

Speech on Veganism

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People often ask me — and maybe you're wondering too: "Why is there so much advocacy for veganism these days? Aren't there **other** issues that deserve our attention as well?"

It's true: there are **many** important issues and problems in the world. And **obviously**, veganism isn't the only cause we should care about.

However, what makes veganism so **special** is that it affects so many different areas of life **simultaneously**. I was not aware of that when I was younger, never really learnt about it in **school** or at **home**.

In case you've had a **similar** experience, I'd like to give you a glimpse into the **astonishing** things that I've learned over the last few years — and that have **fundamentally** changed my view of the world.

My **first point** begins with an excerpt from a **United Nations report**:

*"The **livestock sector** emerges as one of the top two or three most significant **contributors** to the most serious **environmental problems**, at **every scale** from local to global."*

Environmental harms caused and accelerated by the animal industry include **soil degradation, species extinction, climate change, water pollution, air pollution, acid rain, overfishing**, and the irreversible **destruction of marine ecosystems**.

The consumption of animal products is also responsible for over **70% of rainforest destruction** in South America — and generally the **leading cause of deforestation worldwide**.

Additionally, animal farming generates more than **five times** the greenhouse gas emissions of **all aircraft** in the world taken together.

Recently, an article in The Guardian revealed that the emissions from just **thirteen dairy farms** match those of the **entire United Kingdom**.

Second point:

Working conditions for employees in the animal industry are often **cruel**, leading to **frustration, despair, severe accidents, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism**, and an increased **risk of suicide**.

Working conditions in the animal industry are regularly described as “**modern slavery**”.

After thorough research into the working conditions of the U.S. animal industry, *Bloomberg* published an article titled, “America’s Worst **Graveyard Shift Is Grinding Up Workers**”.

A *Business Insider* headline reads, “The meat industry is hiding a **dark secret**, as workers at ‘America’s **worst job**’ wade through seas of **blood, guts, and grease**”.

The slaughterhouse employees put at risk to satisfy society’s taste for meat are overwhelmingly **people of color** and members of other **disadvantaged minorities**.

Third point:

In its official statement, the **world's largest** organization of nutrition experts, the **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**, confirms that a balanced **vegan diet** is, quote, “appropriate for **all stages of the life cycle**, including **pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood**, and for **athletes**.”

According to the physician and bestselling author Michael Greger, **abstaining from animal products** has a **preventive effect** against **14 of the 15 deadliest diseases** of our time. Scientifically confirmed **health benefits** of a vegan diet include (among many others):

- **Reduced risk of various types of cancer,**
- **Significantly fewer cardiovascular diseases,**
- **Lower risk of diabetes,**
- **Fewer cases of food poisoning,**
- **Reduced need for medications** in old age, and
- **Reduced risk of internal inflammations**

Furthermore, the animal industry is the **leading cause of antibiotic resistance**.

In many countries, including the U.S., **more than half** of all antibiotics are used on farmed animals, making the industry an **ideal breeding ground** for resistant bacteria.

In the long run, this will render many types of surgeries impossible, and horrible diseases untreatable. According to predictions, by 2050, **10 million people** will die each year from resistant bacteria — more than the current deaths from **all types of cancer** combined.

Fourth point:

While **24,000 people** die from hunger and malnutrition every day, our society wastes massive amounts of **grain, corn, soy, and fresh water** to grow livestock — resources that could be **directly consumed** by humans.

Animals are an incredibly inefficient food source. It takes about **100 calories** of grain to produce just **12 calories** of chicken or **3 calories** worth of beef.

The world's cattle alone consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of **8.7 billion** people (**which is more than the current world population!**)

And while **every third human** suffers from water scarcity, the production of **one pound** of beef uses as much water as a **135 days'** worth of showers.

Fifth and **final** point:

The animal industry — even when you ignore its effects on public health, world hunger, and exploited workers — remains one of the largest, if not **the largest, source of mental and physical suffering** in the world.

Most of us **wouldn't tolerate** animal abuse if it happened right in front of our eyes.

Yet, **every 30 minutes**, as many animals are **killed for human consumption** as people have died in the six years of the **Second World War** — the **deadliest** conflict in human history. **Every 30 minutes!** And this doesn't even count fish and other marine animals.

Contrary to common belief, even the production of **eggs** and **dairy** products are deeply cruel. In the **egg industry**, it is a standard practice to kill all male chicks by **gassing** them, **suffocating** them in waste bins, or by **shredding** them alive.

To make them lactate, dairy cows are **forcibly impregnated** over and over again. They are bred to produce **ten times** as much milk as they would naturally, and as a result often suffer from **painful udder infections**.

Newborn calves in the dairy industry are separated from their mother immediately after birth in a **traumatizing** procedure — many of them are dehorned and castrated **without anesthesia**.

While cows have a natural life expectancy of **20 years**, it is common in the industry — even on organic farms — for cows to break down from exhaustion after **4 or 5 years** of continuous pregnancies and milk production. Milk production declines around that time anyways, so if the dairy cows are still standing, they are killed for hamburgers and beef regardless.

Now, I have talked about:

- **impacts on climate change and environmental harms,**
- **horrific working conditions,**
- **public health,**
- **world hunger, and**
- **animal suffering.**

Having heard all this, please answer this question for yourself:

Should we support this industry?

Should we pay with **our money** for this incredibly **destructive** and completely **unnecessary** industry to continue to exist?

The answer seems more than obvious to me today.

And I have consumed animals for **most of my life**. Clearly, I'm in **no position** to point fingers.

But I agree with Jonathan Foer when he says:

“Our response to this industry is ultimately a test of how we respond to the **weak**, the **invisible**, the **silent** — it is a **test** of how we act when no one is forcing us to act one way or another. (...) Those who live today belong to the generations that now know better. (...) We are the ones who will rightly be asked: **What did you do** when you learned the truth about **eating animals?**”

The vegan lifestyle may not be perfect. But it offers a **huge** contribution to **reducing** the many **harms** I have talked about.

To wrap up, let me summarize once again — and now from a positive perspective:

A vegan lifestyle not only avoids unnecessary violence against animals, prevents many forms of environmental destruction and improves your own health, but also protects your fellow human beings from **hunger, misery and exploitation**.

Honestly, can you think of a more convincing reason to try out a new diet and lifestyle?

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Thank you so much for listening.