

A Radical Case for Vegetarianism

by Barry Casey

It has long been a commonplace in Adventism that one was a vegetarian because the Bible seemed to recommend it and because the “health message” demanded it. Adventists, perhaps uncomfortably, found themselves trying to explain Deuteronomic health laws along with their particular slant on health reform to a secular and uncomprehending public. Indeed, until a few years ago, vegetarianism was probably considered by most people as an eccentricity confined to a few religious fanatics, nature freaks, and anemic-looking health nuts.

Much of the social ignorance about vegetarianism has vanished in the last decade in the shadow of the phenomenal rise of participatory sports, a mass market for dietary and health publications, and the growing awareness of ecological concerns. It is no longer as difficult as it used to be to order a vegetarian meal in many restaurants. It is almost chic to be a vegetarian in the circles in which it is obligatory to jog ten miles a day, wear designer sweatpants, and drink Perrier water. Society has finally seen the light. This means that all of us who were raised vegetarians, and were slightly embarrassed about it, can now “come out of the closet” and admit

that we have been practicing vegetarians for most of our lives.

However, dietary and religious convictions are not the only reasons for being a vegetarian. In fact, there is a good case to be made that the rights of animals and the inequities between the affluent nations and the Third World are more powerful arguments in favor of vegetarianism for a secular society than are religious convictions. Accordingly, this essay will deal first with some of the ethical issues involved in animal rights and suffering, and second, with economic and political factors involved in the production and consumption of meat. I will argue, furthermore, that on the basis of the arguments outlined in this essay, meat-eating in our affluent society is immoral.

The question of the rights of animals is intimately tied to the question of the nature of animals. Further, the question arises whether the rights of animals, if they indeed have any, imply obligations or duties on the part of humans toward animals. Traditionally, the answers to these questions have taken the form of further questions which seek to establish what capacities are required before it can be said that an animal has rights and that others have duties toward it, and again, to determine which animals have those capacities.

Three capacities have been considered essential before a creature, human or nonhu-

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man, can be said to have rights. One is *sentience* — the capacity for both pleasure and pain; another is *rationality* — the capacity to reason; and still another is *autonomy* — the capacity to make free choices based on the action of the will.

Philosophy has regarded these capacities in varying degrees of importance, usually with ill consequences for relations between animals and humans. The first philosophical interest in the question arises in Aristotle, writing in the fourth century B.C., who stated that the lower animals have much in common with humans, including the capacity to gain nourishment, to reproduce, to be aware of the world through their senses, and to feel, remember, imagine, and desire. According to Aristotle, humans alone possess the capacity to reason, rationality thus being the differentiating characteristic between humans and animals.

Thomas Aquinas' Aristotelian rationale concerning the nature and rights of animals was built on the premise that rationality is the characteristic which makes beings more or less perfect. The more perfect a being is, the more power and right it has to use those creatures or things below it for its own ends and purposes. Thus, animals use plants; humans may use plants and animals; angels may use plants, animals, and humans; and God, because he is "Pure Intellect," may use everything and everybody. Animals, in effect, were excluded from this system of morals because they lacked rationality and attacked human beings for reasons other than justice, "the consideration of which belongs to reason alone."¹ Thus, humans may kill and eat animals for food as their God-given right. But what about the question of animal suffering and cruelty to animals?

Aquinas had no room in his moral scheme for wrongs against animals because, he believed, animals simply have no natural and special rights of their own (natural rights being those intrinsic to their kind and special rights being those which are conferred upon them by someone else). For Aquinas, rights presuppose the capacity to reason. So even though animals are (as Aquinas believes) sen-

tient, their inability to reason means that they have no rights. Human beings, therefore, have no duty — no *direct* duty, that is — to treat animals kindly. Aquinas did allow, however, that human beings have an indirect duty to abstain from cruelty to animals, since such cruelty, he believed, would lead to cruelty against humans.

