

Between acceptance and veto: the meat perceptual dimensions

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Abstract

This paper designates and describes the perceptual dimensions (practical perceptual dimension and cultural perceptual dimension) that affects the acceptance of meat consumption and animal products, as well the (production) perceptual dimension that conditions hegemonic eating habits which may trigger the veto for the products mentioned above. I argue that the focus or the development of certain perceptions generated by consumers defines value systems, and beliefs, which influences the eating behaviors related to meat and animal products.

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Introduction

Animals play many roles in human society, including as companions, entertainers, used for food and merchandise purposes, etc. Eating habits, e.g., eating cows and creating emotional bonds with cats, are “important sources of meaning embedded within culture” (Berndsen *et al.*, 2005). The reproductive behaviors concerning meat and animal products are not dis-fellow shipped of belief systems and specific perceptual dimensions. This work focuses on perceptual dimensions concerning meat as well as on the discourses and ideologies that build related eating habits. In other words, the aim of this paper is to define and characterize perceptual dimensions that condition behaviors: both laudatory for the consumption of meat and animal products; or others that can potentially lead to vetoing the products mentioned above.

The first section of this article is focused on the perceptual dimensions of meat. We developed an empirical approach to carnist¹, vegetarian and vegan populations. This empirical base supports the hypothesis that there are three perceptual dimensions that influence consumer behaviors concerning meat and animal products: one that includes the time of purchase, preparation and consumption – a *practical perceptual dimension*; a second dimension that includes a whole mishmash of cultural assumptions about meat and animal products, which are coordinated and shared by the discourses, representations and language - a *cultural perceptual dimension*; and a third dimension that brings to light the negative impacts on exploited animals; on human health; on the environment and the unsustainable management of natural resources - the *production perceptual dimension*, usually invisible to consumer populations.

The second section of this paper discusses the importance of the invisibility of the *production perceptual dimension* and how the focus on this perception reinforces beliefs and practices that are antagonistic to the *cultural perceptual dimension* - which may lead to the adoption of vegetarian and/or vegan diets. This section also discusses the language and representations used by groups, as well the ideological shocks that result from different ethical and/or culturally based perceptions.

¹ Because we don't depend on the consumption of animals to ensure our survival, it will be incorrect to apply the term "carnivorism" to describe our practices regarding animals used for food. The term "omnivivorism" also refers to the biological condition of consuming products of meat and plant origin, but is a term disconnected from the philosophical, moral and cultural choice concerning our food. Because food in humans consists of culturally-based belief systems, which determine eating some species of animals, the term "carnism" will be used throughout this article (Joy, 2010).

Although this paper assumes a strong empirical component, references were used that would help address the meat perceptual dimensions. In order to focus on this subject we had to consider the importance of converting food into cultural products through its preparation (Arppe, *et al.*: 2011; Stibbel: 2001); and to consider the eating habits as constituents and mobilizers of certain groups (Taylor: 2010). The centrality of meat, while one of the main symbols of contemporary food culture (Fiddes: 2004), is contained in ideological assumptions that are expressed in language speeches (Stibbel: 2001) as well as representations that can be subject to deconstruction.

The focus on the *production perceptual dimension* predicted the use of expert (uncontroversial) sources that addressed the various impacts of the livestock industry. To focus on the impacts on non-human animals, we consulted sources that mention the Portuguese case: the *Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal* (Portuguese farmers Confederation) concerning “animal welfare at slaughter” (S/D), as well the *Revista Portuguesa de Ciências Veterinárias* (Portuguese Journal of Veterinary Sciences). Both sources detail forms of exploitation of non-human animals.

For more information on the impacts of animal based products on human health, e.g., red meat as a risk factor for developing lung and colorectal cancer, see *World Cancer Research*; on the development of cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, see *Nutrition Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases*; on the impacts of cow milk and derivatives as risk factors for cancers, diabetes and obesity, see *The Nutrition Source*, published by the Harvard School of Public Health, and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

Regarding the non-sustainability of natural resources due to the production of meat, data is presented about the use of vegetables for animals raised for consumption: the United States case (Hawthorne 2008 and Dasa, 2012), and the Ethiopian case (Hawthorne, 2008).

