

## Introduction

### *in Eating Earth*

WHEN I WAS in my twenties on a Watson Fellowship that took me to the Tibetan Plateau, I met an Irishman at a low-end restaurant. We had dinner together. Though each of us had met many other people in our travels, there was something magnetic about our connection—I refer to the negative ends of a magnet. We disagreed about pretty much everything. At the time, I would best have been described as a budding philosopher, ethicist, atheist, feminist, and animal liberationist; he was a scientist, mathematician, born-again Christian, and environmentalist. Ideologically we had almost nothing in common, but since we had both been traveling for months with little opportunity to speak English (and even less to engage in meaningful discussions) we spent our days together . . . and argued almost perpetually.

Because we tended to meet at dinner, and because I was a vegetarian, our disagreements usually began over food, then spread to innumerable other areas of discord. Despite the discord, we continued our discussions long after we returned to our respective homes. Yet neither reason nor heartfelt pleas shifted the Irishman to a plant-based diet. He was sympathetic to human moral responsibilities for animal suffering (ever the Christian), but on learning of the cruelty of animal agriculture, he merely shifted to “happy meat” and the eggs of “free range” chickens. Though I feverishly pointed to the horrific transport and dependable adolescent slaughter of grass-fed and “free range” animals, and the absence of any nutritional need for animal products in our diet, my energy was wasted. Ultimately, it was the Irishman’s concern for the environment, combined with his predilection for numbers, that altered his dietary choices.