Aquinas' influence has been long-lasting and widespread. As recently as the middle of the nineteenth century, Pope Pius IX forbade the establishment of a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Rome on the grounds that such an action would imply humans had duties toward animals.²

Two objections can immediately be made to Aquinas' theory. First, one can agree with him that humans have duties to creatures with reason, but object by saying that there is evidence that some higher animals *have* reason and thus rights; therefore, we have certain duties toward them. Another objection, a more important one, is made by such philosophers as Plutarch, Jeremy Bentham, and Albert Schweitzer, and claims that the important question is not "What beings are rational?" but rather "What beings have sentience?" In this view, humans have a *direct* duty and obligation to animals not to cause them unnecessary pain. This approach has a great deal to offer, as we shall see later.

Aquinas' objection to the rights of animals were based primarily on animals' lack of rationality; Descartes, the seventeenth-century French philosopher, claimed that animals had neither rationality nor sentience nor autonomy, thereby denying all of the qualities which Aristotle proposed concerning the nature of animals. In fact, Descartes held that animals were mere *automata*, machines having no souls or minds, not conscious of anything. Thus the squealing of a pig cut with a knife was a merely mechanistic response, probably the screech of a "spring" set in motion by the slice of the knife.

There is a direct line from Descartes to the first experiments of seventeenth and eighteenth-century vivisectionists, who nailed dogs up alive on boards by their paws and slit them open so that the movement of the circulatory system could be studied. Descartes' assertions allowed the scientists to

rationalize that the animal's cries were not expressive of real pain but were merely mechanistic responses.

According to the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, humans have no duties toward animals because animals are not conscious moral agents and do not have the capacity to act out of free will. He believed animals are merely means to an end and the end is humanity itself. Like Aquinas, Kant believed that cruelty to animals was not good for human nature since it could lead to cruelty toward humans, but there is no necessity to be kind to animals. This attitude has been described by philosopher Peter Singer as "speciesism," a term which we find especially applicable to the type of attitude toward animals which most of us carry. Singer compares the speciesist to the racist and says, "Similarly the speciesist allows the interests of his own species to

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override the greater interests of other species.”³

From my perspective, the definitive answer to Kant came in 1780 from Jeremy Bentham, who, in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, said of animals: "The question is not, can they *reason*? nor can they *talk*? but can they *suffer*?"⁴ Picking up on Bentham's utilitarian principles, Singer writes: "If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration."⁵ This draws the line sharply between the position of Aquinas and Kant on the one hand, and Bentham and Singer on the other. "This is why," concludes Singer, "the limit of sentience . . . is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others."⁶

Taking the suffering of animals seriously means regarding animals as having interests and rights of their own. It means debunking the deeply-ingrained Kantian attitude that claims animals merely for the use and ends of human beings. It means recognizing that animals *suffer* as people suffer, that the torturing and killing of animals is as indefensible as our torturing and massacring of each other.

My thesis is that rights make a claim upon others and presuppose obligations and duties toward those who possess them. Philosopher Joel Feinberg has defined a right as "a claim *to* something and *against* someone, the recognition of which is called for by legal (or other institutional) rules, or in the case of moral rights, by the principles of an enlightened conscience."⁷ If we apply this definition to the case of animal rights, we meet three objections immediately.

First, as Aquinas and Kant have claimed, rights are only attributable to beings who have the intellectual capacity to reason and make moral choices. Since animals do not reason, they cannot have rights. Our answer to this is that the last word on animal reasoning capacity is not yet in. Who knows what we may discover concerning the levels of animal consciousness and reasoning capacity? If we truly have not reached the end of our knowledge about animal nature, it does not seem reasonable to deprive animals of their rights on the basis that they do not have the same capacity as humans.

A second objection to our viewpoint is that animals do not *know* that they have claims or rights, so they cannot make claims to or against others on their own. But here, by analogy, we must remember the cases of infants and the insane or handicapped who have representatives to speak for them in court and uphold their rights. Against the objection that animals cannot *choose* to be represented may be put the example of people who are defended in court by a state-appointed attorney, in spite of their possible reluctance to be represented by that particular person.

