

Slaughter, Drink, Look Away — A Pamphlet on the Animal Question

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1.

Roughly eighty billion land animals are slaughtered every year so that humans can eat them. Add to this, depending on how one counts, between one and three trillion fish. These are figures that exceed human comprehension. The number of pigs that die for a single year of German sausage consumption would, laid end to end, wrap around the equator several times over.

These figures are public in FAO statistics. They are no secret. They are simply not looked at.

2.

That is the starting point of any serious engagement with the animal question: not the individual animal, not the individual steak, not the individual glass of milk. An industry that operates at a scale never before seen in human history.

Whoever says “eating meat is natural” is talking about something other than what is at issue. A Stone Age group sharing a deer they have caught after days of unsuccessful gathering has nothing in common with a slaughterhouse processing thirty thousand pigs per day through a killing line. The one is subsistence. The other is industrial production. To call both “eating meat” is a category mistake.

3.

The popular narrative — that humans were “made for meat,” because meat made the brain grow — is no longer scientifically tenable. The most recent systematic re-evaluation of the archaeological record (Barr et al., *PNAS* 2022) shows: when sampling bias is controlled for, there is no evidence for a rise in meat consumption with *Homo erectus*. The cut-marks on bones increase in proportion to investigative intensity, not to actual practice.

Plant starch was probably equally important, perhaps more so (Hardy et al. 2015). Cooking, social food-sharing, tool use, language — all contributed to brain development. Meat was a component, not the component.

Those who invoke the “Stone Ape Theory” — that mushrooms made the brain — appeal to a writer’s speculation (Terence McKenna 1992) that has never been peer-reviewed support. The

same applies to the “Aquatic Ape Hypothesis.” Both are marginal positions in academic circles; in non-academic discourse they are sold as science.

4.

Anatomically the human is an omnivore with a plant-frugivorous tilt. He has no carnivore anatomy. The often-cited low stomach pH is scavenger protection, not hunting specialization. Salivary amylase genes (AMY1) appear in multiple copies — a genetic adaptation to starch, that is, to plants. Lactase persistence in adulthood is an evolutionarily recent, geographically limited mutation; only about a third of the world’s adult population tolerates milk.

Whoever speaks of “human nature” and means meat and milk is speaking of a norm that, genetically, does not apply to the majority of the world’s population.

5.

What happens biochemically when one eats meat? A great deal that no advertising leaflet mentions. Trimethylamine-N-oxide, a metabolic product of animal-derived L-carnitine and choline, correlates in several large studies with elevated cardiovascular risk. Neu5Gc, a sialic acid from mammalian meat that humans themselves do not produce, is incorporated into tissue and triggers chronic inflammatory reactions — “xenosialitis.” IGF-1, upregulated by animal protein, accelerates cell proliferation, which in adulthood has tumor-promoting effects. Heme iron evades the body’s own absorption regulation and is colorectally carcinogenic in animal models. AGEs and postprandial endotoxemia add to this.

This is not esoterica. These are documented mechanisms from peer-reviewed sources (all referenced in the Master Paper). In moderate amounts these effects are often clinically inconspicuous. At the 60 to 80 kilograms of meat that an average Central European eats per year, they add up.

6.

Nutritional studies are methodologically difficult. No one can compel humans to forty years of strict diet, so mortality RCTs are nearly impossible. What we have are large prospective cohort studies — EPIC-Oxford, Adventist Health Study-2, Tong 2019 — and Mendelian randomization studies that use genetic variants as natural experiments.

The overall picture is robust: a plant-emphasizing diet reduces cardiovascular risk, diabetes incidence, some cancers. The effect is on the order of 12 to 22 percent for all-cause mortality. Mendelian randomization shows: LDL cholesterol is *causally* linked to cardiovascular risk, not merely correlated. Animal saturated fats raise LDL. The causal chain is closed.

Whoever says “the science is divided” misuses the term. There is mixed evidence with residual uncertainty. But the direction of the weight of evidence is unambiguous.

