

Why I Am A Vegetarian
Written From A Christian Perspective

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Revised and Completed on December 17, 2004

I believe that pity is a law like justice,
and that kindness is a duty like uprightness.
That which is weak has a right to the
kindness and pity of that which is strong.
In the relations of man with the animals,
with the flowers, with all the objects of creation,
there is a great ethic, scarcely perceived as yet,
which will at length break through into the light,
and which will be the corollary
and the complement
to human ethics.

Are there not here unsounded depths for the thinker?
Is one to think oneself mad
because one has the sentiment of
universal pity in one's heart?

VICTOR HUGO

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Personal History and Introduction

This is my answer to all of you who have asked (or wanted to ask) me why, written with love, thoughtfulness, and sincerity.

Before I was a vegetarian, I thought vegetarians were weird. When I actually became one, I didn't suddenly turn into one of the stereotypes. I was still me. I didn't join a club, memorize a motto, and start making picket signs. I didn't choose a new "vegetarian" personality—the spandex-wearing health nuts, the scary basket-of-fruit-totting "whole foods" ladies (you'll see one on most natural foods cookbooks), the radical always-angrily-preaching "meat is murder" crusader, and the dirty hippie living on peace, love, and tofu were all equally unappealing to me.

The day I made my decision, I was pretty much the same as the day before, and I still am now, more than eight months later. I do not, and never have, associated my vegetarianism with a "movement," and therefore do not associate with the culture of any of those movements. I just made vegetarianism part of my beliefs. My convictions in this area aren't rooted in a cultural trend any more than my belief in God is. Furthermore, just because there *are* cultural trends of which vegetarianism is popular, they don't negate its legitimacy.

I grew up never giving vegetarianism a thought, largely, if not solely, because it was not the norm. Perhaps this is why many people do not give it a thought.

Our personal views are largely affected by the time and culture in which we live. We are shaped by what those near and dear to us think and do. Where I grew up, turkey at Thanksgiving and prime rib at Christmas as well as pork, chicken or beef at dinner most of the week was normal. Growing up in an agricultural area, farmers raised chickens, cows, and pigs for slaughter. We would have an entire cow in our deep freeze. I never wondered if it was right or wrong. No one asked me to think about it. It just *was*.

The cow in the freezer was just food neatly divided, wrapped and labeled. The pieces were kept out of view until they were cooked and seasoned. None of us had to do the unappetizing act of slaughtering the animal, draining the blood, peeling off the skin, cutting the body up into pieces. A chicken breast wasn't a body part but a cooking ingredient. Cooking a leg was as mindless as cooking the seasonings. We didn't have to separate ourselves from any reality; the separation was done for us at the slaughterhouse and at the grocery store by way of miles and cellophane wrap.

I love cooking, especially with my mom, when I get the chance. There is something about being in the kitchen with good smells and precious people that brings comfort. None of this has changed since I've become a vegetarian.

Before I go on, I want to share some more personal history. As I said, the subject of "animal ethics" was completely foreign to me growing up (other than "don't hit them"), but there is one memory from my late childhood that stands out.

I remember sitting around our kitchen table with my mom, brother, and sister. It was raining and Dad was in the backyard with a shovel and the body of our dog, D.J. A few days before he and our other dog, Nugget, ran away. When we found them, D.J. was badly injured and Nugget was quite shaken up. D.J. had been hit by a truck and was in

considerable pain, so my parents decided the most merciful thing would be to put him to sleep. The vet could not dispose of his body because D.J. was too big.

We all cried quietly, wiping tears away between periods of shocked disbelief. The afternoon seemed to drag on forever as we tried not to think about my dad and the shovel behind the house. We told stories about D.J., like the time he sat on Mom in the kitchen while she had dinner on the stove, trapping her until someone came home to rescue her. Or the time when he curiously stuck his big head in a flowerpot only to get it stuck inside. As he paced the backyard with this pot stuck to his face, we were all laughing too hard to help him. There was the time he wandered over to the neighbor's yard and stuck his black fluffy head into a bucket of white paint. He looked like an extra large skunk for days.

What made this situation even worse was that Nugget grew so depressed that she stopped eating or responding to our affection. Not long after, we had to have her put to sleep as well. This was almost more than we could bear, especially since Nugget had been with us since I was only four years old. We remembered how she would actually *tiptoe* on the hardwood floors at night when we were sleeping so she wouldn't wake us. Or how she, when given a plate of leftovers from the table, would finish everything but leave the peas in a neat corner, licked clean.

We loved them and it hurt terribly when they were gone. I never made the connection, though, that the animals I allowed myself to get close to were just as valuable as the animals we were eating for dinner. One was a living, breathing, walking personality with quirks and a name, while the other was cooked on our plates. As the *New York Times*' Michael Pollan says, "There's a schizoid quality to our relationship with animals, in which sentiment and brutality exist side by side. Half the dogs in America will receive Christmas presents this year, yet few of us pause to consider the miserable life of the pig—an animal easily as intelligent as a dog—that becomes the Christmas ham." Indeed, I would have been mortified had someone suggested we take D.J. out back, slaughter him, and serve him on a platter.

Eating meat is more than culturally accepted—it's culturally *expected*. Not only were family dinners centered on meat, so were restaurant menus, church potlucks, and college cafeteria selections. So, obviously, when I got married my husband and I ate the same way we were brought up to eat (as most people do).

After reading "Fast Food Nation," I vowed never to eat at McDonald's again. We gave up most fast food but when we *would* eat it, we noticed how greasy and heavy we felt, wincing through heartburn. Our meals, home and out, consisted of lots of meat, cheese, and processed things. We were on a high fat, high cholesterol diet without realizing it, both of us carrying extra pounds. I was breaking out every day. I was miserable that I looked so lousy and I failed to deal with my depression in a healthy way, which only made it worse.

I finally checked out some books about healthy eating from the library, and among them were cookbooks that talked about organic, unrefined, and unprocessed foods. I tried some of the new recipes and they were delicious. We began to feel a bit different. This was in January of 2004.

I stopped eating meat by default. I didn't suddenly realize I was digesting a corpse. When I learned about all of the health hazards, I didn't want to eat meat. The only safe alternative, I thought, was to eat free-range meat, but this was impossible to

find in our area. Then, in my search for more recipes and information I came across a website about vegetarianism.

I learned that there was more to giving up meat. I had no idea that eating meat contributed to world hunger. And I always thought that I was compassionate toward animals. I just never considered not eating them.

I began reading books on vegetarianism from a Christian perspective (some cited at the end of this paper). I was encouraged and challenged. My views have been formed, torn down, and tweaked largely due to some of these books. My curiosity and need to live a morally harmonious life compelled me to keep learning about this much-ignored and much-misunderstood area of ethics.

Sometimes I do feel like throwing my hands up and forgetting it. When day after day someone else is expressing disagreement, annoyance, or even hostility, when I am continuously met with pressure from our culture to include meat in my diet, when I just don't feel like being singled out or defending my convictions one more time—these are the times when I get discouraged and wonder if it's worth it. But nevertheless I think this is part of living a compassionate life that glorifies God, and there are always those days when encouragement comes and I remember why I changed.

What follows is why *I* am a vegetarian, not why *you* have to be one. If reading this helps you to understand me better, then it has accomplished its purpose. If it inspires you or convicts you, then it has done more than I intended and I am glad.

There are a few more things I need to make clear: 1) I don't think eating meat is a sin, 2) I don't belong to PETA, 3) I am a total vegetarian (or "vegan" as they say), which means I avoid all animal products when possible (lacto-ovo-vegetarians still eat dairy and eggs, etc.), but I'm not seeking a label with which to define myself (I don't fit the hardcore vegan position because I will eat dairy in certain situations), and 4) I am a Christian first and a vegetarian complementary to, or because of, that conviction.

Being a Christian and a vegetarian puts me in a strange place. I am too liberal for the Christians and not liberal enough for the animal rights crusaders. Please do not label me a tree-hugger just because I'm a vegetarian any more than you might label me a bigot just because I'm a Christian. It's not that simple.

My paper is divided into the three main areas where eating animals presents a problem for me: the world hunger problem, the ethical problem, and the health problem. After discussing these I have included a few pages of typical objections that people raise against me for being a vegetarian, both theological and non-theological, and my responses. I have also included some cooking comments that I've learned if you are interested. Lastly, there are a few facts and quotes that I couldn't fit into my paper but which I have included in a list on the last couple of pages.

The World Hunger Problem

Ten million people starve each year because the affluent use what grain is available to fatten animals for slaughter. Roughly half of the grain produced in the world (80% of the grain in America) is being fed to the animals that are fed to the rich.

To get back 1 pound of meat, a chicken must be fed 3 pounds of grain, a turkey 4 pounds, a hog 6 pounds, and cattle 16 pounds of grain (Sussman, 234). This is hardly a fair or logical use of our grain when there are ten million dying a day for lack of it.

Supplying one person with 2500 calories for one day requires 3.5 acres of land on a meat-based diet. The same person on a wheat-based diet only needs .25 acre. One acre used for meat production yields enough animal protein for 250 days, whereas one acre used for soybean production yields enough protein for 2200 days (Sussman, 234). Again, considering that a ration of grain equals 1/2 pound, then the same amount of grain needed to produce 1 pound of meat could feed 32 people a day if *they* ate the grain. One acre of land can produce the following: 40,000 pounds of potatoes, 30,000 pounds of carrots, 50,000 pounds of tomatoes, and only 250 pounds of beef. It is not very difficult to see the “inherent inefficiency of raising meat” (Lyman, 41-42). Lastly, consider this: *the world’s cattle consume enough food to feed 8.7 billion people, which is more than presently exist on earth* (Webb, 23-24).

Imagine what could happen if the world’s wealthy just *ate less* meat than they regularly do. You may be wondering what your change would accomplish. Is it really worth it? We watch the starving children on commercials and feel helpless sitting in our living room, worlds away. It’s really not much to ask, but we fail to give because we fear its lack of effectiveness. But how effective is the alternative?

Doing nothing because your individual contribution won’t change *everything* is not a reason to do nothing. Many influential things must be done little by little. I saw a cartoon once that showed a sea of faces fading into the distance. Above each single head there was a caption saying, “But what can I do? I’m just *one* person.”

Tony Campolo asks us to imagine a plane crash with six survivors who are stranded in the mountains. One of the six people is a very fat man. He hoards all of the rations to himself while the other five people starve to death in front of him. We are the fat man of the world. Not only are we using up all of the grain to fatten our cattle, but we are also taking land from the poor in order to graze even more of our cattle. This leaves the poor surrounded by lands they cannot use to grow food for themselves because the rich have claimed it for themselves.

Borders and social classes do not restrict God’s love. People he loves are dying so that we, the privileged, can eat what we want. A re-reading of the story of Lazarus and the rich man reminds us of what God thinks about the rich having disregard for the poor man begging from his abundance. It is not only those who steal from the poor whom God judges, but also those who simply ignore them.

I am not trying to “guilt trip” anyone. I am saying that our actions have consequences, sometimes beyond what we imagine. I am asking you to consider where your meat comes from and whom it costs for you to have it. Consider your brothers and sisters around the world who do not have such abundance, and have a few less beef dinners a week—we all have that to give.

I learned many things in church but one thing that never came up was how to treat animals. We sang about God's beautiful creation and read Psalms that said all creation glorified Him. I also remember boys doing obnoxiously cruel things to small animals ("boys will be boys!"), road kill jokes and hunting stories. No one prodded me to consider how strange it was for us to sing about the wonder of God's created beings and then hunt them as a pastime (or to spoil a cat and roast a pig). Why?

Christian Theology and Animals

Christians have unknowingly received much of their theology about animals from men such as Aristotle, Rene Descartes, Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant. Their basic ideas are passed on to us and we eventually assume their origin is in Scripture.