A final objection is that animals do not have interests, a point we have discussed pre-

viously. "Possession of interests," comments Feinberg, "by no means automatically confers any particular right or even any right at all upon a being. What it does is show that the being in question is the kind of being to whom moral or legal rights can be ascribed without conceptual absurdity." While the interests of animals may be small compared to those of humans, they are sufficiently obvious to make talk of interests and rights meaningful. Animals certainly sense pain and pleasure, and seem also to have purposes, desires, and a certain conative sense about them.

I believe, then, that animals *have* interests and therefore have rights also. Those rights presuppose that humans have obligations to honor animals and that we have *direct* duties to the animals themselves. A final quotation from Feinberg expresses this succinctly: "We ought to treat animals humanely but also we should do so for the animal's *own sake*, that such treatment is something we *owe* to animals as their *due*, something that can be *claimed* for them, something the withholding of which would be an *injustice* and a *wrong*. . . ."9

While I would agree to the main body of Feinberg's argument, I would go farther and say that as created beings made by the purpose of God, animals have an *intrinsic* right to life. Such a position is a reinterpretation of Augustine's affirmation that created things and beings have intrinsic value by virtue of their createdness at the hand of the Creator.¹⁰ It is also expressed by H. Richard Niebuhr's echo of that sentiment in the phrase, "Whatever is, is good."¹¹ This lays upon humans, as stewards of the earth, the responsibility to safeguard and protect the freedom from interference of wild animals, to treat domesticated animals with kindness and prevent unnecessary suffering, and finally, when it is necessary to kill, that it be done as painlessly as possible. It also means that killing of animals for food should be done only when absolutely necessary for the survival of humans. This rules out killing for sport and for the mere gratification of human palates. The question of using animals in research cannot be given serious attention in this essay except to say that the general rule of

the least pain possible applies, and that research should be done on animals only when the results of such research directly and vitally affect the survival and well-being of humans.

Although cruelty to animals is wrong, there may be instances where causing pain to animals is justified, just as it may be right in some cases to inflict pain on humans. Nevertheless, as James Rachels says, "there must be a *good reason* for causing the suffering, and if the suffering is great, the justifying reason must be correspondingly powerful."¹² Rachels goes on to cite an example of the needless and terrible suffering of civet cats who are kept in the darkness of heated sheds until they die. As a result of tortuous heat as high as 110°F., a musk is produced on the genitals which is then scraped off and used in perfume. Many people would regard

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the giving up of perfume, as a way of protesting this suffering, to be a cheap price to pay, but the same argument can be used with even stronger force in the case of animals raised for meat production. We turn now to more direct arguments against meat-eating, based on the methods and practices of "intensive farming," the result of which is the extreme suffering of literally millions of animals each year.

The associations most people have about the meat in their local supermarkets rarely involve images of actual animals. If people stop to think of the process at all, they are likely to have some vague notions of a brief moment of pain to the animals at the end of a reasonably happy life. On the contrary, the slaughterhouse is often a welcome release from an awful life for most animals raised for

meat. Meat production is a billion-dollar business, and the helpless animals are treated as food-producing machines rather than living beings.

There are three factors in intensive farming which inevitably cause animals a great deal of suffering: methods of rearing, methods of transportation, and methods of slaughtering. While the last two are certainly areas that are chronically at fault, the methods of rearing as practiced in this country are the most critical, because they involve the prolongation of suffering for virtually all the animal's life.

The process of turning animals into meat is governed first and foremost by the profit margin. Today's large farms are basically factories, where the greatest number of animals that can possibly be accommodated are housed and fed at the lowest cost to the farmer. In practical terms, this means that the care and treatment of individual animals is nil, the cost of production and competition inevitably making possible only the most cursory attention.

For example, calves raised for veal are kept in pens too small for them to turn around in or even lie down comfortably — often they spend their short lives with their legs bent double under them. Since the aim of veal production is to raise the heaviest calves in the shortest amount of time, and to keep the meat as pale as possible, the animals are overfed and underexercised. This is accomplished by a process which would otherwise be called unhealthful, but under the circumstances works wonders at putting on weight. In order to get the calves to eat as much as possible, they are deprived of all water, their only source of liquid being the rich milk replacer which they are fed daily. Since the barns are kept fairly warm, the thirsty calves drink much more than they would if allowed water; this overeating causes them to sweat, losing moisture that they must replace by drinking again.

