is purported to be the most recognized vegetarian symbol in the world and McDonald's UK now uses it on 50 menu items including its french fries. By using the case of the extension of the McDonald's fast-food global corporation into vegetarian products, and more recently into vegan products, in this chapter I examine the links and tensions that arise from relationships between charities such as the Vegetarian Society that have an ethical commitment to nonhuman animals and global corporations, such as McDonald's, which have nonhuman animal products as their main source of profit.

## **1. Introduction**

Since 2004 the fast-food global corporation McDonald's has been licensed to use the United Kingdom (UK) Vegetarian Society Vegetarian Approved trademark alongside a range of its foodstuffs. McDonald's now lists around 50 items that are Vegetarian

Approved (McDonald's Corporation 2018a). The Vegetarian Society promotes the trademark as being '...far more popular and widespread than ever, which can only be good news for vegetarians and food manufacturers alike' (Vegetarian Society 2018a). This paper examines, in particular, the 'good news' that this heralds for 'food manufacturers' such as McDonald's and the ethical paradoxes and dilemmas that this articulates for charities such as the Vegetarian Society.

The increasing use of the Vegetarian Approved trademark reflects public growing awareness of and acceptance of dietary vegetarian choices. Vegetarians in particular, though vegans also, are catered for more now and especially so since businesses have found a further means by which to maximise their profits. By using the case of the expansion of the McDonald's fast-food global corporation into vegetarian (and more recently vegan) products, in this chapter I examine the links and tensions that arise from relationships between charities such as the Vegetarian Society that have an ethical commitment to nonhuman animals and global corporations, such as McDonald's, which have nonhuman animal products as their main source of profit. In order to do this I consider the growth of vegetarianism and veganism as an additional source of profit-maximization for the food industry and as an additional source of revenue for charitable funds. I reflect on vegetarianism and veganism as ethical choices and consider the ways in which McDonald's seeks to develop strategies to display its credentials as a socially

responsible and ethical business. To put the issues into context I begin by providing a picture of the global industry in nonhuman animal products for human food consumption.

## **2. The Business of Nonhuman Animals as Food**

Nonhuman animal foods are 'big business'. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reports that '[t]he world food economy is being increasingly driven by the shift of diets and food consumption patterns towards livestock products' (Bruinsma 2003). The increased human preference for nonhuman animal based foods is one of the factors that is driving up the global production of 'meat', eggs and dairy. Australians are reported to consume the most nonhuman animal flesh per capita, with individuals in the United States of America (US) running a close second (Myers 2015). Based on data for 2011, Australians consume nearly 111 kilos of nonhuman animal flesh per capita (Wong et al. 2015, p. 2). In the US, 500,000 nonhuman animals are killed per hour for their flesh alone (Robbins 2012). The global human consumption of eggs has increased significantly since the mid-1960s (Bruinsma 2003) and the demand for 'meat' and dairy is projected to increase so much that in 2009 the FAO estimated that the 'production' will need to double in order to satisfy the expected demand for nonhuman animal proteins in 2050 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations 2009).

The German public policy group Heinrich Böell Foundation and Friends of the Earth predict that 'the booming economies in Asia and elsewhere, will see around 80 percent of the growth in the meat sector by 2022. The biggest growth will be in China and India because of huge demand from their new middle classes' (2014, p. 10).

The growing craving for profit and the increasing demand for nonhuman animal protein has been paralleled by historical changes in farming. A principal change has been the move to a Fordist approach that is designed to raise the affordability, profitably and consumption of nonhuman animal-based products by means of intensified production, while keeping financial costs to a minimum (Franklin 1999 p. 130). Increasing numbers of nonhuman animals are incarcerated in intensive industrial systems 'in which chickens, pigs, turkeys, and other animals are confined in cages, crates, pens, stalls, and warehouse-like grow-out facilities' (Koneswaran and Nierenberg 2008 p. 579). Intensive industrial farming is one of the cruellest manifestations of the commodification of nonhuman animals (Peggs 2012). Maximising profits means that there is little interest in the welfare of nonhuman animals who are captive in the industry (Stibbe 2001) or in the humans who labour in the industry (Schlosser 2001). Intensive industrial farming can be extremely detrimental to the health of farm workers who may develop, as a result of their work, respiratory diseases and other illnesses, though they might not perceive their work to be hazardous (Ramos et.al. 2016). The hazards to the nonhuman animals are extreme. Tom Regan explains that 'The vast majority of these animals,