Kant and Descartes believed only rational beings "matter," which poses a problem for irrational human beings (mentally handicapped, mentally ill, infants) and leaves me wondering, "but why?" Descartes declared "animals are machines" (Regan, 45) and wrote off their value completely because they have no language—this seemed to be a very important characteristic for one to have in order to matter. The superiority of human beings is emphasized again and again throughout Descartes' theology.

To display this human superiority over animals, Descartes' pupils "kicked about their dogs and dissected their cats without mercy, laughing...and calling their screams the noise of breaking machinery" (Wennberg, 313). This is how they displayed "superiority" but it was merely a display of the ego. Thank God that his superiority was shown by becoming a servant.

Aquinas, following in the anthropocentric vein, called men "masters of creation" (Regan, 17) who were to have dominion. However, as Jurgen Moltmann writes, to 'subdue the earth' refers to human beings finding nourishment from it for themselves, which "according to [Genesis] verses 29 and 30, is evidently supposed to be exclusively vegetarian...This means that the right to kill animals is excluded from the lordship of humans over them" (Young, 20). He goes on to say that if humans and animals alike were to eat only from the earth, then the "lordship" of humans over animals could only mean that humans are called to be keepers of the peace.

Aquinas also held that animal cruelty is only wrong if it leads to human cruelty. This is problematic because most of us recognize that torturing a dog is wrong whether or not it leads to human violence. It is obviously wrong to beat a dog but not to beat a rug, which could just as well lead to beating a human. We only fear that mistreatment of animals leads to mistreatment of people because we recognize that one evil could lead to another evil, thereby recognizing that *both* are evils (Wennberg, 123).

Animal Afterlife

The idea of animals in the afterlife is usually avoided by Christians today or dismissed as something only children worry about. The assumption is that God created animals in paradise, sustained them through this life, and will then drop them from existence. However, if this is true, then God is "bringing into existence creatures whose life was a curse for them, such that in essence it would have been better for them not to have existed" (Wennberg, 338). Again, if God creates animals and sustains them through

this life, in which they suffer considerably as do people, but does not reconcile their suffering as he will ours, then what kind of a God is he?

Some people reject the possibility of animal afterlife because they think it isn't logical or practical. They perceive that redeeming *all* of the Christians as well as *all* of the animals is a little too laborious. An obvious point is that if God can *create* life out of *nothing* among all of the other things he can do (which is, well, anything), then this is not too difficult. Also, if God were to refrain from redeeming part of his creation just because it would *be too hard*, he is not really God but some lazy, self-centered man. If God "took the time" so to speak, to make animals in the first place, if he cares enough about them to make them and sustain them, then he cares enough to redeem them from the sinful world they endured.

Others reject the possibility of animal afterlife because they think that it somehow lowers their own ranking or significance with God. Descartes denied that animals have "souls" because he could not accept that the hope of man could be the same as that for animals (Regan, 48). Surely God had wonderful things in store for men, the crown of his creation, but why would he possibly care for "brutes"? The problem with God creating animals and then abandoning them has been discussed already. To me, excluding animals from God's restoration because men are afraid it will take away from their own future is a lot like a child hating his baby sister because he is afraid she will take away from his own relationship with their mother. God's love is not some commodity that will run out. Though animals will be redeemed with us, that doesn't mean that their redemption is the same as ours—we who have chosen freely will also love freely.

In this talk, the issue of the "soul" of animals must be addressed. The common Christian notion of "soul" has come mostly from Greek philosophy. Plato taught that the soul was immortal, then Aristotle added that only the rational soul (human) was immortal and finally Aquinas picked this idea up and it has become part of the Church's doctrine ever since (Young, 24).

My question in all of this was, "does the Bible talk about a soul? If it does, is it like how we have defined it?" To answer this I did some research on the Hebrew and Greek words translated "soul" throughout Scripture using the Complete Biblical Library as well as concordances. I found that "soul" is an English translation for the Greek *psuche* and the Hebrew *nephesh*. Other words used interchangeably with these are "life," "heart," "mind," "breath," "person," "creatures," "lifeblood," and "alive," among others.

Both the Old and New Testaments use it to mean "the principle of physical life, the spirit of life in both humankind and animals" (CBL, 555). The idea, which Descartes held, that the soul is separate from the body, is rejected in Scripture.

However, let me make a distinction here, one that ultimately separates me from the animal rights position. I do not believe that animals are equal to humans. This is both a common sense observation (as I will discuss more later) as well as a correct theology. The word *psuche* in Greek, while referring to the spirit of life in all created beings, also has an aspect that relates only to humans. For example, the *psuche* often translates as "will," which only humans have, both to sin and not to sin (CBL, 555-6). In other uses it can refer to the part of humans that makes them like God or that mirrors his attributes (CBL, 557). In these ways humans are much different than animals. We alone can choose our eternal destination, whereas animals are not made to choose.

The Hebrew word *nephesh*, as I brought up earlier, is also translated “soul” as well as “breath” or “life.” This word appears in the creation accounts to describe animals as “living creatures” who have the “breath of life,” which is the same word used when God breathed “life” into Adam (Young, 24). In contrast, plants do not possess this life breath. “The diet prescribed for all creatures having a *nephesh* (or breath of life) did not include killing and eating other creatures with a *nephesh*. This implies that there is something special or sacred about the life principle *nephesh*” (Young, 25).

So, God created animals with the same life-breath as man (*nephesh* used in Genesis 1:20,24, 30). Though they differ in terms of rationality, creativity, and free will, animals and humans are the same in the possession of this life-breath as is nothing else in creation. We do not have to be equal before God creatively in order to all receive his compassionate love and redemption. While the redemption of humans involves much more (as deep cries out to deep), the redemption of animals should not be denied.

Humans may have the ability to *choose* how they will exist for eternity, but that choice doesn't rob the rest of creation from redemption. All that belongs to him will be made new. Is everything else only background for us or is all of his creation significant? The clay cannot say to the potter “why did you make me?” anymore than “why did you make anything *besides* me?”

Let me end this section with a picture of what that redemption to paradise looks like. I was taught in church that heaven was a place in the clouds. However, I have come to see that, just as paradise was originally on earth (though a perfect earth), so will paradise renewed. Heaven is that place where we envision God staying with the angels and saints until this earth is finally paradise and he can walk with us in the cool of the day as he once did. Because of sin, God cannot dwell with us here as he did before. As Irenaeus says, “Neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but the *fashion* of the world passeth away;’ that is, those things among which transgression has occurred” (Young, 147).

Isaiah 11:6-9 paints a hopeful and peaceful picture of harmony with God and restoration to him: *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Stanley Hauerwas says of this peace that it “is a genuine eschatological peace that renews the peace of the beginning, where humans and animals do not depend on one another's destruction for their own survival” (Young, 145). The covenant in Hosea 2:18 promises “the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground” that “bow and sword and battle” God will “abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety” (NIV).

The redemption of animals and humans is “inseparably bound, for humans will continue to exploit animals and other humans until their own bondage to evil is purged from the heart. God's goal then is not simply the redemption of humanity, but liberation of all creation from bondage to human sin” (Young, 146). We may also conclude that if God wanted animals with him in the beginning, he will surely want them with him in paradise. He either cares about them or they are disposable (as we could also be). Paul

says in Romans 8:19-20, “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”

A Note on Reactionary Theology

The church has also received theology about animals from its reactionary stance against pagan animism, by going too far in the opposite extreme. The Church has overcorrected: not only are animals *not* gods but they don't matter *at all*. I am not saying that this is a normative characteristic of the Church, but that we can be reactionary in our theology. Our attitudes about animals have been shaped by ideas whose origins we have forgotten but whose principles we continue to uphold. We cannot just be defined by what we are *against*—we must be defined by what we are *for*. We must be purposeful in our beliefs, not just reactionary to what comes along.

Let me also note that there is a secular philosophy that the modern Church, for the most part, has not reacted against as strongly in relation to an animal ethic: humanism. Apparently, that “man is the measure of all things” continues to be our doctrine as far as our treatment of animal life is concerned. John Burnaby, in *The Purpose of Creation*, says it well, that the purpose of creation as a whole is far beyond our comprehension, and that God, through Christ, has shown us “what *man* is meant to be. And this should make it impossible for us to think that God has created all things with no other purpose than the satisfaction of men's natural desires and needs... It would be presumptuous to imagine that the glory of God *depends* on the existence of the human eye” (Regan, 25).

Research has shown that church attendance is directly related to animal care. The *more* often one attends the *less* he cares (Wennberg, 18). Perhaps this stems from such inaccurate and reactionary theologies. We have over-reacted against animism as well as the popular notion of animal rights. In reacting against animal equality we have ended up denying their worth yet again.

Animal Rights

The idea of animal rights upsets a lot of people, largely due to the publicity of isolated events. A few radicals break into a science lab or throw red dye on ladies wearing fur coats, and these stories get a lot of coverage in the media. They get blown out of proportion when compared to the things animal rights activists do that aren't so extreme—or the good things they do. The same is true of Christians. I am not saying that everything they do is right, but it is not all wrong and horrible, either.

PETA is not a Christian organization and cannot be judged by those standards. We *can* disagree with secular ideas without berating them for being secular. We cannot make the mistake of labeling *everything* secular as *completely evil*, as this is absurd. There are many world hunger relief organizations that are not Christian but still care more for the orphans and widows than we might. We can support giving cups of cold water to those in need without rejecting our beliefs that they need God. If Christians aren't going to care for the orphans, others who see the need will. The same is true for animal life; where we are falling short others will fill in.

While I do support groups like PETA for the goodwill they are doing, I do not support everything that they stand for. As I've said before, I disagree that animals are

equal to humans. I believe that they have worth and are valued by their Maker but I also recognize clear differences between animals and people.

It's not that I don't think animals have rights, such as the right to live without being abused; I just don't know if the language of rights is best. Any rights that animals (or we) have come from God alone (Andrew Linzey's "theos-rights"). We all have the "right" from God to be alive because he continues to sustain us. Our value comes from the value God places on us, the fact that we are the Creator's creation and that we *belong* to him. Perhaps instead of talking about rights we should talk about compassion. We should care because we want to be people of compassion, not because we reluctantly recognize some legal boundary.

Recognizing the appropriate valuable-ness of life will help us define a more godly ethic in relation to all of his living possessions.

Intrinsic Value & Stewardship

All created things have intrinsic value from God. But consider these differences. If people were stranded for a while it would be justifiable to kill an animal for food, but it would not be justifiable to kill a person for food. If an ant crawled onto your floor, it would not be questionable for you to squish it, but it would be questionable to beat a dog to death if he walked across your floor.

We recognize that there is value in the things God created but not necessarily the *same* value. Christians tend to think there are only two roads: either animals do not matter (which is accepted) or they are equal to humans (not accepted). However, there is a third road that has been overlooked: animals have value, though not equal to ours.

We know that a plant is different from a table because the plant grows and produces fruit, among other things. A bug is different from a plant in that it moves around, acquires food differently and reproduces differently. An animal is different from a bug because it cares for its young, it plays, discovers, gets into trouble, has a personality with emotions, the ability to suffer, and to enjoy pleasure and relationships. Lastly, people are different from animals because they think more deeply, they invent things, they worship, they share common languages, they have deeper relationships, they pursue long-term goals, etc.

We can see that animals are most like us, even as they are different, and that differences in intrinsic value are not an all or nothing thing—it's not "you have it or you don't." We still often wonder what to do with these strangely familiar creatures that God put here to live alongside us. How do we treat them? What honors God?

When he made animals God said that they were "good." He created them from the same dust and breathed the same breath of life into them as he did into the first man. He blessed them and provided for them. He made a covenant with them as well as Noah never to flood the earth again.