Because their liquid diet is high in protein and deficient in essential minerals, calves will, in their desperation, gnaw the wood of their stalls to get roughage and, if allowed to turn around, will attempt to lick their own

urine for the iron, although under normal circumstances they find this repugnant. They are allowed virtually no movement, for exercise burns up the calories needed for the expensive dinner cuts and builds muscles which are tough and stringy.

The poultry industry is another prime example of the Kantian principle drawn out to the extreme. Chickens are raised for two purposes: to lay eggs and to become table chickens, or "broilers" as they are usually called. The essential step in this process is for chicken farmers to get the birds out of the farmyard and indoors where they can be crowded by the thousands into windowless sheds. Usually, the chick broilers are raised in cages stacked in tiers and fed and watered automatically from hoppers suspended from the ceiling. As the chickens grow they are crowded, eight to ten at a time, into cages smaller than a newspaper page.¹³ The stress of extreme crowding and the lack of exercise and natural activities lead to outbreaks of fighting which often result in the stronger birds killing and eating their weaker mates.

Feather-pecking and cannibalism are regarded as "vices" by the poultry farmers, although such behavior is inevitable under the circumstances. Even though the farmer may personally regret the hardship and suffering caused his chickens by the crowding, there is little he can do to relieve the situation, unless he is willing to forego his profit margin. In the poultry industry, eliminating overcrowding usually means eliminating the profit; so in order to keep the birds from pecking each other to death, the farmer often utilizes very dim lighting. A more drastic, and almost universally used measure, is called "debeaking," which "involves inserting the chick's head in a guillotine-like device which cuts off part of its beak. Alternatively, the operation may be done with a hot knife."¹⁴ Although some poultry farmers claim the operation is painless, a British governmental committee formed to examine aspects of intensive farming found that, in fact, the process cuts through a layer of extremely sensitive tissue, causing severe pain.¹⁵

The life of a laying hen is hardly easier than that of a broiler. Layers are debeaked, forced to lay eggs on the slanted floor of wire cages

crowded with up to four or five other hens, and live out their lives in semidarkness until their egg productivity is over. The wire cages, although extremely uncomfortable, have an economic justification, it is claimed: the excrement drops through and piles up on the floor where it can be cleaned in one operation. Unfortunately, a chicken's feet are not adapted to crouching on wire and, consequently, many farmers report chickens actually becoming anchored to the floor of the cage as their toenails catch on the wire and eventually grow around it.¹⁶ Furthermore, the chickens often suffer from the constant chafing of the wires against their bodies, and bloody, raw patches of skin, especially near their rumps, are not uncommon.

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These are examples drawn from research conducted on several giant poultry farms across the country.¹⁷ Together with examples considered before, they suggest that even the most modern and advanced methods of intensive farming have raised profits at the expense of causing millions of animals to suffer. The huge American appetite for meat demands large-scale intensive farming methods, which, it seems, virtually guarantee that millions of animals will lead lives of boredom and unnatural conditions at best, prolonged and intense suffering and fear at the worst.

Given the evidence, we are faced with what William James called a “forced option” — we cannot *not* decide. What can and must we do if we are convinced of the suffering of animals raised for meat?

Certainly, we must attempt to influence our political representatives to work for legislation that will more closely regulate the practices of intensive farming so as to reduce the suffering in whatever ways possible. Not surprisingly, the agribusiness lobby is one of the most powerful in the country, representing millions of dollars spent yearly on influencing politicians. Further, the links between agribusiness and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are longstanding, powerful, and cordial. Two fairly recent examples: Clifford Hardin, secretary of agriculture in the Nixon administration, resigned in 1970 to become a top executive of Ralston Purina, one of the nation's largest agribusiness corporations; his successor, Earl Butz, resigned a position with Ralston to take over the secretariat.¹⁸ While efforts in this area may not be immediately effective, they are still part of a larger pattern of protest that can eventually make a difference.

