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JAMES MCWILLIAMS - James McWilliams is an associate professor of history at Texas State University, San Marcos, and author of *Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly*.

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Meat: Sometimes 'Sustainable,' Never Okay

JAN 10 2011, 8:27 AM ET 144

Recommend



Ali San/flickr

My last post on the ethics of animal agriculture generated a firestorm of commentary. An especially compelling response came via e-mail from a noted food blogger. This person said not a single word about my argument per se but complained that anyone critical of free-range farming was implicitly in support of industrial agriculture. Why would I spend my time, this writer asked, tarnishing the only sliver of animal agriculture that provided animals a modicum of happiness when 99 percent of animals suffered under the cruelest conditions imaginable?

A fair question. My response is that, while I've been perfectly clear in my disdain of industrial animal production, the argument I'm working to develop transcends the conventional agribusiness vs. agroecology debate. I'm not saying my perspective is necessarily more important. Just that it's different.

The pig's sentience—its status as a non-object capable of suffering—morally trumps my

The fact that free-range animal husbandry is undoubtedly better than factory farming is irrelevant to my argument that raising animals for human consumption is, in and of itself, a morally problematic act. In attempting to illuminate the fundamental problems of animal agriculture per se, I'm engaging in a different sort of activism. The fact that it doesn't jive with the conventional attack on

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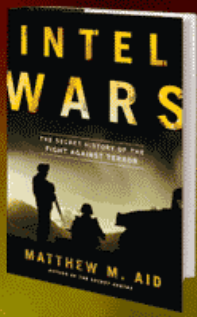


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desire to eat a BLT, no matter how much pleasure it gives. No life is worth a sandwich I don't need.

agribusiness really isn't my concern.

What I am concerned about is the fact that farm animals are sentient beings. As such, no matter what methods are employed to bring them to slaughter weight, they can suffer. Enlightened culture reached this obvious conclusion centuries ago when it rejected Rene Descartes's claim that animals were objects devoid of sentience. We can draw all the distinctions we like between humans and

farm animals—we can produce operas, they cannot; we can do calculus, they cannot; we can send smug holiday greeting cards, they cannot. But none of these distinctions undermines the fundamental reality that we're both sentient beings capable of suffering.

If the ethics of eating matter in the least, then our understanding of animals must begin with this premise. Above all else, we must acknowledge that our shared sentience means that humans have a moral responsibility to treat farm animals differently than we treat objects. Specifically, as the philosopher Gary Francione has argued, all beings capable of suffering are entitled to the "principle of equal consideration." What this means is that, before using an animal in any way, we should evaluate what's at stake for everyone involved. We must do so, moreover, on the primary grounds of our shared sentience, thereby downplaying the many differences between humans and farm animals. Just because a farm animal cannot do math or send greeting cards doesn't mean that its capacity for suffering is in any way fundamentally different from our own.

I admit that making this distinction can be hard. Human accomplishments and abilities seem to so obviously distinguish us that downplaying our differences might appear to be nothing but a philosophical gambit. But consider: The ultimate problem with giving primary moral consideration to the amazing feats that humans can exclusively accomplish is that doing so requires us to assess all humans in such terms as well. In other words, we would have to undertake different evaluations of suffering for the mentally ill, the infirm, infants, the elderly, those with low IQs, etc. If sentience took a back seat to cognitive ability or skill sets, the moral value of human life would become dependent on variations in intelligence and ability. Needless to say, such a moral code would have horrific consequences.

Let me try to bring this argument down to Earth. Say I'm stranded on an island with a pig. And say the island is stocked with an endless supply of fruits, vegetables, grains, and nuts—enough to feed us both. Am I justified in killing the pig?

The application of equal consideration would require me to consider if the suffering I would cause the pig—indeed, taking its life—was worth satisfying my own taste for pork—something that I hardly need. My answer would have to be no. The pig's sentience—its status as a non-object capable of suffering—morally trumps my desire to eat a BLT, no matter how much pleasure it gives. No life is worth a sandwich I don't need.

But say I'm stranded on a vegetation-free island with a pig. There'd be no question as to who would feed whom. Applying the principle of equal consideration, I would decide that, given that my own life is at stake, and given that somebody was going to eat somebody, the pig's suffering would be worth the continuation of my life. Thus the pig would die.

I would make this choice based not on the idea that *Homo sapiens* are inherently superior to *Sus scrofa domestica*, but rather on the basis that, even though our capacity to suffer is shared, I'm the sentient being more likely to accomplish something like find a cure for cancer (of course, I'm also the one more capable of causing mass Armageddon, but we'll leave that alone for now). In other words, it is at this extreme point—a clear-cut case of life or death—that I'd be justified in identifying the positive differences in intelligence, ability, and potential. Of course, in order to be consistent, I'd have to apply the same equal consideration to a human being who was, say, excessively old, sick, or debilitated (assuming that I was capable of resorting to cannibalism to save my own life).

I realize that this argument against eating farm animals isn't airtight. But my motivation here, once again, is not to pick on free-range systems, but to highlight a new set of questions. After all, given that this idea of equal consideration is so central to an ethical understanding of our relationship with animals, why do we so rarely think about it? In a food culture that's become quite obsessed with producing and consuming food in ways that are morally just, why do we consistently avoid the issue of animal sentience, and the



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basic rights that such sentience guarantees? Why do otherwise socially conscious consumers fail to ask if an animal's death is a fair price to pay to satisfy our carnivorous palates?

My sense is that we've avoided these questions for a single reason, one that Gary Francione identified decades ago: Farm animals are legally property. And their status as property poses an enormous, and enormously unrecognized, barrier to our recognition of their basic right to equal consideration.

Objects are legitimately property. Sentient beings—beings capable of suffering—should not be. There's no denying that free-range systems are generally more concerned with animal welfare. But it's very difficult (if not impossible) for the owner of farm animals to give their "property" equal consideration because their status as property skews all consideration toward the owner's interest. There are gradations of freedom, and an owner of an animal raised to produce meat is only going to go so far down that scale. Otherwise, there would be no need to own the animal.

Our entire discussion of animal welfare and the comparative humaneness of free-range farming has taken place behind the protective veil of property status. Lift this veil, if only as a mental exercise, and you'll be amazed at what a radically different question you'll be forced to contemplate.

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Rachel Greenberger 1 year ago

James, thank you for posing an important perspective and breaking free of a linear zero-sum game attitude about eating animals. The food system will not improve as dramatically or as quickly as it needs to if we "spend our time behind the wheel gazing only in the rearview mirror." Food advocates must take the best lessons of the past and fuse them with a brave and creative future. Thank you for your thoughts.

15 people liked this. LIKE REPLY

J.W. Hamner 1 year ago

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Just Food: Where Locavores Get It Wrong and How We Can Truly Eat Responsibly

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We've been having this same argument for what? 2500 years? Whenever Buddhists decided they didn't think eating meat was the right thing to do at any rate... and yet meat consumption continues to rise. Your arguments are not new, novel, and/or clever but they are proven to be completely ineffective. Talking about sentience will convince basically nobody and we know this, but if it makes you feel better and morally superior go for it I guess.

If you care as much about animal suffering as you claim I'd think you'd want as few animals killed as possible. The **only** thing that will make that happen is more expensive meat. How does that happen? Free range farming is one way. But don't let the good get in the way of your perfect or anything.

8 people liked this.



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to J.W. Hamner

Sentience doesn't convince anyone?

Of all the vegans and vegetarians I know (which are a lot since I'm active in AR circles in my state) ALL are veg*n due to caring about the suffering and sentience of farmed animals. Every single one. Maybe some started out as health or environment vegans but they all shared a deep and strong conviction that animals matter, their lives matter, their suffering matters and they aren't ours to use.

It baffles me that it's not convincing MORE people, honestly. How is discussing the pain and emotional states of our fellow creatures not convincing? People lose their shit over dogs/cats being abused - the sentience of those animals matters to the majority. Why do those same people balk at caring about farmed animals? Is it because our companion animals aren't seen as tasty so we can put aside our greed and care about them as individuals?

I do not get the disconnect or the hypocrisy. Companion animals sentience is convincing and matters to just about everyone. That the chicken on your plate suffered miserably and died, needlessly, so you can enjoy a few minutes pleasure is ignored. We are so good at ignoring what's inconvenient. I know, I did it for the first 20 years of my life, too.

46 people liked this.



enigma3535 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

I have travelled the world extensively ... at last count, I have spent time in more than 50 countries.

I have seen poverty like I never imagined growing up in a middle-class suburb of Boston.

One common theme in every one of the poor countries I have visited has been the critical nature that meat has meant to basic subsistence.

A Vegan in the US can harp poetic about their ability to maintain all their dietary needs eating only those carefully selected items that religiously agree with their world view. Good for you ... save your anxiety regarding the harm done to animals with how you choose to eat.

But, when you criticize others for how they eat [given the reality of the current world order], that pretty much plumbs the depths of condescension ... IMHO.

6 people liked this.



WBRV 1 year ago in reply to enigma3535

Meat consumption is an extremely inefficient means of sustenance. The amount of grain used to fatten one cow could feed hundreds of people whereas the meat from that cow could only feed a couple dozen. If people in the US and other Western countries would adopt a vegan diet we would be able to ship massive amounts of grain to poor, starving humans in less economically-fortunate areas of the world. Furthermore, if the massive amounts of money which are spent raising, feeding, murdering animals, and eating their flesh, were instead spent on developing programs of sustainable plant-food agriculture programs (in addition, of course, to other beneficial socio-economic programs to make the people in these countries economically self-sufficient) to promote access to clean-water, improved in less-developed countries, the hunger and poverty you witnessed in those countries would not exist. Finally, animal agriculture is a major cause of deforestation of the Amazon and global warming, both

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of which threaten the very livelihoods, ways of life, and homes of the poor people you claim to defend.

19 people liked this.



Joel Gabelman 1 year ago in reply to WBRV

Let's not forgot to blame others. How about the princess in the middle east who have 24k toilets, or the billionaires from tech, manufacturing and pharmaceuticals. Whose responsibility is the poor? This is not an easy question - but I feel it's narrow minded to blame carnivores and meat production singularly. There is potential blame on everyone - even those effected.



WBRV 1 year ago in reply to Joel Gabelman

Ending poverty is the responsibility of everyone who has the resources to do so. Those with financial resources (i.e. wealthy individuals, corporations, and nations), and those with intranational and international political power resources (unjustly, but not surprisingly, the same three entities as above). All three must advocate for, and ensure the enactment of, significant policy changes both within and between countries (in terms of industry and trade) in order for poverty to be eliminated. Of course, there are many industries and policies in addition to animal agriculture which contribute to worldwide poverty, and must be significantly modified or completely replaced. However, the elimination of animal agriculture and the diversion of the resources once consumed by the industry, does have the potential to end worldwide hunger, significantly reduce global warming, and bring the end of poverty within sight.

9 people liked this.



kire73 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

Very well said Melissa... I couldn't agree with you more.



stantoro 1 year ago in reply to J.W. Hamner

You have a good point about expensive meat, and free range farming will certainly produce that. But that's always going to be for people who feel like paying a higher price for a tastier, or more ethical product - it's never going to compete with the great majority of cheaper, factory-farmed meat. Much more effective, and more widespread, would be reducing or eliminating the massive taxpayer subsidies to the meat industry, maintained by a powerful lobby and paid for by you and me, whether we eat meat or not. If consumers had to pay a price for meat that was even close to the real cost of producing it, a hamburger would be a luxury item, and a LOT less meat would be produced and consumed. That wouldn't be perfect, but it would be good!


4 people liked this.