The FAO Report (United Nations) is used to address the environmental impacts of the livestock industry (greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation, deforestation). In addition, the example of a Portuguese case, in the region of Leiria (Crespo, 2011) is used to illustrate the case of wastewater resulting from exploited animals for slaughter.

The *production perceptual dimension* (second section of the article) focuses on the importance of its invisibility, which is the primary defense of the livestock industry system that enables to support its cultural representation mechanisms (Joy, 2010) as well dissociations (Bastian, *et al.*: 2011) from the real processes. In addition, we felt it necessary to address the concept of “*absent reference*” (Adams 1991) concerning meat. The representations of reference, the dissociations, and the “*absent references*” are crucial for understanding the different value systems: for carnists, for vegetarians and for ethically motivated vegans (see Taylor, 2010). Because the previously mentioned groups aggregate and share cultural ideologies, and can also be ethically motivated, it can result in ideological clashes (Regan, Tom in Singer, 1985) derived from different perceptions (Fiddes, 2004). The aim of approaching belief systems that guide tastes (Joy, 2010) and ideological positions towards meat and animal products is to obtain notions about how the perceptual schemes are shaped.

The perceptual dimensions of meat

Food consumption in modern society has become the subject of strong emotional and moral investment, and is one of the main areas where nature and culture converge (see Arppe *et al.*, 2011: 276). Although food is vital, consumers don't choose it randomly, at random times, or based on its preparation in random forms. The selection of food and its preparation (cooking) assumes its transformation into cultural products (*idem*: 277). Moreover, the preparation and also the origin of food determine food choices and expresses membership in a social group in a given culture; as well the definition of its own members as insiders or outsiders (see Taylor, 2010: 74). Meat appears in different contexts, cultures, and periods of history as the supreme “food”, as the core around which a meal is arranged. “Red meat”, in particular, appears at the top of the hierarchy associated with virility and masculine strength², and with power and prestige, followed by chicken, fish³, after eggs and cheese; vegetables have practically no status, appearing only as a supplement (see Fiddes, 2004: 14). Literally, and also figuratively, meat is ubiquitous, evocative, a natural symbol of Western culture; not only is it one of the many food ingredients available, but also the only food that holds a meal together, which is not complete without its presence (see Heinz: Ronald, 1998: 92)⁴. The range of meat analogs, i.e., the “*substitutes*”, testify its centrality in a meal. A “*meatless meal*” presupposes a gap in the usual food system that needs to be filled with something that mimics the shape and/or its nutritional content (see Fiddes, 2004: 18). These terms reveal the basic assumption that cooking with meat is the norm, and that meatless dishes are likely to be “*poor*” in taste and in nutrition. The consumers' perception about meat is a critical issue for the livestock industry, because it entails

² The association of meat with masculinity, virility, athletics, etc., derives from the patriarchal ideology, the same values of masculinity above femininity. About the intersectionality of this issue, see Adams, Carol J.; (2003) “*The Pornography of Meat*” and Adams, Carol J. (2010) “*The Sexual Politics of Meat: a Feminist Vegetarian Critical Theory*”

³ Some animals of the shellfish category and some fish are more expensive than “*red meat*” and have a better standing. However, the referred hierarchy concerns the association of meat with masculinity and with wholesome food, as being nutritionally most important in a meal.

⁴ The term “*meatless meal*” used here is an indicator of a symbolic constitution of meals, which is based on the assumption that meals typically contain meat (See Heinz: Ronald, 1998: 92).

direct impacts on its profitability. For the consumer population, to buy and to eat meat in good will means that the perceptions must be positive.

Perception is defined by (a) the act of obtaining information by the sensory system (such as sight, taste, and smell), but it is also formed by (b) learning and socialization practices that take place from the time when our eating habits are shaped (see Troy, et al. (2010): 216). It is argued in this paper that the perception that consumers have about meat is founded on three dimensions: 1) a *practical perceptual dimension*, consisting of purchase, preparation and intake; 2) a *cultural perceptual dimension* (productive and reproductive), related to the exploitation of non-human animals (e.g., through traditions, media advertising, children's books, language, etc.), and 3) the *production perceptual dimension*, which is invisible, and refers to: 3.1) production, management, slaughter and processing of non-human animals (*Idem*); and its associated impacts: 3.2) human health 3.3) management of natural resources and 3.4) environmental impacts.

