

The background of the slide is a photograph of a vast herd of cattle, likely in a savanna or prairie setting. The cattle are scattered across a green field, with some standing and others lying down. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, and the overall scene is somewhat desaturated, giving it a soft, ethereal quality. The text is overlaid on this background.

Meat Me Halfway?

Health and the Ethics of

Animal-based Diets

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March 14, 2020

Catherine

- **Multiple sclerosis (for 25 years)**
 - Inability to walk and drive, limited sight, seizures
 - Dementia, dysautonomia, anemia, etc.
- **Now: MS in remission, able to walk, hoping to resume work soon**
 - How? An animal-based diet.
- **Is it ethically impermissible even for Catherine to continue to eat animal-based foods?**
 - What if there are (hundreds of) millions of Catherines worldwide?

Two Central Claims

- **Central ethical claim:** A mostly or exclusively animal-based diet (“animal-based diet”) is *pro tanto* ethically permissible at least for those who would experience a significant improvement in health from such a diet.
 - *Pro tanto* because other (e.g., environmental or economic) considerations may outweigh considerations of health
- **Central empirical claim:** Hundreds of millions of us would likely experience significant improvements in health from animal-based diets.
 - (What counts as “significant”? Hard to say.)

An aerial photograph of a large herd of cattle, including brown, black, and white animals, scattered across a vast, green and yellow grassy field. Numerous white birds, likely seagulls or terns, are seen in flight throughout the scene, particularly concentrated around the cattle. The background shows a flat horizon under a pale sky.

The Central Empirical Claim

Evolution

- Miki Ben-Dor: “[W]e evolved, quite early in our evolution as the genus Homo, to become highly carnivorous ... and ... we continue to retain a biologic adaptation to carnivory.”
 - Relevant adaptations: small guts, high fat reserves, etc.
 - Estimated 90% of calories from animals till recent past
 - “[W]e remain adapted to carnivory despite over 10,000 years of agricultural subsistence.”
- Adaptedness *prima facie* evidence of healthiness of (“paleo”) animal-based diets

Anthropology

- **Traditional diets of Maasai, Inuit, etc.**
 - **The Maasai, whose “traditional diet consists almost entirely of milk, meat, and blood ... have low rates of diseases typically associated with[high-fat and high-cholesterol] diets.”**
 - **Low rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer among Inuit in early 1900s**
 - **Though Americans used to eat almost twice as much meat, heart disease relatively rare up until the 1920s**
- **(What about the lipid hypothesis? “[T]here is little evidence that high cholesterol leads to cardiovascular disease.”)**

Carbs and Vegetable Oils

- If the problem isn't saturated fats and cholesterol, what is it?
Excessive carbs and “vegetable oils.”
- Domesticated grains part of human diet only since ~10,000 BC, vegetable oils only since 1800s
- “The major correlate of high [cardiovascular disease] risk was the proportion of energy from carbohydrates and alcohol.”
- DiNicolantonio and O’Keefe: “[‘Vegetable oils’] ... [are] likely a major dietary culprit for causing [coronary heart disease].”
- Natural toxins and antinutrients (e.g., phytic acid) in plants
 - Lesser bioavailability of plant nutrients

Specific Health Issues

- **Minimal tooth decay among hunter-gatherers and traditional communities with low-carb animal-based diets**
- **Drs. Michael and Mary Dan Eades: No significant cardiac events in 2,000+ patient years of low-carb treatment for 8,000+ patients**
 - **Clean CAC scans**
- **Reversal of 60% of Type 2 diabetes cases with carb restriction**
- **Possibility of low-carb ketogenic diet as metabolic therapy for cancer and other chronic diseases**
- **Also: Crohn's, mental health, obesity, autoimmune disorders, etc.**
- **Anecdotal**

What's the Upshot?

- Even if animal-based diets helped treat Type 2 diabetes alone, they would help hundreds of millions worldwide.
 - Billions if we include obesity, CVD, cancer, etc.
- More remains to be said concerning fiber, RDA's, etc.
- But we have at least some reason to accept my central empirical claim: Hundreds of millions of us would likely experience significant improvements in health from animal-based diets.
 - Ethical implications worthy of consideration even if central empirical claim rejected (or not yet accepted)

An aerial photograph of a large herd of cattle, including black and brown cows, scattered across a vast, green, grassy field. Numerous white birds, likely seagulls, are seen in flight throughout the scene, adding a sense of movement and activity. The background shows a flat horizon under a bright, slightly hazy sky.