Another indirect but substantial action is to raise our children as vegetarians, and to teach them to respect and protect the rights of animals. Further, supporting organizations dedicated to protecting wildlife and the environment, such as Greenpeace and Friends of Animals, Inc., can have international ramifications, as recent world legislation against whaling practices and quotas has shown.

The question might be raised that, if means could be worked out so animals could be reared, transported, and slaughtered humanely, what would be wrong with eating meat? The answer is, first, that even if such methods could be developed, they would raise the cost of meat production so high that only the very rich could afford meat. Intensive farming is successful because of the factory methods used in raising the animals. Humane methods are simply not profitable, no matter how just they may be for the animals involved.

Second, no matter how humane the procedures for raising and slaughtering animals for meat, it is highly unlikely that one could eat animals and continue to regard them as ends in themselves. If animals are being raised for the sole purpose of delighting our palates, it is hard to see how we could come to regard them as anything but creatures for

our use alone. Oliver Goldsmith, the eighteenth-century humanitarian essayist, characterised such people by writing: "They pity, and they eat the objects of their compassion."¹⁹ By eating animals, we help to reinforce the speciesism against animals that has existed for millenia. The basic issue, after all, is that because animals have sentience and can suffer, and have varying degrees of consciousness, they are entitled to the right to life as much as humans. The exact extent of the rights of animals is an open question, even among ardent conservationists, yet few would argue that animals, at least, have the intrinsic right to life. "Compassionate meat-eating," where meat-eating is not *absolutely* necessary for the survival of humans, is a contradiction in terms.

Finally, the question itself is only of theoretical interest because the actual situation and choice we face is buying the meat of animals which *have* been treated inhumanely.

If one is convicted about the part meat-eating plays in the abolition of animal rights, by far the most effective action is to become, or remain, a vegetarian. Vegetarianism is a form of boycott and an explicit protest against the cruelty of intensive farming methods. For most vegetarians, the boycott is a permanent one, since they rarely eat meat once they have made the initial choice to become or remain vegetarian. Although the number of omnivores certainly exceeds the number of vegetarians, still the thousands of vegetarians are not adding to the demand for meat. As health research goes on and as people become aware of the cruelties involved in the raising of animals for meat, the number of vegetarians will most likely increase. From the standpoint alone of concern for the rights of animals, we can be grateful for everyone who abstains from eating meat. The farmers who practice intensive farming methods do so because it is profitable and because there is a tremendous demand for meat by American consumers. Intensive farming methods will continue to be used as long as they are profitable, and farmers will continue to have the political resources to fight reforming legislation because they will use the argument that they are only providing the public what it wants.

But in addition to refraining from eating meat, we must also vocally protest the infringement of the rights of animals. While boycotting meat may be the most effective measure in the long run, persuasion and protest are important as well. In a sense we must be ready "to give an answer" to everyone who asks the reason for our protest!

It is here that we must face our speciesism. It is here that we must attest to our sincerity about our concern for the rights of animals and our desire to reverse the trend of the centuries against them. As long as we are meat-eaters, we are condoning and directly supporting the speciesism which has been directed at animals for millenia, and we are perpetuating the unjust economic structures which make cruelty to animals necessary and commonplace. Vegetarianism represents something direct, effective, and immediate that we can do to contribute, in however small a way, to the relief of the suffering of animals.

Another factor which is of considerable significance in the issue of vegetarianism is the cost-efficiency of meat production versus grain and plant production. Coupled with this is the inequity of food production and distribution between the affluent nations, particularly the United States, and Third World countries. When one considers how tightly interrelated and dependent upon one another the nations of the world are today, it does not stretch the imagination to see how what a farmer in Texas feeds his beef cattle directly affects the life expectancy of a baby in India.