literally billions of them, suffer every waking minute they are alive. Physically, they are sick, plagued by chronic, debilitating diseases. Psychologically, they are ill, weighed down by the cumulative effects of disorientation and depression' (2004, pp. 89-90). Their deaths often do not conform to even regulatory 'animal welfare' standards. For example, 'humanely' stunned chickens are often fully conscious when they are killed (Striffler 2005 p. 17). Bans and restrictions have been placed on some intensive farming practices that have been reported in the news media. For example, the incarceration of calves in veal crates in which they can barely move made headline news in the UK (e.g. see Butler 1995). These crates were banned in the UK in 1990, in the European Union (EU) in 2007, and have been banned in some US states (Compassion in World Farming 2008). Despite the bans on specific practices in particular countries, intensive industrial farming is increasing. An investigation by The Guardian and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism revealed that between 2011 and 2017 there was a 26 percent rise in intensive farming in the UK alone, which included nearly 800 'US-style mega farms' (Wasley et.al. 2017). Intensive farms, the report explains, are those that 'have warehouses with more than 40,000 birds, 2,000 pigs or 750 breeding sows', while mega farms are 'defined in the US as facilities housing 125,000 broiler chickens, 82,000 laying hens, 2,500 pigs, 700 dairy or 1,000 beef cattle' (Wasley et.al. 2017). According to the report, Herefordshire has more than 16 million intensively-farmed nonhuman animals 'which means the county has 88 times more factory-farmed animals than it does humans' (Wasley et.al. 2017). This gargantuan number gives insights into the scale of

the suffering - and huge profits are made from nonhuman animal-based foods. Using the UK as an example, in 2014 milk alone accounted for 17.8% of total agricultural production and was worth £4.6 billion at market prices (Bate 2016, p. 3). In the same year the financial value of flesh-based foods was reported to be £7.3 billion, incorporating 'beef and veal' (£2.6 billion), 'poultry' (£2.3 billion), 'pork' (£1.3 billion) and 'mutton and lamb' (£1.1 billion) (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2016 p. 1). A proportion of the sales is to the McDonald's corporation. McDonald's UK reports that 'All burgers sold in the UK are made from 100% British and Irish beef' and in 2012 'we used over 39,000 tonnes of boneless forequarter and flank in the UK' (McDonald's Corporation 2013).

### **3. Nonhuman Animals and the Business of McDonald's**

The McDonald's corporation has cultivated, exploited and developed the growing global demand for nonhuman animal-based foods. McDonald's is the world's largest user of flesh from cows and is the second largest user of flesh from chickens (Striffler 2005 p. 17). Americans alone consume one billion pounds of 'beef' annually from McDonald's outlets, which is five and a half million cows a year (Feridum 2010). McDonald's introduced the chicken-based McNugget in 1983 and it is reported to have used five million pounds of chicken each week for the first twelve weeks of its introduction

(Striffler 2005, p. 17). The corporation uses about 100 pounds of fish every minute (Agarwal 2017). The profits made by McDonald's are immense. Although reporting a fall in revenue of 10 percent in the three months to September 2017, still the corporation's revenue amounted to US\$5.75 billion (British Broadcasting Corporation 2017). Despite the fall, global sales rose by six percent (British Broadcasting Corporation 2017).

