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WHY DO SO FEW PEOPLE EAT GIRAFFES?

Bel Toledo and Ardon Lyon

We argue that the size of the human population needs to be controlled whether or not people should be vegetarians. We than describe some of the varieties of human flesh eating round the world.

In an article in *Think*, Brockless (2020) points out that it is sanctimonious to argue that people should not eat meat, while at the same time failing to point out that they should have fewer children, as several professional philosophers do in their writings to which he refers. It is not *inconsistent*, which Brockless also alleges, since it is not inconsistent to attack only one of two propositions each of which conflicts with a particular viewpoint. The claim that the earth is a flat square and the claim that it is a flat disc are both inconsistent with its being roughly spherical, but it isn't inconsistent to attack the one but not the other.

A recent intelligent proponent of the view that the alleged problem of human overpopulation will fairly soon take care of itself is Dominic Lawson, who pointed out in *The Sunday Times* on 28 June 2020 that the overall *rate* of increase in size of the human population is slowing down. He concludes that in the not-too-distant future the overall size of the human population will start to decrease. Well, maybe it will and maybe it won't, but even if it does it may by then be too late. Currently the rate of increase is slowed by largely uncontrollable diseases such as Covid 19 (although the disease has been horrifically exacerbated by political considerations), and by murder and mutilation in both declared and undeclared wars. But these are surely not occurrences about which we should all be delighted.

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The argument for population control was put simply in the late eighteenth century by Thomas Malthus. Uncontrolled animal population sizes are liable (in humans mainly through medical advances) to increase geometrically, whereas food supplies for them were believed to increase only arithmetically. This could not continue indefinitely without mass starvation, so as an alternative population size should be controlled, which is normally done in nature by one population attacking (and usually eating) another, so that increases in one species' population provides increased food for species that eat it. This idea was applied by Darwin (and independently by Wallace) to show the *mechanism* of evolution: the idea of evolution itself had been put forward by ancient Greeks, and Darwin's grandfather had written a poem about it. As the mechanism idea, even more than evolution itself, is so profoundly un-Christian, it is not surprising that it had so much opposition, and Darwin himself had qualms about putting it forward, for example because he knew it would upset his wife.

Note that Malthus's account is not quite right. For one thing plant (and animal) food sources also often increase geometrically unless eaten; witness for example multiple flower seeds or spreading weeds. Secondly, if a population increases uncontrollably then it may fall prey to disease, for example myxomatosis in rabbits and tuberculosis in badgers – admittedly a sort of 'eating'. In the UK almost nothing normally eats badgers, although the non-delicate may wish to look up Wikipedia about badger stew, and about the cubs of these shy but enormously strong creatures. Thirdly, symbiosis (i.e. different organisms acting together to their mutual advantage – see e.g. Lynn Margulis and Wikipedia) also produces evolution. None of these however affect the basic point that there are too many humans on earth.

It might be thought that the earth would surely be a kinder place if all animals were vegetarians. But since 'nature red in tooth and claw' provides *a* mechanism for evolution, then without this or an alternative there would presumably be little evolution, and the majority of living

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creatures might remain micro-organisms in the 'primal soup'.[1] There may of course be alternative moral reasons why human animals should be vegetarians, reasons that do not apply for example to fish. A brief account of the pro-vegetarian argument is given in Easton (2019).

Food supplies for humans have been greatly increased by the use of fertilizers, pesticides (although currently these also kill bees, which are needed for pollination), vertical 'fields', etc. But still the Malthusian claim remains, while deforestation, lack of sufficient water supplies, raising cows, sheep and pigs, which contribute to global warming from methane gas from their breath and faeces, rising sea levels from increased global temperatures, and pollution of the oceans, etc., are horrific problems. None of these can be reversed without great reductions in the size of the overall human population: decisions not to eat meat or fish, whether or not morally good in themselves, or good for people's health, simply put off the evil day unless accompanied by reduction in numbers of children. And global warming is contributed to mainly by 'third world' countries, which ask why they should act in ways that (generally) more technologically advanced countries did not do in the past. Currently, China followed by India are the world's greatest polluters, with the USA third but at only about one quarter of India's rate.