Whoever points to “the Inuit ate meat and were healthy” is invoking a scientific myth. The “Inuit paradox” narrative rests on methodologically problematic studies from the 1970s (Bang & Dyerberg); follow-up studies showed elevated cardiovascular rates in traditional Inuit and lower average life expectancy (Fodor et al. 2014). The myth survives because it is popular, not because it is true.

7.

Milk deserves separate treatment. In the West it is marketed as a calcium source and bone guardian. The evidence for this is epidemiologically mixed to contrary. High milk consumption in adults does not unambiguously correlate with lower fracture rates; in the Swedish Mammography Cohort (Michaëlsson et al. 2014), high milk consumption was associated with *higher* all-cause mortality and fracture rate in women.

Today's milk-norm is not natural growth. It has been constructed by a hundred years of industry lobbying. The German CMA compulsory levy — collected from farmers and used for milk advertising — ran for 56 years until the Federal Constitutional Court stopped it in 2009. In the United States the dairy lobby has co-authored USDA dietary recommendations since the 1950s. Nestlé's marketing of infant formula in developing countries in the 1970s and 80s caused documented infant deaths when breastfeeding was replaced by formula mixed with unclean water. This was not an oversight. It was a business model.

Whoever drinks milk is not drinking "nature." They are drinking the product of a politically constructed consumption norm.

8.

The industry is large. Approximately 1.5 trillion dollars in annual turnover. Five corporations (JBS, Tyson, Cargill, Smithfield/WH Group, Marfrig) control the largest part of the global market. JBS owner Joesley Batista publicly admitted in 2017 to having bribed 1,829 Brazilian politicians, including the then-president. This is not a footnote. This is the industry.

It causes between 14 and 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, depending on accounting method. It uses 77 percent of global agricultural land for 18 percent of human calories. It is one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss and Amazonian deforestation.

It is the pipeline for pandemics. Sixty to 75 percent of all newly emerging infectious diseases have animal origins. H1N1 2009 originated in a Smithfield subsidiary facility in Mexico. H5N1 arrived in U.S. dairy cattle in 2024/25. SARS, MERS, COVID-19 stem from wildlife-human contact zones that were created in the first place by the animal trade and habitat destruction. The next pandemic is not a question of whether, but when.

It is a driver of antibiotic resistance. Over two-thirds of the world's produced antibiotics go into animal husbandry. The Lancet study 2022 (Murray et al.) gave the directly AMR-attributable deaths worldwide as 1.27 million per year, plus another 4.95 million deaths with AMR as a contributing factor. Whoever dies in a hospital of a multi-resistant infection is dying of a consequence of industrial animal husbandry.

It is subsidized. The EU pushes 15 to 18 billion euros indirectly into animal production each year via the Common Agricultural Policy. If externalized climate, water, health, and pandemic costs were included, the true price of a kilogram of beef would be several times higher than the market price.

It rests on precarious labor. Tönnies, Smithfield, JBS — the list of slaughterhouse scandals is long. Migrant contract workers, precarious housing, high injury rates, documented PTSD rates comparable to combat veterans. This is not the farm romanticism of the advertising spots. This is an industrially dismembered battlefield.

9.

It is not only about killing the animals. It is also about the workers who do the killing.

This is the point at which the left should be paying attention. Slaughterhouses are places where three exploitations connect: animal, worker, neighborhood-environment. These three are not at the same place by accident. They are functionally entangled. The margin is thin, so the wage must be low. The cleaning costs are high, so the manure gets dumped into local water systems. The killing must be fast, so the animal becomes an interchangeable unit.

Whoever says "class struggle first, animals later" overlooks that the animal industry is one of the central sites of class struggle. It is one of the worst exploiters of migrant labor. It is one of the most powerful lobby actors against ecological and social-political reforms.

10.

Is the human an animal? Biologically yes. Mammal, primate, hominid. Phylogenetically we are one of 6,500 mammal species. The categorical division “human here, animal there” is ideological, not biological.

Does the human separate himself by having language? Reason? Self-consciousness? Each of these properties lies on a spectrum — some animals have components of them, some humans (infants, coma patients, severe dementia) lack them. The clean dividing line between “human with full dignity” and “animal without claim” does not exist in biology. It exists only in our conventions.