Sarah May 1 year ago


I agree. I became a vegan for ethical reasons while still craving meat and cheese, I realized that no amount of suffering is worth it. Now, when I smell meat I think it smells rotten, even the freshest meat, and also, meat eaters smell somewhat rotten. After 3 years of veganism I have a more refined nose, I guess. I am a foodie and gourmand, as well as a sommelier, but nobody will ever convince me that there is anything romantic or good about meat. I can get perfectly fine flavors(and be more creative in the kitchen) using vegetable sources. I have decided that animal products make people in the kitchen somewhat lazy as creatives. Meat kills, too. Watch the film Food Matters. Nothing good about stuffing oneself with animal fats and proteins unless you like heart disease. I guess all those cancers and diseases are a bit of karma the animal leaves behind.

32 people liked this.

 **Guest** 1 year ago in reply to Sarah May


this is condescending and sanctimonious

6 people liked this.

 **Vivi82** 12 months ago in reply to Guest


I don't think her reply was condescending and sanctimonious at all. I share the same opinion, that there does seem to be a stench attached to those that consume dead animal carcasses that is rather unpleasant. I can only attribute it to the rotting animals they are consuming. My father in law (a HUGE meat eater) has body odor and breath that's smell is eerily similar to my garbage disposal when it's extra putrid and in need of a deep vinegar bath.

5 people liked this.

 **Guest** 1 year ago in reply to Sarah May


this is mean. and won't convince anyone to become vegetarian. you claim that the billions of people who enjoy meat, including a lot of my friends and family, are rotten smelling, lazy cooks, and get diseases because of karma. this is wrong, counterproductive, and will only cause more animals pain and suffering.

8 people liked this.

 **VegInPDX** 1 year ago in reply to Guest

It's mean because you don't like it and don't want to hear it? It's true. Read the China Study read any number of books and studies on the effects of eating animal products and you'll see the same damning evidence in all of them... Or you could just keep eating the BULLS**T that the mass media keeps spoon feeding you every night on TV.

24 people liked this.

 **Lemmy C** 1 year ago in reply to Sarah May

Surprisingly, the longest-lived people in the worlds aren't vegetarians. Take a look, among other things, at Inuit diets.

4 people liked this.

 **Melissa** 1 year ago


Well, good for you for coming out of the animal rights closet. It's good to see you stop pretending you are against animal-based local agriculture for environmental reasons and acknowledge you are against it in general. Maybe you can do a post on veganic agriculture? I think it's impossible to have a sustainable system without animals, which are needed for fertilizer, but maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you should report from the front lines of people trying veganic out?

Either way, our current moral system isn't based on suffering or sentience. You are going to have to convince people that it should be to convince them to forego meat. But there are other things that must be given up in such a system. Indeed, is anything worth the suffering it causes? Strawberries? Apples? These crops are not nutritionally required and result in the destruction of animal habitat and the poisoning/killing of pest species. In a true suffering-based moral system, we would not only have to forego animal products, but we would have to pick crops based on their destructiveness towards animals. I know most fruits and vegetables are pretty destructive from my experiences in ag school, so we'd have to rely on mainly a few pulses and grains. It would also be logical to dissuade humans from reproducing, since this is another unnecessary act that creates a great amount of destruction and suffering for the sake of human pleasure. When we chose systems based on condemning of other human's pleasures as trivial, this is how it goes.

We would also have to try to protect wild animals from predators. Sure, predators don't have diet choices like we do, but that doesn't make it OK for them to cause great amounts of suffering and to violate the bodies of other animals.

I'll stick with humanism. Morals were invented by humans to better the human condition. I don't see how they can be consistently applied to non-humans.


23 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **k10ld** 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

"I'll stick with humanism. Morals were invented by humans to better the human condition. I don't see how they can be consistently applied to non-humans."


Very aptly put. I wholeheartedly concur.

6 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Ronval912** 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

Very well said. It always seem to me that if one uses the "suffering" rational to argue against eating meat, then that argument would ultimately lead one to conclude that there is no way that 7 billion people could ethically exist on this planet.

5 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)


 **Hugo Pottisch** 1 year ago in reply to Ronval912

"...there is no way that 7 billion people could ethically exist on this planet."

Most scientists, starting with E.O Wilson, the Union of Concerned Scientists, the United Nation, WordWatch etc not only disagree but claim the opposite: "...there is no way that 7 billion people could exist on this planet without ethics" and less meat...

PS: Ronval - do you have a cat? Can I borrow "it"? As "it" does not suffer like humans and as we cannot apply ethics to animals - I would like to run some "tests". I call them "taste tests". If I break it - I will replace it - I promise.

13 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Melissa** 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

LOL, are you from Animal Farm? We are talking about consistently applying ethnics to the animal kingdom with the idea that all sentient beings have rights. Which I say isn't possible.

What is possible is for a human system of humanist ethics to arbitrarily extend protections (not rights) to animals for various reasons, such as the law against eating cats in the US.

As for feeding everyone, I suggest you check out Meat, A Benign Extravagance, which advocates, like many reputable ag economists and other experts, a low-meat or vegetarian, but mixed system involving the use of animals. Veganic agriculture is a fantasy.

8 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Hugo Pottisch** 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

O come on Melissa. A low-meat or vegetarian diet would be great and I am all for it. Where does the "fantastic veganic agriculture" suddenly come from?

This is a philosophical and therefore even fun discussion (given the realities behind it). Why don't we just follow a very simple rule: treat others as you want to be treated yourself. This simple rule worked well for women, African-Americans, homosexuals,

etc. One does not need a law on how to treat each species or race or sex etc. We know that "leaving them alone" would be a great end. Not killing and enslaving them for taste, fun and entertainment would be a great start and that is what we are discussing right now?

Please don't misunderstand the discussion as: "Become Vegan Now or I Kill Your Cat". Outside these thought experiments I personally advocate less meat (or better less animal products) and we probably share the same goals. I do not invade articles on The Atlantic Food Channel presenting meat dishes etc to discuss ethics philosophically - this is the setting here.

7 people liked this.



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Oh, well I thought you were against animal oppression. When I was an ARist I thought that low-meat or vegetarian was unacceptable because it still involves animal slavery.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

I am against animal oppression but that is a goal and obviously not the journey itself. Less meat is a great first step for everybody, it happens that less for me personally is none. I know enough people who only eat animal products 1-3 times a week instead of the average 3x7 diet. If the West were to eat like that - we might not have this discussion at all as livestock agriculture would not be killing the planet. There would still be some unlucky animals who do get killed before they reach their potential but we would not risk dragging all life down as we do now. But I am also a realists - even if murder and rape were illegal - they will still happen. Going vegan is too difficult and most people block it as an option and I understand why. But the need for less meat is too difficult to not accept and to ignore and therefore I am for "less meat" here and now.

Nevertheless - I find it important to have a playground where one can look at things philosophically - take a step back if you will. The question of whether it is ethical to torture only a little and to kill only a few for taste and entertainment alone is still worth pondering.

I have the most respect for those who actually say it's not ethical to kill animals for taste but they do it nevertheless because they "want to" or because they are "weak" or "need others to change first". That kind of honesty requires more guts than a vegan claiming that he does not eat animals. or a meat eater claiming that its ok because "we can't change it", others do it too", "plants feel pain too" or "we don't know if domesticated animals really suffer". I like guts.

2 people liked this.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Maybe you will respect the guts it takes for someone to watch Meet Your Meat and Earthlings:

<http://chooseveg.com/meet-your...>

<http://www.earthlings.com/>

These two films make it ridiculously easy to go vegan forever. I would also like to dispel the notion, once and for all, that "going vegan is too difficult." There is nothing difficult about going vegan. Really, I eat better now and enjoy food more than I ever did as a meat-eater. The choices these days are plentiful. Going vegan today is as simple as crowding out the animal products with all the delicious and highly nutritious fruits, veggies, legumes, beans, grains, nuts, nondairy

milks, yogurts, spreads, cheeses, desserts widely available in everyday supermarkets and farmers markets. Going vegan is a piece of vegan cake!!

7 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

Yo Vegan,

Like you I have been vegan for long (more than half my life and I am in my Late/mid-thirties). I find the films that you have linked to - to be important. It is my experience that we humans are more or less all the same but live with different backgrounds, conditions, life phases and ages etc.

It was very easy for me to go vegan the first time around as I was in school and had no responsibilities to distract me from.. me. I then took a break because a girl who I fancied thought I was wired, the way I ate. The second and final time around was less easy due to another life phase I was in. My second and final decision to go vegan took more than a year. My life had become more stressful by then. Now, so many years, decades, later I don't have to think about it anymore as the vegan lifestyle has become not second but first nature to me.

Still - when I went vegan it was during a time where I had time to think about the subject, to question my beliefs and broaden my views. It was the same for my sister who is now also vegan. But not for my parents. My parents were not at school or university or were paid philosophers. They were workers who had to keep their marriage together while taking care of us children and putting aside money for our education etc. When they came home in the evening they were already concerned about the next day and there was no room for "going vegan over night" for them. They respected our wishes and started cutting meat but not fish and milk. They did what they could given the circumstances. Cutting meat over night was ridiculously easy for them - cutting all animal products was not. Over the course of 10 years however - they have even reduced their milk and fish intake drastically. They are aware of the black-listed fish and have switched to soy milk completely. I consider my parents, given where they come from and for how much longer they have eaten meat than us children to be more impressive with their almost-vegan-except-for-little-fish-diet than us vegan children.

Less meat is something that everyone can start with over night. I do think that we could inspire many people to go vegan but the segment would be, in reality, limited to teens, students and some pensioners. Most working people, especially with children and relationship challenges would not find it ridiculously easy to go vegan. But they could easily cut from 3x7 animal products to say 1x5. In other words - more animal lives would be spared if 80% of people cut meat than if 20% went vegan. And ideally we want both at the same time. Less meat does not exclude going 100% vegan from the discussion but 100% vegan does exclude less meat and hence the majority of the population (it does not matter, in reality, if veganism has great arguments or not. Not at this stage at least).

If vegans can say "less meat" as Jonathan Safran Foer and if meat eaters like Mark Bittman can say "more vegan" - then we have all won.

7 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Ah, the social issues. Yes, I know these excuses well for why "going vegan is too difficult." The girl I fancy; my fancy chef boyfriend; my parents, peers, coworkers, family, and friends—all will reject me if I go vegan, or even vegetarian. It takes guts to stand up for one's values and, often, to dine on our carrots and lentils alone because of the hurtful fun-poking at our expense, the inane jokes, the in-your-face mockery, the pain and physical revulsion of seeing dead animals on the communal table.

Being vegan can be a lonely proposition, maybe even difficult, without supportive family, friends, and significant others. By our mere presence, without saying a word or a side-wise glance or grimace, we cause guilt and "spoil" the party. I know it well. Having just experienced two holidays of dining alone—by choice—I know the heartbreak of family who refuses to see and feel the way I do about animals. Nevertheless, refraining from harming Others is so morally essential, the social issues, pressures, and isolation are of insignificant consequence. For those who say, "It's too hard to be vegan," I say, "What is 'hard' is what the animals endure." To hell with societal issues.

Your summation is right on, though. Less meat is good; transitioning to no meat is better; no meat at all is BEST! Go Vegan: For Animals, For Humanity, For Earth.

8 people liked this.



Dantonio482 8 months ago in reply to Melissa

LOL, if it's an "animal kingdom", then animals should rule.

This is not about applying ethics to the "animal kingdom", it's about recognizing their interest to live on their own terms.



Ronval912 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Well, I agree about the "less meat" part. But the original article was not about eating less meat. It was about eating NO MEAT. I do not think that 7 billion people can exist on this planet eating a vegan, must never kill animals, not even vermin that will destroy all our crops, diet. We humans make up the rules that govern our human society and behavior. If we decide that eating animals is ethical than it is ethical BY DEFINITION.

1 person liked this.



Dantonio482 8 months ago in reply to Ronval912

There's a difference between ethics and morals. What we refuse to do for moral reasons, we may may one day be forced to do for survival.



Dantonio482 8 months ago in reply to Melissa

Except that before humans walked the earth, other social animals had a sense of what is right and wrong within their groups, and they still do. Humans are not the only animals who have morals.