The McDonald's corporation is vast. Second only to the fast food chain Subway, which has around 45,000 outlets in 112 countries (Subway Group 2018), McDonald's has more than 36,000 outlets in over 100 countries, its most recent in Kazakhstan in 2016 (McDonald's Corporation 2018b). The corporation has plans for further development, which includes opening a further 1,000 outlets (McDonald's Corporation 2018c). In the UK alone McDonald's has 1,200 outlets that serve three million customers daily (McDonald's Corporation 2017). Why is it so popular? Barry Smart observes that 'The globalization of capitalism...brings everyone within the ambit of the economic empires or powerful enterprises eager to encourage us to develop a taste for their products, to acquire a need for their services, and to accommodate to their ways of doing things' (1999 p. 1), and it seems that a taste for McDonald's has been developed by the over 68 million customers across the world who eat McDonald's products each day (Lubin and Badkar 2012). On its opening day the first McDonald's outlet in Vietnam served 22,500 customers (Barnett 2016). Globally, McDonald's is reported to sell more than 75



hamburgers per second (Lubin and Badkar 2012) and the Big Mac, the second most popular item on its menu, is consumed 900 million times a year (Harris 2009). However, these extraordinary global sales figures do not seem to be underpinned by high consumer satisfaction. In the UK McDonald's does not feature in the top 50 Institute of Customer Service UK (ICS) Customer Satisfaction Index for July 2017 (Institute of Customer Service 2017a, pp. 18-19), though the ICS reports that the corporation has 'improved on its 2016 score by 2.3 points, receiving an overall score of 79.1 points' (Institute of Customer Service 2017b). The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) 'measures the satisfaction of U.S. household consumers with the quality of products and services offered by both foreign and domestic firms with significant share in U.S. markets' (American Customer Satisfaction Index 2018a) and ASCI records McDonald's as being at the bottom of its list, with a score of just 69 points out of 100 (American Customer Satisfaction Index 2018b). The explanation seems to lie in customer expectations of fast food outlets. A 2013 Consumer Edge survey shows that 'great-tasting food is only the 8th most important factor in driving [customer] loyalty' to fast food chains (Huffington Post 2013). David Decker, the president of Consumer Edge, explains that, '[f]or quick-service restaurant patrons the most important factors that drive loyalty to a brand are good value and convenience, with low prices and quick-service being very important as well' (Huffington Post 2013). He concludes that the McDonald's corporation 'has a clear image lead on all of these factors... [The corporation's] high repeat-purchase intention scores despite their lower satisfaction

scores illustrates the strength of their brand on the attributes that matter most to quick-service customers.’ (Huffington Post 2013). These factors speak to the principles of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control which, George Ritzer (1993) maintains, are at the heart of the McDonald’s empire. Customers get their food products fast, the food product and service are standardized and predictable, food items are calculated so that customers can quantify them in relation to cost, and the food products are controlled by standardized processes and uniform employees. Ritzer amalgamates these largely Fordist principles of production into a set of rationalising processes that he calls ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 1993), which is ‘coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society and an increasing number of other societies throughout the world’ (Ritzer and Malone 2000, p. 99). But in addition to the convenience, low-cost, and uniform predictability of fast food that is wanted by so many, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important to consumers of fast food (Gheribi 2017, p. 67).

McDonald’s is keen to be recognised as a company that takes CSR seriously. CSR centres on matching company objectives, policies and decisions with societal values and objectives (Bowen 1953). The food sector is a major source of concern for many consumers because it depends on a range of resources, has a major impact on the environment, affects human and nonhuman animals, and because ‘people have strong views on what they eat’ (Gheribi 2017, p. 68). Lack of attention to CSR can lead to

