

What about plants? Don't plants have feelings too?

It is possible that plants have sensitivities that we do not yet understand. Because plants do not have nervous systems and cannot run away from predators, it has generally been assumed that they do not experience pain and suffering. Recent scientific evidence suggests that the life of plants is more complex than we once thought. However, we do know that birds, mammals and fish have well-developed nervous systems and pain receptors. Like us, they show pleasure and pain and they present comparable evidence of fear and well-being. Animals cry out in pain, they nurse wounded body parts, and they seek to avoid those who have hurt them in the past.

In order to live, one has to eat. However, when we eat animal products, we consume many more plants indirectly than if we ate those plants directly, because the animals we eat are fed huge quantities of grasses, grains, and seeds to be converted into meat, milk, and eggs. As a vegan (one who eats no animal products) you cause fewer beings to suffer and die for you.

What will we do with all the animals if we stop eating them? Won't they overrun the earth?

Farmed animals will not overrun the earth if we stop eating them because we will no longer intentionally breed them as we do now. Parent flocks and herds are deliberately maintained by artificial insemination, genetic selection, bizarre lighting schedules and other manipulations to force them to produce billions of offspring each year. This inflated population will fade as people stop eating animal products. In time, as David Gabbe states in *Why Do Vegetarians Eat Like That?*, “farm animals could be left to fend for themselves; some would make out fine, others would struggle to keep from becoming extinct. But, like all animals (except humans), they would adjust their numbers in accordance with the conditions around them.”

In the meantime, we have to remember that we, not they, are responsible for their predicament. We have an obligation to find ways to ease the transitional period for these animals.

Farm animals have been bred for domestication. Haven't they lost their natural instincts? They can't survive on their own, can they? If we stop providing for them, won't they die of starvation and failure to reproduce?

On the one hand we're afraid that farmed animals will overrun the earth. On the other hand we worry that they'll become extinct. Feral chickens, pigs, and other farmed animals (“feral” refers to domesticated animals who have become self-sustaining again) successfully resume their natural activities given the chance: they forage, graze, mate, raise their young, socialize and get along very well without humans. Farmed animals are much more autonomous and resilient than is commonly supposed. Otherwise, it is better for creatures afflicted with human-created defects not to be born. People who think it is all right to imprison animals in genetically-impaired bodies and who then get testy about their becoming extinct, are indulging in cynicism and sentimentality. Call their bluff and move on to other issues.

Is confinement so terrible? After all, farmers protect their animals from bad weather and predators and provide them with food, water and shelter. Isn't that better than being in the wild?

Slave traders and slaveholders argued that it was better to be a slave in a “civilized, Christian” society than to be at liberty in a heathen jungle. This same rationalization is used to justify expropriating and subjugating other species. Producers tell the public that farmed animals prefer “three meals a day” to a life in the wild. In fact, the “wild” is a human projection onto areas of the earth and modes of being that are alien and inhospitable to our species. The wild isn't “wild” to the animals who live there. It is their home. Animals in wall-to-wall confinement are forced to live in a situation that expresses human nature, not theirs. If they preferred to be packed together without contact with the world outside, then we would not need intensive physical confinement facilities, since they would voluntarily cram together and save us money.

It is illogical to argue that humans protect farmed animals from “predators.” We are their predator. Moreover, by confining them we subject them to many more nonhuman predators in the form of parasites and other disease organisms than they would otherwise encounter. By locking them up, we prevent them from using their natural flight/fight abilities, so that when a predator (such as the farmer) comes along, they cannot escape. Millions more animals die of heat stress and other climactic conditions in intensive confinement facilities than they would in nature. The inability of confined farmed animals to exercise their natural defenses and self-assertion

induces pathological stress leading to immune-system breakdown. Only by twisted standards can apathy and atrophy be regarded as benefiting an animal.

If farm animals are treated as badly as you say, why are they so productive? Wouldn't they stop producing meat, milk and eggs if they were treated inhumanely?

Farmed animals can be profoundly mistreated and still “produce,” in the same way that profoundly mistreated humans can be overweight, sexually active and able to produce offspring. Like humans, farmed animals can “adapt,” up to a point, to living in slums and concentration camp conditions. Is this an argument for slums and concentration camps? Farmed animals do not gain weight, lay eggs, and produce milk because they are comfortable, content, or well-cared for, but because they have been manipulated specifically to do these things through genetics, medications, and management techniques. For example, egg producers artificially stimulate and extend egg production by keeping the lights burning for 16 or 17 hours a day to force the hen's pituitary gland to secrete increased quantities of the hormone that activates the ovary.