And pesticides are not necessary for growing crops.



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago

"We can draw all the distinctions we like between humans and farm animals—we can produce operas, they cannot; we can do calculus, they cannot; we can send smug holiday greeting cards, they cannot. But none of these distinctions undermines the fundamental reality that we're both sentient beings capable of suffering."

This is very interesting: You are saying that all of us animals are sentient (I agree), and therefore we should not justify killing animals based on our presumed superiority over the non-human animals. Yet this argument is rooted in a belief that we are superior to animals: Those stupid animals eat each other all the time, but WE SHOULD KNOW BETTER.

Sadly, the belief that humans should be ABOVE nature is what has wrought the planetary destruction we see all around us, whether its the rape of wetlands, the mass confinement of farm animals or the poisoning of our air, land and water. It sounds nice to say that using that argument selectively will save the lives of some animals. But we will NEVER achieve harmony with the fellow denizens of this planet as long as we believe ourselves to be above them. The reality is that harmony and balance in nature includes some of us killing and eating others of us, and ultimately all of us being eaten after we die, whether by plants, fungi or animals.

16 people liked this.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

Are you volunteering to be eaten in order to achieve harmony?

8 people liked this.



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Hugo, I don't need to volunteer - it will happen regardless of what I think of it.

Am I OK with the idea? Yes. I'd rather be eaten by a bear than die of any of the dreadful diseases civilization has wrought, or by getting shot by some wacko who's a symptom of our diseased society. It's not personal. It's not immoral. It's just eating.

3 people liked this.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

Ok then. Come to my place at around 5pm this afternoon (that gives you some time to say goodbye to loved ones?).

In front of a basket full of fruits, legumes and veggies I shall tie you up so that you cannot move or see light for a few months and then I beat and kill you for the taste alone, making sure you know that I would have had healthy alternatives. Wants over needs is rarely seen in nature but oh oh the harmony and balance we could achieve in only one afternoon...

PS: What is the difference between say a terrorist amok attack and say a car accident or cancer?

7 people liked this.



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Hugo, that's very silly. Bears don't tie up their prey and torture them. And who said I was an advocate for veal? I hunt for my meat.

As for the difference between terrorist attacks, car accidents and cancer: Cancer kills slowly. Terrorist attacks and car accidents tend to happen quickly. One may die of or survive all three of them. And all three are a function of our glorious "civilized" lifestyle.

3 people liked this.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

NorCal

Veal? I am talking about 99% of animals in the US or approximately 20 billion individuals who cannot turn around or see daylight as we speak. Not veal - 99% of all animals. You say you hunt? How much of your meat, milk and eggs do you hunt? Do you hunt it like a bear - with your bear claws and fangs or do you use those hated "civilized" methods that use little bullets that fly at the speed of light and usually kill the large healthy animals and not the weak or sick ones? Thereby avoiding natural selection, weakening the gene-pool and sustainability?

The civilized lifestyle that you talk about started when we started using cultural weapons and not our biological means to hunt and kill and it reached its peak with factory farms. As Zeus said - we started behaving like Gods - deciding who should live and die - eating from the Tree of Knowledge. And most of us always chose death and not life. Lions or even bears do not decide that - humans do. A bear who is offered a basket of fruits or honey would not risk his health and life in a hunt. A lion could not survive on fruits (cats need l-carnitine and taurine but produce their own Vitamin C - apes including humans work the opposite). Humans kill for pleasure and taste and not survival - and that includes modern day hunters. In other words, lets not compare sustainable self-defense with some form of holocaust or slavery. The wild has produced infinite numbers of species who have lived long lives.. before we arrived. Now it's mass extinction, baby?

As you say - it is not about the killing. A cancer death can be more painful than being eaten alive because somebody else had to survive. But imagine losing your daughter - not because somebody needed to eat for survival - but because somebody killed her for fun. Imagine losing your child - not due to a tragic car accident where nobody had bad intentions - but because somebody felt like raping and murdering. There is enough natural suffering on earth like earthquakes, accidents, diseases, natural carnivores, interspecies competition for mates or volcano eruptions etc. We don't necessarily need to add to all this suffering artificially as we do with meat, rape, slavery, terrorist attacks, murder etc. We can practice all that if we want - but we don't have to.

Anyway - my dog needs to eat. As I am a human who can chose what to eat and feed... I chose to feed you to my dog. You say, publicly, that you don't have a problem with it. If you don't want to pass by my house - send me your address and I can come by to kill you myself. If you don't want me to slit your throat - I can also hunt you down (as you do with animals) by using a gun - it is really up to you. Either way - I will try to slaughter you painlessly and will utter a respectful, grateful prayer afterwards (I mean it is all for harmony and such..).

11 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

I get my eggs and milk free-range/organic. We hunt for most of the meat in our house, though we supplement wild game with pastured pork. When I hunt, I use the tools available and allowed and/or required by law, following the rules that mitigate the advantage of advanced weaponry. (And fyi, no ammunition moves at the speed of light.) I do not hunt for antlers; I hunt for meat. I have never killed a "trophy" big game animal. If the opportunity to do so arises, I will, but I would not go out of my way to seek out such an animal.

Eating meat is not "artificially" adding to death on earth. It's what we've been doing for millions of years. What's artificial is our ridiculously large population that cannot be sustained under the rules of nature, and when our "advances" bring inevitable collapse, the earth will cheer and perhaps things could go back to normal for a while. Meanwhile, I choose to live as close to my species' roots as possible. Should I be a survivor of that eventual collapse, I won't have to run around looking for Vitamin B12 so I can continue to live in an artificial world.

As for you, feel free to "evolve" into something that could not survive in nature - I won't threaten you with death for your choices, even though

plenty of living things die to support your chosen lifestyle.

6 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

Nooo.. I really do want to learn how to survive in nature with guns. You are right by the way, bullets might reach the speed of sound but not light, it was symbolic but technically not accurate. I have to admit that I really fancied a bean burrito today - but I also want to learn how to survive sustainably like yourself and in balance with nature. That is why I will not eat vegetarian but indeed use a gun to kill and eat you.

PS: I also want to live close to my species roots. I am a human and am intolerant to cow milk (it has been around for only a few thousand years). I prefer human milk as all animals prefer the milk of their own species. Is it all right, since I am already passing by this afternoon for meat at your house, to milk any females who I might find?

PS II: Don't forget to send me your address. I am getting hungry and might eat the unnatural, harmony and balance destroying beans.

PS III: Are you sure about all this population thingy? What if we just avoided an Armageddon instead of wishing for one - like you seem to do? I somehow think that eating my beans instead of you would do the trick? We could support 10 billion people on a vegetarian diet but only 2 billion on an American diet. Killing people so that we can continue killing animals is one option. The other option is to stop killing animals so that humans can live.

8 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Strangely enough, I have a fair amount of respect for vegan zealots like you because you believe in something and you're arguing for it. While I find your worldview to be naive and unrealistic, you're still better than those morons who trash hunting with a mouthful of meat.

But your debate tactics are self-defeating (which is awesome for me). And I find your desire to engineer a diet to support 10 billion people repugnant and selfish. Every additional human takes away habitat for the other denizens of this earth. Oh well, there may be a lot less of them, but at least they wouldn't be eaten by us, right? Uh, yeah. That doesn't work for me.

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

NorCal

Same here. I probably have more in common with you than the average Joe. The discussion here is not about my world view per se. This is a philosophical article to start with and I have on purpose followed that path. It is not about winning a battle of arguments per se or making a better impression etc and therefore also not about defeating or self-defeating tactics.. We all want to think about something here. Actions and changes can come later.

Indeed - a world with 10 billion humans who live sustainably sounds better to me than killing 5 billion

humans so that the remaining 2 billion can continue to kill animals or torture animals on farms. I don't like calling others naive - I rather people give me this title - but given the current state of the planet, risking a serious resource shortage due to taste is.. naive is not the right word. Maybe 'careless' hits it?

7 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Who said anything about killing five billion people? The earth will take care of that without any deliberate assistance on our part. I just don't see any need to deliberately enable further population growth.

I think the difference between us is that you think killing animals is rotten and I think our whole model of civilization, starting with agriculture, is rotten. I choose to align myself as closely as possible with the system we KNOW works (which, admittedly, is not very close, given the constraints of law and the severe constriction of habitat for wild humans); you choose to accept the current system and attempt to rectify its ills with modifications that are at least theoretically possible (biologically and agriculturally). You have faith in humanity. I have faith in nature.

The sad thing is that when earth hands us our big smackdown - whenever that may be - I have zero doubt that we will regroup and begin to follow the same path, all over again, over and over again, until the conditions that allow our species to prosper disappear for good. We are too enchanted by our own cleverness, too easily seduced by conveniences whose longterm costs aren't obvious, and so addicted to those conveniences that when we do identify the cost, we don't care anymore. We are a race of junkies. I freely admit I'm one of them, sitting here typing on a computer in a house with central heating.

And BTW, nice icon. I'm a fan of Planet of the Apes too. I'm a big fan of post-apocalyptic fiction (no surprise there), and a proponent of at least trying to imagine walking in others' shoes. And believe it or not, I do so with every animal I kill.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



TStacy 1 year ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

"you're still better than those morons who trash hunting with a mouthful of meat."

Or the people that call for Mike Vick's head with a mouthful of meat.

7 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

i think it would be more accurate to describe hunting down and killing innocent animals "repugnant and selfish". and it just might be possible amid all the machismo and false bravado that the "fair amount of respect" you have for vegans stems from the little boy in you that KNOWS it is

wrong to murder animals for their flesh that neither your survival or heath requires in the first place.

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



NorCal Cazadora 12 months ago in reply to Vivi82

Sorry, sweetie, there is no "little boy" in me - no Y chromosomes here at all. (That's why it's "CazadorA," not "Cazador.")

But no matter, I'm sure you're right - I'm sure that several billion years of life on earth have been morally "wrong" with this ridiculous idea of living things eating other living things. Stupid planet! Stupid biology!

Yeah.

So, I'm going to keep eating my natural diet. Just because it's possible to alter the natural order of things doesn't mean it's wise. Just look at what 10,000 years of tinkering with nature has done to us, and to our planet.

LIKE

REPLY



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

you read my response wrong. my missed point: you were a little boy at one time where you probably were a kind, sweet, little child who appreciated and respected animals. it's unfortunate and sad that somewhere along the way you grew hostile and mean, compartmentalizing which animals are deserving of respect and which should be murdered, all because you enjoy the taste of them and are convinced their decomposing flesh is "natural" for your sustenance and survival.

"stupid planet! stupid biology" what does the planet or biology have to do with our (compassionate) choices as humans? isn't the whole point to grow more humane and respectful of other living creatures rather than raping and pillaging our land and every being we share it with?

your "diet" is anything but natural. but i guess we should use that same brilliant logic for women and african americans. why change? why "tinker with the natural order of things?"

no matter how much you see yourself as this big macho hunter you're a weasel. a frightened, apathetic little coward with a gun. a neanderthal, incapable of expanding your mind. those seem to be pretty prevalent these days, so you fit right in.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



NorCal Cazadora 12 months ago in reply to Vivi82

I just love how you assume you know so much about me. Hunting isn't about

hostility and meanness - that's an ignorant stereotype.

And you're the one who's compartmentalizing - you appear to feel that humans are soooooo much better than those stupid animals, that they're so dumb they can't make a choice, but we're supposedly so smart that we're supposed to reject the system that worked fine for billions of years. Pure and unjustified sanctimony.

LIKE REPLY



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

"I am getting hungry and might eat the unnatural, harmony and balance destroying beans."

LOL!

LIKE REPLY



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

probably the most BRILLIANT response on modern-day hunting i've ever read!

LIKE REPLY



Ray Sylvester 1 year ago

We may be the beings most likely to find a cure for cancer, but we're also the reason cancer is such a problem in the first place. Because we've found all sorts of ways to replace much of nature's ready nourishment--including, yes, the animal fats that have sustained us for millennia--with hideous industrial alternatives.