In the last three decades, the productivity of American farmland has increased by 50 percent; in effect, the United States has had its own "green revolution."²⁰ In that time, corn yields have leaped to three times per acre the yields of the later forties and early fifties. With this abundance of food, it would seem that America could both feed its people and export a tremendous amount of food to hungry nations. Not so. With the increased productivity, the economic gap between the North Atlantic nations (Canada, the United States, Western Europe) and the Third

World countries continues to expand at an alarming rate. Because the poorer nations could not afford the grain and soy supplies they needed, the American farmer had the unique problem of producing too much food. The solution was to cut back production by holding back the amount of land used for crops. The American government paid farmers \$3.6 billion in 1972 to hold back one acre for every four and a half acres harvested.²¹ Still, the crops reached record highs. An interesting and startling development in this worldwide economic gap comes to light when we begin to examine the relationship of meat production to grain and plant production.

Among the meat-producing animals (cattle, pigs, turkeys, and chickens), cattle are by far the least efficient in the protein yield ratio of grain to meat. Frances Moore Lappé reports that “today an average steer is able to reduce 16 pounds of grain and soy to one pound of meat on our plates. The other 15 pounds? It becomes inaccessible to use, for it is either used by the animal to produce energy or to make some part of its own body that we do not eat (like hair), or it is lost entirely in manure.”²² It takes approximately 21 pounds of protein fed to a calf to produce one pound of animal protein for humans to use.²³ Lappé notes that the discrepancy in ratio figures is the object of a fierce battle today between the experts of the interest groups involved. The discussion turns on the difference in gained weight that a protein diet puts on a calf and its actual body weight. Needless to say, the figures which grain manufacturers arrive at are considerably lower than studies by government agencies! Nevertheless, an average ratio of 16:1 (16 pounds of grain protein to every one pound of animal protein) is a fairly accurate working figure.²⁴ Lappé’s characterization of the steer as “a protein factory in reverse” is well deserved.²⁵

Livestock other than steers are considerably more efficient: hogs consume six times the protein they give back, turkeys, four, and chickens, three. Milk production is even more efficient, as it takes less than one pound of grain to produce a pint of milk.²⁶

Still another way to understand the inefficiency of livestock as protein converters is by

comparison with plants. An acre of cereals produces five times more protein than an acre used for meat production; legumes produce ten times more; and leafy vegetables approximately 15 times more.²⁷ Granting that an acre devoted to plant production is more efficient than one used for meat production, one might well question where the tremendous harvests in this country are going.

As a result of the over-production of protein crops (corn, barley, oats, soybeans, and wheat), a tight world market, and the increasing demand for meat, the feedlot operation came into being to help relieve, in part, the pressure created on the world market by too much U.S. grain.

If a calf grazes on land that produces only grass, or on land that is not arable, then the

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protein derived from that calf is a net gain to humans, since it required no loss of proteins to produce it. But if that calf is crowded into a feedlot with thousands of other cattle, then it must be fed. And what we feed it is grain that could otherwise be used as protein for humans.

It takes a ton of grain and approximately 300-400 pounds of high-protein feed to fatten a feedlot calf for slaughter. While in the 1940s only one-third of all beef cattle were grain-fed, by the early 1970s fully three-quarters of all marketed cattle were grain-fed. The effectiveness of American livestock operations in reducing the “surplus” protein crops has worked so well that “by 1973, American livestock consumed the protein equivalent of *six times* the recommended protein allowance of our human population.”²⁸ This means that we feed about 90 percent of our corn, barley, and oat crops to cattle.

Combining the two factors of the enormous plant crops consumed by animals and the inefficiency of animals in converting plant protein into animal protein, we arrive at some appalling statistics. Lappé calculates that of the 140 million tons of grain and soy fed to livestock in 1971, only 20 million tons returned as meat. The rest, close to 118 millions tons of grain and soy, was inaccessible for human consumption. This is enough to provide every human being with one cup of grain per day for a year.²⁹ When one considers that the United States produces three-quarters of the world's soybeans and feeds 95 percent of its yearly crop to animals, it becomes clear that the world cannot afford the expensive tastes of Americans.³⁰