Population reduction used to be attempted by China's 'one child only' policy, but this led to other problems, and was abandoned – and not only because the current Chinese government would presumably now like there to be as many Chinese people as the earth can conveniently contain.

The problem was put starkly and brilliantly in a recent play, the name of which alas we cannot remember, and we report only from a review. In it a young man and woman are living together, doing everything they can to save the planet by recycling, etc. After a while the girl tells the man she wants to have a child. 'Well', he says 'What about the problem of increased population?' Exasperated, she replies

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'So kill yourself.' How can one not be moved and impressed by this response?

The question we would now like to raise, and for which we request readers' answers, is why there seem to be various wild animals that humans tend not to eat and for which there appear to be no religious, ethnic, or reasons of fear not to do so. 'Strictly' religious Jews and Muslims do not eat pork flesh, while Hindus may, but may not eat cow flesh (although Hindus cite quite different reasons from the first group, since religious Hindus consider cows to be sacred, whereas Jews and Muslims don't consider that pigs have this property, but quite the contrary). Humans don't eat tiger flesh (unless, we suppose, there is nothing else to eat), but then tigers are very frightening. Then there are probably genetic reasons: Chinese, Japanese and many Middle Eastern peoples tend not to drink cow's milk or its products. Furthermore, there are perhaps rather strange national reasons. French people often eat horse meat, which English people would normally consider completely barbaric. After all, horses are obviously lovely creatures, while cows and pigs are … well, often thought not. Some wild birds, and some tame ones, are eaten, and some tend not to be, again depending to some extent on the nationality of the eater. Poor dodos were too eagerly eaten by non-indigenous people in Mauritius, so the species has become extinct, alas. Some Chinese people apparently eat bats, presumably with disastrous results at the present time, even if Covid 19 strains also escaped from a lab in Wuhan, which is vehemently denied by Chinese authorities ('Well, they would do, wouldn't they?', as Mandy Rice-Davies remarked in court about another denial, rather long ago).

But there are other wild animals which appear not widely to be eaten and to which none of these sanctions seem to apply. Giraffes used not to be widely eaten, although unfortunately they are now eaten by local peoples, so that giraffes have become an endangered species. Perhaps it would therefore be a good idea to raise them for food, as we do cows and pigs. This would surely also be better for

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the environment, for they need to feed on the leaves of trees, so their cultivation would lead to some reforestation.

Cows, sheep and goats are not only eaten, but they produce milk for human consumption – although pigs at least mainly do not. There are several problems however in obtaining giraffe milk. Firstly, it is probably an acquired taste. Secondly, giraffes don't give birth very often, so it would perhaps be difficult to get them to produce a continuous supply. Thirdly, a step-ladder would be needed for milking. Fourthly, if you have ever been kicked by a cow, you would know that you don't want to be kicked by a giraffe. So it would perhaps be better to drink some form of nut or oat milk – but these also require land for planting.

Penguins and pelicans seem hardly to be eaten by humans, and it is anyway illegal to do so in at least many countries. Cats and dogs, unless treated as pets, are usually eaten either only in some Asian and African countries or during starvation conditions, but then even human flesh is sometimes eaten by humans during these periods, something normally considered *verboten* except by cannibals, who may eat in particular the brains of their enemies in order allegedly to gain their power.

If therefore any of our readers are able to explain why some wild animals – if any – tend not to be eaten and to which none of the above strictures appear to apply, then we suggest this would be interesting in itself. But the main purpose of this article is to underline Adrian Brockless's point that it is sanctimonious to change one's diet without also attempting the important task of trying to decrease human population size, even though it is not also, as he claims it is, inconsistent to do so.

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Notes

[1] For a history of the appalling behaviour of human beings, mainly but not entirely AD, sacrificing living humans to their gods, and as an alternative various Christians burning heretics alive, see Holland (2019).

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