The Central Ethical Claim

My Argument

1. If killing animals is necessary under certain circumstances to promote a significant human interest, then killing them is *pro tanto* ethically permissible under those circumstances.
2. A significant improvement in human health is a significant human interest.
3. Killing animals for an animal-based diet is necessary under certain circumstances to promote a significant improvement in human health.
4. Killing animals for an animal-based diet is necessary under certain circumstances to promote a significant human interest (namely, a significant improvement in human health).
5. Killing animals for an animal-based diet is *pro tanto* ethically permissible under certain circumstances—namely, those circumstances under which it is necessary to promote a significant improvement in human health.

My Argument

- (2) is uncontroversial. (3) is (a restatement of) my central empirical claim. (4) follows from (2) and (3), and (5) follows from (1) and (4).
 - So the question is whether (1) is true: “If killing animals is necessary under certain circumstances to promote a significant human interest, then killing them is *pro tanto* ethically permissible under those circumstances.”
- What is there to say in defense of (1)?
 - Relevant analogous case: animal deaths and transportation.
 - If you travel by bus or car, you should accept (1).
 - (Cf. also animal research)

The Transportation Analogy

- In the United States alone, motor vehicles kill roughly one million animals every day. How can we justify this?
- The answer must be: *something like (1)*.
 - Fast and cheap transportation a significant human interest
 - Roadkill a “necessary evil”
 - We implicitly accept the ethical permissibility of killing animals whenever doing so is necessary to promote a significant human interest such as fast and cheap transportation.
 - But then we seem implicitly to accept (1).

Disanalogy: Intent

- Drivers do not (usually) intentionally kill animals, but farmers and others (usually) do.
- But how much does intent matter?
 - *Unintentional* killings still killings
 - Thought experiment: 10% chance of killing an animal every day by driving vs. 100% chance of killing an animal every 10 days for food (so equal deaths in the long run)
 - What seems worst about animal death and suffering is animal death and suffering—the *consequences*—not the intent with which they are brought about.

Disanalogy: Extent

- Many more animals are killed for the sake of food than on roads for the sake of transportation.
- But must this be so?
 - The number of animals killed for food could be brought down tremendously if, for instance, we gave up poultry for beef.
 - Steven Davis: Animal agriculture could potentially kill *fewer* animals than plant agriculture.
- (What about animal *suffering*? My argument does not entail the permissibility of factory farming.)
- Furthermore...

Disanalogy: Extent

- Health more important than transportation (so animal killings more easily justified in the case of health)
- Less human suffering in the case of health
 - 30,000+ annual traffic fatalities in the US
 - If we accept 30,000+ human deaths per year for the sake of fast and cheap transportation, how many more *animal* deaths should we accept for the sake of human health?
- Upshot: Killing animals for the sake of food seems more justifiable than killing them for the sake of transportation. So if we accept the latter because we accept (1), we should accept the former.

Other Objections

- **The Speciesist Objection: (1) is unacceptably speciesist.**
 - **Reply: *Consistent* anti-speciesists should give up transportation by motor vehicle, not just animal-based foods.**
- **What about the environmental impact of animal agriculture?**
 - **Reply 1: *Pro tanto* permissibility *can* be overridden.**
 - **Reply 2: The negative impact of animal agriculture has been exaggerated (cf. Frank Mitloehner, Sara Place, etc.)**
 - **Reply 3: Nutritional considerations can't be easily outweighed.**
 - **(And with better health, we could divert more resources to green energy research, carbon sequestration, etc.)**

Conclusion

- **WHO: “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.”**
- **If animal-based diets can bring about significant improvements in health, then we can hardly deny their *pro tanto* permissibility.**
 - **The real question is whether they actually can.**
 - **Much more would need to be said to settle this question.**
- **Our current understanding of nutrition is woefully incomplete.**
 - **My hope: Improved understanding of nutrition can save millions of lives in the near future.**