We were made in God's image and this separated us from the animals. Looking around, we are the most intelligent in creation and the best candidates to take care of everything else. Rather than use our position and intelligence for abuse, we should model ourselves after God and the way he faithfully cares for us all. It may be more advantageous to declare that animals can be used however we see fit, but that doesn't make this claim morally acceptable. We may not like having to widen our moral responsibility, but then again we don't always like the existing moral responsibilities.

Being good stewards doesn't mean that we never look to the animals for help. Newfoundland dogs are experts at recognizing a human in distress, swimming out to him, and rescuing him from drowning. Many cruise ships employ their help. Employing the help of a horse or ox is fine. But when we start treating animals like machines, we are abusing our stewardship.

Some people think we can control creation and do what we want with it. This is contrary to the way God cared for creation in the garden and the way he continues to sustain it. Just because God may do something destructive to his creation (a worldwide flood), that doesn't mean we can act like mini-gods and be destructive too. We don't have the authority or the divine knowledge of God to do such things, and we would be thinking too highly of ourselves if we thought otherwise. We are honored servants put in charge of our master's things for a time, not self-serving dictators.

When we realize the intrinsic value of animal life and own up to the privilege of being stewards of them for God, we will develop an ethic of compassion that also puts restraints on our actions.

Compassion and Justifiable Suffering

Some people seem to think that if we care about animals too much we will run out of compassion for people. This could be referred to as "the logic of the line" (Wennberg, 11). In this reasoning there is an "enormously long line of needy individuals, with humans at the front of the line where they belong and animals at the rear of the line where they belong. And our task...is to start at the front of the line and work systematically back toward the end of the line" (Wennberg, 11-12). With this we assume that in dealing with the needs of people we will simply never get to the needs of animals. The problem with this is that no line exists. Rather than encountering needs in such an imaginary, organized fashion, we encounter them as they enter our lives.

Wennberg gives the example that as Christians we may see that the greatest need among people is the need for salvation. If we were to follow the logic of the line, we would ignore all of the physical needs until every person alive were saved. This, obviously, is not logical, compassionate, or the way we observed Jesus living.

By showing compassion for animals we are not declaring that animals have the same value as humans. Things of value don't have to be equal to still have value. We are simply seeing a need and meeting it out of compassion for the life that God created. We are demonstrating the ability to be people of compassion. To help an animal out of a painful trap or even to simply refrain from setting the traps in the first place is not upsetting the order of some imaginary line where the person waiting next is made to wait longer.

I think that to cause pain or suffering to an animal requires a very good and morally sound justification. I recognize that God made these fellow earth-dwellers in order to bring himself glory as well as, in some cases, to bring us companionship and help. I do believe that there are times when pain or suffering of an animal may be justified, though these times are few. I would say it would be if the choice absolutely *must* be between animal life *or* human life.

If an animal runs into traffic and I must choose whether to swerve and miss the animal, injuring or killing other drivers in the process, or hitting the animal in order to save other drivers, then I would have to hit the animal. I do believe that such instances

are rare, however, and that more situations are justified than morally *should be* justified. There are obvious moral differences among killing an animal, stepping on a bug, and cutting down a pine tree.

I don't believe that God created animals *in order to be* our food. After God had created everything, he said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food" (Genesis 1:29-30). For every *nephesh* being, God provided this food. Even after the fall, God did not give people concession to eat the animals. The curse was that the land would not yield food so freely and they would have to work hard now to get it (3:17b-19a).

Animals were made, not to be our food, but because God desired to make them just as he desired to make us. If we really needed a substance like animal flesh for life and health, then God would have made a similar substance without the suffering involved in obtaining it and the health problems involved in consuming it.

I do realize that a fallen world demands living among less-than-ideal situations such as when animal suffering may be justified. This is the point, however, that animal suffering *must be justified* because they *are* valuable. It is not justifiable to kill an animal for food just because I like it. My tastes do not take precedence over an animal's life, especially when our bodies don't need animals for food and when there are so many other good things to eat. It's not any more justifiable to kill animals for fun.

While hunting may be opportune for male bonding and confidence boosting, it is a very selfish pastime. Can't sports or music do the same thing without causing needless death? Most hunting excursions involve camouflaged men hiding in bushes with deadly weapons—not quite a fair game if you ask me. Even if the playing field *was* fair, what is admirable about it unless you are rescuing someone from the animal's attack or providing the only source of food for someone starving to death (very uncommon in America)?

Much of the hype comes from the idealized image of the tough, rugged man hunting down his food, but this ideal comes from American culture not from Scripture. I doubt that God watches the hunting of his creatures and says, "Yeah, you got another one!" or that he is impressed by our current standards of manhood. The "man" that our culture (including Christian culture) idealizes is not, as Jason Byasse describes in the article *License to Thrill*, the "unmarried rabbi who doesn't defend himself, spends lots of time wandering aimlessly and in prayer, and who fritters away time with outcasts." Indeed, this man of faith "would seem more like the girlie-man Arnold Schwarzenegger blasts." Jesus would go completely undetected on this manhood radar.

A side note on this: In her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), Carol J. Adams argues that the language used in reference to animals is often the same as that in reference to women, as mere objects to be conquered. As Stephen Webb says, "Perhaps this is why women are often animalized in order to express male desires for domination. In male sexual fantasies, women are edible, to be hunted or farmed in meat markets, their body parts weighed and analyzed." An interesting observation—most of us have heard an exasperated, objectified woman say, "I'm not a piece of meat!"

Nature is indeed broken by sin—that "natural evil" exists (natural disasters, predation) does not give us the right to contribute to it further by bringing guns and knives into the picture simply to satisfy our palates or our egos. I thought we were

supposed to be “warriors” against things like injustice and evil, not against God’s creation.

I believe that animals are valuable to God beyond whatever pragmatic use we can come up with to explain their existence. In our culture, if it isn’t practical or doesn’t yield results, then it is basically useless. This is why we value businesspeople more than we value poets. And perhaps we, as fallen people, do have this tendency (at least in modern day America), but we should not think that God does. We are, really, as useless to him as animals are, but he loves us all anyway. And although he gave us the ability to have a relationship with him, he also gave us free will, which led to a most impractical thing for him: the death of his beloved Son.

Practicality cannot be the standard by which we judge the value of living things. God created life because he simply *wanted* to. He made everything out of his goodness and by its very existence from him it glorifies him.

I think it is foreign for some to consider animals for their own worth because it is so culturally normal *not* to. Billboards, restaurant marquees, and commercials are filled with sales pitches for animal flesh in a variety of sauces and value meals. We can’t justify things simply because they have been widely done or because they have been done for a long time. Should we justify mass consumerism while the poor die because it’s widely done? Should we justify murder because it’s been done for a long time?

I have no interest in stirring up controversy. I simply cannot continue to do something that I cannot justify. I am not interested in judging you for what you think is morally justified in this situation. We all stand before God and do what we believe is right and most glorifying to him.

Animal Sacrifices

When I told one of my friends that I was a vegetarian, the first thing he said was, “what about the animal sacrifices?” He was assuming the sacrifices meant that God *didn’t care* about animals. I assumed that his assumption was right.

At first I concluded that animal sacrifices were wrong and that the Israelites came up with it, copying from other religions. But the prophets weren’t condemning animal sacrifices per se, but the wrong attitude of the people. This is what was disgusting to God—“empty,” meaningless sacrifices, void of any purpose.

At first I struggled with a God who would delight in bloodshed. Who was this God, I thought, who demanded slaughter? Was he bloodthirsty? This mystery bothered me for some time and God seemed far away, creepy and disgusting. But deep down I knew that God was holy and full of compassionate love.

If God really did delight in bloodshed, then he would have demanded sacrifices before sin entered the world. If blood thirst were part of his character, then he would have instituted slayings from the time blood-pumping creatures existed. But this is not the case. *Animal sacrifices did not exist until after sin entered the picture.* This brings us to their deep significance and symbolism—their *purpose*. When sacrifices were void of meaning, God *detested* them—“The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats’ (Isaiah 1:11). He goes on to say, “Stop bringing meaningless offerings!” (vs. 13). Again, God

says in Hosea 6:6, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” Clearly, if sacrifices are meaningless, they are detestable.

God is holy and our sin is so disgusting to him that he must be separate from it. Our hardened hearts don’t usually see the reality of sin’s repulsiveness. We can go through our entire day, week, or lifetime without thinking that we are really “bad” people. We may realize that we said something hurtful or avoided helping a friend but not that we are bad enough to deserve eternal damnation.

I think people in the Old Testament understood sin a lot better than we do in the twenty-first century. They were reminded of its tragedy and repulsiveness every time they offered a sacrifice. I imagine that we would have a more accurate understanding of sin if we had to watch one of our lambs struggle on its way to the altar, fear in its eyes, crying out, as it has the life cut from it. If we saw the innocence of the animal and the tragedy and violence of its death each time we committed a sin, we would better understand the innocence of God, the tragedy of our sin, and the symbolic violence with which we must use to rid ourselves from it.

I imagine that the Jews got tired of seeing one bloody sacrifice after another. I would have wondered when the tragedy would finally end, at the same time realizing that it was my own sin causing it in the first place. I imagine a Jewish family raising their sheep, caring for them as good shepherds, even becoming attached to them. I imagine them taking a lamb to the altar and watching the blood flow, again, because of their decision to sin against God. I imagine that this was a time of deep reflection and repentance. In fact when it wasn’t, God told them he hated their empty sacrifices.

Studying this has helped me see how great my own sin is. It troubles me a lot to think that I can go through my life not understanding the death of Christ. Not until I finally saw the great injustice and tragedy of animal sacrifices could I then understand the greater injustice and tragedy of Christ’s sacrifice, bringing healing and an end to all sacrifices. When I think about innocent animals being led to slaughter for my selfishness and pride, I am struck with deep despair. Then I think about how Christ was *the* innocent lamb led to the slaughter of the cross, going voluntarily.

Not only are we far-removed from the slaughter of the innocents, we are also far-removed from the ultimate slaughter of the Innocent One. We are isolated from the tragedy of our sin and how great Christ’s love is to do what he did. It took something so ancient to teach me of something so timeless. Sacrifices were, after all, to teach.

Ancient people also had a much better understanding of sacrifice than we do. When we think of a sacrifice, we think of working long hours or not doing something that we want to do because it’s better for someone else (or ourselves). When we think about animal sacrifices we don’t have a box to put it in. We don’t really think about it and conclude that it was an ancient ritual that meant something back then. We don’t even think about the innocent animals, which I think takes away from our understanding of Christ, who was compared to one of those lambs.

For something to be a sacrifice it must be of value. If animals meant nothing then they wouldn’t be sacrifices. The people could have “killed” stuffed animals or they could have burned up animal statues in substitute of their sins. These actions could still have represented something tragic, but they would not be sacrifices because nothing of value would be offered up. The people would have distanced themselves from the stuffed or bronze representations but they could not remove themselves from the suffering creature.

People recognized the value of life and the tragedy of death and this showed them the same reality in their own lives.

Forgiveness did not come through the physical blood, but through victory over the consequence of sin (death). We know that the people weren't actually forgiven of the sins through the animals' blood (Hebrews 10:2-4), but that it was a tragic act to remind them of their sin and need for forgiveness. Only the blood of Christ has power.

Sacrifices have ceased. They have served their purpose and they are done with. (In fact, when Jews continued to offer animal sacrifices after Christ, the judgment of AD 70 came upon them fiercely.) Sacrifices were for our benefit not for God's. Once they showed us what we needed to see and accomplished what they needed to accomplish, they became unnecessary. I'm sure that God was sorrowful for their necessity. They pleased God because they involved his people in obedience and active learning about their sin and who they were before him.

Christ is compared to the good shepherd who looks after his sheep with care and then he becomes one of the lambs for the sake of all of us. When we take communion, we are reminded of his death and we are saying that we want his new life to reign in us. We take the wine and the bread and remember the innocent lamb that was slain. Interestingly, Communion does not include animal flesh. I wonder if there is any significance to this.