These conventions are mutable. In some cultures the dead were ritually consumed — the Fore in Papua New Guinea into the 1950s, with the bitter consequence of a prion epidemic (kuru) that structurally corresponds to BSE. In other cultures, certain humans were categorically not “fully human” — slaves, women, foreigners, unbelievers. The human/animal boundary, the murder/slaughter boundary, the woman/slave boundary: all have been historically shifted, all continue to be shifted.

This does not mean that pigs and humans are “equal.” It means that the *justification* of the difference requires honest work. “Eating pig is okay because that’s just how it is” is not a justification. It is tradition with a coat of justification painted on.

11.

Whoever is honest sees: the distinction is not held by arguments but by language and distance. “Pig” becomes “ham.” “Cow” becomes “ground meat.” “Slaughter” becomes “processing.” Carol Adams called this procedure the “absent referent” in 1990 — the vanished animal behind the product.

It is experimentally demonstrated that humans assign *less* moral significance to an animal *after* they have eaten it (Loughnan et al. 2010). The consumption act shapes the evaluation, not the other way around. This is classical Festinger cognitive dissonance. We eat meat and adjust our picture of the animal to reduce the contradiction. Four strategies for this have been described (Joy 2010): animals do not suffer (denial), it is not the animal (dissociation), it is natural/necessary/normal (justification), animals are worth less (hierarchization).

This is not weakness, it is human. But it is also recognizable as an ideological operation. And once recognized, it can no longer be carried on without self-awareness.

12.

The affect-economy of killing has a darker thread. Walter Burkert in *Homo Necans* (1972) argued that the ancient Greek animal sacrifice fulfilled a social function: the shared excitement of killing bound the community. Bullfights, cockfights, Roman animal-baiting, group hunts — everywhere the same structure: arousal at blood, communal experience at death.

In modern societies this affect has been displaced. The killing happens behind the walls of industrial facilities. We eat the product and do not see the process. This is a historical anomaly. Two hundred years ago, slaughter still happened in public markets. Today the average European has never seen an animal die.

This has consequences. Slaughterhouse workers show elevated PTSD, aggression, and substance abuse rates. A study of U.S. counties with slaughterhouses found elevated violent crime rates (Fitzgerald, Kalof & Dietz 2009). The killing is not trivial — the affect does not disappear because it has been displaced into the industrial interior. It is outsourced to the workers who must bear it so that the consumers do not have to feel it.

Whoever eats steak tartare or beef carpaccio is retrieving a fragment of this repressed material. Whoever indignantly rejects Maasai blood-drinking but eats hamburgers is performing a moral operation that has more to do with the aesthetics of concealment than with ethical consistency.

13.

The ethics of the animal question runs along several tracks. Singer argues utilitarian: whoever takes suffering morally seriously cannot take the species of the suffering being as a criterion. Regan and Korsgaard argue deontological: animals have rights, are ends in themselves, not mere material. Nussbaum argues capability-based: every species has a spectrum of capabilities whose unfolding deserves respect. Donaldson and Kymlicka argue politically: domesticated animals are in a citizenship-like relation to our society. Adams argues feminist: animal objectification and the objectification of women are structurally related.

These lines are independent. They come from different philosophical traditions. They converge on the same conclusion: industrial animal exploitation cannot be justified where plant alternatives are available. This convergence from independent theories is a strong indicator.

14.

What ethics does not deliver: a universal consumption imperative. Whoever lives in poverty, in homes, in canteens, in remote regions with little choice, does not have the same scope for action as the urban person in the organic market hall.

Here the marxist lens becomes important. Whoever generalizes veganism as a consumption duty across all classes and conditions is conducting middle-class moralizing veganism. This is not ethics, this is distinction. Bourdieu described this forty years ago, and it applies to the oat-milk metropolitan scene as well: ostentatious dietary morality is also a class signal.

A serious position must hold two things at once. First: the animal industry is structurally indefensible, its reduction and supersession is a political goal. Second: the individual availability of plant alternatives is class- and context-dependent, and this is not overcome through moral preaching but through political change in availability, price, infrastructure.