Ironically, while feeding precious grain and soy proteins to cattle to fatten them up, we actually waste up to 20 percent of the carcasses of slaughtered cattle by trimming away excess fat. Instead of the high-quality protein feed going to make up animal protein, the actual emphasis in meat production is on the marbled fat, a USDA quality grading based on the proportion of fat present. "The result of this feeding for fat is incredible waste: much of it is simply trimmed away and discarded. . . . In 1973, some 2.5 billion pounds of excess fat were trimmed from beef carcasses at the retail level."³¹ The United Nations reports that livestock in affluent countries actually eat as much grain protein in *feed* as people in the poor countries eat directly as *food*.³²

What difference would it make to the world hunger problem if Americans were to reduce the amount of grain fed to cattle and cut back on their meat consumption? According to Lester Brown of the Overseas Development Council, "if Americans were to reduce their meat consumption by only ten percent for one year, it would free at least 12 million tons of grain for human consumption — or enough to feed 60 million people." Furthermore, "if Americans were to stop eating grain-fed beef altogether, the grain thus released would be enough to feed *all* the 600 million people in India and Bangladesh."³³

Waste of grain and overconsumption are not the only factors United States and the

affluent countries of Western Europe contribute to the crisis in world hunger. According to the United Nations, the rich, developed nations of the world imported, from 1955 to 1973, approximately twice as much food in dollars from the poor, developing nations as they exported in return.³⁴ The irony in the import-export balance is that the United States, one of the richest nations in the world, actually received, in 1972, \$1.5 billion more worth of food from developing nations than it exported to them. "It is not simply that North Americans consume five times as much grain as do most Asians," comments theologian Ronald Sider. "It is not simply that each day we eat twice as much protein as our bodies need. It is not simply that we devour so many unnecessary calories that more than 80 million of us are overweight. We can do all these foolish, unjust things in part because each year the poor world exports vast quantities of food to North America!"³⁵

One would assume that with the quantity of beef production in the United States, we would be in a position to export beef. That the United States is the world's largest *importer* of beef comes as no surprise when one considers that from 1950 to 1973 the average American's annual consumption of beef and poultry shot up from 60 pounds to about 250 pounds.³⁶ Our imported beef comes not only from Australia and New Zealand but from many Latin American countries as well; in fact, "America imports half as much Mexican beef as all Mexicans have left for themselves."³⁷ This raises another moral and political issue; that is, by importing beef from Latin American countries, we not only deprive them of a present major source of their diet, but we encourage and support unjust power structures within those countries. In Latin American countries such as Honduras and Mexico, the cattle are owned by a tiny minority of wealthy families who control a majority of the arable land and reap the profits. Honduras, for example, exports approximately 34.8 million pounds of beef a year to the United States, but virtually all the profits go to an elite making up 0.3 percent of the total population, who own 27.4 percent of the cultivable land.³⁸

It would be simplistic to assume that by merely cutting back or stopping our meat-eating, we could make it easier for the poor of the developing nations to survive. There are complex social, political, and economic factors involved which make easy solutions impossible. But by becoming aware of the importance that the role of meat production and consumption plays in the world market, we can understand, at least in part, the seriousness of the problems before us.

I wish to draw the issues as clearly as possible in conclusion. First, because I believe that animals have an intrinsic right to life and thus the right not to be exploited as a means to human ends, I have argued that it is ethically wrong, in fact immoral, to perpetuate the centuries of speciesism against animals by eating meat produced by the intensive farming methods. Since virtually all meat available through commercial chain supermarkets and other outlets is mass produced by the intensive farming method, it follows that eating meat is contributing directly to the suffering of animals.

Second, I have argued that the killing of animals for the mere tastes of the human palate is unjustified when so much food of other kinds is available. In an affluent country such as the United States, few people

need meat in their diet to survive and lead healthy lives. Therefore, it seems to me that what the suffering animals go through to gratify an acquired human taste far outweighs the necessity for meat eating. Thus, I believe that it is ethically wrong, and indeed immoral, for the citizens of affluent countries where food is abundant to insist on meat eating.