Animals do not sin but are subjected to natural evil (predation) the way nature is (natural disasters). Animals will be part of the new earth when Christ comes to reconcile all things (Romans 8:19-21—all of creation groans for Christ's redemption).

This brings me to my last observation. It is understandable and right for God to ask those who are guaranteed eternal renewal (animals) to lay down their lives for a time (animal sacrifices) for the benefit of those who have a choice to make (people). I believe that it caused God sorrow to see his innocent creation slaughtered (as it saddened him, even more, when his son was slaughtered), but that he knew that these animals would be restored in the end. He knew that their short time of suffering would be deeply significant for the benefit of those who would need to see it in order to understand their own need for God.

Factory Farming: Conditions

I do not abstain from eating animals only because of the way they are treated in factory farms, but it is definitely a good reason to. This business denies that animals have value to their Creator and abandons the responsibility of stewardship and the proper ethic of compassion.

Every day in the United States alone, 130,000 cattle, 7,000 calves, 360,000 pigs, and 24 million chickens are slaughtered (Webb, 24). Let me make clear that the number of animals raised today far exceeds the natural number that would exist if they were not raised for profit. These animals are being constantly over-produced so that a profit can be made from their numerous deaths. In fact, not only are they over-produced in the name of profit, they are often so over-produced that the meat industry must advertise more vigorously just to sell their excess.

Cattle remain penned up without the freedom to move, jammed together by the tens of thousands, all of their normal needs completely disregarded (Sussman, 174). Swollen udders, mastitis, sore legs, infected feet, and stress-related conditions are

common (179). Cows are kept pregnant constantly in order to keep a steady production of milk. People seem not to realize that cows only produce milk when they have a reason to produce it, which is to feed a baby, which is the same reason why human mothers produce milk. However, we don't quite see the appropriateness of asking women to remain constantly pregnant in order to put their milk on our cereals.

Over-milking causes painful udder infections that never get relief. Whereas a cow on a small farm may give 6,000 to 10,000 pounds of milk per year, the average cow on a factory farm yields 14,000 to 15,000 pounds (Sussman, 179).

On top of this, most of the calves born are seen as unnecessary by-products of the milk industry. Some of them are shipped off to veal farms in order to live a short, deprived life while others are simply killed right after they are born. A veal calf is taken from its mother only three or four days after birth, being neglected the affection and nourishment that it needs. It is locked in a stall, not allowed to lie down or move, fed an iron-deficient diet (which it craves in vain) in order to produce appealing veal meat (Sussman, 180). Other intensive practices are applied, too much to mention here.

The life of a pig these days is not much better. They are kept strapped to the floor in narrow stalls, which makes them restless and combative. Tail biting is a common product of these unnatural conditions; to solve this, farmers amputate the pigs' tails (Sussman, 175). Both cattle and pigs are subjected to intensive breeding, including artificial insemination, hormone treatments, and surgical manipulation; a sow may have her ova surgically removed a half-dozen or more times in one year (175). In response to these drastic living conditions, pigs are often seen chewing on their wire mesh cages, a typical behavior reflecting the stress of confinement (Wennberg, 237).

Chickens are kept in wire mesh cages about 17.5x19.5 inches for five hens, which is incredibly small considering that each chicken's wing span alone is 30 inches (Wennberg, 233). Raised in these conditions, chickens live only about one year of the normal 15-20 years (Wennberg, 234). Such intense confinement terrifies them and upsets their natural way of life to the point that they often turn to pecking one another violently. Beaks are cut off with a hot blade that cuts through the complex horn, bone and sensitive tissue causing severe pain (Wennberg, 234).

Chickens are forced to lay ten times as many eggs in their lifetimes than normal, which is very painful (Young, 49). Since productivity is the meaning of their existence, chickens as well are only kept alive as long as they are profitable. Because male chicks are just the opposite, not able to lay eggs, they are disposed of after birth. As many as 280 million baby male chicks are smothered or ground up alive annually (Young, 49).

Once the chicken is no longer profitable, it is shipped to the slaughterhouse. Many birds suffer broken bones or dislocated hips as they are stuffed into tiny crates by the thousands, in order to endure the cold and starvation of a trip to their deaths (Wennberg, 235). After having made it through abscesses, broken bones, and hemorrhaging (Webb, 222), and if they survive the trip to the slaughterhouse, they are "shackled by their legs to conveyor belts and hung with their heads down so the blood can be concentrated in their heads and easily drained from their bodies when their throats are cut. Still not dead, they are carried through a "bleeding tunnel" and then lowered into a scalding tank. Two out of three of them go into the tank alive" (Campolo, p. 67).

Other methods of slaughter include captive bolt, electrical stunning, and in some cases gunshot. The captive bolt (or mechanical stunner) fires a pencil-thick bolt into the

animal's forehead. The electrical stunner is shoved against the animal, shocking it into insensibility. None of these methods are meant to kill the animal quickly or painlessly; rather, the point is to stun them while keeping their heart beating long enough to pump out as much blood as possible (Sussman, 183-4).

After this the animal is usually shackled and hoisted by one hind leg and then stabbed through the breast or neck, which severs major arteries (184). As you can see, none of this is particularly compassionate. Keep in mind, also, that these slaughter techniques are subject to inaccuracy and delayed suffering if the operator or slaughterer is not skilled, is sloppy, or simply doesn't care about the added pain he is causing.

There is much, much more that I could share with you about this area of animal brutality. There have been many books and documentaries done on this subject where you are more likely to get a complete picture. I think you get the idea.

Another equally nauseating aspect of factory farming is an aspect that affects you more directly: what's done to the meat you eat.

Factory Farming: Health

Because of these dangerous living conditions, animals are pumped full of both growth stimulants (steroids) and antibiotics in order to keep them alive and profitable. However, cattle in confinement develop more diseases than can ever possibly be vaccinated against (Lyman, 55). So while you are eating the antibiotics from the cow's tissues, you are also subject to disease from the tissues that the antibiotics failed to treat, not really a win-win situation. A major problem with the massive amounts of antibiotics pumped into cows is that they soon become ineffective against disease. This is bad not only for the cow's health, but for the health of the person eating the cow as well.

Not only are you eating the antibiotics, you are eating the growth hormones. This has led to a trend among adolescents: they are becoming adolescents much faster than normal. Whereas a girl used to reach puberty at about age 17, she is now getting there around age 8, thanks to bovine growth hormones (Cohen, web). It's a scary thought that children are growing up at abnormal speeds, keeping up with the cows raised for their food.

Other unwanted substances that will make it onto your dinner plate are the insecticides used to keep larvae off of cattle. Howard Lyman, a third generation cattle-rancher turned vegetarian says of his cattle raising days, "Naturally, I had neither the time nor the inclination to think about the possibility of this deadly chemical passing through the hide into the tissues that would become somebody's dinner" (p.57).

It is hard to believe that bovine growth hormones, mass amounts of antibiotics, and insecticides wind up on your fork. But wait, there is more. A meat-eater consumes more than just what is added to the meat; she also consumes what the meat is made of.

Cattle these days are not fed grass (their natural food source) or 100% grain (although much of the world's grain still goes into animal feed). They eat "protein concentrates." These consist of whatever parts of the cow are not sold directly to you: intestines (and their contents), heads, hooves, horns, bones, and blood. Also in this protein mix is the remains of road kill and pets that have been put to sleep (Lyman, 11-12).

Laws passed in the late nineties were meant to quiet those opposed to such practices. These laws made it illegal to feed animals to animals that eat vegetation; however, such laws are rarely followed very closely and if someone is caught in this illegal activity, he

will most likely get a stern letter. This law makes it illegal to feed *solid parts* of animals to other animals but doesn't stop what was already taking place. Animals raised for slaughter are still eating ground-up dead horses, dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, and turkeys, as well as blood and fecal matter (Lyman, 13). Aside from using "protein concentrates," farmers also rely heavily on chicken litter (13) for feed.

This means that the meat you are consuming contains a variety of dead animals ground up together, blood, and poop. "If you are a meat-eater," Howard Lyman says, "understand that this is the food of your food" (p13). If finding something gross directly *in* your meat isn't bad enough, you can also find plenty mixed in it. These things were found by a meat-cutter in ground beef tubs (from five states and sixty supermarkets): gum, cigarettes, plastic combs, hair, detergent, floor cleaner, cardboard, nitrates, buttons, food tray pieces, beer can tops, metal staples, and more (Sussman, 163).

Old cold cuts are regularly rescued from the trash, ground into sausage, and sold at supermarkets. Meat grinders are used to alternately grind beef and raw pork and are then left uncleaned for weeks at a time. Such practices, though illegal, are often the norm (Sussman, 163-4).

What isn't illegal is just as unappealing. Sides of beef are commonly hung for 10 to 14 days so that bacteria can break down the fibrous tissues. The only difference between steak in a supermarket and road kill is that the steak has rotted under supervision (Sussman, 149). Few meat eaters would probably like to think of their food in reference to the terms "putrefaction," "rotting," and "rigor mortis," but this is reality. This is allowed because no one likes the appearance or taste of truly fresh, just-killed meat (149).

Let's add one more thing to your dinner plate: food borne diseases!

Did you know that about 80% of food poisonings come from bad meat and that these poisonings lead to 9,000 deaths a year (Lyman, 13)? E. coli and salmonella don't come from vegetables. The antibiotics you're eating via animal muscle are keeping your immune system weakened to more and more powerful diseases, also found in your meat.

So many animals pass by on an inspection line that most of them aren't inspected. A USDA official says, "It's unrealistic to expect every single piece of meat passed to be 100% pure. The price of meat would go out of sight if we had to make a complete analysis of every carcass. Some questionable carcasses do get past the inspection process. It's unavoidable" (Sussman, 150). Roughly 2 seconds are given to each body on the inspection line. Up to 25% of chickens are covered in feed, feces, and bile, and are often soaked in chlorine baths to remove slime and odor (Lyman, 38).

More than 99% of broiler carcasses had detectable levels of E. coli according to a recent Agriculture Department study (Lyman, 38). On top of that, about 30% of the chicken eaten in America is contaminated with salmonella and 70 to 90% with another deadly pathogen, campylobacter (38). Other diseases that livestock spread include anthrax, brucellosis, encephalitis, leptospirosis, pneumonia, bluetongue, pinkeye, scabies, and rabies (Lyman, 144).

You may be wondering, "Is it okay for me to eat animals that have been fed grass and kept free of all those hormones?" It may be. But it is not for me, even *if* the animals are treated somewhat humanely. Here's why.

1) Even if the animal is raised for slaughter, that does not take away from its value as a being*, 2) even if the animal is killed humanely, it is still an unnecessary tragedy,** 3) there is still unavoidable waste produced as a by-product of raising animals for slaughter,

such as the wasted grain, water for drinking, land for grazing,** and water polluted by animal wastes, 4) there are hoards of other foods available for us to eat, and 5) even though you are by-passing the dangerous and disgusting things done *to* the meat, you can't by-pass the fact that meat just *contains* a lot of cholesterol and saturated fat.

* I have heard that if an animal is raised for slaughter, then this in and of itself is some form of justification for killing it. This is comparable to saying that if a person is raised to be a slave, then this in and of itself is a justification for their slavery.

** In the same way, if a person is killed painlessly, it does not make the loss of life any less tragic.

*** Entire tribes have been displaced in Africa to satisfy our craving for hamburgers (Campolo, 16).

The Health Problem(s)

In this section I want to show how destructive it is to our bodies to consume animals (in addition to the processes they go through on factory farms, which I have just mentioned). I will also talk about the marketing employed by meat and dairy lobbyists. As I have said before, on certain occasions I will eat dairy (at someone's house, for example), but after reading this you may understand why I try to avoid it as much as possible.