Animals in production agriculture are slaughtered at extremely young ages, before disease and death have decimated them as would otherwise happen even with all the drugs. Even so, many more individual animals suffer and die in intensive farming, but because the volume of animals being used is so big—in the billions—the losses are economically negligible, while the volume of flesh, milk and eggs is abnormally increased.

What difference does it make how we treat farm animals— they're going to die anyway, aren't they?

The fact that giving farmed animals a decent life before killing them can be seriously questioned represents an important reason to stop raising them for food. It is not that they are going to die anyway that seems to justify our mistreatment of them when they are alive—we are all going to die but we do not generalize the argument—but that we are deliberately going to kill them. There is a felt inconsistency in valuing a creature so little and yet insisting that he or she be granted a semblance of tolerable existence prior to execution. So wanton can our disrespect for our victims become that any churlish sentiment or behavior seems fit to exercise. It is

contemptible to assert that humans have no responsibility, or that it makes no sense, to enrich the life of a being brought into the world merely to suffer and die for us. The situation confers greater, rather than lesser, or no, obligations on us towards those at our mercy.

Yes, but didn't God give humans dominion over all the other animals? If so, what's wrong with raising them for food and killing them as long as we treat them humanely while they're still alive?

Some people believe the Creator gave humanity “dominion” over other life. Others see the idea of “dominion” as an assertion of human ego in conflict with true spirituality and common sense. One way or other, a loving God does not authorize humanity to degrade, insult, and terrorize the other creatures of the earth, any more than people are authorized to bully, terrorize, and belittle one another. The idea of a gracious human spirit is expressed in Matthew 23:37, for example, where it says, “O, Jerusalem . . . how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.” Like nature, scripture can be invoked to justify almost anything one wishes to do. Instead of dwelling on verses that invite us to be pompous and violent, we should focus on passages and images that instruct us to be peaceful, participating members of creation.

Most world religions envision a “golden age” when humans lived peaceably on earth without bloodshed. In Genesis 1:29, God gives to humans “every herb bearing seed . . . and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed.” God says that, for us, these seeds and fruits “shall be meat.” The Biblical image of the Garden of Eden is paralleled by the classical image of the Golden Age and by ancient Indian depictions of a peaceable kingdom on earth.

Aren't humans natural meat-eaters? Aren't we omnivores, designed to eat plants and animals?

Arguments about the true and ancient diet of humanity are largely speculative. Opposition to flesh-eating goes back to antiquity, as shown in Howard Williams's history, *The Ethics of Diet* (1883). Records show a traditional association between certain human cultures throughout the world and a diet comprising, though not necessarily based on, meat. A vigorous human lifestyle can sustain some intake of the flesh of vigorous animals. However, westernized populations are not active by

stone age standards, and the mass-produced animals whose body parts and secretions they consume are forced to live sedentary lives, in filth and confinement, because natural activity expends energy that “wastes feed.”

There is clear evidence that an animal-based diet causes degenerative diseases—actual cases can be cited and actual clogged arteries and starved internal organs can be viewed every day in the hospital or morgue. Where is the comparable evidence showing that people living on a varied plant-based diet suffer, as a result, from calcium, protein, and iron deficiencies, heart attacks and strokes? Recent studies by Dr. Dean Ornish and Dr. T. Colin Campbell in the U.S. and China show the opposite. European travellers in the 18th and 19th centuries marveled at the vigor and longevity of peasants in Turkey, Russia, South America and elsewhere: they were amazed that people living on such “impoverished fare” as rice, beans, millet and potatoes could be so hardy and long-lived. While there is no evidence that the human body needs animal products, there is abundant evidence that the human body thrives on a nutritious plant-based diet.

There is no such thing as cruelty-free food! To raise vegetables, you have to kill animals—”pests” who would otherwise eat up your crops, like rodents and insects. What’s the difference between directly killing animals for food and killing them to protect crops and grains?

Assuming that all known methods of harmless self-protection have been exhausted, there is still a definite difference between defending oneself from predators (including insects) and deliberately bringing creatures into the world to suffer and be killed for one’s appetites and habits. We kill bacteria to defend our teeth from decay. Only thoughtlessness considers this the same as, or a justification for, slaughterhouses and the violence surrounding them—castration, debeaking, starvation, force-feeding, electrical shock, etc.