1. The palate, of course, plays a major role in the *practical perceptual dimension*. Through culinary and cultural practices, the palate and the steps that precede consumption are shaped by the social environment. The meat purchasing in a commercial establishment results from the culmination of a long process in which all, with the exception of the final product, is removed from the consumers' sight. The price one pays for meat includes tasks which most consumers would never choose to have: the processing and death of non-human animals. A pack of hermetically sealed meat is effective in its dissociation of rest of the pieces that once belonged to a non-human animal (see Fiddes, 2004: 97): there is no associated element in the meat pack to a non-human animal which once breathed, walked and suffered (see Adams, 2003: 89). Handling raw meat in traditional butchers, where the smell of blood and death are evident, it is a deterrent for many consumers. At the time of purchasing, for example, a package of "*baby veal meat*", consumers first go to the point of sale. The alternative to traditional butchers, where the visual look and smell of dead non-human animals is more intense, are the large areas where hygiene and the formal aspect of the showcases mitigate odors, and where the non-human animals appear more fragmented, thus further deprived of their individuality (see Fiddes, 2004: 91). The color of meat, its fat, the dripping blood (or lack thereof), the packaging and basic information (such as origin) are also taken into account. Then at the time of consumption, the preparation of meat is the requisite for making it edible, with a pleasant odor, softer to the teeth in order to assess its smoothness, flavor and juiciness (see Stibbel, 2001: 149). The preparation, the sauces, the seasoning not only thicken the taste but also disguise the original nature of the animal remains, providing to its real consumption the metaphorical consumption of "meat", instead of the dead animal (see Adams, 2010: 76). But the culinary practices are not only sources of pleasure and fun: they are also important sources of meaning embedded within the culture. The *practical perceptual dimension* is, therefore, closely linked to the *cultural perceptual dimension*.

2. The *cultural perceptual dimension*⁵, concerning the explored sentient animals⁶, plays a key role in consumers' adherence to dietary practices. *Cultural perceptual dimension* is objectifying because it defines non-human animals not for their individuality, but euphemistically for their utility (e.g., "*Animals for slaughter*", "*dairy cows*", "*lab rats*", "*circus elephants*", etc.). Non-human animals are not represented as beings endowed with sensitivity, will and emotions, but as products, as means to our ends (see Joy, 2005: 112).

Although their processing in the livestock industry is coercive and exploratory, there is a whole amalgam of ideological premises, coordinated and shared, that are inherent in speech and language (see Stibbel, 2001: 146) that perpetuate (the apparently neutral) speciesist domination. The carnist ideology is an extension of the highly competitive livestock industry sector which, by condition, is exploratory of non-human animals. In this context, livestock industry enjoys an exclusively mythological status in current thinking, which decisively contributes to a more effective incorporation of the carnist culture values by consumers (see Fiddes, 2004: 173). As an aesthetic and ideological tool for the livestock industry, advertising substantially affects the audiences with its representation formulas. The anthropomorphized non-human animals arise in grazing idyllic images, or even in humanized contexts, happy to work and to serve the oppressor group and explorer – the human species. In order for consumers to gladly adhere to meat and animal products, the livestock industry uses anthropocentric frameworks where the othering, objectification, and fantasy emerge as the most used representation formulas. In other words, non-human animals exploited for food are enclosed in defective representations of the true offset.

It is not only the representations but also the language generated around non-human animals that aim to legitimize and to extend domination as benign, natural and inevitable (see Stibbel, 2001: 148). Because non-human animals are excluded from the language designations⁷ they themselves cannot be partakers of their identity construction. In terms of semantics, syntax and morphology, there are differences in how non-human

⁵ For e.g., advertising, television programming, children's books, language, traditions, etc.

⁶ Like the human species, non-human animals are sentient, i.e., they have the ability to feel emotions and feelings (pain, pleasure, hunger, thirst, heat, cold, etc.), are able to interpret information, understand its context, to establish relationships and bonds with their peers.