The Bad News about Animal Products

We tend to think that heart disease is like old age that “just happens” to people. In fact, heart disease is close to smoking as a leading cause of *preventable* death in the United States. Dr. Julian Whitaker, a noted preventative health care expert, says, “Death of heart disease is as unnecessary as dying of drug abuse, yet it is taken as a normal thing” (Lyman, 24). It may be normal in the sense that it has become *common*, but it is not normal in the sense that it is *natural*. We are doing this to ourselves.

Even as early as 1961, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* said the following: “A vegetarian diet can prevent 97% of our coronary occlusions” (Lyman, 27). Animal products are harmful to our health because they contain so much cholesterol and saturated fat, which clog our arteries and stress out our hearts.

Heart disease is only the first of a long line of health problems directly linked to an animal-based diet. These are often referred to as the “diseases of the affluent,” since diets high in animal products are popular in wealthy nations. They include heart attack, stroke, osteoporosis, type II diabetes, and high blood pressure, not to mention an increased risk of hypoglycemia, ulcers, intestinal disorders, gout and other forms of arthritis, kidney stones, gallstones, asthma, impotence, and anemia (Lyman, 36). Add to this that there is a direct correlation between consumption of dairy and animal fat and the presence of prostate, colorectal, lung, and breast cancers (32).

Many people think that if they are choosy about *which* animal products they consume then they can still be healthy. Even if you ate smaller portions of *only* chicken and fish (trimming away fat), if you were to drink only skim milk and eat egg whites instead of whole eggs, cholesterol levels fall by only 5 percent and the artery blockages continue to worsen (Robertson, xii).

Also consider the following: a 3.5-oz serving of beef has 85 mg cholesterol while the same size serving of chicken (white meat, skinned) also has 85 mg. The same amount of pork has 90 mg, trout has 73 mg, and turkey has 82 mg (Lyman, 37). And as far as saturated fat goes, “extra-lean” ground beef provides about 54% of its calories from fat, chicken provides 51%, and salmon 40%. Compare this to a baked potato, which has less than 1% yet at the same time provides the same amount of iron as 4 oz of beef.

Henry David Thoreau said, “It seems ridiculous that a man, especially in the midst of his pleasures, should have to go beneath a cow like a calf three times a day.” Think about how absurd it is to market the milk of one species to another species. All mammals produce milk for one reason: to grow their own particular young until they are weaned to more healthy food. Human breast milk has the same purpose. We are weaned

off of milk, too, because our bodies quit producing the enzyme to break lactose down. Lactose is “a sugar that cannot always be digested by most people in the world over the age of five years” (Nestle, 79).

Studies show fundamental differences in the composition of cow’s milk and human milk and consequently that cow’s milk best nourishes calves, not people (Young, 108). Studies also show that animal protein seeps calcium from our bones (leading to osteoporosis) and that cow’s milk is a possible contributor to type I diabetes if given to children at a young age (Thomas-Peters, 24). We do not store human breast milk in cartons or continue to mix baby formula and drink *it* at meals, do we?

And here’s an appetizing thought: Pus. The FDA allows 750 million pus cells in every liter of milk. It takes 10 pounds of milk to make 1 pound of cheese, which will have up to 7.5 billion pus cells (Cohen, web). Hormones, pus, and saturated fat (especially combined with puberty) contribute directly to acne pustules.

And one more thing: eighty percent of milk protein consists of casein, a glue that is also used to hold wood furniture together (Cohen, web). It is a foreign protein and your body reacts to it by creating an antibody. Mucus and phlegm are produced as a result. This mucus congests internal body organs, clogging the kidney, spleen, pancreas, tracheal-bronchial tree, lungs, thymus, etc. After not eating dairy for one week, your body will excrete *a full gallon* of mucus (Cohen, web).

Despite all of this, people are eating close to thirty pounds of cheese each year (Cohen, web) as well as 93 pounds of beef, 57 pounds of pork, and 45 pounds of chicken and 9 pounds of turkey (Sussman, 13), as estimated in the 1970s. Current figures say that an average meat-eater will consume 1 calf, 3 lambs, 11 cows, 23 hogs, 45 turkeys, and 1,097 chickens in his lifetime (Vegetarian Times, 146).

“How dairy foods came to be considered *essential* despite their high content of fat, saturated fat, and lactose is a topic of considerable historical interest” (Nestle, 79). Similar health dangers are found in meat. So why do people buy it and even believe that these things *are* essential to health? The answer: they’re marketed, so we buy them.

Meat Market(ing)

Not only are we told “Beef: It’s what’s for dinner,” but we’re also told about all of the health benefits of animal products, even led to believe that their absence in our diets would be harmful. The idea that we “need” meat and dairy at all comes from a “highly competitive economic society with large numbers of special interest groups protecting their stakes through lobbying, mass media campaigns, and financial contributions to politicians and research” (Young, 168).

Marion Nestle, an academic nutritionist, worked for the Public Health Service back in 1986. She was the managing editor of the first (and only) *Surgeon General’s Report on Nutrition and Health*, which appeared in 1988. Her first day on the job, she was given this rule: “No matter what the research indicated, the report could not recommend ‘eat less meat’ as a way to reduce intake of saturated fat, nor could it suggest restrictions on intake of any other category of food” (Nestle, 3). She goes on to say, “whereas ‘eat less beef’ called the industry to arms, ‘eat less saturated fat’ did not.”

While advice from health professionals has consistently been to eat diets based largely on plant foods and has not changed in over 50 years, people seem to be confused about what foods are healthy (Nestle, vii). A huge part of the problem is that food

lobbyists refuse to allow “eat less animal fat” or “eat less meat” into the government-issued health statements, but “eat less saturated fat” is acceptable (Nestle, 78) although they are the same thing. People are confused because commercials say one thing (which can usually not be trusted as accurate health information) and health reports say another. Even among health reports, facts differ because of lobbying.

The food industry is entrenched in this competition because the food supply in this nation is double that of our caloric needs (Nestle, 1) and because, “like companies that sell cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, or any other commodity,” the food industry regularly puts “the needs of stockholders over considerations of public health” (Nestle, viii). Nestle goes on to say this: “Food companies will make and market any product that sells, regardless of its nutritional value or its effect on health.”

Most of us do not want to admit that we are manipulated by marketing—but we are. Alcohol and cigarettes are marketed to certain groups of people, and so are meat and dairy. The meat and dairy industry is very clever at appealing to a vast array of people. Not only do they appeal to the health-conscious and maternal instincts, but to macho men and athletes as well. They have a different angle for each demographic.

To appeal to the health-conscious as well as athletes, meat is often marketed as an “essential” for protein. Tyson chicken has advertisements that show a person doing a strenuous activity at an abnormally high speed or duration with the words “Powered by Tyson” across the bottom. In reality, protein does not give us energy, carbohydrates do. And while protein in general does aid in muscle repair, animal protein specifically will also give you heart disease.

Meat is also marketed extensively as “man’s food.” Many commercials use famous football players or other manly men grilling big slabs of steak, and meat is packaged as “hungry man” dinners in the freezer section. The goal is to relate meat to adjectives like strong, big, tough, etc. while implying that it alone is a satisfying meal for “real men” who are “really hungry.”

This manly image relies on the idea of men hunting down animals and thumping their chests. However, driving to the climate-controlled grocery store and picking up a clean, labeled, and wrapped piece of meat (or letting the wife do it) is hardly meeting the glamorized image. Nevertheless, this marketing angle works.

Dairy as well as meat is marketed to women primarily by highlighting health benefits (what does “The Power of Cheese” mean anyway?) and by promoting the “low fat” versions of milk. In reality, milk *labeled* at 2% fat is actually 35% fat and is a high-fat food (Lyman, 168-9).

In an attempt to appeal to all groups at once, the meat industry promotes animal flesh as “real food” compared to a salad (which is for sissies, of course). Consider the slogan, “Where’s the Beef?” which implies “Where’s the Substance, Where’s the Real Food?” I recall a relative chastising me for ordering a vegetarian dish at a restaurant. While eating his burger, he declared, “you need meat that’ll stick to your ribs.” If by “sticking” he meant “clogging,” and by “ribs” he meant “arteries,” then I suppose he was right. Out of tactfulness, I didn’t bring up the fact that he just had bypass surgery a few months before in order to un-clog his arteries of cholesterol. Sad as it is, he, as well as most of us, has bought into the marketing and is part of the culture that perpetuates it.

How does the food industry milk us this way (pun intended)? They are driven to make money and they are good at making it. They use “marketing imperatives” which

include the following: 1) taste: make foods sweet, fat, and salty [translation: addictive], 2) cost: add value but keep prices low, 3) convenience: make eating fast, 4) confusion: keep the public puzzled, 5) advertise, advertise, advertise, 6) introduce new products, and 7) serve larger portions (Nestle, 17-26).

Of course, meat and dairy are not the only foods that are marketed. Healthy foods are marketed as well. However, consider that “producers of eggs, beef, and chicken receive 50% to 60% of retail cost, whereas producers of vegetables receive as little as 5%” (Nestle, 17). Also, consider this: “The USDA blocked publication of the 1991 *Eating Right Pyramid* [version of the government’s Food Guide Pyramid] under pressure from meat and dairy groups objecting to the position of their products in its hierarchy” (Nestle, 52). Whenever they start to feel left out (or no longer in the lead), lobbyists for big meat and dairy companies start yelling.

Mark Alan Stamaty ridiculed the USDA in 1991 for “caving to the pressures of the meat and dairy lobbyists in designing the *Pyramid*” by way of a cartoon that appeared in the *Washington Post* and the *Village Voice* (Nestle, 60):

Teacher: Now, class, which foods are most essential for a healthy, balanced diet?

Students: Ooh! Ooh! I know! Ooh! Call on me!

Teacher: Billy?

Billy: Meat and dairy!

Teacher: Very good...and what is it about those foods that makes them so essential?

Student: Their Washington lobbyists who are so influential they can convince the department of agriculture to ignore the advice of nutritionists when presenting itself as an authority on nutrition!

Teacher: Very good! Excellent! Because who knows more about nutrition than nutritionists?

Students: Anyone with the authority to publish a governmental document.

Teacher: Exactly!

And the Good News...

The good news is that there is an alternative to all this disastrous food. Neal Barnard suggests this alternative to the government’s questionable pyramid, called the New Four Food Groups: whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and legumes (Young, 175).

Naturally, however, being fed all of this rhetoric from the meat and dairy industry, people tend to ask if I get enough nutrients in my diet. They believe, as the commercials have told them, that strong bones, strong muscles, and energy come from eating meat. They assume that eating muscle builds muscle, but this is simply not true. That logic is like saying that cars only run if you put other car parts in the gas tank.

Americans have become obsessed with protein, especially after the popularity of fad diets. In reality, the recommended amount of protein is only 10% to 15% of our total caloric intake (Thomas-Peters, 28). Protein is found in most foods except sugar, fats, and oils; therefore, a diet with sufficient calories will have sufficient protein (29). We do not get energy from protein but rather from carbohydrates. Not only are there many non-animal sources of protein available, but they are more beneficial as well.

Another guaranteed question is about iron. However, consider that well-balanced vegetarians will generally get more iron from their diets than meat-eaters (Lyman, 36). Iron deficiency is usually caused by a heavy reliance on dairy because dairy products are relatively low in iron (Lyman, 36-7). Relying on an iron-deficient source for your iron will leave you with a deficiency. Like I said before, one baked potato provides the same amount of iron as 4 ounces of beef (minus all the fat and cholesterol). Soybeans are an

exceptionally good source of iron as are leafy greens, dried fruits, whole-grains, pumpkin seeds, and molasses (Sussman, 118).

I get plenty of calcium from soy foods (milk, tofu), almonds, nut butters, legumes/beans, green vegetables, blackstrap molasses, and dried figs, and I don't have to worry about bone density loss. Plant foods are rich in calcium. It's how cows get theirs.