Third, I have argued that the increasing demand for meat, particularly beef, and the "green revolution" in crop production have tended to create a situation in which more grain is being used to fatten cattle than is consumed directly by humans — especially humans in the famine areas of the Third World countries. In addition, the wasteful inefficiency of converting grain and plant protein to animal protein not only contributes to spiraling costs and the greed of an overconsuming society, but directly affects the lives of the millions of malnourished and starving poor in the Third World. In short, the world is reaching the point where it can no longer afford the affluent countries' consuming many more times their share of the world's resources and goods. I believe that this, too, is immoral, and that a vegetarian diet is a first step toward alleviating world hunger and undermining support for oppressive economic and political structures, both in the affluent countries and in the Third World.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II, II, Q159, art. 2. Quoted in Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 202. Singer is an authority in the field of animal rights; *Animal Liberation* provides a much more detailed and fuller exposition of the examples used in this essay. I am indebted to Singer for raising my consciousness about animal rights — and for much of the factual material relating to the intensive farming method and animal use.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

3. Peter Singer, "All Animals Are Equal," in *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, ed. Tom Regan and Peter Singer (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p. 154. *Animal Rights* is a collection of essays examining several questions concerning the rights of animals, as well as selections from the history of philosophy on the nature and rights of animals.

4. Singer relies on Bentham's utilitarian principles throughout *Animal Liberation*, building his argument for the equality of animals on Bentham's principle, "Each to count for one and none for more than one," and repeating the quoted question concerning sentience on p. 211.

5. Regan and Singer, *Animal Rights*, p. 154.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Joe Feinberg, "Can Animals Have Rights?" in *Animal Rights*, p. 190.

8. Joe Feinberg, "Human Duties and Animal Rights," in *On the Fifth Day: Animal Rights and Human Ethics*, ed. Richard Knowles Morris and Michael W. Fox (Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books, 1978), p. 55.

9. Feinberg, *Animal Rights*, p. 196.

10. Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, The Modern Library (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 366.

11. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks ed., 1970), p. 37.

12. James Rachels, "Vegetarianism and 'The Other Weight Problem,'" in *World Hunger and Moral Obligations*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh La Follette (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 187.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

14. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 99.

15. *Report of the Technical Committee to Enquire into the*

Welfare of Animals Kept Under Intensive Livestock Husbandry Systems, Command Paper 2836. Quoted in Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 99.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 92f.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
19. Oliver Goldsmith, *Collected Works*. Quoted in Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 163.
20. Frances Moore Lappé, *Diet For a Small Planet*, new rev. ed. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), p. 7.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 170.
24. Lappé, *Diet*, p. 382.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.
30. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 174.
31. Lappé, *Diet*, p. 17.
32. Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p. 44.
33. Singer, *Animal Liberation*, p. 171.
34. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 153.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 157, 158.
36. Lappé, *Diet*, p. 40.
37. Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 159.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Unclean or Unhealthy? An Adventist Perspective

by John Brunt

Many Seventh-day Adventists typically emphasize two distinct ways one may err with regard to diet. On the one hand, to eat meat, excessive sugar, or a generally unbalanced diet is seen as a violation of health principles. On the other hand, to eat pork, shellfish, or other foods specified as “unclean” in Leviticus 11 is seen as a violation of God’s law and is “sinful” in a way that mere lack of regard for health is not. This paper calls such a qualitative distinction into question.

There are two major problems with the way many Adventists use Leviticus 11 with respect to clean and unclean foods. First, Adventists are inconsistent. While parts of

Levitical rules concerning what is clean and unclean are accepted, other parts are rejected or ignored, and there is no valid basis for this selective acceptance. For example, while most Adventists would have no difficulty agreeing with the teaching of Leviticus 11:20 that insects which crawl should not be eaten, few would heed the teaching of Leviticus 11:24-25 and wash all their clothes and consider themselves unclean until evening because they touched the carcass of such an insect; yet both teachings are part of the same body of instruction. Nor do we consider new mothers unclean and exclude them from the sanctuary for forty days after the birth of a male and eighty days after the birth of a female (Lev. 12:1-5), yet this, too, is part of the same body of instruction.

Second, in their use of Leviticus 11, many Adventists are not biblical, for the New Testament explicitly abolishes distinctions be-

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