You yourself admit that your argument isn't airtight, and I'd agree. Our relationship to the earth and its other creatures in the great cycle of sustenance is so much wider and more complex than narrow notions of property or even sentence, and the ethics of meat eating can only be fairly considered in a much broader holistic sense. To think one could answer the question on such slim logic is lazy and egotistical.

It's curious that you mention the human propensity to tip off Armageddon, then conspicuously dismiss it. Could it be that you realize (and are implicitly acknowledging) that there's so much more to consider here?

3 people liked this. LIKE REPLY



Walter Scheper 1 year ago in reply to Ray Sylvester

Humans are not the cause of cancer. Long before human technology, or even humans, existed ultraviolet radiation, old age and just plain old bad genes were causing cancer. Exposure to carcinogens may increase your *chance* of developing cancer, but they do not *cause* cancer.

2 people liked this. LIKE REPLY



fukuoka 1 year ago

In a world full of people who can't handle a choice beyond "A" or "B", Professor McWilliams has chosen to take his analysis of the world around him to a much greater depth. Everything this article says is the truth--uncomfortable and inconvenient as it may be.

I believe, back in the days of African slavery, there were also people who made the same arguments that we hear now about animal slavery--that the slaves should be more humanely treated, but never should their

status as property be eliminated. What does history think of those folks now? I think E-V-I-L would be an accurate word...


I am reminded of Howard Lyman, who came from a long line of ranchers--if his family didn't technically participate in factory farming, they were certainly a part of that system. Howard became the same kind of rancher himself. But he eventually opened his eyes to the cruelty and environmental destruction that animal agriculture creates. He is now one of the country's most outspoken vegans and he truly understands that animals are living souls, no different than you or me.

15 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **chenpofu** 1 year ago


the cavemen ate meat, were they wrong?

1 person liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **TStacy** 1 year ago in reply to chenpofu

Possibly the worst argument ever. I eat meat, but that's stupid beyond words.


6 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **chenpofu** 1 year ago in reply to TStacy

some people need to chill a bit.


I was not making an argument, I was asking a question.

[LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Lemmy C** 1 year ago in reply to chenpofu

A lamb judges right and wrong differently from a tiger.

1 person liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Vivi82** 12 months ago in reply to chenpofu

they needed to for survival.

[LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

 **Malorie Bankhead** 1 year ago

I am a 5th generation cattle rancher pursuing a college degree at the age of 19 and I do not view myself as a bad person for raising livestock. I very much agree with you that cattle are sentient, as you put it, but I do believe that they were put on this earth for a purpose. Sure the livestock are our property, but that doesn't mean that we don't care about them. Which is another point that you made, seeing as how my ranch is small with only ten cows. I know them each by name and every Spring they do me a service of having a calf that I raise to gain weight to produce food for the greater population. If everyone was a vegetarian, livestock animals would over-populate the world. At this time I would like to point out that plants are living things too. I view the bottom line of life as survivability. I could eat a solely plant based diet, but I choose to incorporate animal protein into my diet as well, because it gives me the energy I need to learn new things and live my life to the fullest! And I'll also mention something about sustainability. My father works hard to ensure that the land we graze our cattle on is well taken care of, because someday I will be able to graze my cattle on it! Future generations are very important to cattle ranchers in America! I love my way of life in animal agriculture, and I wouldn't change it for the world!

5 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



BeaElliott 1 year ago in reply to Malorie Bankhead

"I very much agree with you that cattle are sentient, as you put it, but I do believe that they were put on this earth for a purpose." Whose "purpose"? Mandated by whom? It is always the user, or the one that benefits that claims a being has a "purpose" other than the purpose of living his/her own life. "They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men." -Alice Walker.

"Livestock" are cared for to the extent that it is their deaths that really have "value"... And their lives are measured only in the material value that they yield. I think the degree of "care" is greatly compromised by "bottom line". If they were not destined to "make money" would a rancher still feed and "care" for these animals? I think you'll find people who truly "care" for animals work (very hard) in sanctuaries... Not in "production".

"If everyone was a vegetarian, livestock animals would over-populate the world." You do know that almost all cows and pigs are artificially inseminated? Turkeys can't even reproduce by themselves... It is the breeding of these animals that IS overpopulating the world now. And as a result forcing humans to compete with them for our food.

"I could eat a solely plant based diet, but I choose to incorporate animal protein into my diet as well, because it gives me the energy I need to learn new things and live my life to the fullest!" There's no reason that all this (and more) is not possible on a plant based diet. None.

"I love my way of life in animal agriculture, and I wouldn't change it for the world!" I understand that you love your way of life... That it has been done for generations before you... But in truth these same arguments were used to justify human slavery. Those plantation owners enjoyed their heritage as well. But if something is wrong --- If it cannot be justified ethically... It demands from our species the ability to set things right... We have a responsibility to evolve. And this would not be giving up "a world" but transforming ours into a better one. ~peace~

22 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



J. Tyler 1 year ago in reply to BeaElliott

well said, Bea!

2 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to Malorie Bankhead

ah...1.) the rapist ("they were put on this earth for a purpose") 2.) or pedophile ("Sure the livestock are our property, but that doesn't mean that we don't care about them") or 3.) slave owner ("they do me a service of having a calf ") argument.

what goes around comes around sister.

4 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



Ploughman 1 year ago

How do we know that plants are not capable of suffering?

5 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



Kevin McNamara 1 year ago in reply to Ploughman

because they have no central nervous system. did you skip basic biology at school, as well as apparently thinking for the remedials?

18 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)

NorCal Cazadora 1 year ago in reply to Kevin McNamara



Read "The Lost Language of Plants" by Stephen Harrod Buhner. You'll never look at plants the same way again.

5 people liked this.



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

this argument is old and frankly insulting to the BILLIONS of sweet, creatures (on the line right now as i type) literally SCREAMING (loud and clear) in fear and agony as they're butchered to death.

7 people liked this.



kire73 11 months ago in reply to NorCal Cazadora

You sir, are an idiot.

1 person liked this.



NorCal Cazadora 11 months ago in reply to kire73

Masterful comeback, Kire73! Truly masterful. Except I'm not a man.

And Vivi82, have you not heard that plants scream too? Do some research! No living thing wants to die, yet all of us are designed in part to become food for other living things. It is simply how life on earth has evolved.

I won't defend factory farms. Hell, I think agriculture was the biggest mistake ever made on this planet - it's enslavement, pure and simple (of animals AND plants). But all living things eat each other, one way or another. I won't live in denial of that simple fact.



CRM_Boston 1 year ago

Thank you for this post; it is absolutely wonderful. It is important to continuously raise this question about sentient beings over and over and over. . . Posts do not have to always have the answer or suggest an answer - as with any post or article to raise the conscious and explore thoughts and ideas and to have a conversation is necessary. Anyways, simply put, "No life is worth a sandwich I don't need" a thought I will keep in mind and follow. Thank you McWilliams!

12 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago

Before this argument can even be meaningful there has to be some sane measure of the "suffering" experienced by an animal in the wild and an animal in captivity -- and between the various forms of captivity. Added in, the suffering experienced when an animal experiences a "natural death," and is killed for butchering.

Generally speaking a short life of hunger, fear, untreated illness and injury, completed with death by wild predation or, again, illness or injury, seems likely to be at least as painful and filled with suffering as even a feed-lot existence concluded with death in an abattoir. Indeed, captivity and death in an abattoir may be easier, quieter and less anguished.

That, of course, is assuming wild pigs, free running cattle and feral chickens would be permitted to exist in our "wilderness areas" in the first place, and existing would not overrun the surviving wild species.

The answer that we as a species can or should just quit the system that has grown around us since the

Neolithic Revolution (10,000 BC) is pat, and unfortunately simplistic. We can change our food system, or improve it, but we can't terminate it without causing as much or more suffering, both animal and human.

By all means, choose a vegan life to satisfy your own ethical hot buttons. But don't pretend that those hot buttons represent strong universal arguments. They don't. The situation is far more complex than the binary of "vegan = good, causes only acceptable suffering, omnivore = bad, causes unacceptable suffering." Suffering and responsibility stretch a lot farther in all directions than you're taking into account.

1 person liked this.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to Peg

You are aware that the average farm animal, humanely raised or not, dies far sooner than in the wild?

I also do not understand your argument that "We can change our food system, or improve it, but we can't terminate it without causing as much or more suffering, both animal and human." Why not?

8 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

Yes. And a wild animal lives in far more immediate want, experiencing more illness, injury and parasitism, with just as certain a death...quite likely a far more prolonged and unpleasant death.

We can't just terminate it because such good as our ag systems, food systems, and economic systems have are dependent on the animal element of our system. Remove the animal element without finding a replacement and you simply send the entire system out of balance, further damaging the environment, the ecology, the food ways of continents, and the economic hope of millions.



Janet Weeks V 1 year ago in reply to Peg

That's what THEY said:

"Yes. And a wild ["dark-skinned savage"] lives in far more immediate want, experiencing more illness, injury and parasitism, with just as certain a death...quite likely a far more prolonged and unpleasant death.

"We can't just terminate [human slavery] because our economic systems are dependent on the [human slavery] element of our system. Remove the [human slave] element without finding a replacement and you simply send the entire system out of balance, further damaging the economic hope of millions."

Puts your argument into a bit of perspective, doesn't it, Peg?

15 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago in reply to Janet Weeks V

No, it merely suggests your own perspective is warped by conflation of domestic animals and humans. Suffering may be suffering, but domestic animals are not captive slaves: there are differences in understanding, instinct, ability to function as peers in society, and far more, that make your comparison nothing more than shock-fodder. Even the nature of their suffering is different: not necessarily more or less, but different and distinct. Pretending they are the same only leads to bad analysis of the actual problems.

Confusing human slavery with domesticated animals developed over 10,000 years and no longer adapted to live in the wild is a frivolous false equivalency. Or are you suggesting that a capable black captive kidnapped from "the wild" was no different in understanding, intellect, and ability to survive if freed than a domestic chicken bred to live in symbiosis with our species for millenia? Or that the chicken experiences the same broad range of compounding suffering that human self-awareness and time-

marking ensure?

While playing for hyperbolic shock value, none of your response addresses the real questions of how to end an entire network of symbiotic relationships that have endured since prehistory, without that cessation causing damage on all fronts -- including damage to the very individual animals and their species for which you express concern. Are you planning to let the chickens free, like Elsa -- to be run over on the roads? Let the pigs free to root in forests or damage fragile grasslands? Will you set the cattle free to spread domestic diseases among wild bovine relatives? How will you deal with the pain and suffering of injured animals? Their anguish as they starve? Their desperation as they go feral and try to survive living in our suburbs, getting run over by our traffic? Their illness if and when they over-breed due to lack of predation? How will you ensure they live lives with less suffering, if we are to cast them aside and refuse to provide their traditional due or meet our traditional obligation to our domestic symbionts?

What, precisely, are you planning on doing for Maasai who depend on cattle blood for their protein source? Or Indian children whose main form of protein and much of their available fat content comes from milk? What are you going to do for rural families in areas not suited to growing complete protein crops? Or poor urbanites in the US whose most affordable form of high-grade complete protein may be from eggs? Farmers living in regions where oxen are the only appropriate way of plowing? Families for whom possession of a goat may mean the difference between abject poverty and slowly rising prosperity? Sheep-herding communities carrying on traditions going back into prehistory? What are you going to do for the economy when literally millions of leather workers are thrown out of work? Or the wool trade collapses? How will you fertilize such crops as you wish to provide, when we're already finding that artificial chemical fertilization techniques are bad for the ecology and damaging to the soil, and that the old connection between domestic animals and crop fertilization was more sound and sustainable?