Another question that comes up concerns the vitamin B12. The rumor is that our bodies need it quite regularly, in good amounts, and that the only source is from animals. The truth is that we need only a miniscule amount of this vitamin and our bodies store it for years (Lyman, 181). All vitamin B12 comes from bacteria that live either in the soil, animal intestines, or in the human mouth and intestines (Robertson, 6).

People who eat an animal-based diet are suddenly concerned about health when they hear that I am a vegetarian even as their own diets are not exceptionally healthy. Even if you do eat meat, you still absolutely must be sure to get adequate amounts of the various vitamins and minerals from a variety of sources. In the meantime you have to hope that your body has figured out some miraculous way to avoid all of the harmful by-products that come with the diet.

Also consider this: meat is your food *after* it has already been food for an animal. We are eating food the second time around. The animal's digestion and metabolism process refines the food—losing fiber, carbohydrates, phytochemicals, and other nutrient-rich ingredients while adding saturated fat, cholesterol, animal hormones, viral and bacterial organisms that the animal might be harboring (Thomas-Peters, 9). In eating nutritious grain vicariously through flesh, we also forfeit 90 percent of the original protein, 99 percent of the carbohydrates, and 100 percent of the fiber (Lyman, 42).

If animal products were essential for human life then they would not be clogging our arteries, seeping calcium from our bones, forming painful kidney stones, upsetting our insulin levels, raising our blood pressure, or harboring mucus throughout our internal organs.

Since I stopped eating animal products, I have maintained my ideal weight. My skin cleared up remarkably and has gained a healthy glow. People have told my husband that his eyes are whiter and we both noticed feeling in better general health.

I discovered wonderful new foods and different ways to cook that I never would have discovered otherwise. In fact, cooking (and clean-up) is a lot less messy now, not having to deal with blood or bacteria. I get full but never feel heavy or greasy.

Vegetarianism does not guarantee health. I do have a healthier immune system and have yet to get sick, but it's just a diet, not a miracle cure for everything. Someone can be a vegetarian and still eat primarily junk foods with little nutritional value. A diet of whole foods rather than refined ones and without hydrogenated fats is very important as well. Exercise is always a good idea, too. You will notice a difference.

I hope this has opened your eyes to some surprising facts about the food you eat. I was certainly shocked (and a little angry). I had to admit that I bought the commercials, the advertisements, and was part of the "norm" that they sought to perpetuate. But now I know, and so do you.

Conclusion

I do realize that there are opposing Christian viewpoints on this issue. The same is true of many issues that we face in life—it's not always black and white—in fact, I think a lot of it is gray. What you do with this “gray” is between you and God.

If you think that killing animals and eating them is “right,” then base that conviction on God's character and his Word; if you think eating them is just “not wrong,” then do the same—that is what I have done. (I believe that it is merely a concession to sinful people and not the “best”—or even the “better.”) Where you think killing an animal is justified is between you and God, as are the situations where you think killing a human is justified and a number of other, varying matters of ethical conviction. Whether you believe that God has “divine indifference” toward animals or that he cares about them, that makes up part of your theology.

For me, the decision is based largely on my eschatology. In hopeful anticipation of the day when Christ brings *shalom* to the world, I want to live like it was intended to be, how it *will be*—by how I treat other people, how I treat animals, and how I exist in the world now. I call this hopeful preparation.

As I said before, my main purpose for writing is to share how I have changed and why. If you do nothing with it other than say “good for you,” then I suppose I have at least made my convictions clear. Maybe you have been challenged to think about things differently than you have before, and that's great. Separating yourself from popular culture is very hard—but just because most of our society shows no qualms about eating animals does not mean that it doesn't matter. The very fact that we do eat animals separates us mentally from even considering their real value.

Basically it all comes down to this: we all must live before God with whatever convictions we believe are the most glorifying and obedient (without judging each other). This is one way that I live that out. God bless.

Objections Considered

There have been quite a few objections raised to my decision to become a vegetarian, some challenging, others not so much. I think some of these come from people dealing with something they have never had much exposure to. Some of it also comes from the fact that I am young and have become a vegetarian while my friends watch; if I had just “already been one” then maybe people wouldn’t have felt as much of a need to challenge me for it. After all, it is quite a change and there are many bad stereotypes attached. Here are some objections that I have heard here and there that didn’t make it into the main part of my paper.

Theological Objections

God said we could eat meat.

Yes, it’s true that God did grant us permission to eat meat *after the flood*. I think it’s interesting that he waited *until* then. Of course the very idea of eating animals was not allowed in Eden, because that would’ve required killing and bloodshed. However, it is not automatically granted *after* the fall, either, when sin entered the picture. The curse is that food will come only through toil, which God outlines as working the fields and making bread, but he doesn’t mention killing for food. In fact he waits to grant permission until after he flooded the earth for its violent wickedness.

Why did he grant this concession to Noah and his family? Maybe because all other food sources were virtually wiped out in the flood and without eating meat, all the people would have died, or maybe because God knew that they would do it anyway, and they wouldn’t be judged if they had been granted a concession to do so. Either way, I don’t think that God was telling Noah, “I can’t wait for you to kill these animals and eat them!” Indeed, Christians do not eat animals because it is the “right” thing to do, but because it is not technically a “sin” to do so.

As John Austin Baker says in *Old Testament Attitudes to Nature*, “The Flood and the subsequent new start for the world are used as an opportunity to switch from the theoretic ‘golden age’ to the conditions actually obtaining; and one of the saddest features of this change is the degradation of relations between man and the animals from their first created beauty” (Regan, 16). He goes on to say, “The language of Genesis 9:1-2... betrays at once the poignancy of his [God’s] feelings... Man has become the enemy of all living things,” and finally, this: “Although it [the Old Testament] recognizes man’s preying on nature as a fact, it characterizes that fact as a mark of man’s decline from the first perfect intentions of God for him” (17).

God regulates eating meat—doesn’t this mean it’s okay?

As I said before, I do not believe that consuming meat is “sinful,” but it began with sin and is an effect of sin. It is not the best way for creation simply because it is contrary to the design of our Creator.

We do have a choice—we can choose not to kill and eat and be content to eat what God has already provided as “good” food for us. However, the introduction of sin brought with it the introduction of desiring flesh, which results from free will given by a loving God. Our freedom does not warrant all things, but gives us the opportunity to desire the things that God desires for us. Because God works within the freedom he gave

us, he works with fallen people. As he works with us, he gives us guidelines in order to draw us to himself rather than an infinite number of commands that would frustrate us.

Right before Adam and Eve leave the garden, God curses all things (they will no longer thrive, but will be provided with toil) as a result of sin, and from here on all of creation begins to groan for its redemption. Although God's words to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:18-19, which is immediately after the fall, refer to a diet of the "plants of the field" and of "bread," they raise animals to eat anyway and God later provides guidelines.

Examples of these guidelines can be found in Leviticus chapters 11 and 17, to name two. In chapter 11 rules are given concerning clean and unclean animals. The clean animals were those who ate "cud," which means that they were herbivores. The unclean animals were carnivores and were forbidden. Although the guidelines were given to a people living in very different cultural times, it is interesting to see that God forbade the eating of carnivorous animals. Just as certain washings were given for health reasons, I think it is likely that this rule is given for health reasons too. These laws do set the Jews apart from other nations, as does circumcision, which was also a healthy rule to follow.

In chapter 17, eating blood is forbidden. Verses 10-11 say, "And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement" (NASB). They were required to rid an animal of his blood before they ate (vs. 13) because the blood, which was the life of the animal, belonged to God alone.

In dealing with man's decision of sin, God grants us permission to do things that are less than perfect for us. He consents, as a patient and loving parent, to some of our fleshly desires in order to draw us to him and not frustrate us away from him. Aside from the concession to eat meat, God has granted his children an earthly king (1 Samuel 8:22), quail in the desert when manna was not good enough (Numbers 11:18-22), and divorce because their hearts were hard (Matthew 19:7-8).

We see this from good earthly parents as well. Stephen Webb compares it to a parental consent to watching television. Even though it flaunts violence and sex, encourages disrespect and selfishness, pushes consumerism, and leads to apathy and inactivity, parents know that their kids will inevitably want to watch it. Instead of establishing rules of perfection ("no TV, ever"), which will only frustrate and drive their kids away, they set boundaries and provide healthy guidelines. They determine which shows and how many shows their children can watch. This directs children in a desirable path without exasperating them and allows them to experience restorative patience. This gives them the opportunity to make external guidelines internal.

A parent who allows television is not advocating it, and is surely not commanding it. With concession, God responds to humanity's hardness with patience. However, permission does not mean desire; merely agreeing to allow something does not mean it is what ultimately pleases God.

Jesus ate meat.

Yes, it's true that we have an account of Jesus eating fish once or twice. We can also pretty accurately assume that he ate lamb at Passover each year, being that he was a good Jew. Unlike some Christian vegetarians, I don't think it's necessary to try and explain away every instance where Jesus ate fish or most likely ate lamb, etc.

God came and dwelled among his fallen world in order to accomplish one important thing: the cross. He had a short time here and a very narrow goal. That his goal was the redemption of people only makes sense, seeing that we are the only ones in creation that hang in the balance. We are the only creatures with free will, which makes us the entire reason Jesus came to earth. His primary concern was with people's hearts, not social issues, even issues dealing with people. He never spoke against human slavery, and it continued for 1800 years after that, even being supported with Scripture. Does this mean that Jesus didn't care about slaves? Didn't he care that women were being treated as second-class creation?

Of course he cared about all these things, just as he cared about animals and the rest of what he spoke into existence and will one day redeem. However, if he would have focused on or even dealt with any of these side issues, his main purpose would have been distorted by people unclear of his message. Jesus knew that if people's hearts changed, their behavior would change, too, and that all the unaddressed issues would be resolved as people began living by his Spirit.

If Jesus lived up to every ideal, then why did he eat fish and lamb at Passover, and possibly meat at other times? What does it mean that Jesus lived up to every ideal? He was tempted but never sinned or abandoned his mission from God. Since eating meat is not a sin, Jesus was not sinning when he ate it, especially when he ate it at Passover (which was most likely the main time he ate it). However, we know that striving for God's ideal means more than simply "not sinning." God's ideal for creation was (and is) different than it exists today, because of sin. When God came down into the world, he was dealing in its sinful state—no longer could he deal with us as if we were still living in Eden, communing with him and creation perfectly. Jesus did not calm every storm or heal every ailment, but did what was conducive to his purpose. This included, as stated before, presenting the way of salvation to men. Period.

As I said before, it seems perfectly right that, in dealing with a fallen world, God would ask those in his creation destined for renewal (animals) to give up their lives *for a time* for the benefit of those who still had a choice to make (people).

Here I would like to mention briefly the concept of "situational ethics." We are all to be people whose lives are defined by obedience, compassion, truth, and love; however, because the world is fallen, there are some situations where the "better" good must be chosen over the "lesser" good for that situation. For example, ideally it is always best to tell the truth. But, in situations where the truth might be the "lesser" good, it may be better to lie. If the people hiding slaves as part of the Underground Railroad or the people hiding Jews during the Holocaust would have told the truth, lives would have been taken by unjust men. Would it have been worth it to "tell the truth" at the expense of people's lives? Likewise, would it have been worth it for Jesus to abstain from eating meat at the expense of his message?

Ideally, no one would ever be in a situation where he had to choose the "better," for all would co-exist in peace and obedience to God. This is not the case, though, and we all have to choose the "better," with pure hearts behind it, until the day when we do not have to choose any more. Jesus did not use superpowers to overcome dealing with a fallen world. If he had, then he could not have expected us to live like he did.

