**The 4th Annual Conference of the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics**

## ****The University of Birmingham: 31 May and 1 June 2018****

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**Date submitted: 29 January 2018**

**Word count: 497 words**

**Could Brexit risk UK consumers’ right to high quality, safe food?**

In July 2016, United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister, Theresa May, announced that the UK would leave the European Union (EU), emphasising the decision with the phrase ‘Brexit means Brexit’ and asserting that there would be no attempt to remain in the EU. The justification for taking the country out of the EU was based on the result of the advisory EU Referendum of 23 June 2016. Of the valid votes cast, 51.89% favoured leaving the EU and 48.11% expressed the desire to remain. The proportion of votes supporting the Leave option represented only 26% of the British population. The margin of 3.8% between Leave and Remain (representing 1.9% of the population) was used to mandate the termination of the UK’s EU membership, justified as ‘the will of the people’. The nature and consequences of the referendum raise many ethical questions: not least the closeness of the result as a justification for the cessation of EU membership, and that the simplistic Leave option concealed a range of possibilities regarding the UK’s future trading relationship with the EU that were not made clear to the British electorate.

While ethical questions arise in relation to the way the referendum was conducted, particularly concerning the Leave campaign and notions of truth-telling, Brexit – the removal of the UK from the EU – brings to the fore ethical concerns about the possible loss of regulatory protections provided by the EU for the common good of EU citizens, including British citizens.

The possible outcomes of Brexit that give rise to food-related ethical concerns include deregulation and the reduction of food standards in order to facilitate UK trade agreements beyond the EU. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that people have the right to food of a standard adequate for health and well-being. The EU has set high standards for food quality and safety, recognising the human right of EU citizens to various food-related protections. The UK government has stated the intention to adopt and adapt EU regulations post-Brexit. This may mean the reduction of UK food quality and safety standards if, for example, bilateral trade deals are agreed with the USA resulting in the importing of US food products of lower standards than would be permitted by the EU. Concerns have already been raised about the importation of US chlorine-washed chicken and meat containing antibiotics and hormone growth promoters. Effectively, for reasons of political and trade expediency, the UK government may decide that UK consumers no longer have the human right to food of the standard the EU requires for its citizens.

This paper explores and analyses the possible consequences of Brexit with respect to food-related deregulation, giving particular attention to the moral rights of consumers in matters of food quality and safety, as well as issues of UK government truth-telling and consequences for the protection of UK consumers’ food sovereignty and respect for their autonomy and freedom of consent.