consumer boycotts, can damage brand reputations, and can be competitively detrimental. Thus 'CSR may no longer be a strategic differentiator, but a requirement in the eyes of the stakeholder' (Gheribi 2017, p. 67). Consumers have become increasingly concerned about nonhuman animal welfare and this is now a central aspect of CSR (McEachern et. al. 2007). Although McDonald's does not 'own farms or rear animals directly' (McDonald's Corporation 2017-18a), the corporation has been inculpated in a range of scandals, including those that involved cruelty to nonhuman animals. High profile campaigns include what has become known as the McLibel trial and the McCruelty campaign run by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). In 1990 McDonald's sued five activists in the UK over their alleged distribution of a leaflet that charged the corporation with cruelty to nonhuman animals, with destruction of the environment, with the exploitation of employees and with selling unhealthy food (Ritzer and Malone 2000). The website campaign against McDonald's that followed reported an average of 1.75 million 'hits' a month. (Ritzer and Malone 2000, p. 113). The more recent PETA McCruelty campaign charged McDonald's with using cruel methods for killing chickens (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals 2014). In response to an online question about video footage of cruelty to chickens McDonald's UK acknowledged that the videos related to the 'US chicken supply', stating that 'our colleagues in the States have taken swift action with their suppliers to tackle this wholly unacceptable situation' (McDonald's Corporation 2015). The corporation declares that it is committed to the welfare of nonhuman animals.

'The Five Freedoms and the provision of positive welfare for those animals in our supply chain are the fundamental responsibilities of those that provide raw materials to the McDonald's System. We maintain objective measurement systems at all our approved slaughter facilities to safeguard positive welfare and are committed to working further back into the supply chain to advance animal welfare at the farm (McDonald's Corporation 2017- 18b).

Among its specific assurances the corporation details its commitment to 'beef production' that protects the livelihoods of farmers, the welfare of nonhuman animals and the security of the environment (McDonald's Corporation 2017-18a) and to using only free range eggs (McDonald's Corporation 2014). Among its awards the corporation lists some from Compassion in World Farming (CiWF) (e.g. in 2017 for welfare standards in organic milk supply and in 2016 the CiWF Best Marketing Award for McDonalds UK) and the Humane Society of the US (in 2016 the Henry Spira Corporate Progress Award) (McDonald's Corporation 2017- 18b). Because the welfare standards set by McDonald's aim to demonstrate the corporation's commitment to alleviating nonhuman animal suffering they address the concerns of customers who consume nonhuman animal products but who are disturbed by the treatment of nonhuman animals who are used for food (Cornish et.al. 2016). Publicising commitments to such standards makes

business sense because good reputation and profits depend on consumer confidence and consumer concern about nonhuman animal welfare is becoming more widespread (Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare 2017). For example, in the UK the Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare found that 78 percent of respondents listed customer and client interest as the main influence on their approach to the welfare of nonhuman animals because 'Farm animal welfare is increasingly seen by companies as a strategic opportunity, with respondents pointing to its potential as a tool for brand differentiation and reputation enhancement' (Business Benchmark on Farm Animal Welfare 2017 p. 3). The UK Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is one among a number of charities that offers recognition to farms that meet their organisational nonhuman animal welfare standards (e.g. see Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2017a). The charity established its own Freedom Food trademark in 1994 (McEachern et.al. 2007). This is now the RSPCA Assured Mark, which, the RSPCA declares, 'makes it easy for your customers to recognise products from animals that had a better life' (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2017b). McDonald's UK is licensed to display the RSPCA Assured Mark across its UK menu because, the corporation states, it now uses only 'RSPCA assured pork', where pigs live on farms that conform to the 'RSPCA's welfare standards' (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals 2017c). But the RSPCA Assured Mark articulates the 'fundamental paradox' of 'caring about the welfare of animals on the one hand and eating them on the other' (McEachern et. al. 2007, p. 169). What is

fundamental to the 'animal welfare' approach is the idea that there can be a "humane use" of animals by humans' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, p. 3). Many 'meat' eaters feel that the welfare of nonhuman animals matters (De Backer and Hudders 2015, p. 69) but only secondarily, because it is subordinated to 'the interests of human beings' (Donaldson and Kymlicka 2011, p.3) who want to eat 'meat'. The 'animal welfare' approach does not eschew the killing and eating of nonhuman animal flesh if the lives and deaths of the nonhuman animals concerned conform to specified welfare standards. Of course, eating nonhuman animal flesh is not conducive with vegetarianism however 'welfare-assured' it might be.