⁷ Examples of Portuguese dishes where the preparation and language are generated around the "meat": "*Arroz de Pato*"; "*Arroz de Frango*"; "*Bife à Portuguesa*"; "*Bifes de peru enrolados e arroz de alho*"; "*Bifes de cebolada*"; "*Prego no prato*"; "*Bifinhos de lombo de porco assados no forno*"; "*Carne de porco à Alentejana*"; "*Coelho à transmontana*"; "*Entrecosto no forno*"; "*Frango de caril*"; "*Vitela assada no forno*", etc.

animals are designated comparing to human animals. First, the use of the word "animal", which is included in scientific discourse, excludes humans from its semantic extension (see *idem*: 149). The term "*animal*" is often used to create distance towards non-human animals and to demote people to an inferior and gross position⁸. Non-human animals have come to represent the antithesis of what being "*human*": they are beasts and inhuman creatures; they represent the irrational, the instinctive, the uneducated, the uncivilized, the "*thing*" (see Joy, 2005: 112). Because these dualisms are hierarchically structured, the dominated group (non-human animals) is, in addition, culturally exploited by the dominant group (human animals) (see Adams, 2003: 50).

The carnist culture that manifests itself in representations and language integrates consumers in traditions, practices and manners that generally are not subject of questioning, because they reflect a way of reproducing everyday life of universal values, broadcast by a vast majority. These values are so entrenched that these practices are seen as common sense, as a rule (see Joy, 2010: 31) and this is why the term "*carnism*"⁹ was designated only very recently after centuries of speciesist domination.

3. The *production perceptual dimension* involves unhealthy impacts (physical and emotional) on the exploited non-human animals; negative impacts on human health; an unsustainable management of natural resources; and environmental impacts. Generally, the institutional walls, in particular those raised by the mass media, keep these impacts invisible to the consumer population.

3.1. Much of the violence that is perpetrated against non-human animals takes place behind closed doors, away from the sight of consumers. Most consumers will never access a slaughterhouse or an intensive production plant. The only way to access intensive production of non-human animals is through videos and documentaries (that usually result from clandestine investigations) and articles, normally made by activists and researchers.

Although the Portuguese livestock industry applies the so-called European standards of "*animal welfare*"¹⁰, all the inherent business logic is to promote a higher profit return from the exploitation of non-human animals: the beatings and electric shocks used to route the animals who refuse to be transported or to enter the slaughterhouse premises; the forms of "desensitization" or "stunning" (by electrocution, by the plunger gun, or gassing)¹¹; the mutilations; the instrumentalization of natural social standards (e.g., the repeated violations of females and artificial insemination; the separation between babies and progenitors¹²; the impossibility to have access to fresh air, to the sun, and to move freely due to incarceration; being barred from expressing innate behaviors, such as interacting with other animals, seeking food, explore, etc.); the stimulation of the galloping growth through "fattening"¹³; the castration without anesthetics, the genetic manipulation; among other measures, are aimed to obtain the "*maximum efficiency*" for the obtainment of young non-human animals for meat, and for the production of milk and eggs. Science and technology are the keys of the intensive farming systems: in all these designed environments, all the variables mentioned are carefully monitored.

The records show that farm industry treats non-human animals as objects and abstractions – objects because they become production units in disassembly lines, and abstractions because the gross volume of animals killed for meat (in tones) strengthens their deindividuation. The massive production of meat, anchored in the consumers' lack of awareness of the production processes, makes them accomplices of the violence towards non-human animals and, more than ever, desensitized or too comfortable with their killing. Technology and representations have increased the gap between the behaviors and values and, thus, increased the moral dissonance that the system works well to hide (see Joy, 2010: 124), allowing the consumer population to eat billions of animals per year without witnessing a single part of the process by which they are converted into food (*Idem*).