How do you plan to make this work? Especially as domestic animals are NOT human, not slaves, and not capable of entering into full citizenship as peers, or providing for themselves, or in many cases even surviving without human intervention and management? And, assuming your idea works, how will it make animals suffer less -- not differently, LESS? More humane techniques of farming absolutely do allow domestic animals to suffer less. Sustainable agriculture integrating ethical and humane animal husbandry and vegetable production benefits all the members of the symbiotic suite: humans, animals, and plants, all in concert, all experiencing a better quality of life and death, if not a longer life. Ending animal farming, if anything, causes animals to suffer more, for lack of the very services and security we can and do provide, and upon which domestic animals have been bred to depend. It also provides a less sustainable agricultural system.

I agree that animal suffering is likely to be close enough to human suffering to warrant serious moral concern. But "just say no to meat" does not address the full sum of animal suffering or human responsibility. Suffering shifted to a "hidden ledger" is still suffering. Your system just makes it easy to look the other way while we blame "nature" for being red in tooth and claw... The argument to quit is no more helpfully ethical than Arjuna thinking he'll back out of the battle of Kurukshetra, and for many of the same reasons.

12 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



markeemoon 1 year ago in reply to Peg

A vegan revolution would not be an overnight thing, leaving the economy in the lurch, releasing millions of domesticated animals into the wild, left to certain suffering and death. People are slowly becoming more aware of the hypocrisy of turning a blind eye to unnecessary animal suffering, and as they continue to do so, demand for animal products will decrease. In turn, demand for cruelty-free products will rise, and the economy will adapt to this new demand. As demand decreases, so will "production." Animal husbandry will slowly die out, and with it, the domesticated species. So the idea that these animals will be suffering regardless, either in the animal agriculture system or in the wild when they are all released at once, is a false dichotomy. They will never have been born in the first place.

9 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



markeemoon 1 year ago in reply to Peg

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3 people liked this.



Hugo Pottisch 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Peg - you sound genuinely interested in this topic and also sound like an open and concerned person. Nevertheless - some of your arguments sound as if they come from a Green Revolution Propaganda leaflet from the 60s? No offense! I don't have time to go into the many issues that you raise but I do recommend you watch Mark Bittman, one of America's foremost writers on food, talk about the food industry here: <http://fora.tv/2010/10/05/Mark...>

Another interesting article comes from the prestigious Foreign Policy Magazine. The article argues that albeit African American were more or less bread and domesticated - it did not make them slaves for good. "Meat, the slavery of our time" is here: <http://experts.foreignpolicy.c...>

5 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago in reply to Hugo Pottisch

The state of the food industry is indeed worth changing. But the assumption that the economic and ecological elements you think of as "Green Revolution Propaganda" are unrealistic or don't apply to agriculture as a whole, or to the underlying realities of domestic animal keeping, says more about your naivete than my lack of reading or study of agricultural systems.

I read and watch Bittman. I will gladly read the FPM article, but expect to be no more impressed by the false comparison between human slavery and domestication there than I have been here. It's good emotional/sentimental shock-copy, but bad science or philosophy, take your choice which.

Change the system, by all means. It needs improvement desperately. But you won't change the laws of ecology, economy or agricultural stability...and all of those are wrapped in the underlying logic that made creating a mini-ecology with a domesticated suite of plants AND animals "good planning" all the way back into the Neolithic.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Reply, Part TWO

- Tradition doesn't justify cruelty

- "What are you going to do for the economy when literally millions of leather workers are thrown out of work? Or the wool trade collapses?"

Demand—and hence jobs—will gradually shift to non-leather

alternatives.

- "How will you fertilize such crops as you wish to provide, when we're already finding that artificial chemical fertilization techniques are bad for the ecology and damaging to the soil, and that the old connection between domestic animals and crop fertilization was more sound and sustainable?"

One of the largest community sponsored agriculture farms in the US is completely veganic—no animal byproducts. Permaculture, biodynamics, vertical farming—all these can be much more efficient than using animals. At current levels of animal consumption, factory farms are a given, and the runoff from these horrible places creates enormous ecological problems. Furthermore, if we switch to vegan diets, all the models show that we'll decrease water, fertilizer, and fossil fuel use because at current animal consumption levels most grains go to livestock instead of people.

- To summarize the last few responses, 1- animal agriculture causes huge ethical and environmental problems right now, 2- the alarmist scenarios of a post animal-agriculture society almost certainly will not occur.

- "How do you plan to make this work? Especially as domestic animals are NOT human, not slaves, and not capable of entering into full citizenship as peers, or providing for themselves, or in many cases even surviving without human intervention and management?"

Repeat; by lowering demand so we stop breeding them.

- "More humane techniques of farming absolutely do allow domestic animals to suffer less."

9 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

Permaculture and biodynamics does use animals. Come back when you have some peer-reviewed research.

LIKE

REPLY



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

What a snarky comment, Melissa. Why the animosity? These methods may "use" animals, in the sense that their natural excretions nourish the crops as the crops nourish them in return. Any animals "used" in such systems benefit with their lives lived fully and to completion. They are part of the system and so are not killed or exploited for any other purpose. Both methods emphasize balancing the interrelationship of plants, animals, and soil with its holistic development as a self-nourishing system, without external inputs.

If this is all you can pick apart in my lengthy 3-part reply to Peg, then I am not too worried about the validity and strength of my argument. Sheesh!

11 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

No, my family has a biodynamic farm and animals are kept in captivity is such a farm. They have much much longer and arguably happier lives than factory farmed animals, but they are eventually eaten. I also

know many permaculturalists that keep animals. There are specifically vegan permaculturalists, but comparatively few. I only know of a few veganic farms and they don't produce much.

I don't have time to pick apart your essays, which I think belong on a blog themselves in not in a casual comment section, but I'd suggest you pick up Meat: A Benign Extravagance which discusses the agro-economics of all these systems.

1 person liked this.



Gary Loewenthal 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

But permaculture and biodynamic farms don't need to use animals. Note that in many cases "food" animals are used because of tradition, subsidies, and the fact that there are so many of them - not because of necessity. Veganic farming is new but showing great results; one of the largest CSA farms in the country is veganic. Even in my small garden plots I've noticed no decrease in yield since giving up animal products. As veganic methods spread, they'll only get better.

8 people liked this.



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to Gary Loewenthal

Which farm is that? You don't really have to grow much to be a large CSA. I have one of the largest CSAs in the country and it's only about 100 members.

Yes, veganic farming is a growing movement. But people should know that biodynamic and permaculture does not equal veganic. In fact, since biodynamic is a philosophy based on Steiner, one of its core principles is the use of dairy cattle. I guess people want to think it's veganic because it sounds nice.

I suggest Meat: A Benign Extravagance because it does look quite heavily at the feasibility of feeding the world with veganic.



CQ 10 months ago in reply to Melissa

I found lots of information on veganic farming at www.veganorganic.net and www.stockfreeorganic.net.

1 person liked this.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Reply, Part THREE

Most forms of animal agriculture are inherently cruel. Commercial dairy and egg production depends on breeding cows to overproduce milk and hens to overproduce eggs—otherwise there is nothing left to sell. Cows must be constantly re-impregnated to give milk. Which means the herd will constantly grow. The dairy farmer is forced to dispose of the “excess” cows. Wild cattle have calves every two years. Dairy farmers impregnate every year, to make a profit. Wild cattle have no real predators in their native lands. Dairy farmers kill cows at five years old—young adulthood—to make a profit.

Male chicks at hatcheries don't lay eggs and don't grow fast enough to be profitable to the meat industry, so they're destroyed.

If we quit breeding chickens to overproduce flesh, there would be a lot less meat on each bird to sell. If we let them live just one year that would greatly increase the price of chicken meat, since we kill them at seven weeks old now. Chickens need varied terrain and should be in rather small flocks with lots of space. They crave to fly up to roosting spaces. Flocks should be led by roosters who proudly watch over their flocks. And where are we going to find the space for the nine billion chickens we raise in the US each year? And what effect will that have on native wildlife? And do we really believe that animals who are created only to be sold and killed as soon as economically profitable are going to get good care? Rabbits from celebrated “humane” farms are stuck in small cages with wire floors. They never hop, never eat greens. Animal sanctuaries across the world are filled with neglected, starved, and abused animals from family farms. We kill a million land animals for food an hour—sloppiness and mistakes are inevitable, and the nature of the work frequently results in slaughterhouse workers taking out their frustrations on the already terrified and weakened animals. The animal agriculture industry fights the tiniest reforms tooth and nail. And enforcement is often a joke. Rather than dream of a mythical society in which animals slated to be killed are treated nicely and live normal lives, it's much easier to purchase the plant alternatives. The only cruelty-free milk, at least in this part of the world, is nondairy milk.

If we're truly concerned about animal welfare, first let's stop deliberately harming them when avoidable. Let's not rationalize our exploitation of them. Let's transition to an Edenic vegan world and strive to minimize our impact even further by improving farming methods and our own lifestyle choices. There may still be a place for pets and sanctuaries, where the animals are loved for who they are, where they are taken care of for life, where they know only kindness, not betrayal or brutality from humans.

Nature is not only red in tooth in claw—which, by the way, was not even the meaning of the original quote. It is also full of pleasure. Bunnies literally leaping for joy. Turkey poults running all over their mothers. Birds swooping just for fun. Squirrels finding tasty nuts. Foxes sleeping in the sun. Enduring friendships. The security of herds, of families. Read *Pleasurable Kingdom* and *Second Nature* by Jonathan Balcombe. There are far more vegetarians than predators in nature. There is abundant cooperation. Ecologists are recently discovering that “survival of the kindness” is just as accurate as survival of the fittest.

Saying no to meat today means dismantling factory farms, horrific animal transport, and unthinkably cruel slaughterhouses. It means ending the engineering of animals to grossly overproduce flesh, milk, and eggs. It means the ending of orphaning animals, breaking up families and herds. It means restoring some land back to natural habitat. It means respecting animals enough not to kill them for pleasure or profit or out of habit. It means living by these versions of the Golden Rule: If you wouldn't do it to your dog, don't do it to a pig. If you wouldn't do these things to animals, out of pity, mercy, or empathy, don't pay others to do it on your behalf.

8 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Reply, Part ONE

- Comparisons of atrocities are valid and useful even if the atrocities are not identical, which is always the case.

- A pig struggling for months to get out of a two-foot wide gestation crate is indeed a captive slave. Other forms of confinement in animal agriculture may not be as severe, but almost all limit the animals' natural range of social and physical behaviors that give the animals meaningful lives.

- "Are you suggesting that ... the chicken experiences the same broad range of compounding suffering that human self-awareness and time-marking ensure?"

The chicken's suffering may be worse because the chicken lacks some of humans' coping mechanisms, such as prayer and rationalizing the plight. Furthermore, in the throes of severe physical agony, the human and nonhuman responses are strikingly similar. Finally, the suffering we cause to animals is so severe so often that they deserve for us to stop it rather than analyze it.

- "...none of your response addresses the real questions of how to end an entire network of symbiotic relationships."

To the cow whose babies are stolen from her and sent to veal pens, or the chicken crammed in a battery cage, or the turkey bred to be so top-heavy her legs fold and collapse, the relationship is anything but symbiotic. Nearly all farm animals in the developed world are denied families and sufficient space, and nearly are killed just out of babyhood. The relationship is one of dominator and victim, not symbiosis.

We end your "network" by shifting demand to plant-based foods. This will happen gradually and the market will adjust.

- "Are you planning to let the chickens free, like Elsa—to be run over on the roads?"

We plan to stop breeding them. Though in many cases, being free at the risk of being run over would be far preferable to being in a dark, crowded shed with ammonia so thick it burns the eyes and damages the lungs.

- "Let the pigs free to root in forests or damage fragile grasslands?"

I would be more concerned by the real damage to habitat caused by animal agriculture than by the theoretical damage caused by releasing pigs. Grazing is a leading cause of rainforest destruction. Animal agriculture is a leading source of water pollution. The UN has identified animal agriculture as one of the most environmentally destructive and unsustainable activities on the planet.