#### **4. McDonald's, Vegetarianism and Veganism: Ethical Paradoxes**

Ethical veganism eschews the human use of and consumption of nonhuman animals and rejects the idea that there can be a 'humane' use of nonhuman animals. Ethical vegetarianism takes an 'animal welfare' approach to the human consumption of eggs and dairy but not to the eating of flesh: vegetarians reject the consumption of flesh and flesh by-products. 'Quasi-vegetarian' versions that do not renounce the consumption of flesh (e.g. pescovegetarians who eat fish and pollo-vegetarians who eat chickens) quite simply are not vegetarian (Preece 2009). The Vegetarian Society description of 'vegetarian' confirms its commitment to the eschewing of the consumption of

nonhuman animal flesh and its derivatives. A vegetarian, the Vegetarian Society states, is 'Someone who lives on a diet of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits with, or without, the use of dairy products and eggs. A vegetarian does not eat any meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish or by-products of slaughter.' (Vegetarian Society 2018b).

More and more individuals are adopting vegetarian and vegan diets (Hodson & Earle 2018, p. 75). According to Vegetarians New Zealand (2013) India, with around 500 million of the total population being vegetarian, has more vegetarians than the rest of the world combined. But the World Food Survey reveals a shift towards less strict vegetarianism in India with a minority (42 percent) of households reporting that they are strictly vegetarian (Scribd Inc 2014). Drawing in veganism as well, recent statistics show that the UK stands behind the US in terms of the proportion of adults and children who say they are vegetarian or vegan (Bates et. al. 2013). In the US a 2012 Gallup Poll survey found that five percent of the population identify as vegetarian and a further two percent as vegan (Newport 2012). A recent survey by the UK Vegan Society indicates that around 1.68 million people aged 15 and over (3.25 percent) is either vegetarian or vegan and just over 32 percent of these (542,000) follow a vegan diet (Vegan Society 2016). But global figures are much harder to find. No reliable global figures for veganism exist. For vegetarianism, in 2010 Elmeary Leahy and colleagues calculated that nearly 22 percent of the world's population is vegetarian (2010, p. 6). However, they

note that only a minority (around 75 million) is vegetarian by choice and the majority (about 1,450 million) who are vegetarian 'of necessity...will start to eat meat as soon as they can afford it' (Leahy et.al. 2010, p. 2). On average, human populations in 'developing countries' consume one-third of the flesh and one-quarter of the milk products that are consumed by populations in the 'developed countries' in the richer northern hemisphere (Delgado et.al. 2003, p. 3907). This substantial difference is a reflection of global economic inequalities and associated disparities in wealth (Franklin 1999). However, the association between a vegetarian diet and poverty is complex because, within wealthier nations, vegetarianism tends to be more common among better educated and higher income groups (Franklin 1999). So it is likely that the number of vegetarians will grow gradually with increasing affluence and education (Leahy et.al. 2010).

Being the oldest vegetarian organisation in the world, the UK Vegetarian Society is a key organisation in global vegetarianism and its Vegetarian Approved trademark is said to be the most recognized vegetarian trademark globally (Brook 2004). This trademark is an important source of revenue for the Vegetarian Society. For the financial year 2016/17 the society reports that over a third (£394,773) of its total income (of £1,038,909) came from their Vegetarian Approved trademark sales (Vegetarian Society 2017a, p. 9). This represented an increase of over £12,000 on the revenue from the trademark for the previous financial year (Vegetarian Society 2017b, p. 30). In addition