3.2. In most developed countries, where access to meat and animal products is easier, the rates of obesity, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer are the leading causes of death. *The World Cancer Research* states that "red meat" emerges as one of lung and colorectal cancer risk factors (see Santos, Fonseca, 2012: 207). Also in relation to "red meat", *Nutrition, Metabolism and Cardiovascular Diseases* associate it to the onset of cardiovascular diseases, in particular heart attacks, as well as increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes (*Idem*: 207). Contrary to what the dairy industry states, cow's milk and dairy products also have negative impacts on human health. A Harvard study indicates that the presence of high levels of retinol (Vitamin A) in

⁸ Examples of conventional metaphors relating to non-human animals: "*porco*" (greedy or lustful); "*cabra*" (relative to prostitute or whore); "*burro*", pejorative (which has limited intellectual abilities), etc.

⁹ Like "*carnism*", which is oppressive and implies the exploration of non-human animals, the term "*feminism*" also appeared later (by Charles Fourier, 1837), after centuries of male domination. It's not the timing of the onset of terms that is relevant, but rather the definition of these terms - in both cases: one (invisible) belief system that is hegemonic and implies dominated and prevailing groups.

¹⁰ Although European standards are based on the principle of '*five freedoms*' (freedom from hunger and thirst, discomfort, injury or illness, fear and anguish, freedom to express normal behavior), these measures are not applied in the stabling and management systems of non-human animals in general, including in Portugal.

¹¹ See Confederação dos Agricultores de Portugal, "*Bem-estar Animal no Abate*" (S/D)

¹² Stilwell, George "*Quando separar o vitelo recém-nascido da vaca leiteira? Uma revisão dos efeitos sobre bem-estar animal, produção leiteira e reprodução*", p. 117, Revista Portuguesa de Ciências Veterinárias

¹³ In most cases, fattening is done by injecting growth hormones and high protein feed provisioning.

cow's milk weakens bones (see *Harvard School of Public Health*) and increases the risk of fractures. The *Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine* brings to light the high risk of contracting prostate, breast, and ovarian cancer, due to the consumption of cow's milk and its derivatives. The same source states that the emergence of diabetes (Type 1) is associated with the consumption of cow's milk (*Idem*). Moreover, proteins, sugar and saturated fat milk products encourage the development of obesity (*Idem*).

3.3. Meat production provides, on a global scale, an unequal distribution of natural resources¹⁴, which leads to malnutrition in the poorest countries. A drop in production and in meat consumption to 70% would enable the resulting basic food used for animal feeds (soy, corn, grain, barley, etc.) to be channeled to the poorest people in the poorest countries. For example, in the United States 157 million tones of cereal and vegetable proteins are converted into 28 million tones of animal proteins intended for human consumption (see Dasa, 2012: S/D). Also in the US, 56% of agricultural land is used for the production of beef; 80% corn and 95% of the cultivated oats are intended for cattle – food that could feed 1.3 billion people (see Hawthorne, 2008: S/D). A meat-based diet requires the populations of the poorest countries to abandon subsistence crops (see Taylor, 2010: 76). For e.g., although 60% of the Ethiopian population has serious nutritional problems, this country accounts for the largest amount of animals for slaughter in the entire African continent, and is one of the largest in the world (50 million) that consumes food, water and degrades the soil (see Oppenlander 2012: S/D). Ethiopia is the second largest corn producer in Africa; it also produces coffee, grains, cereals, potatoes, sugar cane, and vegetables. The use of vegetables and cereals more targeted to needy populations would reduce massively natural resources (such as water and soil) and substantially offset the hunger and poverty indexes (see Hawthorne, 2008).

3.4. According to a UN report, the agricultural sector is one of the most significant contributors to environmental degradation at a global scale: water pollution, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss (see FAO United Nations, 2006: 408), and responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas emission (a rate even higher than in the transport sector) (*Idem*). Non-human animals raised for feeding generate an amount of feces three times greater than the one generated by humans, causing environmental disasters where the large quantities of waste produced by pig farms discharged in water causes the extinction of aquatic life, and the degradation of life quality of the surrounding population. Moreover, for the sake of production efficiency, the progressive trend of livestock industry is the increasing adoption of monoculture systems over vast areas of land, which implies deforestation (i.e., destruction of ecosystems)¹⁵, and conversion of industrial landscape in nature (See Fiddes, 2004: 80).

