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Most people are taught to treat each other with respect and to dignify the lives of others, including our household pets. If we treat our family members and pets this way, then it is a wonder why factory farmed animals are treated with such a lack of respect solely because of their great taste. An acknowledgement of this lack of regard for factory farmed animals in terms of their poor treatment is given in the American novelist Jonathan Foer’s, argumentative essay, “Against Meat”. Through the use of logos in his essay, Foer uses data to convey why it was so important for him to keep returning back to vegetarianism throughout his life precisely because of his moral values and respect for life. Using the example of his life story as a vegetarian, Foer is able to effectively persuade the audience using emotional and ethical appeals to live according to our own values and to never lose sight of those values, despite road blocks.

Through statistics, Foer uses logos to convey that animals in factory farming are treated terribly and these farms are quite harmful to the environment. Every reader has at least heard of the idea that factory farming is detrimental, but many do not know quite how prevalent it is in the United States. Foer appeals to our reason by including the U.S.D.A statistic that “factory farms now produce 99 percent of the animals eaten in this country” (7). This logical appeal gives the audience an exact number that is related to the percentage of animals treated this poorly. Little did we know that the vast majority of meat on our dinner tables comes from a source that is tearing apart the animals and the environment of the United States. Furthermore, he also includes a citation from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N. that describes how “factory farming has made animal agriculture the No. 1 contributor to global warming” and it is also “one of the top 2 or 3 causes all the most serious environmental problems” (7). His use of quoting reliable sources and using big data adds to the accountability of his argument. Likewise, these logical claims force the audience to sit back and consider their ethical views and whether some changes should be made for the welfare of our country, because it doesn’t make sense that these animals should be poorly treated just so we can have the pleasure of eating them.

Foer also appeals to ethos from his credibility in commenting that it is not what your beliefs are that matter to him, it is your will-power to stick with them no matter what drawbacks you face. He goes on to say, “I won’t measure my success as a parent if my children share my values, but whether they act according to their own” (9). This statement provides the audience more respect for him because it is very selfless for a parent to not be overly hurt if their children have different beliefs. Additionally, Foer gains credibility by admitting that he hasn’t always stuck it out with his beliefs. He comments on how for him vegetarianism “lasted a few years” and then “sputtered and quietly died” (3). This appeal to ethos is significant because it makes him relatable to the audience. Just like them, he has seen failure, but he makes it clear that people can move on from failure and return to their morals. Furthermore, this great credibility he gains gives him leverage to continue his argument.

Chicken, steak, and pork all taste great, but at what cost? Foer repeatedly inquires whether it is ethically okay to kill animals solely for their good taste. In his appeal to pathos, Foer compares “taste, the crudest of our senses” to “a horny person” and describes how horny people don’t have “as strong a claim to raping an animal as a hungry one does to confining, killing and eating it” (8). This metaphor makes it clear that our taste buds have an even greater say in our ethical tendencies than our sexual inclinations. Foer’s emotional appeal makes the audience solemnly ponder over how they have been eating and to question if rich, hearty food is really worth the mistreatment of animals. Foer also appeals to the audience’s emotions by including the quote from his babysitter, “You know chicken is chicken, right” (3). This use of the rhetorical question is highly persuasive because the statement is obvious to the audience. Everyone knows that a chicken is a chicken and doesn’t deserve to be treated as if it were not a chicken. Additionally, the animal lovers in the audience begin to feel gloomy because no animal deserves to be treated unjustly. By appealing to the readers sense of ethics and morality, he establishes the firm ground that we must live by our moral values.

Using personal examples and curiosity about the way animals are treated, Foer is also able to effectively appeal to pathos. He pronounces how we are taught that we should all be treated equally, when in reality animals are treated in all different ways. Likewise, Foer depicts how in factory farms, chicken and other animals are “treated in ways that would be illegal if it were a dog or cat” (8). This claim appeals emotionally to the reader because any pet owner would be terrified of their dog or cat being treated unjustly. Moreover, the audience is forced to consider if anyone’s dog or cat is really any better than the millions of other lovely animals that lose their lives daily to our overzealous taste buds. Furthermore, Foer’s emotional tone toward the topic also persuades the audience to stick to their values. He repeatedly remarks how shameful it was when he could not stick to vegetarianism even though he always felt called toward that lifestyle. However, the fact that Foer repeatedly returned to be a vegetarian throughout his life demonstrates to the audience that if we are passionate enough about our beliefs, in time, we will return to them.

Foer provides another personal example of a change he made in his life in order to follow his beliefs, while still respecting the beliefs of his family. Practicing the cultural tradition of eating grandmother’s meaty meals was very important to his family. Foer’s family even “believed in [their] grandmother’s cooking more fervently than [they] believed in God” (2) Because her cooking held such significance to her family, Foer did not want to diminish its importance. Therefore, when he decided to go vegetarian, he let his grandmother know that she should still cook her classics for everyone else, but when he came, he would eat only vegetarian options. This story is crucial to his argument because through it we see him illustrating everyone’s need to have their own beliefs. Furthermore, he exemplifies his strength to quit succumbing to this cultural custom that did not have underlying importance to him. This example Foer provides convinces the audience that small changes can be made to traditions to fit into current lifestyles. Foer argues that it is important that we stick to our underlying beliefs no matter what changes need to be made.

Exigence is also used by Foer to convey how deeply he believes that everyone should have a set of values to live by. He offers the example of children learning the ways of the world and having many questions regarding all of the decisions their parents make for the family. Likewise, Foer mentions how he did not want his children to ask him questions about why they are eating animal meat, when eating meat truly went against his morals. Some questions he may have been afraid to answer include, “which animals does this meat come from?”, “why is it okay to kill some animals, but not others?”, and worst yet, “does this mean some people are better than others too?” He tells us how he didn’t want the lessons he taught his children to contradict the ways in which he acted. This inspires the audience to want to act as a role model to youth and to live by their beliefs. It is made clear to the audience that Foer’s inspiration to write ‘Against Meat’ is not necessarily to persuade everyone to follow his beliefs. But rather, to point out that a major societal flaw is that many have not even established a set of values to live by. The root of humanity is at stake without this great problem being solved, because if there is nothing to believe in then what is the point of living?

A major constraint that Foer faced was the question of his credibility to speak as a passionate vegetarian who had his values all in line. Foer went through many phases where he questioned and even went against his vegetarian ideals. Throughout his childhood, high school years, his marriage, and even when he had his kids, there were plenty of times when he found himself eating meat. Though these small failures took a mental toll on him, he never gave up and he always found himself returning to vegetarianism. Luckily, this constraint is not detrimental to the majority of the audience because we know that no human is perfect, and we should all simply strive to be the best version of ourselves. However, passionate vegans and vegetarians might think it is shameful or immoral for Foer to ever lose sight of value of respecting animals’ lives. They might think that Foer is not doing enough by giving up meat during only certain periods of his life. Consequently, he might lose some credibility with these people. But overall, the example of Foer’s past failures provides a reality check for the audience as we know we do not always live up to our own standards. Indeed, like Foer, with perseverance we can all live by our values and stand up for what we believe in.

Through his effective language, purpose, credibility, and appeals to the audience, Foer is able to effectively convey why he feels so strongly that we should live by our values. By his use of pathos, he argues that when animals are getting hurt that don’t need to be, why shouldn’t we stick up for what is right? Virtuous leaders, like Foer, set an example for society that we need to live by the lessons we teach our children to ensure that they live out their values too. If we achieve this someday in the future, the world will be a better place for everyone.

Bibliography:

Foer, Jonathan Safran. “Against Meat.” *The New York Times Magazine*, 7 Oct. 2009.