to the revenue from their trademark their income comes from sources such as membership subscriptions, legacies, cookery schools, donations and publications. But this income was not enough to cover the society's expenditure of £1,298,689 in 2016/17. The Vegetarian Society declares, 'we are currently having to spend our reserves on the work we need to do' (Vegetarian Society 2017a, p. 9). The society recognises that this is unsustainable in the long term 'so it's important to increase our income now' (Vegetarian Society 2017a, p. 9). Appreciating the increasing interest in veganism, in March 2017 the Vegetarian Society launched its own Approved Vegan Trademark (Vegetarian Society 2017b p. 14). In the words of the Vegetarian Society, the presence on a product of the Vegetarian Approved trademark is an important marker for vegetarians who '...can be confident that the product or food has undergone stringent checks to meet our vegetarian criteria' (Vegetarian Society 2014). The trademark is displayed on thousands of products that are available in the UK and overseas, including food, drinks, cosmetics and household products, and it is approved for use in a range of establishments such as restaurants and bars (Vegetarian Society 2018a). The trademark is licenced to products that are '[f]ree from any ingredient resulting from slaughter'; where '[o]nly free-range eggs are used; where there is no possibility of 'cross-contamination during production'; that are 'GMO-free'; and where '[n]o animal testing is carried out or commissioned' (Vegetarian Society 2018c). These criteria point to the ethical basis of the Vegetarian Approved trademark and they reflect the three altruistic motivations for becoming vegetarian reported by Thomas Dietz and

colleagues (1995). In their study of a sample of vegetarians Dietz et. al. (1995) found that altruistic concerns about nonhuman animal cruelty, world hunger, and the environment were the most often cited motivations. In addition they found that some vegetarians were motivated primarily for reasons of personal health (Dietz et. al. 1995). In many instances, of course, a combination of motivations is evident because an appreciation of the physical health benefits of being vegetarian is likely to accompany declared ethical concerns about nonhuman animal well-being and/or the environment (Clery and Bailey 2010).

Ethical branding and health branding differ and overlap. The moral concerns that consumers have towards nonhuman animals influence their choice of ethical brands (McEachern et. al. 2007) and health branding has raised the profile of the nutritional attributes of food products (Schröder and McEachern 2005, p. 213). Because nonhuman animal welfare is an important indicator of CSR (Anselmsson and Johansson 2007), ethical branding as it relates to nonhuman animals is sought increasingly. Because human health is an important aspect of consumer choice, companies covet trademarks and logos that approve the healthiness of their foods (Schröder and McEachern 2005, p. 213). Increased interest in vegetarianism and veganism and increased consumer demand for healthy dietary options has fuelled the expansion of a meat-free sector (Datamonitor PLC 2009, p. 1). In the UK alone the meat-free sector was valued at £607 million in 2012 (Mintel 2012) and in 2013 Mintel recorded a 17

percent increase in the volume of meat-free sales on those of 2008 (Mintel, 2013). In the UK consumers regard convenience and wholesomeness 'as polar opposites' and the increased interest in health has induced changes in many fast food suppliers (Schröder and McEachern 2005, p. 212). Healthier options, such as salads and fruit, are now available in fast food outlets 'alongside traditional burger and chicken meals' (Schröder and McEachern 2005, p. 213). In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century McDonald's set out to 'green' its reputation (Jones et.al. 2005, p. 133), and the McDonald's profit boost (discussed above) is reported to be associated with changes to its menu and the addition of healthier options (British Broadcasting Corporation 2017).