The importance of the invisibility of production perceptual dimension

The basic principle that I argue in this paper is that the focus or the development of certain perceptions reinforce beliefs and specific practices concerning non-human animals exploited and slaughtered for food.

Considering the *perceptual cultural dimension* (production and reproduction of traditions, representations and language) and the *perceptual practical dimension* (purchase, cooking, flavor, aroma, texture, etc.), concerning meat and other animal-based products, both are widespread and regimented in current practices since our childhood. Children are traditionally educated to eat meat and animal-based products, and accustomed to regard these practices as normal and desirable. It is in the childhood phase that the *habitus* is built; and because carnism is so hegemonic, so early instilled, and secularly constituted by the traditions, consumers would hardly regard their practices and beliefs as ideological.

The *practical perceptual dimension* and the *cultural perceptual dimension* concerning meat and animal products can only originate renewed practices on condition that *perceptual dimension of production* and respective livestock impacts become visible. Therefore, habits and beliefs will only change when perceptions shift; i.e., the recognition of the invisible perception – the production dimension.

Invisibility is the primary defense of the livestock industry system enabling support to all mechanisms of forged representations (See Joy 2010: 21) and, simultaneously, concealing its impacts. When one consumes a steak there is no thinking of what was once a sentient individual, but there is a disassociation from the non-human animal to the meat – the "*absent referent*" (mentioned by Carol Adams) where, from the utilitarian anthropocentric point of view, the original meaning is plucked to be integrated in a different category of meaning (See Adams, 1990: 67). The non-human animal disappears and out comes the "meat" (*Idem*: 66), its flavor, texture, way of cooking, context, social interaction, etc. This disassociation mechanism of the meat from the non-human animal enables the reduction of dissonance between enjoying the meat taste, as well the perception of the damage and suffering to which the animal has been subjected (See Bastian, *et al.*, P. 247, 2011). In contrast, when one conceives meat as a piece of a "dead animal", and thinks of the words "dead animal" while tasting a steak, the idea of the food changes and it may lead to aversion, disgust, rejection, and even revolt (See Hamilton, 2006: 133). The vetoing decision of many vegetarians and vegans occur when, for

¹⁴ E.g., water, cereals, vegetables, soil and energy.

¹⁵ Derived from privatization, millions of hectares of old forests in Ethiopia, Somalia, Brazil and some Latin American countries have been destroyed due to the production of monocultures. Multinationals like Cargill, Smithfield, Purdue, Tyson, JBS and Swift control over 80% of animal exploitations to be converted into meat (See Oppenlander 2012: s / w), while companies like Monsanto, Bayer and DuPont have the monopoly and control seed prices.

some reason, they correlate meat with once living non-human animals. In this sense, it often happens that the language used by vegetarians¹⁶ and ethically motivated vegans is different from the language used by carnists. The first group tend to use unpleasant terms that revolve around death and suffering (e.g., “corpses”, “dead chickens”, “dead baby cow”, etc.); the second group normally uses aestheticizing terms that revolve around taste and experiential sensations (e.g., steak, ribs or burgers, meatloaf, etc.). The reference representations are also different: ethically motivated vegetarians and vegans associate meat with images of death and suffering of non-human animals, which stimulates feelings of disgust; carnists not only lack these references, but they consider as reference others alluding to the *cultural dimension*¹⁷. It is no coincidence that activists in support of non-human animals use, in their campaigns (against, for e.g., the meat and fur industries, and products tested on non-human animals) strategies for the uncovering the hidden cruelty of products: to show the ugliness of blood and guts, diseases, emotional suffering and death (See Taylor, 2010: 84).

Because it completely excludes animal-based products, veganism can be seen not as an egalitarian ideology, but as an extreme, an abnormal alternative. In addition, the use of the terms “vegetarian diet” and especially “vegan diet” might have connotations of self-discipline and rigor, helping to provide food practices as extremists (See Regan, Tom in Singer, Peter: 1985). Vegans may be called hypocrites if they use leathers, and purists or extremists if they don’t use them (See Joy, 2010: 106). Moreover, both diets, especially veganism, are considered nutritionally poor, particularly by some health professionals that still connote them with some myths¹⁸. Sometimes vegetarians and vegans not only have to explain their options and defend their diet, but they are also stereotyped as *hippies* with food deviations, who sometimes don’t like humans.