What’s wrong with eggs and milk? Eating dairy products and eggs is not the same as eating animals, is it?

Vegetarians do not eat animals, but, according to the traditional use of the term, they may choose to consume dairy products and eggs, in which case they are called lacto-ovo (milk and egg) vegetarians. These distinctions are essentially academic, as the production of eggs and dairy products

involves enormous killing as does the production of meat. Surplus cockerels (young roosters), unwanted calves, “spent” dairy cows and laying fowl have been slaughtered, bludgeoned, trashed, drowned and ditched through the ages. Disposing of the “surplus” males by the dairy industry is the basis of the veal calf industry. The egg industry trashes half the population of birds born—more than 250 million male chicks—every year.

In fact, dairy products and eggs are every bit as much animal parts as “meat” (muscle tissue) is. Like muscles, these parts derive from and comprise within themselves the physiological, metabolic, and hormonal activities of an animal’s body, and a magnitude of bodily expense. A hen’s egg is a generative cell, or ovum, with a store of food and immunity for an embryo that, in nature, would normally be growing inside the egg. Milk is the provision of food and immunity that is produced by the body of a female mammal for her nursing offspring. Milk, literally, is baby food.

For thousands of years, human beings have manipulated the bodies of hens and cows in order to extract these body, or baby, parts for themselves. Now as in the past, the economically “spent” fowl and cow are shipped to the slaughterhouse when their bodies no longer pay. They endure days of pre-slaughter starvation and long trips to the slaughterhouse because of their low carcass value. To be a lacto-ovo vegetarian is not to wash one’s hands of misery and murder.

What about jobs? What will happen to all the jobs if people stop consuming animal products? Are you trying to put people out of work?

The fear pounded into meat-industry workers about losing their jobs if people convert to a vegetarian diet locks them into the only fate they know. As long as people exist, food will have to be produced and someone will have to produce it for them. Imagine if all those protein-rich soybeans and other produce now fed to farmed animals were harvested directly for people and turned into everything from burgers to ice cream. Imagine all the jobs! The huge amount of money that is now being spent to patch up human bodies ravaged by animal-based diets and to clean up an environment polluted by farmed-animal wastes could be used to retrain workers and redirect food technologies. As consumers, we can use our purchasing power to speed technological conversion to the production of all-vegetarian foods. In retooling, producers will “create their own competition,” hiring just as many workers as before in order to

feed the hungry-as-ever human population.

What about human problems? Why concentrate on animals when so many suffering people need help?

Are Mothers Against Drunk Drivers (MADD) badgered with why they are not working instead for battered women or abused children or some other cause? Were Americans who fought against slavery attacked for ignoring the plight of white people? Choosing a particular issue does not mean that one is indifferent to other concerns. Animal abuse, like child abuse and spousal abuse, is a human problem. The world we have made for farmed animals to live in hurts people as well as the animals and offers good evidence that hardening of the sensibilities is an even worse disease than hardening of the arteries. As human beings, we have a responsibility to the victims of our society and our species, whoever and wherever those victims may be. Every social justice movement in history has been scorned by the mainstream, which is made up ironically of people whose own freedoms and rights were won by revolutionaries at an earlier time.

Forget about ethics. You’ll make a better case for vegetarianism if you stick to health and environmental issues. Do you honestly think most people are ever going to care about farm animals?

Some people argue that we should emphasize health, food-safety, and environmental issues rather than the animals and their plight, because humans are basically selfish. While it is important to combine these issues whenever possible, it is a mistake to assume that people cannot or will not care about their fellow creatures. Just as we owe it to our animal victims to rescue them from cruel and degrading circumstances, so we owe it to them to be their voice. To insist that most people will never care about farmed animals is to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Two centuries ago, most people “didn’t want to hear about” human slaves, either. Many more people will openly care and move toward change when they feel it is socially safe. Millions of people have impulses of compassion that have been stifled by self-doubt and fear of ridicule. Eventually, some of the health and environmental problems caused by an animal-based diet may be solved or reduced by technology, at least in appearance. Only the ethics of diet, the pain and suffering, the shared mortality and claims of our fellow creatures upon us are lasting.

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Responding Effectively to 13 Frequently Asked Questions About Food, Fiber, Farmed Animals, and the Ethics of Diet



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