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It is known that in order for life to be sustained, organisms must take in nutrients in the form of food and expel waste. For some people food is derived from animals, from either their flesh or milk. The vast majority of people in the United States enjoy eating a wide variety of meats. Numerous species of animals are raised world wide to feed the billions of humans that inhabit the earth. However the over consumption of meat and dairy has lead to the formation of factory farms. This paper will show how the impact that factory farming has on human health, the environment, and livestock makes factory farming an unethical practice.

As one will see, there are a number of sinful acts to be found in methodologies of factory farming. Lets us first begin with a summary of the writings of St. Augustine, which will serve to contrast the current practices associated with factory farms. When reading his work *Confessions*, one is presented with his answer to the question "What is the nature of sin?" He holds that all humans are of such a nature that they are constantly seeking love. This love can be either from the infinite love of God, or from the love of worldly things. For Augustine, sin is in the action of finding their fulfillment in the finite pleasures of the flesh, or worldly things, over the infinite love offered by God. The end result of sin is the creation of unnecessary suffering. When one looks to find their fulfillment in worldly things they will be unfulfilled and show disregard for others, the earth, and themselves.

Perhaps the most obvious effects of factory farming can be seen in the ways in which it affects human health. When consumers purchase meat at a typical store they believe that it has undergone rigorous inspection to ensure that it has been processed in accordance with government regulations. This may not be the case, as the USDA no longer has much control over

the sanitation of meat. The meat industry generates a tremendous income. Anything that could cut into these profits, such as stopping the slaughter line to inspect animals, is reason for reprimand in the eyes of supervisors. Public health is being risked every day simply to keep slaughter line speeds fast and money rolling in. USDA inspectors are authorized to re-inspect six sides of beef at the end of the line to give the impression of government oversight. These six sides of beef are equal to three cows. With many factory farms slaughtering as many as 3,200 cattle per day, which equates to roughly three-tenths of one percent (0.3%) that are thoroughly inspected. Yet one hundred percent of the meat is stamped as “U.S. Inspected and Passed”. (Eisnitz 181)

Without adequate government inspection sickly animals make their way through the slaughter line. Their meat is rendered from them and then processed and sold to the consumer public. The grinding process used to create hamburger is a playground for contamination. This is due in part to the fact that ground meat has a larger surface area in which to host bacteria than a singular cut of meat. In the case of the E. Coli bacteria, typically found in the fecal matter of cows, one contaminated animal carcass can easily contaminate over 32,000 pounds of meat (Eisnitz 159). A USDA Meat Inspector named David Carney has this to say about the relaxing meat inspections: “We use to trim the shit off the meat. Then we washed the shit off the meat. Now the consumer eats the shit off the meat.” (Eisnitz 155)

This is just one of the many ways in which the owners of these factory farms are putting the monetary value of meat before the safety of the consumers. There is no denying that cutting off section of potentially contaminated meat will reduce the profits of the company. As a result of their unwillingness to discard parts of contaminated carcasses they are willing to put the consumers health at stake. The young and the elderly are particularly susceptible to food

poisoning which could, in some cases, result in the death of the individual. This demonstration of greed would be considered by St. Augustine as the love of the material world. By putting their love of money as the highest priority, they are creating the unnecessary suffering of people who eat their contaminated products.

More illnesses are spreading due to factory farming; however, they are not caused by a pathogen. Psychological and mental illnesses are being bred in those that work the kill floor. One account of this kind of trauma comes from Tommy Vladak, a former pig sticker, “You become emotionally dead. And you get just as sadistic as the company itself. When I was sticking down there, I was a sadistic person. The worst part was what happened to my family life” (Eisnitz 75). The trauma of working the kill floor has a tremendous negative impact on the mental health of the individuals. Tommy Vladak like so many other stickers became physically abusive to his wife and children. The repeated beatings he administered to his family resulted in his wife seeking to divorce him (Eisnitz 80). The working environment of these factory farms is the cause of suffering in the employees and their families.

For many, alcohol is the only way to cope with the horrors they witness daily. Another sticker named Donny Tice recounts his past experiences: “I’d hit the bar after work every day, pound down four or five beers” (Eisnitz 92). Tice further commented on an instance between himself and the kill floor superintendent, “I threw my knife on the floor, I’m screaming at him, ‘Come on! Right now!’ If he’d come down there I would have slit his throat. Could’ve taken a human life and not given it one thought or had one regret for it” (Eisnitz 93). Factory farms are breed excessive of violent behavior because employees at factory farms are constantly under pressure to process as many animals as possible. This pent up aggression causes the workers to suffer unnecessarily and is often directed outward against coworkers, family, and friends.

One can look again to St. Augustine's writings for an understanding of why people are undergoing this kind of physical and mental anguish. It results from our love of the material world. From the fact that we constantly desire corporeal pleasures in the form of material goods, we begin to objectify external things. From this objectification we detach ourselves from the knowledge that we are taking the life of another living being which displays emotions and feels pain. This devalues not only the animals' lives, but also humans. Other people are viewed simply as things that can be used to our advantage. This love of worldly things leads to the unnecessary suffering of the people and animals that are being objectified. Since the objectification process applies to humans too, people working in these conditions are left feeling empty and disconnected from their families and communities. To accommodate this feeling they turn to other temporary worldly pleasures such as drugs and alcohol. Which in turn have their own threats, but their causes are something that can be addressed.