The acquisition, the sharing and the consumption of food, whether animal or plant based, not only reflect relationships between consumers and their sociocultural contexts, but are also a significant standpoint of a shared ideology and affiliation into a particular group. By adhering to some dietary rules, about what to eat and what not to eat, groups maintain control over its members, while ensuring the adherence to the respective codes (See Fiddes, 2004: 41); and whoever deviates from the patterns of its group is commonly stigmatized because their diet is not in compliance with the majority (*Idem*: 40). These ideological clashes, which result from different perceptions, not only happen between carnists, vegetarians and vegans. Depending on the culture, and prejudices that underlie it, several species of animals are seen as “edible” and “inedible”; the ideological clashes also occur between carnists of Islamic culture in relation to carnists in the West who consume pork; or the Western carnists in relation to East Asian populations, who consume dog meat. There can also be intracultural ideological clashes based on ethical motivations. For e.g., the Portuguese populations from urban environments that believe that civilization must do away with certain traditions (like pig slaughtering that takes place in small rural communities in the country). In other words, the perceptions of meat come also from a *perceptual cultural dimension*, and cultural shocks can also cause reactions of an ethical nature.

This reality suggests that not only taste but also affection is oriented and discriminatory, resulting in mental schemes of sociocultural origin (See Joy, 2010: 17). This same belief system that allows us to view some animals as edible is the same that protects us from feeling any psychological discomfort when we eat them (*Idem*). Joy says that to avoid this moral discomfort implies three types of actions:

“We can change our values to match our behaviors, we can change our behaviors to match our values, or we can change our perception of our behaviors so that they appear to match our values.” (Idem: 18).

It is precisely in this third option that the perception scheme of carnists concerning meat and animal products is shaped. Therefore, the three groups mentioned in this paper display different perceptions that influence their own behavior. If for carnists the consumption of some types of meat and animal products is closely linked to a *cultural perceptual dimension* and a *practical perceptual dimension*, for the ethically motivated vegetarians and vegans all meat has a polluted connotation, even if cooked (See Hamilton, 2006: 128) – therefore, the connection vegans and vegetarians make concerning meat is typically associated to the *production perceptual dimension*. But there are variations concerning vegetarian practices that allow the consumption of animal-based products: some species of fish, or eggs and cow's milk: in this context, the ethically motivated vegetarianism is also fixed in the *perceptual cultural dimension* and the *production perceptual dimension*. As for the ethically motivated vegans, any type of meat and any animal product are perceived under the *production perceptual dimension*, which implies the adoption of practices, including feeding, totally analogous to the dominant food culture.

¹⁶ The pursuit of vegetarianism and veganism as a lifestyle can be motivated by several factors: personal distinction by anomie, health reasons and/or ethical reasons. The vegetarians/vegans mentioned in this paper are the ethically motivated ones.

¹⁷ Consequently, the ethically motivated vegetarians criticize and blame the meat eaters for their co-authoring in animal suffering; because meat eaters defend their cultural practices, sometimes accusing the other group of extremism: what is at stake here is to protect cultural commitments (See *Idem* p.248), as well as all the social aggregation (i.e.: gastronomic ceremonies, business meals, family dinners, festive seasons, etc. – practices whose reproduction settles the perceptual practical dimension which, in turn, strengthens the cultural dimension).

¹⁸ However, there are more and more independent studies, and even vegan athletes and public figures, which evidences that vegan diet is not only feasible, but also healthier than the traditional carnist diet.

Table 1. The three perceptual dimensions concerning meat and non-human animal-based products

Cultural perceptual dimension	Practical perceptual dimension	Production perceptual dimension
Rooted in traditions, advertising, television programming, child books, language, etc.	Refers to the acquisition, preparation/cooking, and ingestion of meat and animal-based products.	Refers to raising, slaughtering and processing of non-human animals. Also includes other impacts of livestock industry: on the environment; natural resources management; human health.