- "How will you deal with the pain and suffering of injured animals? Their anguish as they starve?"

They suffer much more right now in factory farms. It is constant. Transportation is hellish; many animals die along the way from stress and lack of food or water—it is considered an acceptable economic cost by animal agriculture. Newborn male chicks at hatcheries are suffocated or chopped to death. Chickens starve to death because they fall over due to their artificially induced top-heaviness and cannot get up. One-day old calves, still wet from birth, fall from trucks and end up in ditches by the side of the road. The animals are in Hell right now. But again, we'll gradually breed fewer of them as demand goes down; there won't be cows roaming the streets.

- "Their illness if and when they over-breed due to lack of predation?"

Humans are the worst predators they've ever known. Practically none live more than a fraction of their life spans even in the wild. In their natural habitat, populations reach an equilibrium.

- We're not advocating to the Maoris but to people in the developed world who have the means to be vegan.

- What are you going to do for rural families in areas not suited to growing complete protein crops?

It's been shown time and again that in the developed world we can feed many more people on a plant-based diet. Even when factoring in transportation, it is far more efficient and less environmentally destructive to eat a plant-based diet rather than meat- and dairy-based diets.

- "Or poor urbanites in the US whose most affordable form of high-grade complete protein may be from eggs?"

It's been demonstrated that one can eat a healthy vegan diet for as cheaply as one can eat a carnivorous diet. And this is even before removing the huge subsidies that put salads at an economic disadvantage compared to animal products. It is simple to get enough protein on a reasonably well-balanced vegan diet. I would be far more concerned with these real problems in poor urban areas: concentration of fast-food joints and lack of decent produce. The cheapest solution to our health, diabetes, and obesity epidemic is increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and less consumption of meat, dairy, sugar, and refined products.

- Introduction of plant-based technologies is far more sustainable and less cruel than giving a goat to a family that does not have the means to take care of it. The Heifer Project is basically an arm of the animal agriculture industry. And it's ludicrous to send dairy cows to populations that cannot digest milk. But it makes sense to show them how to produce nondairy milk from native legumes. Too many people are duped by Heifer Project ads.

8 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Peg 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

I doubt any sane person could claim our food production system can't be vastly improved, especially in respect to animal husbandry. But your response, to me, feels more like True Believer propaganda and utopianism than actual practical planning or evaluation... the more so when you fall into sentiment or jingo. Heifer International "an arm of the animal agriculture industry?" That's up there with "capitalist running dog" hype, and it's about as off-putting and unconvincing.

Look, if you want to brush everything under the rug of incrementalism, that slow change will fix everything, then, sure: give it a few thousand years and we could be there -- a vegan humanity. History says it's not happening: ecology, economy and human biology and psychology militate against it. But, nu, things DO change no matter how much people like to pretend it's an eternal, unchanging reality. The thing is the moral invective you and others offer isn't remotely aimed at incrementalism: it's aimed at self-righteous demands for Change Now, and Change Absolutely. If you insist on running this as a complete revolutionary Civil War for animal abolition, then you have to be ready to answer what you're going to do about Reconstruction. The way you're arguing and the absolutist frenzy you present isn't about incremental change, it's about sudden death of a system that permeates all parts of human culture, including human vegan culture. You may not eat animals or use animal by-products, but you live in suspension within a culture, economy and ecology that allow

you that luxury in large part because of the benefits that have been brought by even our simply horrible but prosperous ag system.

Again, improving animal husbandry reduces animal suffering. Vastly. Quitting animal husbandry, however, if anything increases it, especially in respect to domesticated species. Wild is not the same as free from suffering.

2 people liked this.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Peg

There is no self-righteousness here--I am merely the voice of the voiceless. This is about ending avoidable suffering. Humans do not need to eat animals or their secretions to live and to thrive. Because all sentient beings suffer when they are imprisoned and prematurely killed, and humans have the capacity to stop it, it is our moral imperative to do so.

As for answering to the hows of "Reconstruction," I already have (read all three parts of my reply). It will be incremental, as social change for the betterment of all has historically been. Look, I realize these ideas threaten the status quo (as ending slavery and granting women their rights threatened the status quo), and change is always scary. But, we're well past the initial stages: No longer ignored; no longer laughed at; being fought tooth and nail; and then the whole of creation wins.

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."
~ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

11 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

"There is no self-righteousness here--I am merely the voice of the voiceless."

Um.....

Do you really not detect the self-righteous pomposity of that very statement? Or are you doing parody and assuming I will catch it?

3 people liked this.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Yes, I am self-righteous, pompous, selfish, rude, and a whole host of other negative adjectives all because I want to end animal suffering. Call me every name in the book, if it makes you feel better.

You, my dear, are excessively defensive. No need to get your boxers--or briefs--all in a bunch.

11 people liked this.



Peg 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

Ah, not parody, merely sanctimony on a level that approximates parody.

Ok. Fine. Got it.

2 people liked this.

 **veganforever** 1 year ago
in reply to Peg


I can see you like to have the last word. Fine. You got it.

9 people liked this.

 **Gary Loewenthal** 1 year ago
in reply to Peg

A few years ago Heifer was co-sponsor with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association of an atrociously exploitative piece of junk science in which African children eating an impoverished diet were given some meat and showed improved health, leading the "researchers" to assert that children need meat. Never mind that vegetables, peanut butter, tofu, vitamins, or practically anything else added to the diet would have also improved their health, or that there are plenty of thriving vegan children in the US.

7 people liked this.

 **Melissa** 1 year ago
Loewenthal in reply to Gary

But can they produce these things themselves?

IMHO no one has yet proved the health of totally vegan children on a multi-generational level. I follow veganism during parts of the year and I've done a lot of research into the subject. If there were the possibility that I were to get pregnant, B12 supplements are a must. I'd also probably do taurine, carnitine, and DHA. Nutrition science is a young science and there is still a lot they don't know.

I'd hate for those farmers to be dependent on industrial capitalism for supplements...

 **Gary Loewenthal** 1 year ago
in reply to Melissa

First of all the "researchers" did not continue to feed the children once the short experiment was over. Secondly, the assertion that children need meat is preposterous based on the "study."

I have no idea if they could produce the beef themselves. In general, feeding a cow and killing the cow requires far more resources than growing crops to eat directly. And cattle grazing can be horribly destructive; it's a leading cause of rainforest destruction - and most of that beef is exported to richer countries - speaking of industrial capitalism.

There are certainly plenty of healthy vegan

children in the West, including our godchildren and the cherubs on this page: <http://www.veganhealth.org/art...> And the American Dietetic Association, and the Canadian equivalent, have once again declared vegan diets to be safe for all ages.

There are extremely healthy, long-lived societies such as the Hunzas and Okinawan Elders that are nearly vegan. So we know that much. These societies may eat their tiny amount of animal products largely for ceremonial reasons. There's no reason b12 couldn't be locally sourced. Meanwhile, animal protein in the US is the cheapest, in relative dollars, that it has been in decades, cheese consumption has skyrocketed, and childhood diabetes and obesity are at epidemic level. I would be much more concerned about these real and severe problems. Whole foods based vegan diets OTOH have been shown to reverse diabetes and heart disease.

6 people liked this.



Melissa 1 year ago in reply to Gary Loewenthal

Smallholder livestock doesn't go to exports. That's big industrial farms that are unfortunately being created even in developing countries even now.

What a Heifer project looks like is maybe a few goats or sheep, which are primarily kept for fiber, milk, and dung (extremely valuable as fertilizer and fuel). Or maybe water buffalo that are kept for all those things + labor. Meat consumption would only come at the end of that animal's productive life. Pretty much like the Hunzas.

How could b12 be locally sourced?
Building a lab?

That's great about your godchildren, but I'm just not going to take that risk. The ADA isn't perfect and have continuously revised their recommendations. I guess it all depends on how much stock you put in nutrition science.



Gary Loewenthal 1 year ago in reply to Melissa

The longer the animal is kept alive, the more expensive it is to care for the animal. And what if the animal gets sick? What if there is a drought? Will highly social animals be forced into solitude? Or must the family raise several animals? And most people cannot digest cow's milk. And to get milk, the animal must be impregnated. And what will be done with the babies? The problems go on and on. I've

heard reports of families selling the animal right away. There are non-exploitative alternatives that may be far more sustainable, such as the deceptively-named VitaGoat project:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v...>

I don't know the details of what it takes to produce b12. I just wouldn't assume that it has to be from an industrial capitalist source.

But anyway, I assume you live in a more industrialized society and you have many more choices that may not be available to people in third-world countries. You likely can thrive just like I do without animal products.

Yes, the ADA like all scientific bodies update their recommendations all the time, though they've recommended vegan diets for quite some time now. And I haven't seen any evidence that they're harmful. There was one story which made a splash a couple years ago, but in that case the parents were feeding their baby an insanely impoverished diet.

I have to move on...it's been nice chatting with you. I very much appreciate your respectful tone. I hope we agree on the cruelty of factory farms, hen hatcheries, and long-distance livestock transport, e.g. no food, water, or rest even in 24 hour trips in sweltering heat - and if you thus boycott products coming from those sources, that would be most animal products, and I thank you, and in their own way, the animals thank you.

5 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Gary Loewenthal 1 year ago in reply to Peg

Incremental change can be quite powerful. But we can always speed up the pace by making those changes ourselves and encouraging others to do so, rather than lamenting how long it will take. Furthermore, one should do what they feel is right regardless of how many other people are doing it. "Change now" is vague; "Strive to refrain from inflicting avoidable harm" is simply the golden rule. If you prefer incremental change, then incrementally replace animal products in your diet. Nearly all vegan advocates realize that people tend to transition in steps to veganism. There is a wealth of info online to help you get there and stay there, in good health and with peace of mind.

Leading institutions are increasingly conveying that ecology practically demands a shift away from animal

agriculture. The fact that there are millions of healthy vegans is compelling evidence that humans don't biologically need animal products. Economically we can feed more people on a vegan diet - the numbers nearly all point that way.

As for "reconstruction" - people will still eat and wear clothes in a vegan society. We'll simply won't exploit animals to do so. Social mores and fashions change all the time and the market responds. Since we'll need less land to grow crops, some areas can return to their natural habitat, and wildlife populations may rebound.

But vague fears about "reconstruction" is no excuse for doing what we can to end the Hell that is right now.

6 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



Gary Loewenthal 1 year ago in reply to Peg

It's delusional to think that we're going to kill ten billion animals a year - in the US alone - kindly, or sustainably. As Veganforever has pointed out, some forms of commercial animal exploitation, namely dairy and eggs, are inherently cruel.

There was no golden age when food animals were treated kindly. Castration methods around the world are ghastly and done without painkillers. Victorians kept birds confined in the basement. Cattle ranchers in the late nineteenth century invaded Indian lands. The oldest known word for war pertains to fighting over cattle. Centuries ago people learned that taking a hen's eggs would coax her to lay more.

Selective breeding to increase yields, at the expense of the animals, started centuries ago and is now a huge business. Animals raised for meat are fattened as quickly as possible and killed. They don't live long lives. Sick animals are left to die if treating them isn't profitable. As an animal sanctuary volunteer, I could fill this page with stories of horrid abuse and neglect on family farms. Visit a sanctuary and ask how the animals got there. On Polyface Farms, held up as an ideal in Food, Inc., visitors have reported terribly inhumane conditions.

It is far easier to pick up a carton of soymilk or coconut milk than to find a truly humane carton of cow's milk. It is far easier and cheaper to cook a delicious stew with seitan than to find a truly humane piece of chicken flesh. Even Polyface uses chickens who grow so fast they sometimes die of heart attacks when only a few weeks old.

Let us divest from thinking of animals as disposable assets.

Of course there is suffering in the wild. There is also freedom, happiness, and the ability to live normal lives in the habitat to which one is suited. Thus, chickens do best in the lush jungles of Southeast Asia. Sheep do best in cooler climates where they don't need to be sheared.