15.

Consumer individualism alone will not topple the animal industry. Beyond Meat, oat milk, Vegan — all are capitalist business models. Cargill sells soy for animal feed and for tofu. The accumulation logic remains; consumption shifts.

What would be necessary is political change at the structural level. CAP reform with an end to animal-husbandry subsidization. Abolition of school milk programs, replaced by meaningful nutritional education. Advertising bans on animal products analogous to tobacco. VAT reform with higher rates on animal products, lower on plants. Animal welfare regulations that deserve the name. Anti-corruption laws against the lobby. International agreements on antibiotic restriction in animal husbandry.

These are political tasks. They happen at the level of parliaments, EU commissions, unions, social movements. They do not happen at the oat-milk purchase. But the oat-milk purchase is not *therefore* wrong — it is only not sufficient.

16.

A warning at the end. The historical vegetarian movement has dark strands. In the völkisch-antisemitic-fascist spectrum of the early twentieth century there were currents that linked vegetarianism with racial hygiene, purity ideology, and nature mysticism. Hitler practiced from the late 1930s phases of meat-reduced to largely vegetarian diet, which in the secondary literature is often shortened to “Hitler was a vegetarian” — the historical reality is episodic and inconsistent, but the ideological environment of National Socialist *Lebensreform* is uncontested. Some reform movements of the *Lebensreform* around 1900 had antisemitic components. Today there is, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, a Carnivore Diet subculture on the right that explicitly agitates against “feminine-feminized plant cuisine” and “cultural-marxist vegan lobby”

— well-known representatives are Jordan Peterson, Brian Johnson (“Liver King”), and Paul Saladino (an American physician and book author with broad social-media reach who markets a pure-animal diet as “biologically optimal”).

Both strands — the historical right-wing vegetarianism and the present right-wing carnivorism — are not serious discussion partners. The position taken here is *materialist* and *emancipatory* in its grounding, not *völkisch*, not spiritual, not purity-based. It takes class analysis and subsistence conditions seriously, it criticizes the industry structurally, not moralistically. It is compatible with antifascism; it is not compatible with nature mysticism and racial purity.

Whoever wields veganism as a hammer against migration, women, the left, or particular religions is not engaging in animal ethics but in racism with a plant-veneer. Such positions are not contained in this argument and are explicitly rejected.

17.

What remains at the end of an honest engagement?

The human is not a “born” meat-eater. He is an omnivore with a plant-tilt. His current consumption structures are industrially constructed and ecologically not sustainable. The animal industry is climate-killer, pandemic ramp, antibiotic-resistance driver, exploiter of workers, and lobby monster. The ethics of several independent traditions say: industrial animal exploitation cannot be justified. The anthropology shows: the human/animal boundary is ideological, not given by nature.

Whoever takes this picture seriously does not suddenly have the duty to be vegan. But the duty of honest self-enlightenment. Whoever continues to consume meat and milk should not claim that this is “natural,” “necessary,” or “neutral.” It is practice with history and with consequences. Whoever chooses it, chooses it — it is not self-evident.

And whoever eats plant-based should not act as if this were already politics. It is private life-conduct that can move into political change, but does not have to. Purity is not achievable; consequence is.

18.

There are no clean hands in this question. Whoever buys soy tofu often finances the same corporation that markets soy for Brazilian feedlot cattle. Whoever eats purely plant-based still lives in a society whose economic structures co-finance animal exploitation — via taxes, subsidies, international trade agreements.

This is not discouraging. It is clarifying. The question is not “how do I become pure?” but “how do I shift, in what direction, with what consequence?” That is a political question. It is decided in the interplay of consumption, discourse, organization, election, legislative action, and collective action.

Whoever takes this seriously stops treating animal production as a private question of taste. It is one of the central industries of the 21st century, and its reform or supersession is one of the urgent political tasks.

Whoever acknowledges this has taken the first step. What comes after is not purity but practice. Practice in the sense of what in older discussions was called *praxis* — a doing that follows from an insight, without elevating itself to a religion.

More is not to be expected. Less should not be accepted.

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