Alongside its sales of hamburgers and chicken products a traditional menu item at McDonald's is french fries. These fries are the most popular item on its menu, with approximately 9 million pounds in weight being sold each day (Harris 2009). Though not endorsed as being healthy, the fries are promoted in the UK as being vegetarian and the product gained the Vegetarian Approved trademark in 2004 (Brook 2004). This approval was secured in the context of the 2001 scandal when McDonald's US was accused of misleading its customers by declaring that vegetable oil was used for cooking its french fries while failing to explain that the fries are flavoured with beef tallow (for further discussion Peggs 2018 ). In 2002 it was reported that McDonald's planned 'to issue an apology and pay \$10 million to vegetarian and religious groups for using beef flavoring in its French fries' (Reuters 2002). McDonald's still uses 'beef' flavouring in its

french fries in the US (McDonald's Corporation 2017-18c) and none of the McDonald's menu items sold in the US is 'certified vegetarian', though the corporation makes clear that it does offer items 'without meat' (McDonald's Corporation 2017-18d). In the UK McDonald's has chosen a different path. Following the Vegetarian Society trademark approval of its french fries, McDonald's UK now features around 50 items that are Vegetarian Society Approved (McDonald's Corporation 2018a). These include vegetable patties, french fries, hash browns, dips, sugar donuts, tea, coffee, milk shakes and soft drinks (McDonald's Corporation 2018a). But in response to the question about why there are not more vegetarian options McDonald's UK replied that 'We appreciate your point and are always looking at ways to refresh our menu. However, as a burger restaurant, our vegetarian options, including the Vegetable Deluxe and Spicy Vegetable Deluxe are very low-selling items for us' (McDonald's Corporation 2017-18d). In other parts of the world McDonald's piloted a new vegan burger, the McVegan, in Finland in October 2017 (Hosie 2017a) and in Sweden in December 2017 (Hosie 2017b). It was reported that, although many vegan customers welcomed the innovation others did not 'explaining that they have fundamental issues with McDonald's as a company' (Hosie 2017b).

## **5. McVeg\*nism as Trademark**

Given the on-going consumer interest in vegetarianism and veganism it is not surprising that McDonald's seeks to access these markets. As with all capitalist industry, McDonald's main purpose is to secure profits that are large enough to satisfy its shareholders. Business strives to develop strategies that will increase sales and thus profits by pursuing new markets, cultivating innovations and persuading consumers to buy their goods (Smart 2010). Gaining Vegetarian Society approval enhances the status of, and thus potential revenue from, the products that the corporation markets as being vegetarian. What is surprising is that the Vegetarian Society, a charity that seeks to promote vegetarianism, would allow its Vegetarian Approved trademark to be used by a global corporation that not only does not promote vegetarianism but also, and more significantly, is responsible for the industrial slaughter of billions of nonhuman animals who are consumed in McDonald's outlets. Of course, the Vegetarian Approved trademark, like all trademarks, is merely 'the unique symbol that differentiates the offer of a seller from the others' (Nistorescu et. al. 2013, p. 29). It is a 'property right' (Nistorescu et. al. 2013, p. 29). But the Vegetarian Approved trademark is associated with the more comprehensive brand that is the 'Vegetarian Society', and a brand 'represents all the physical and emotional connections that are created between a product and its consumers' (Nistorescu et.al. 2013, p. 29). Thus, a brand offers both a visible sign and a mental representation in the mind of the consumer (Riezebos and van der Grinten 2011, p. 8). Brands, such as the Vegetarian Society, 'are the emotional relation between the buyer and the product...on the values expressed by the brand

itself' (Nistorescu et.al. 2013, p. 29). Ethical vegetarianism is fundamental to the history of the vegetarian movement. The Vegetarian Society makes clear that for its nineteenth century originators '[t]hrough health was undoubtedly part of their reasoning, the basis of their vegetarianism was asceticism - living as simple and morally accountable a life as possible' (Vegetarian Society 2011). Brands that are associated with ethical consumption help to raise consumer awareness and assist consumers in making ethical choices about which products and services to buy (McEachern et. al. 2007, p. 169). The Vegetarian Society seeks to promote vegetarianism, and ethical vegetarianism is embedded in its Vegetarian Approved trademark. Paradoxically, the licensing of the trademark for use by McDonald's calls into question the ethical stance of the charity. It seems that the licensing of the trademark essentially offers a visible sign of the marginalisation of 'ethical vegetarianism' and the centralisation of its replacement, 'the doing of the consumer' (Tester 1999). Selling vegetarian, and more recently vegan, products is part of the profit-maximising corporate strategy of the immensely profitable McDonald's corporation. In contrast, by means of education the Vegetarian Society seeks to promote vegetarianism with limited funds (Vegetarian Society 2017a, p. 9). In terms of revenue, the Vegetarian Approved trademark is a central source of revenue and it is likely that the Vegan Approved trademark will afford additional rewards. But funds are not all, as was noted by Liz Warner the CEO of charity Comic Relief in a very different context (McVeigh 2018). Following the charity's recent decision to abandon its celebrity-based 'white saviour stereotypes', Warner is reported to have declared that