It's true that some domesticated animals may require human assistance. Rather than mass-slaughter them, and destroy habitat and native wildlife along the way, we could stop breeding them and forcing that dependence, save perhaps for a small number who could live peacefully on sanctuaries. In most instances, our breeding has created inherent suffering in the animals. Broiler chickens

and turkeys suffer almost from day one because they're so top-heavy and grow so fast. Dairy cows have been bred to produce five times more milk than normal - that's without hormones - which causes constant undue hardship.


Peg, I assume you boycott nearly all animal products since they come from sources that are not remotely close to practicing "good husbandry." I thank you for that.

6 people liked this.

 **David Ryan** 1 year ago

Three topics guaranteed to provoke long, angry comment threads at The Atlantic: Meat, Wine, and Porn.

7 people liked this.

 **Vivi82** 12 months ago in reply to David Ryan

i can see animals and porn but why wine?

 **JKMas** 1 year ago


I just love animal rights discussions. Such special people, and special commentary. From hilariously outlandish hypothetical situations set up to make halfway irrelevant points to rhetorical gems like "and also, meat eaters smell somewhat rotten," this topic delivers through and through. Thank you so much.

3 people liked this.

 **Julie Ann Sherwood Zserdin** 1 year ago

If I was on desert island with a pig I still would not eat it. there are plant foods available and a pig simply is not acceptable as a food item.

10 people liked this.


 **veganforever** 1 year ago in reply to Julie Ann Sherwood Zserdin

For the most part, I agree with this author. However, if I were stranded on a vegetation-free island with a pig it would not even cross my mind to kill and eat my only friend and companion, nor likely would it cross hers. Destroying a life just to sustain my own for an extra week or two would never be worth the loss. I would starve first.

I also disagree with referring to members of other species as "it," rather than "he" or "she." It is high time we recognize and acknowledge their personhood with our language choices. It may seem jarring at first, but it is necessary to change our mindsets and help others to change theirs. (Recall the first usage of Ms. to replace the sexist terms Mrs. or Miss? Jarring at first but now commonplace, and it caused people to THINK differently.)

"A person (from Latin: persona, meaning "mask") is most broadly defined as any individual self-aware or rational being, or any entity having rights and duties; or often more narrowly defined as an individual human being in particular." ~Wikipedia

6 people liked this.

 **abulinix** 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

How about fish, mollusks, geese, eggs?

Also, would you cultivate vegetables? On what land? Would you attempt to keep various animals from eating your crop.

1 person liked this.



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to abulinix

Of course, except, perhaps, the egg. Until we know the sex of a developing embryo, we're stuck without an accurate pronoun for the time being. Was this a trick question? :)

2 people liked this.



abulinix 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

OK, so I take it you possibly WOULD eat the egg (but not the rest), which is good, because you'd need some protein, and probably wouldn't be able to find high quality protein in sufficient quantities without eating animals or their products... And whether you'd find eggs in sufficient quantities is somewhat in doubt (especially if you were not the only human or the island was particularly small). Survival (through the winter or whatever tribulation) might well demand that you eat WHATEVER was at hand.

It WAS a trick question in the sense that it was meant to sneakily demonstrate that our existence relies, to some extent, on (at the very least) competing with/displacing and therefore harming other animals. We can try to minimize this by how we eat. But everything else about our "lifestyle" (housing, clothing, technology...) relies on resources "stolen" (is this too strong a word?) from other animals, if not on outright killing of other animals. So this is all a matter of degree, and in fact we are not willing to hold animals as true equals, are we?



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to abulinix

Oh! Did you mean would I EAT these species or developing embryos? Recognizing this highly improbable quandary meat-eaters love to challenge vegans with, my answer would still be No! Nor would I kill and eat a human child, if he or she were all there were to eat.

4 people liked this.



abulinix 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

I see how my original response was misleading!

I'm still curious about your response to the cultivation/competition question. It works on the desert island, but that scenario (though I am not the one who thought it up), is not a necessary condition. The quandary is equally relevant under "normal" conditions. Also: what about an unfertilized egg? (you could keep a hen) Or grubs/insects? On the island, they could mean the difference between life and death. Or, if you like, should insects be treated as person-equivalents in your life as it is? Wouldn't that make agriculture on any scale pretty much impossible?



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to abulinix

I would eat whatever vegetation I found and that's it. Death by starvation can't be pleasant, but it is preferable to killing.

4 people liked this.



abulinix 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

But you are free to do this NOW. You are free to go out into the wilderness and eat only plants. Anything you are doing, right now, beyond subsisting on wild-growing plants (which I am sure you do not do) relies on killing of animals. And even just eating vegetation for any period of time guarantees direct killing of insects and insect eggs at least, and competition with animals for resources, which has the same effect.

LIKE

REPLY



veganforever 1 year ago in reply to abulinix

True, we are BOTH free to do this NOW! Let us away to the woods to do the least harm, you and I. We can sit upon a rock and meditate together until we become one with the rock.

Dear Abulinix, I see what you're driving at, and I appreciate the polite, philosophical discussion. It IS impossible to be an absolutely "pure" vegan. That is setting oneself up for failure (would I no longer drive a car for fear of hitting insects? No, I have responsibilities and dependents and I have to work to pay for our necessities--food, shelter, clothing.) But being a "pure" vegan is not really the goal. The goal is to reduce avoidable suffering for as many animals as possible. A vegan diet is simply one (important) tool toward that end. By eating only plant foods and being a conscientious consumer of other goods and products, I contribute far less to the suffering of other species than I would if I consumed animals and their secretions or "byproducts." No leather, wool, feathers, fur, or silk in my home; no animal testing performed on or animal ingredients in my nonfood cleansers and personal-care products. I do the best I can to prevent avoidable killing and suffering when I can, given the world as it is. (That includes the occasional ant I find crawling on my kitchen counter or little mouse scurrying along the baseboard.)

4 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



abulinix 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

OK... So we are talking real world, and real choices... I would argue that in this real world there is NO moral equivalence between a human child and a pig or a mouse or a worm, or even between a pig and a mouse, or a mouse and a worm. There's a continuum there, and we (people) clearly put ourselves at one end of it... At the other is the worm, the protozoan, the plant... I'm not sure there's a satisfying explanation for this decision, but it's certainly the way virtually all of us behave. It's fair and reasonable to argue that we should consider reduction of animal suffering as an objective good, to be weighed against other values, but when you paint in absolutes and strive for complete consistency (which I maintain is impossible to actually achieve) you open yourself to criticism that you're not living within your beliefs.

Sometimes it seems to me that the point of all this is the creation of an illusion of consistency or virtue. It's not clear to me why avoiding silk, for example, is supposed to reduce suffering. Is it clear that alternatives, like cotton or synthetics or even hemp, are more suffering-neutral? Or that silk, by virtue of being an animal (though nominally in the sense of having sentience) byproduct induces suffering. Maybe all this is clear--I haven't looked into it. I suspect that it's the relationship to the animal as a tool, a thing, that is problematic. If that's so then this would seem not so much about suffering, the topic of the original post, as it is about the moral disgust at using another being (however I choose to define that). But that becomes more difficult to justify from first principles, I

believe...

LIKE REPLY



LesterBallard 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

That would be your choice, of course, but it sounds just fanatic enough to make me wonder how far you would go to stop other meat eaters.

LIKE REPLY



Gary Loewenthal 1 year ago in reply to abulinix

Every vegan realizes that it's impossible to live an impact-free life. And no vegan is calling for that. Ethical veganism means living a life where you strive to refrain from exploiting and causing harm to others, as far as practical and possible. Don't let the perfect get in the way of the good. It may be impossible not to step on bugs, but it's easy to refuse a hamburger.

Animals need not be our moral equivalents for us to have an obligation to strive to refrain from inflicting avoidable harm on them.

But moral equivalence is a tricky subject and may be relative depending on who's judging. The lamb wants to live just as badly as we do, and may derive just as much meaning from his life as we do from ours. A mother cow may love and fiercely protect her baby as much as we do ours. And I've seen cows grieve deeply. But we tend to be biased toward our own species and devalue our victims. One way to show moral superiority is to sacrifice for the benefit of those with less power.

Abraham Lincoln said the true test of a man's character is to give him power. We have a frightening power over the animals. History shows that we tend to use our power to dominate and exploit our victims - human or nonhuman - and to cleverly rationalize those exploitations. We can see through the lens of history that all those exploitations and rationales were wrong, though they might have made us feel better about the exploitation at the time. Can we perhaps transport ourselves a hundred years into the future and avoid being trapped in the normalized institutionalized exploitations of today, including ones in which we may be a participant?

6 people liked this. LIKE REPLY



veganforever 1 year ago

Reply, Part ONE

- Comparisons of atrocities are valid and useful even if the atrocities are not identical, which is always the case.

- A pig struggling for months to get out of a two-foot wide gestation crate is indeed a captive slave. Other forms of confinement in animal agriculture may not be as severe, but almost all limit the animals' natural range of social and physical behaviors that give the animals meaningful lives.

- "Are you suggesting that ... the chicken experiences the same broad range of compounding suffering that human self-awareness and time-marking ensure?"

The chicken's suffering may be worse because the chicken lacks some of humans' coping mechanisms, such as prayer and rationalizing the plight. Furthermore, in the throes of severe physical agony, the human and nonhuman responses are strikingly similar. Finally, the suffering we cause to animals is so severe so often that they deserve for us to stop it rather than analyze it.

- "...none of your response addresses the real questions of how to end an entire network of symbiotic relationships."

To the cow whose babies are stolen from her and sent to veal pens, or the chicken crammed in a battery cage, or the turkey bred to be so top-heavy her legs fold and collapse, the relationship is anything but symbiotic. Nearly all farm animals in the developed world are denied families and sufficient space, and nearly are killed

just out of babyhood. The relationship is one of dominator and victim, not symbiosis.

We end your “network” by shifting demand to plant-based foods. This will happen gradually and the market will adjust.

- “Are you planning to let the chickens free, like Elsa—to be run over on the roads?”

We plan to stop breeding them. Though in many cases, being free at the risk of being run over would be far preferable to being in a dark, crowded shed with ammonia so thick it burns the eyes and damages the lungs.

- “ Let the pigs free to root in forests or damage fragile grasslands?”

I would be more concerned by the real damage to habitat caused by animal agriculture than by the theoretical damage caused by releasing pigs. Grazing is a leading cause of rainforest destruction. Animal agriculture is a leading source of water pollution. The UN has identified animal agriculture as one of the most environmentally destructive and unsustainable activities on the planet.

- “How will you deal with the pain and suffering of injured animals? Their anguish as they starve?”

They suffer much more right now in factory farms. It is constant. Transportation is hellish; many animals die along the way from stress and lack of food or water—it is considered an acceptable economic cost by animal agriculture. Newborn male chicks at hatcheries are suffocated or chopped to death. Chickens starve to death because they fall over due to their artificially induced top-heaviness and cannot get up. One-day old calves, still wet from birth, fall from trucks and end up in ditches by the side of the road. The animals are in Hell right now. But again, we'll gradually breed fewer of them as demand goes down; there won't be cows roaming the streets.

- “Their illness if and when they over-breed due to lack of predation?”

Humans are the worst predators they've ever known. Practically none live more than a fraction of their life spans even in the wild. In their natural habitat, populations reach an equilibrium.

- We're not advocating to the Maoris but to people in the developed world who have the means to be vegan.

- What are you going to do for rural families in areas not suited to growing complete protein crops?

It's been shown time and again that in the developed world we can feed many more people on a plant-based diet. Even when factoring in transportation, it is far more efficient and less environmentally destructive to eat a plant-based diet rather than meat- and dairy-based diets.

- “Or poor urbanites in the US whose most affordable form of high-grade complete protein may be from eggs?”