Just some of the ways in which factory farming directly affects human health have been demonstrated. Lets now take a look at the incredible impact that factory farming has on the natural environment. All animals must eat to live, including animals whose only purpose in life is to be slaughtered. The population increase has caused a surge of meat production throughout the world, and as a result humanity faces a number of problems. In order to raise the astronomical number of cattle, sheep, pig, and poultry, we must generate even higher amounts of grain to feed them. The waste generated by livestock is polluting soil, drinking water, air, and depleting the rainforests. People must stop the over consumption of meat to protect the fragile environment of this planet.

There is a finite amount of land on which to grow grains for livestock to consume. In the United States alone 87% of all agricultural land is used to raise food for animals (Peta 9). That is

roughly equal to 45% of the entire landmass of the U.S. (9). Need to expand upon farming land has caused the deforestation of over 260 million acres of woodland in the United States. Not only are forests being razed in the U.S., but tropical rain forests around the world are being cleared as well. One problem with depleting the rain forests is that they function to purify the air by removing carbon dioxide and giving off oxygen. The topsoil in the rain forests is also very shallow. This means that a freshly cleared area of land can only yield two to three years worth of crops before it becomes unfit. For every fifty-five square feet of rain forest cleared, one-quarter pound of hamburger is raised (9).

As populations continue to rise, more pressure is being placed on farmers to produce feed for livestock. This leads to more forests being leveled into shoddy pastures for cattle to graze. However, this is a very inefficient means to feed an increased population. An excerpt from the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals pamphlet helps put this into perspective:

In the U.S., animals raised for food are fed more than 80 percent of the corn we grow and more than 95 percent of the oats. The world's cattle alone consume a quantity of food equal to the caloric intake of 8.7 billion people-- more than the entire human population on Earth. (9)

Not only are land resources being used to support food for animals, but also vast quantities of water. It takes more than half of all the water consumed in the U.S. to raise animals for food (PETA 9). To produce a single pound of beef it requires 10 pounds of grain and 2500 gallons of water. However, it only takes about 25 gallons of water to yield a pound of wheat (9). The U.S. Geological Survey had reported a 90-foot drop in an underground aquifer at the Carolina Food Processors plant in Bladen County, North Carolina (Eisnitz 260). This was after a mere two years of operations. Carolina Food Processors at the time had been reportedly a factory farm

built to the most modern standards. It boasted one of the cleanest and more sanitary facilities of its kind. However, in August of 1997 the parent company, Smithfield Foods, was convicted in a federal court for over 7000 counts of illegally discharging hog plant wastes into a major Virginia waterway and then falsifying records to cover up its activities (Eisnitz 261).

Taking a look at the enormous environmental impact of the factory farming business, one is left to consider how much longer the natural environment can sustain our over consumption of animals. We are squandering vast amounts of land to satisfy our sense of taste. Since people enjoy eating meat regularly for its taste alone, as meat is not necessary to our diets nor is it particularly nutritious, our love of the flesh drives our desires. The over consumption leads to mass production, and from that we generate mass pollution in quantities that the natural environment simply cannot handle. Coupled with the love of money, some companies willingly defile the environment rather than pay to properly remove the waste.

One can see from the negative ways that factory farming affects people and the environment that it is an unethical practice, but lets now examine with regards given to the unnecessary suffering of the animals. Many workers at modern factory farms beat, prod, and drag animals to the line in order to keep the slaughterhouse line moving at blazingly fast speeds. None of these tactics are allowable under the Humane Slaughter Act. The United States Congress passed the Humane Slaughter Act (HSA) in 1958 and then broadened it in 1978 (24). Perhaps the single most important provision in the HSA is that a trained person must render animals unconscious with a single application of an effective stunning device. This must take place before the animal can be shackled and hoisted up on to the line. Even with these federal guidelines in place most animals are never given proper treatment. Tommy Vladak relates several infractions he has witnessed:

I've seen hog beaten, whipped, kicked in the head to get them up to the restrainer. One night I saw a driver get so angry at a hog he broke its back with a piece of board. I've seen hog drivers take their prod and shove it up the hog's ass to get them to move. (68)

This kind of treatment is not limited to swine. Cows are given equally brutal handling in order to get them from delivery trailers to the slaughter line. Downers are animals that are unable to walk or stand. Due to the extreme conditions in which they must travel to slaughterhouse many animals will arrive as sickly and stressed downers. The cows are often packed into open trailers that do not offer protection from sun or rain. Billy Corbey was a former supervisor at Kaplan, one of the larger meat packing facilities in the United States. Billy relates how downers are typically handled in the meat industry:

You'd drive an old, worn-out tractor with a bucket up to the truck. The bucket had a chain attached to it. You'd take the chain and fasten it around one of the animal's legs. By lifting the tractor's bucket you'd take up the chain's slack and lift the animal. The animal would be hanging upside down by its leg, and you'd drive it over to a pasture.(45)

The failure to follow even the relatively simple stunning phase of the slaughter line leads to the cruelest imaginable treatment of the animals. When the animals are not properly stunned, or rendered unconscious, they end up going through the majority of the slaughtering process still alive and aware. According to federal law the procedure for cattle to be slaughter should be something like this example:

Cattle in a slaughterhouse are either prodded along a chute into a "knocking box" or up to a conveyor/restrainer, which then carries them up to the "stun operator." The stun operator, or "knocker," shoots each animal in the forehead with a compressed-air gun that drives a steel bolt into the cow's skull and then retracts it. If the knocking gun is

sufficiently powered, well maintained, and properly used by the operator, it knocks the cow unconscious or kills the animal on the spot. The next man in the line, the “shackler,” wraps a chain around one of the stunned cow’s hind legs. Once shackled, the animal is automatically lifted onto a moving overhead rail. The cow, now hanging upside down by a leg, is sent to the “sticker,” the worker who cuts the throat-- more precisely, the carotid arteries and the jugular vein in the neck. The sticker makes a vertical, not horizontal, incision in the animal’s throat, near where the major vessels issue from the heart, to cut off the flow of blood to the animal’s brain. Next the cow travels along the “bleed rail” and is given several minutes to bleed out. The carcass then proceeds to the head-skinners, the leggers, and on down the line where it is completely skinned, eviscerated, and split in half.” (20)

There is little room for interpretation on how that process should occur in the slaughterhouse. However, many managers and foremen in the plants still believe in the myth that an animal will not bleed out properly unless the heart is still beating (62). So they will take it upon themselves to turn down the power of the stun gun, and many times, replace the captive bolt device with a much smaller bolt that is far less effective, even at higher power levels (64).

Improper stunning allows live, conscious, and struggling animals to make their way through the slaughter line. This endangers the workers, as an animal struggling for its life is prone to kicking and thrashing about. If the animal is lively enough it may even be able to thrash its way out of the shackles and fall to the kill floor. A several hundred pound cow could easily crush and kill a worker if it were to fall on them. Any animal that falls off the line is generally beaten with a lead pipe and quickly hosted back into the line, with no regard given to the blood and fecal contamination that litters the floors (32). Poultry must also be stunned prior to

slaughter. The most popular method of stunning of poultry is an electrical bath in which the birds, suspended by their feet, are dunked head first into the pool (162). GAP reports that only one third of the fowl are properly stunned when removed from the bath (163). The remaining birds suck water into their lungs to be released as contamination later in the process. After stunned the birds are brought to a communal scalding tank, which their entire bodies are immersed in hot water to loosen their feathers (163).

Currently in the United States, more birds are slaughtered everyday than in the *entire year* of 1930. Between 25 and 30 million chickens and turkeys are killed every day. Most of these birds never have been able to fully stretch their wings as they live four to a cage offering each bird no more than a foot by a foot and a half of floor space in which to move (164). Shortly after hatching, these birds have their beaks sheared off with a hot blade. Removing their beaks prevents them from pecking the other birds to death in such confined spaces (165). Still the death rate for birds raised for meat is very high due to genetic engineering and growth hormones. Large operations will produce about five hundred pounds of dead birds a day due to what has been coined “flip-over disease” (164). It used to take about four months to raise a three-pound chicken. Now it takes only six weeks to produce that same bird. The accelerated growth in these birds is more than their bodies can take and result in the bird flipping over of a heart attack, “at the ripe old age of one month” (164).

One can see that the objectification of animals as mere objects to be consumed has allowed for their unnecessary suffering. Even with laws on the books to prevent these actions, they are overlooked in the name of profit. How is it that this has become the current state of factory farming? It must be viewed as the result of our greed and addiction to the material goods of the world. The huge demand for meat comes from people’s love of the flesh as people try to

find pleasure from their sense of taste. The nightmarish conditions that the animals suffer can be attributed to love of money, another worldly good, as factory farms are reluctant to spend the necessary amount to make their practices meet ethical standards for humane slaughter. The motivation of profit is what generated the factory farm in order to satisfy the demand for meat. The entire factory farming process has been created and shaped by people's love of the material world as their highest priority.

From the examples that have been shown, it can be stated that factory farming is unethical as it is a danger to human health, a danger to the environment, and creates the unnecessary suffering of the animals that are being consumed. It is the result of human over consumption of meats due to people seeking pleasure from worldly things. Factory farming practices are perpetuated by the love of money, which is another worldly thing. St. Augustine's message still has meaning today, as it is clear that the love of the flesh can bring about no real happiness. For anyone who wishes to live an ethical life, they should consider these factors about factory farm as detrimental and should be avoided. The vegan lifestyle, one which does not consume any animal products, is one which avoids these apparent ethical problems.

Bibliography

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