'We can't be irresponsible in not raising money for the work we do...we have to be about total impact rather than always chasing totals' (McVeigh 2018). Through its trademark scheme the Vegetarian Society seems to have strayed into promoting vegetarianism as merely a dietary inclination and has thereby lost the ethical commitment along the way. The total picture perhaps appears to be one of McVeg\*nism where both ethical vegetarianism and potentially ethical veganism have vanished in, to use Keith Tester's words, 'the moral malaise of McDonaldization' (1999, p. 212). In his discussion, Tester recalls Peter Singer's argument that vegetarians bring together 'conduct and ethics' because 'vegetarianism is a form of boycott' (Singer 1976, p. 175) through which the individual becomes the 'self-aware author of her or his own moral integrity and ethical being' (Tester 1999, p. 213). When we take ethics seriously, note Campbell Jones and colleagues, we reflect on how things ought to be (2005, p. 134). Ethical vegetarians reject how things are in the eating of 'meat' for how they ought to be in a world that eschews the eating of nonhuman animal flesh. The licencing of the Vegetarian Society Vegetarian Approved trademark for use by McDonald's affords financial rewards for the corporation and for the charity but the ethical provenance of vegetarianism and of the charity are lost in the process.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have reflected on how the growth of vegetarianism and veganism has provided an additional source of profit for the food industry and an additional source of revenue for the funds of some charities. The ethical paradoxes and dilemmas that this articulates for charities has been at the forefront of my thinking. This in a context in which CSR has become increasingly important to consumers and in which concerns about the treatment of nonhuman animals is becoming more widespread, even to consumers who eat 'meat'. The Vegetarian Society has an ethical commitment to nonhuman animals. Their Vegetarian Approved trademark is declared to be the most recognized vegetarian trademark in the world. There are clear tensions that arise from allowing this trademark to be used by global corporations, such as McDonald's, which have cultivated, exploited and developed the growing global demand for nonhuman animal-based foods. Gaining Vegetarian Society approval enhances the status of, and thus potential revenue from, the products that the corporation markets as being vegetarian and thus makes business sense. The licencing of the Vegetarian Society Vegetarian Approved trademark for use by McDonald's offers financial rewards for the charity as well as for the corporation but contra McDonald's, the penalties for the Vegetarian Society are potentially great. The trademark implies that a vegetarian ethic attends the products on which it is displayed. However, an ethics of how things ought to be would involve rejecting the use of ethics as a 'lubricant for business' (and corporations like McDonald's) and, rather, would 'attempt to put a spanner in the works' (Jones et. al. 2005, p. 134). The ethical stance that was at the centre of the



Vegetarian Approved trademark seems to have been lost and this calls into question a central tenet of the position of the Vegetarian Society, which perhaps we can precis as making things as they ought to be for nonhuman animals at least in terms of eschewing the eating of animal flesh. In the McDonald's context vegetarianism as a form of consumer boycott has become merely an option on a menu. The Vegetarian Approved trademark merely differentiates the trademarked products from other McDonald's food products losing the more comprehensive brand 'Vegetarian Society' and all the connections it represents for consumers who seek to boycott the exploitation of nonhuman animals

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