God had a richly significant purpose behind the isolated animal deaths—he instituted these things for a deeper purpose than a main entrée. Animal sacrifices had

rich significance, and Passover did as well—they pointed to the Messiah. It's obvious here that the "better" is not, unfortunately, preserving an animal life. Now, however, there is no Christian holiday or practice where animals are killed or eaten. This is because there is nothing for it to symbolize—after all, the lamb that was slain has risen.

Paul said it was okay.

For example, he says for stronger brothers who eat meat not to judge those who eat only vegetables (Romans 14:1-15:2). He is not talking about the strength of their faith to eat animals, but rather the strength of their faith to know that idols had no power over them. Of course, he is not talking about showing compassion to animals but partaking of something that had been in unholy use. The issue is one of living as a believer in a fallen world. Paul is saying not to judge: if it bothers your conscience, then don't do it. If your conscience is not bothered, then go ahead. If it bothers your brother's conscience, don't do it, etc. But don't cause disunity because of differences in conscience. For example, some Christians may have a problem if their bible study group, because of growth, starts meeting in an old bar or strip joint while others realize that what it *used to be* has no power over them now. For some, the very idea of what it was once used for makes them feel "wrong" about it, but others realize that what made it "wrong" is no longer present. Since neither conviction is wrong, they must not judge each other.

Paul also says that we should give thanks for our food because it comes from God (1 Timothy 4:3-4). He is talking about meat here in particular response to a popular Gnostic heresy. This heresy said that all spiritual things were good and all physical things were evil, which is blasphemy against God's good creation. Paul was countering the popular Gnostic teaching that devalued God's creation. Attributing evil to a good God is blasphemy. (The Pharisees tried this angle once, saying that Jesus cast out demons with the power of hell—and they got rightly rebuked.)

I also want to mention that just because Paul says something, gives advice to some people in the first century dealing with specific problems, that doesn't mean his message is necessarily timeless or universal. Paul even says in places that some of his words are merely his opinions of what the right thing would be.

Peter had that carnivorous dream.

One last instance I will mention is Peter's dream about the animals on the sheet in the book of Acts. He has a vision, sees the sheet with animals on it, and hears God's voice telling him to kill and eat. I hardly think that this was God's recanting the value of his creation or advocating that we eat tons of animals. For the meaning of this vision I look to what Peter's immediate reaction was to it (his interpretation). He didn't go find a pig and eat it, but went immediately to the house of a Gentile and shared the gospel with him.

Clearly, the message of his vision was that the faith of the Jews was for the Gentiles too. The Jews were very proud of their faith and not inclined to sharing. This vision was shocking enough to a Jew (you *never* violated a dietary law, or any law for that matter) to convince him that things really *were* different. That Gentiles and Jews could worship the *same* God in such an open way was certainly shocking. If God were to give certain Christians today a vision about including sinners into their holy huddles, perhaps he would use a flask of alcohol and say, "Christian, open and drink." God's intention isn't that we get plastered, but that we find a "sinner" whom we would normally avoid and show him the deep love of God.

God created all animals just as he created all people. Obviously, pigs aren't less valuable than the other animals, and Gentiles weren't less valuable than the Jews. God was essentially saying this: If I made all of this, then all of it is good and all of it is valuable to me. Go and tell!

I am not trying to justify anything. I am being honest in my search to know how God really wants me to live. I also have to, at some point, acknowledge that God knows all things in the universe and beyond, and I do not. I also know that my decision to show compassion to all life is not a sin or even risking anything sinful. Why would God *not* want me to show compassion for his creatures?

Other Objections

You're just being straight edge.

I am not trying to be "straight edge," which is a self-promoting philosophy. My conviction to treat animals with compassion is something I do to glorify God. I do believe that a vegetarian diet is the healthiest diet and that is a reason for doing it, but not in a spirit of self-glorification but in a spirit of compassion and stewardship.

Animals kill each other so we should be able to kill them (law of the jungle).

This is like saying children hit other children so we should be able to because that's how children treat each other. To ignore that we as adults have a responsibility to children just because they are not like us developmentally is like ignoring that we as humans have a responsibility to animals just because they are not like us creatively. In the same way, just because people kill each other, that doesn't make it right. With animals, there is a difference between moral evil and natural evil.

Why are there carnivores if God doesn't want killing?

It could have been part of God's curse on creation because of man's sin (Gen. 1:14). We could just as easily say, "why are there murderers if God doesn't want killing?" Because we chose to sin, all of creation is subjected to it. The difference between us and the animals is that we morally decide to do wrong and they do not. It's obviously not *right*, but animals are subject to natural, not moral, evil. No animal *was* a carnivore in the beginning and no animal *will be* one in paradise.

It's natural for us to eat meat.

Our bodies are not built to digest flesh. Our digestive system is twelve times the length of our bodies (like herbivores), whereas carnivorous digestive systems are only three times the length of their bodies. The shorter allows for a speedy removal of decaying flesh from the system. If in the body for too long, decaying flesh can poison the bloodstream (Lyman, 182). It takes vegetarian food only one or two days to pass through our bodies, whereas meat takes five days to do so (183). Carnivores produce acidic saliva (hydrochloric acid) to digest flesh, but we don't. What we do produce is the enzyme ptyalin for digesting grains (Sussman, 134). Our teeth are also different, built to chew food rather than tear it. We must cook meat before we can (or want) to eat it, which prevents sickness from eating it raw but can't do much to make the presence more welcome or beneficial to our bodies. No human being is a true carnivore. As Howard Lyman says at the end of his book, "Do we have blood lust? Well, does the idea of tearing a chicken or cow apart with your hands and teeth and sucking its warm blood appeal to you? People eat their meat packaged and disguised precisely because the reality of eating flesh disgusts most of us. Maybe there's a reason for that" (183).

Boycotting factory farms won't change anything.

People have given this criticism that even if I stop eating meat from factory farms that I won't be able to prevent the millions of brutal deaths or mistreatment. I suppose I am being charged with not being practical. I already mentioned that one person might think their actions are inconsequential but that many people's actions together can make a huge difference. I want to emphasize our obsession with pragmatism one more time. If it doesn't produce results, we don't value it. There may be some things that I do morally because they are practical, but mostly because they are just the right things to do whether they are practical or not. By *not* hitting someone I am not subtracting much from the abuse and torture worldwide, but it is nevertheless right not to hit them. I am more concerned with being the right kind of person. It is important not to even *be a part of an evil* even if my not being part of it doesn't produce huge results.

You vegetarians are just idealists.

So are Christians, and we should be. We should always be throwing off the entanglements and straining for the better way. We should not judge each other for failure (because we will fail a lot), but we should not live as close to the line as we can get without technically doing wrong. Instead of asking how much we can get away with we should be asking what kind of people we should be. It's true that many vegetarians have an attitude of elitism or purism and they judge anyone who isn't like them. These people have identified their own moral standards by which to live. As a Christian, I know that unity and love are more important than individual moral convictions. Being a vegetarian for me is not joining a "we're better than you" club, as if showing compassion to animals somehow makes up for the fact that we can be real jerks to each other. No, for me it is one way that I give my life up to God in service and worship. I do not live morally in an attempt to build a tower up to God but in an attempt to thank him for all that he has done for me.

It's rude not to eat meat if someone makes it for you.

If someone were on a diet and he declined certain foods that were not "allowed" on his diet, most would not consider him rude but would congratulate him on his self-control. Apparently, it is more acceptable to be discerning out of health than conviction.

Some say I make others feel guilty or condemned, and if that is my mission, then I am wrong; but if my simple statement, "no thanks, I don't eat meat," makes someone feel defensive or guilty, then that is his dilemma. I'm not going to preach about it (especially during a meal); there is a time and place for sharing, usually if the person asks me to (which is why I write this paper). I would be rude to make fun of you or belittle you for eating meat, as you would be just as rude to belittle me for not eating it.

The erroneous assumption is that *I* am the only one making a choice, but the person serving meat has also made a choice. If my only crime is that my convictions are "inconvenient," I have not really done anything wrong. I've heard comments directed at me such as, "I don't get along well with 'picky eaters,'" as if I am a spoiled child. It hurts when people shut me down with such an inaccurate assessment. If I have personal reasons for not smoking (say, my grandpa died from lung cancer), am I finicky for declining to take a cigarette from you?

The bottom line is that we all have convictions, many of them different, and we all, in unity, must strive to accept each other's convictions. With this one, maybe you have to give a little for my sake, such as make the meat separate and not mixed all

throughout a dish, while I can give a little and eat whatever dairy you fix (since this is not a moral issue for me). On other areas completely, I will be the one to give for your sake. That's what unity always tries to do.

There's nothing to *eat* if you don't eat meat.

Think about the typical American diet—at most restaurants, homes, and yes even hospitals: there is almost always a chunk of meat taking up most of the plate while the vegetables and grains are mere afterthoughts to fill in the empty space. When most people think about cutting out meat, they see their dinner plate minus the main attraction and are left with only sideshows. This is a shame, not only because it's harmful to our health but also because there are so many other wonderful things to eat. When I was a meat-eater, I got rather bored with meals. It was meatloaf Mondays, taco Tuesdays, hamburger Wednesdays, and so on. You get in a rut a lot of times, where if you take away the meat all you have left is a taco shell or hamburger bun. I have discovered so many new foods, spices, and cooking techniques that I enjoy shopping, cooking, and eating much more. And I don't feel heavy and greasy after eating, but more of a satisfied, healthy full.

People also ask me where in the world I go to eat out. I don't really, since I don't see eating out as a treat anymore but usually a downgrade from home cooking. Not a lot of places serve good vegetarian meals, but you can usually find *something* to eat. Meat-centered restaurants are pretty terrible at cooking vegetarian entrees. They give you an unappetizing plate of watery vegetables and flavorless white rice with some bottled dressing thrown on the top. Some people are lucky enough to live in a town where good vegetarian food is served at local restaurants. If you want to try decent vegetarian food, there are countless varieties of pizzas, casserole bakes, stir-fries, pasta dishes with marinara, pesto, or other sauces, fresh breads, stews, salads, pies, cookies, granolas, and much more.

I used to look at vegetarians, as Stephen Webb put it, as if they had been holding their breath for a long, long time. I thought that their meat-less years were years of self-sacrifice, blandness, missing out, and cravings. I didn't have a clue. I'm not saying it isn't hard sometimes with all the "normalness" of eating meat in our culture, but any difficulty with it comes from social pressure not from deprivation.

Are you going to *force* your kids to be vegetarians?

I suppose this is assuming that serving meat at every meal is not forcing your kids to be meat-eaters? I have heard more stories of parents losing patience with their kids for choosing *not* to eat meat than for deciding to eat it, which implies an acceptance of eating meat and a very clear "excommunication" for not doing so.

As a parent, I can force my children to stop hitting each other, to do their chores, to go to school, etc., but I cannot force them to choose for themselves what is truth. As my mom said to me, "My job is to show you the right path, but it is your responsibility to walk down it." She is a very wise woman. I cannot and will not "force" my kids to be vegetarians any more than I can force them to love God. These things they must choose for themselves.

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Additional Recommended Reading:

Fast Food Nation by Eric Schlosser. More information about the practices of the meat industry with particular emphasis on fast food chains.

Milk A-Z by Dr. Robert Cohen. Short and funny with a children's picture-book lay-out that goes through each letter of the alphabet with facts about milk (A is for allergies, B is for breast cancer, C is for Crone's disease, Z is for zits, etc.).

Cooking Comments

If you want to eliminate or cut back on dairy, you will be confronted with the ugly fact that most cookbooks use a liberal amount of it. I have noticed that baking and cooking without dairy has been less messy, just as delicious, and I can sample my cookie batter, etc. without worrying about getting salmonella poisoning. Here are some egg substitutions that I use in baking:

For each egg called for, use 1 TBS cornstarch dissolved in 3 TBS warm water. Be sure to use a fork and beat the mixture (like an egg) so that it dissolves completely. Depending on the recipe, a mashed banana can also be used or you could buy a box of Ener-G egg replacer (which acts a lot like the cornstarch). Tofu can also be used.