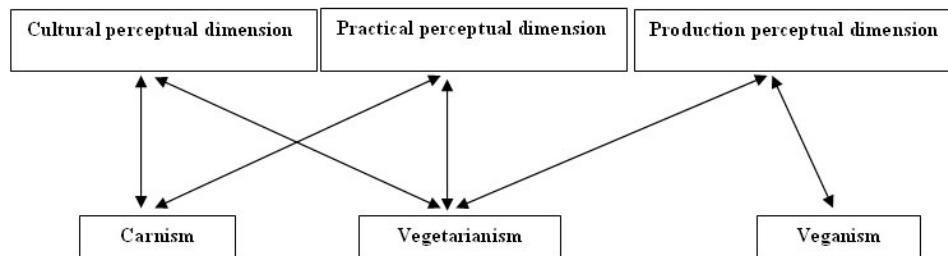


Figure 1. Diagram of the three dietary diets and their grounding in the perceptual dimensions

Conclusions

Legitimated by a hegemonic culture, meat and animal products have become benchmarks in generating experiential dynamics in the consumer populations. On the one hand, the livestock industry explores the slaughtering of non-human animals; on the other hand there is an underpinned consensus on cultural traditions, representations and language – founders of both dimensions – the *practical perceptual* and the *cultural perceptual dimensions*.

- The *practical perceptual dimension* shows no connection between the meat and the non-human animal that was once alive; the fragmentation and packaging of non-human animals; the taste, the aroma, the visual aspect of cooking, are components of taste stimuli that constitute a powerful force of aggregation.

- Moreover, the *perceptual cultural dimension* plays a key role in the definition of non-human animals. Euphemistically defined by language as non-individuals and as goods and means to our ends: through othering (i.e., like the others, the beasts, the uncivilized, etc.); through objectification (i.e., food, fillet, steak, etc.); and sets them in anthropocentric representation frames (i.e., advertizing where bipedal animals smile and perform human tasks, conniving with their exploitation, etc.).

The wide spread carnist culture is so entrenched that consumers practices are seen as common sense, as a rule, which plays a definitive role in cultural perceptions as well as in the respective feeding practices. Consumer attitudes concerning meat and animal products are a reflection of one's own worldview, and changing habits that include the veto of animal products may be an indicator of perception changing (See Fiddes, 2004: 7).

- Consumers who focus themselves on the *production dimension* of non-human animals used for human consumption usually have a more consolidated perception about the negative impacts of production (physical and emotional) towards exploited animals, human health, about the unsustainable management of natural resources, and about environmental impacts. The development of the *production dimension* is the key element to trigger and consolidate ethically motivated vegetarianism and veganism. So, only habits and beliefs will change along with the perception change, i.e., the acknowledgement of the invisible perception – the *production dimension*. The aversion, disgust, rejection and even revolt that vegetarians and vegans feel about meat and animal products reflects a perception also acquired, ethically motivated, which implies changes not only of food practices, but also averse in posture, language and representations about meat and animal-based products.

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Entre la apología y el veto: las dimensiones perceptivas de la carne

Resumen

En este artículo se indica y se describe las dimensiones perceptivas (dimensión perceptiva práctica y dimensión perceptiva cultural) que condicionan la apología por el consumo de carne y productos de origen animal, así como la dimensión perceptiva (de la producción) que condiciona los hábitos alimenticios hegemónicos y puede desencadenar el veto relación a los productos antes mencionados. Es decir, que sostiene que el enfoque o el desarrollo de ciertas percepciones generadas por el consumidor son definidores de sistemas de valores y creencias, lo que influye en las conductas alimentarias de carne y productos de origen animal.

Entre l'apologie et le veto: les dimensions perceptibles de la viande

Résumé

Cet article désigne et décrit les dimensions perceptibles (dimension perceptible pratique et la dimension perceptible culturelle) qui conditionnent l'apologie de la consommation de viande et produits d'origine animale, ainsi que la dimension perceptible (de la production) qui conditionne des pratiques alimentaires hégémoniques pouvant occasionner le veto par rapport aux produits mentionnés auparavant. En d'autres termes, il est défendu que le développement de certaines perceptions générées par les consommateurs définissent les systèmes de valeurs, croyances, ce qui influence les comportements alimentaires en rapport à la viande et aux produits d'origine animale.