It's been demonstrated that one can eat a healthy vegan diet for as cheaply as one can eat a carnivorous diet. And this is even before removing the huge subsidies that put salads at an economic disadvantage compared to animal products. It is simple to get enough protein on a reasonably well-balanced vegan diet. I would be far more concerned with these real problems in poor urban areas: concentration of fast-food joints and lack of decent produce. The cheapest solution to our health, diabetes, and obesity epidemic is increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and less consumption of meat, dairy, sugar, and refined products.

- Introduction of plant-based technologies is far more sustainable and less cruel than giving a goat to a family that does not have the means to take care of it. The Heifer Project is basically an arm of the animal agriculture industry. And it's ludicrous to send dairy cows to populations that cannot digest milk. But it makes sense to show them how to produce nondairy milk from native legumes. Too many people are duped by Heifer Project ads.

6 people liked this.



BeaElliott 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

Thank you veganforever for your more than adequate responses. I don't think you left a thing unanswered truthfully. Pity though that they don't wish to yield to logic... Or to compassion. How grateful we all should be that the message IS being listened to by many others. In solidarity - Thanks for all you do.

10 people liked this.



kire73 1 year ago in reply to veganforever

I second BeaElliott in my appreciation of your thoughtful, accurate and passionate words, Veganforever. I was going to jump into the conversation, but darn if you didn't cover all the bases, in concise fashion. Saved me the headache of having to post & reply all night! Ha! I also very much appreciated your post BeaElliott. Thanks from a 15 year Vegan! - Erik

8 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



abulinix 1 year ago

Melissa points out that the welfare of animals simply is something that virtually NO ONE, in practice, elevates to the same level as human welfare. Pretending otherwise is just that... One more instance of this is our reliance on other species for medical research, something that's not likely to go away anytime soon. Is this also "not OK," ie something that needs to stop immediately?

[LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



TStacy 1 year ago

I agree with everything you wrote. I still eat meat. I'm working on it, though.

2 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



AG 1 year ago

Hi James,

This is possibly the most concise explanation from a vegetarian person about why they don't eat meat ... one that aligns almost exactly with my take on this.

PS: I will also add that while I've come to understand the alternative view on vegetarianism (nature, food chain, etc.) I do especially have a problem with people who want Michael Vick to be given the death penalty for abusing dogs (despicable, glad he went to jail) while also bragging about the big steak they ate.

PS2: Some of the objections to your post wreak of guilt.

6 people liked this. [LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



TStacy 1 year ago in reply to AG

"I do especially have a problem with people who want Michael Vick to be given the death penalty for abusing dogs (despicable, glad he went to jail) while also bragging about the big steak they ate."

No doubt about it. It's amazing that some people can't see the hypocrisy in that.

[LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



Jon Fraud Carry 1 year ago

As a former botanist, I am appalled at those who would take a tender plant, the underpinning of so much that is good and decent on this earth, and rip its delicate root systems from the bosom of the earth into which it had woven a symbiotic, almost metaphysical relationship. To then take this innocent, frail, exquisitely complex organism and subject it the fires of the oven or the boiling waters of the stove is beyond cruel. The deceitful subterfuge of vegetarianism scarcely hides the barbaric soul, the merciless heart, the pitiless spirit of the plant killers.

[LIKE](#) [REPLY](#)



Calliope11 1 year ago in reply to Jon Fraud Carry

If we following this line of thinking, humans should not eat plants, and do work to prevent other consumption and destruction, including that of animals. Animals/Humans are left with some chemically

produced sustenance? While science does not provide us that option yet, in the short term we can work to reduce that by consuming via the more efficient food sources (animal agriculture consumes a lot more plants than us directly eating them), we could also advocate a diet more based on fruits where the plant doesn't get destroyed.

LIKE REPLY



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to Jon Fraud Carry

oh lordy, please spare us the bad humor.

1 person liked this. LIKE REPLY



enigma3535 1 year ago

IMHO, I do not think you understand what the term "sentient" really means in the current vernacular.

That said, I do think I understand what you want it to mean.

In a couple of centuries, if nothing untoward happens to the climate or geo-political landscape [if we evolve without much in the manner of trauma or cataclysm], you might get your wish ... in the meantime? This one suggests you pursue a more meaningful cause with your mental energy.

As long as 99% [or so] of the worldwide populace consumes meat and much of them depend on this food item to survive, expending this time crafting these posts is puzzling given all the other shite that is actually actionable and could meaningfully sway public opinion.

LIKE REPLY



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LIKE REPLY



neverdopedneveradoper 1 year ago

I need to see this mystery email. It's quick dismissal and then a entire article about rebutting it, well it's odd.

LIKE REPLY



TheAnalogKid 1 year ago

Man, I could go for a big old juicy steak right about now.

LIKE REPLY



Maura 1 year ago

I just wanted to weigh in in favor of Mr. McWilliams' argument for equal consideration of non-human animals

because I know, sadly, that I am in the minority.

I agree that the property status of animals raised for food plays a large part in how people think about them and treat them. However, dogs and cats are considered property under the law and as mistreated many are though millions are "euthanized" each year, people generally show more concern for them. I think human consideration of some animals as food is a very complex social, cultural and psychological phenomenon. Melanie Joy, PhD wrote about it in her book, "Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism." I haven't read it, but I've heard her speak at a conference.

To those non-vegans that are still reading and have found the arguments against eating animal products and for veganism sanctimonious, or found themselves on the defense, please push yourself to lower your defenses, give the arguments their due consideration and try eating more vegan meals. When you do, you are likely to find that the satisfaction and even joy that many find from going vegan or nearly vegan isn't from smug superiority, it's from feeling connected to other species and having the power to boycott the products of their mistreatment and killing. These feelings have moved even some of those who participated in the raising and killing of animals for food to become vegan. It's that powerful, and eating vegan can be very easy to do. There are many vegan foods that are fast and easy to prepare, and many restaurants offer items that are vegan or can easily be ordered vegan. Do it one meal at a time if you have to, but please do it.

7 people liked this.

 **stantoro** 1 year ago

Thank you, Prof. McWilliams, for setting out this issue so clearly and forcefully. The basic moral point is very simple, and very clear.

2 people liked this.

 **stantoro** 1 year ago

Thank you, Prof. McWilliams, for setting out this very basic and very clear moral issue so forcefully. I've heard variations of the "you and the pig" scenario many times, and it's usually done in a flippant and jokey way. But this article actually goes there and gives a reasonable answer.

2 people liked this.

 **Joshua Allen LaBure** 1 year ago

Thank you for this article. You have beautifully articulated the same feeling that I have on the subject.

3 people liked this.

 **Veggie Brothers** 1 year ago

James - wonderful post. Kudos for expressing your thoughts and sharing such an important topic with others. Love this: "Our entire discussion of animal welfare and the comparative humaneness of free-range farming has taken place behind the protective veil of property status. Lift this veil, if only as a mental exercise, and you'll be amazed at what a radically different question you'll be forced to contemplate."

3 people liked this.

 **J. Tyler** 1 year ago

I am very encouraged to see this article published by The Atlantic. Unfortunately, other supposedly progressive publications avoid such topics, or treat them with contempt, misinformation and mockery (as is done over at Mother Jones). I suppose it's easier to blame the Republicans or whomever, rather than take a cold hard look at our own daily complicity in needless violence and injustice. We are not justified in enslaving others or taking a life simply for our own pleasure, that much should seem obvious to any intelligent and compassionate person.

My thanks go out to The Atlantic for having the integrity to engage your readers in such important and enlightened discourse.

4 people liked this.



Joel Gabelman 1 year ago

Interesting - perhaps rather than blaming man's desire to eat meat as a fault, one could certainly blame God for creating us in his image. If this is the case, perhaps God loves BLT's. Something to think about...



Vivi82 12 months ago in reply to Joel Gabelman

or man's desire to rape women, molest children, enslave & torture, eat cats/dogs/horses, shoot a dozen innocent people....there are a few more "desires" i could list in which the majority of us can find PLENTY of blame.

"If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men". ~St. Francis of Assisi

2 people liked this.



J. Tyler 1 year ago

<http://www.thisveganlife.org/y...>

2 people liked this.



trulypigs 12 months ago

Good article. A few thoughts: you state: "Human accomplishments and abilities seem to so obviously distinguish us that downplaying our differences might appear to be nothing but a philosophical gambit." Compare our great accomplishments to those of a colony of ants, a hive of bees, and we suddenly don't seem so accomplished.

Another point I disagree on, is the stranded on a vegetation free island with a pig scenario. I personally don't think I am on the verge of finding a cure for cancer, and I think to say that you just might be is kind of ridiculous. I can say with absolute certainty that the pig and I would be starving to death together, unless of course, he chose to eat me. I have no delusions of any kind of superiority, and if the pig had a higher survival drive than I and chose to make me his last meal, then so be it. The only thing I possess as a human that the pig does not is morals, and those morals would not change if my very life depended on it.

I also have a problem with the whole locavore, free range, and crate-free movement. No matter how well the animals were treated in life, there is no such thing as humane slaughter. These same animals are still transported to slaughterhouses, and killed in the same manner as the factory farmed animals. The potential for cruel conditions in transport and slaughter is great.

The last point I want to make is on the "property" argument. I can't accept that this is the reason animals are slaughtered without any regard to their sentience. Pets, after all, are also considered "property" and we don't kill and eat them.

Just my 2 cents.



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Just my 2 cents.

2 people liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



ALCAF2 11 months ago in reply to trulypigs

Not just your 2 cents - that is what you think, feel, believe, understand. One point to consider is that none of this is going to convince anyone to make a culinary change. IF someone wants to take meat out of their diet, then that is a personal choice.

I am an omnivore, that means I eat animals and their products. I choose to do so, just as I choose to eat fish or vegetables. I know that this means they must be killed. That decision works for me as I keep my culinary choices separate from my ecological or even ethical positions.

I cannot speak for others, and I find the all too often "discussions" like these end up as attempts to convince or berate.

I don't want to hurt animals or any one or anything for that matter, but my decisions lead to some pain and I own that and live with that. I guess you could say I'm a semi Jainist.

LIKE

REPLY



BigRedAngus 11 months ago

This is a terrific article and I am late to the discussion. As someone who practices stock free organic (now termed 'veganic') agriculture, I am a bit concerned by those readers suggesting that animal manures are necessary to 'sustainable' agriculture. They are not necessary and in fact, come at a great environmental cost.

Please realize, animals do not create soil nutrients, they merely concentrate them through digestion. They are 'mobile composters', but animals produce nothing that is not supplied equally well (and much more cheaply) through stock-free composts and the breakdown of nitrogen fixing crops - many of which are part of the optimal human diet.

I've had my soil tested yearly over the past decade and have radically increased fertility using veganic methods. I am also pleased to know that I am not contributing to manure run off, risking crop contamination by ecoli, nor wasting resources on livestock.

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



ElizabethH 11 months ago

You bring up an interesting point towards the end of your article, when you mention that the status of an animal as property trumps other considerations. It reminded me of the fact that the primary opposition to the abolition of slavery was that slave owners would experience economic set-backs. Even in a case with clear-cut moral implications, such as the ownership of another human being, it really comes down to economics in the end.

<http://vegan-ish.blogspot.com/>

1 person liked this.

LIKE

REPLY



EarthFirstNH 10 months ago

But say I'm stranded on a vegetation-free island with a pig. There'd be no question as to who would feed whom. Applying the principle of equal consideration, I would decide that, given that my own life is at stake, and given that somebody was going to eat somebody, the pig's suffering would be worth the continuation of my life. Thus the pig would die.

I think you may want to retract that statement till you have tried to kill a full grown pig, after having caught it, before it kills you.

LIKE REPLY



Auburn Meadow Farm 1 month ago

I'm not sure that finding a cure for cancer would be on your mind as the only human on your island, and you'd better sleep with one eye open because that pig is eyeing you with the same idea.... :)

LIKE REPLY

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