For buttermilk, use 1 1/3 tsp vinegar in 1 cup of milk.

Any time a recipe calls for milk you can use soymilk, rice milk (which you can buy at most grocery stores), or almond milk. Soymilk has a wonderful taste and functions just like cow's milk but is much healthier. I suggest using plain soymilk in cooking rather than vanilla flavored. There is also unsweetened if you choose (and chocolate, which is wonderful with a snack). Rice milk has a very good taste as well, though it is less thick (comparable to skim) and almond milk is a little sweeter and with a consistency more like soymilk. All of them are delicious.

Instead of butter, which is animal fat, I buy Earth Balance Buttery Spread, which is made mostly of vegetable oils. It tastes, melts, and bakes exactly like butter. Not only is it not bad for you, it actually helps lower cholesterol. Instead of shortening or animal lard of some sort, I use Spectrum Naturals shortening, which is non-hydrogenated palm oil, which is naturally a lard-like consistency at room temperature. It works great.

I usually avoid cheese. There are soy cheeses available but these still usually contain the animal protein (and furniture glue) casein. I admit that I will sometimes just use it anyway if a recipe I love calls for cheese. As far as dairy goes, whenever I have a choice I choose non-dairy unless I am at a friend's house for dinner or unless I just use soy cheese as little as possible at home. There are vegan cheeses but the only kind I have tried wasn't very good. Feel free to find what works best for you.

There are many meat substitutes available, some tasting and looking more like animal meat than others. I'm just as willing to avoid the mock meat as I am the actual flesh. But if you want to use them they are available in most grocery stores. The meatless burger patties are not supposed to taste like a hamburger, or at least the good ones don't. They are made of rice, vegetables, beans, and spices and are a totally different food than ground beef. They are good on buns, cut up in casseroles, or even by themselves. There are also recipes to make them homemade.

Tofu is made from soybean curd (like cottage cheese is made from curdled cow's milk). It is a very versatile food that soaks up whatever flavors you are cooking it with. There are many recipes for tofu (which can be cut up in a stir-fry, crumbled into a lasagna, or pureed in a blender for smoothies) as well as tempeh and seitan, which are also made from soybeans but that go through different processes. They are more substantial in consistency. You're not merely "replacing meat" but discovering entirely new and delicious foods.

Have fun and enjoy.

More Facts & Quotes

1) “Well-planned vegan and other types of vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Vegetarian diets offer a number of nutritional benefits, including lower levels of saturated fat, cholesterol, and animal protein as well as higher levels of carbohydrates, fiber, magnesium, potassium, folate, and antioxidants such as Vitamin C and E and phytochemicals. Vegetarians have been reported to have lower body mass indices than nonvegetarians, as well as lower rates of death from ischemic heart disease; vegetarians also show lower blood cholesterol levels; lower blood pressure; and lower rates of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and prostate and colon cancer.” *American Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada.*

2) “Dioxins have been characterized by EPA as likely to be human carcinogens and are anticipated to increase the risk of cancer at background levels of exposure...Most of us receive almost all of our dioxin exposure from the food we eat: specifically from the animal fats associated with eating beef, pork, poultry, fish, milk, dairy products.” *U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.*

3) “During 1993-1997, a total of 2,751 outbreaks of foodborne disease were reported... *Salmonella* serotype Enteritidis accounted for the largest number of outbreaks, cases, and deaths; most of these outbreaks were attributed to eating eggs.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

4) “Most of the antibiotics sold in America end up in animal feed—a practice that, it is now generally acknowledged, leads directly to the evolution of new antibiotic-resistant ‘superbugs.’” *New York Times.*

5) “For all too many Americans, the first decision they consciously make about their health is the stark one between bypass surgery and angioplasty, or between chemotherapy and radiation. In reality, however, we knowingly or unknowingly make choices every day that can either lead us toward those grim options, or toward happier ones. We do so, of course, every time we decide what fuel to put in our bodies.” *Howard Lyman*

6) “An almost purely vegetarian diet feeds 6.3 billion people; a diet with 15% of calories from animal products feeds 4.2 billion people; a diet with 25% of calories from animal products feeds only 3.2 billion people.” *Peter Uvin in the Hunger Report, Brown Univ.*

7) The following are from *The Rapsheet on Animal Factories* reported by the *Sierra Club*: “Approximately 50 corporations, or their managers, racked up a total of more than 60 misdemeanor or felony indictments, charges, convictions or pleas. The criminal counts included animal cruelty, bribery, destroying records, fraud, distributing contaminated meat and pollution...Forty-three meat recalls by 31 companies that totaled approximately 67,000 tons (that’s almost 134 million pounds) of suspect products that were delivered to schools, military installations, restaurants and grocers. Meat was found

contaminated by deadly bacteria, rodent feces, rodent hair, rot, rust, mold, wire, metal shavings—and the list continues.”

8) “To visit a modern CAFO (Confined Animal Feeding Operation) is to enter a world that, for all its technological sophistication, is still designed according to Cartesian principles: animals are machines incapable of feeling pain. Since no thinking person can possibly believe this any more, industrial animal agriculture depends on a suspension of disbelief on the part of the people who operate it and a willingness to avert your eyes on the part of everyone else... More than any other institution, the American industrial animal farm offers a nightmarish glimpse of what capitalism can look like in the absence of moral or regulatory constraint. Here in these places life itself is redefined—as protein production—and with it suffering...” *New York Times*.

9) “It takes 25 minutes to turn a live steer into a steak at the modern slaughterhouse where Ramon Moreno works. For 20 years, his post was ‘second-legger,’ a job that entails cutting hocks off carcasses as they whirl past at a rate of 309 an hour. The cattle were supposed to be dead before they got to Moreno. But too often they weren’t. ‘They blink. They make noises,’ he said softly. ‘The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around.’ Still Moreno would cut. On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. ‘They die,’ said Moreno, ‘piece by piece.’ Under a 23-year-old federal law [which exempts the slaughter of birds], slaughtered cattle and hogs must first be ‘stunned’—rendered insensible to pain—with a blow to the head or an electric shock. But at overtaxed plants, the law is sometimes broken, with cruel consequences for animals as well as workers. Enforcement records, interviews, videos and worker affidavits describe repeated violations of the Humane Slaughter Act at dozens of slaughterhouses, ranging from the smallest, custom butcheries to modern, automated establishments such as the sprawling IBP Inc. plant where Moreno works.” *The Washington Post*.

10) “For modern animal agriculture, the less the consumer knows about what’s happening before the meat hits the plate, the better. If true, is this an ethical situation? Should we be reluctant to let people know what really goes on, because we’re not really proud of it and are concerned that it might turn them to vegetarianism?” *Peter Cheeke, PhD, Oregon State Univ.*

11) “In Japan, heart disease is much less prevalent than in America, yet when Japanese people live in the United States and adopt the American diet, their rate of heart disease increases as much as tenfold—a clear indication that diet, not heredity, reigns as the determining factor in heart disease.” *Howard Lyman*.

12) “Humanity’s true moral test, its fundamental test (which lies deeply buried from view), consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals.” *Milan Kundera*.

13) “Do we, as humans, having an ability to reason and to communicate abstract ideas verbally and in writing, and to form ethical and moral judgments using the accumulated knowledge of the ages, have the right to take the lives of other sentient organisms, particularly when we are not forced to do so by hunger or dietary need, but rather do so for the somewhat frivolous reason that we like the taste of meat? In essence, should we know better?” *Peter Cheeke, PhD.*

14) “Forget the pig is an animal. Treat him just like a machine in a factory.” *Hog Farm Management.*

15) “They [animals], too, are created by the same loving hand of God which created us... it is our duty to protect them and to promote their well-being.” *Mother Theresa.*

16) “Animals are God’s creatures, not human property, nor utilities, nor resources, nor commodities, but precious beings in God’s sight.” *Andrew Linzey.*

17) “I’ve found that a person does not need protein from meat to be a successful athlete.” *Carl Lewis (winner of 10 Olympic metals, 9 gold).*

18) “A study of 1600 women compared bone loss in vegetarians with bone loss in meat-eaters. It found that by the time they reached eighty, vegetarian women had lost only about half as much bone mineral as meat-eaters.” *Howard Lyman.*

19) “Cruelty to animals is as if a man did not love God.” *Cardinal John Henry Newman.*

20) “Fish is sometimes touted for possessing omega-3 fatty acid, but this nutrient can just as easily be obtained by consuming soy products, pumpkin and flax seeds, canola and walnut oils, dark green vegetables, and wheat germ. What fish *does* have that those other foods don’t are high cholesterol content and a wide assortment of such chemical toxins as mercury, lead, pesticides, and PCBs. The municipal wastes and agricultural chemicals that we flush into our waters become absorbed in the tissues of fish and shellfish and thus into most of the items on the menu at your favorite seafood restaurant.” *Howard Lyman.*

21) “...In discussions of animal suffering, the charge of emotionalism is often directed at those protesting the cruel treatment of animals. The implication is that a cool rationalism undistorted by emotion is the desirable way to go about our moral business. But can we even conceive of the moral life devoid of emotion, devoid, say, of sympathy or compassion?” *Robert Wennberg.*

22) “This attitude [of resentment] will be familiar to anyone who has been involved in collecting money on behalf of animal welfare charities. Such collectors are frequent recipients of critical comments of the form, ‘I wish you took some interest in children’s welfare.’ Presumably those making this criticism would not make similar remarks to people who were merely engaged in private entertainment: that is, going to the cinema.” *Rosemary Rodd.*

23) “The human body was simply not designed to accommodate tar and nicotine—nor was it designed to process dead animals or products derived from the lactation of other mammals.” *Howard Lyman*.

24) “‘Vegetarian’ wasn’t created from *vegetable*, though both words share a common etymological history...[it] was derived from the Latin word *vegetus*, meaning ‘whole, sound, fresh, or lively...’ Thus, the English vegetarians were trying to make a point about the philosophical and moral tone of their lives...not simply promoting the use of vegetables in the diet.” *Vic Sussman*.

25) “Just as the housewife who has scrubbed the room is careful to see that the door is shut lest the dog should come in and ruin the finished job with its footprints, so European thinkers are on their guard lest animals intrude into ethics.” *Albert Schweitzer*.

26) “We might view much of animal advocacy as an attempt to reverse the burden of proof from ‘You must show me why I should not harm this animal’ to ‘I must offer a good reason why I can harm this animal.’” *Robert Wennberg*.

27) “One reason that the Central American rainforests seem doomed to disappear is that their destruction take five cents off the price of an American hamburger.” *Catherine Caulfield*.

28) “So Christian vegetarianism might be understood as a witness to the world that God’s creation is not meant to be at war with itself. Such a witness does not entail romantic conceptions of nature or our fallen creation, but rather is an eschatological act, signifying that our lives are not captured by the old order.” *Stanley Hauerwas and John Berkman*.

29) “One farmer says to me, ‘You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with,’ and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw material of bones; walking all the while he talks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable-made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle.” *Henry David Thoreau*.

30) “I looked up the fellows I used to play poker with. Of the other nine men who were all about my age (I am fifty-nine), four are dead (three of heart disease, one of emphysema), three live with heart disease, one has battled colon cancer, and another has survived cancer of the prostate. I’m the only one in good health.” *Howard Lyman*.

31) “If [animals] do share in the curse of Adam’s sin, with its pain and death, one might not be too bold to suggest that it would be fitting that they also share in the cancellation of that curse in Christ, participating in the resurrection and sharing in their own way, in the glory that is to come.” *Robert Wennberg*.

32) “If it runs away, don’t eat it.” *Dr. John Harvey Kellogg*.