

The ethical meat eater

By Aron Taylor

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HUMAN LIFE AND MORAL CODES

(Section 1 of 4)

Life is a luxury, not some divine right —

Life is not an entitlement. Nor is life a divine right. Either that or God does exist, and in a pre-mortal state, I was tasked with completing a game of solitaire in order to be rewarded with a human body to ensoul. Somehow though, I don't think that would be worth putting a tenner on down the bookies.

In reality, we are purely the biological consequence of haploid gametes fusing to form the diploid zygote. A common, universal truth that can be said for the start of each living organism, from plants to animals.

We are all a result of chemical replication. Life is biology. Life is chemistry. Life is physics. But sacred – it isn't.

It's safe to say that the overwhelming majority of humans would consider life as thing of the highest order. After all, it underpins absolutely everything that we do as an organism.

This is precisely why it can be a pretty hard pill to swallow when asked to accept that we are not entitled to our life. But it's important to jot down in our noble neurological notepads that I'm not for one second arguing that we shouldn't hold our lives in any high regard. Au contraire.

The fundamental point I'm making is that, to humans, life is a luxury. A luxury that we're lucky to be the subject of when you consider the countless number of products that science spits out into existence. So I too believe that we should hold the luxury of life in high regard.

But at the end of the day, who can genuinely claim that we had some divine right to be the product of a scientific sequence of events? Who can claim that we have some divine right to be alive and remain alive? Can we really claim that we have some divine right to live a long life?

As much as we all want to claim such things, we just can't with any credibility. At least I can't. And that applies to every living thing to exist by the way. All simply organic products of science.

The sentimental value we attribute to life is powerful, but again, it's a product of science. Of biology. Of chemistry. Of physics. That sentimental value is derived from a neural impulse, after all.

Humans are inherently self-regarding, and that's nothing to worry about —

Now, by stating that we don't have some divine right to life, am I therefore condoning murder amongst humans? It's a great question which leads me onto the spine of my argument, vital to explaining why it's possible to be an ethical meat eater.

The short, Tom Cruise answer to that crucial question is no – I am not condoning murder amongst humans. But in order to explain why, you'll have to endure me further and stay awake for the long answer.

That very reason why I don't condone the premeditated killing of another person surrounds one simple fact – humans are inherently self-regarding. We are self-regarding survivalists at its most basic level of truth, and that's in no way a worrying thing.

Life is a valuable luxury, and humans will do everything necessary to ensure that such a luxury is persevered and prolonged. It's the reason why we eat. It's reason why we drink. The reason why we generally reduce the risk of, and avoid, situations that could end up with us being killed.

Operating as a “pack” is the best way to benefit ourselves individually —

Of course, we are instinctively “pack animals”, as an ex-colleague once described it. It's why I describe us as 'self-regarding' rather than 'selfish'. The latter involves displaying explicit disregard to others, whereas the former doesn't rule out regard for others.

However, our instinct to operate as a “pack” is ultimately spurred to benefit ourselves on an individual level. We benefit the most as an individual when we operate as a “pack”. We operate socially because it's the best way to benefit ourselves individually.

Our instinct to operate as a “pack” is an ingenious form of self-regard and basic survivalism which is far from something to get worked up over. In fact, we should be the opposite of worked up.

Our instinct to work as a pack in order to individually survive and thrive gave birth to an extremely valuable human structure. The very structure which explains why we don't, and shouldn't, condone the premeditated killing of other humans.

This human structure is based entirely on another simple fact; the best way to exercise self-regard and preserve our own lives is to group together and conform to a set of moral codes. Moral codes that, in the vast majority of cases and communities, prohibit the act of human murder.

The human structure of moral codes —

Our structure of moral codes sees that we, as self-regarding human individuals, stand the best chance of being protected against acts such as murder. But on that note, let's not just solely look at murder. It's not the only way in which we could be put at risk.

Similar can also be said for cases of manslaughter. We still aim to apply and uphold moral codes if such an act is committed, whether it be involuntary manslaughter or voluntary manslaughter.

For example, someone who has committed voluntary manslaughter may have killed someone through 'diminished responsibility'. They are said to have "diminished" mental functions, so therefore cannot be classed as fully liable for the act.

But to ensure the solid continuity of the moral codes in this case, we'd likely aim to treat and/or manage this offender's "diminished" mental functions. Therefore by treating and managing their reduced mental functions, we vastly increase the likelihood of them not committing such an act again.

On the other hand, someone who has committed involuntary manslaughter may have done so through sheer recklessness. The killing wouldn't be seen as premeditated so wouldn't warrant an offence of murder.

To ensure the solid continuity of the moral codes for this example, we'd likely dish out a punishment, aiming to have the offender reflect on and then stamp out any reckless tendencies from their behaviour. This would therefore reduce the risk of them going back out and being as fatally negligent again.

Either way, the manner in which we react to manslaughter results in us aiming to preserve the very codes that are designed to protect us as individuals and proud basic survivalists.

We look out for others so that others look out for ourselves —

Some also may ask how suicide is accounted for in this argument. And they'd be absolutely right to ask such a thing. If someone doesn't regard life as of any benefit to themselves as an individual, why should our moral codes stand opposed to suicide?

Well in response, I'd start by accepting that humans do indeed exercise altruism when they are dealing with the potential of a person committing suicide. And rightly so.

It's a sombre subject, but you'd think that by displaying altruism, that surely contradicts my point of us being self-regarding, right? Surely my logic doesn't allow for altruism? Again in response, I'm sure that it'll be no surprise to you that I would have to respectfully disagree.

That's because altruism is actually a big and beautiful by-product of the moral codes that have been forged between humans. A by-product of the very structure designed and formed to ensure protection of ourselves as self-regarding, survivalist individuals.

Moral codes have required us to work together so that we are able to look out for the interests of our individual selves. So much so that the neurologically induced instincts of the average human have evolved to the extent that it's second nature to look out for the welfare of our fellow homo sapien. It's our moral codes have brilliantly bred this.

In addition, claiming that suicide prevention is completely void of any hint of self-regard, however intentional, would involve ignoring facts as part of a bigger picture. Because we

do in fact protect ourselves and bolster our self-regard as individuals when promoting suicide prevention. Another quality of this structure and one which we should embrace.

This should be embraced because when we create a moral consensus that suicide is something to battle against, we also create a structure in which other people could, one day, actually end up preventing our own self from committing suicide. If that structure is there for everyone, it's also there for ourselves as self-regarding individuals.

The mental welfare of the human is fragile. Mental illnesses are brain disorders. It's an organic problem. And it's fair to say that the brain is an organ which is very hard to harness and control. So as much as we'd love to say that we'd never reach the point of considering suicide, you just can't rule it out.

That's why moral codes that promote suicide prevention do, in fact, benefit the self-regarding human on an individual level. Even if the issue of suicide is not immediately apparent or existing, the structure working to prevent suicide is still solidly in place.

The point is that the risk of suicide could one day become prevalent in our lives. So when/if it does become prevalent, the structure is already in place to try save us as an individual.

A contract between humans to protect the interests of ourselves as individuals —

On the most part, these are moral codes that the human race have compelled themselves to enshrine into law. Codes that, if broken, are usually reacted to with punishment for the individual(s) who acted against them, especially in cases such as the likes of murder, and manslaughter as mentioned.

One of the core aims of a punishment for breaking such codes are usually designed to deter others from doing the same. In other words, it incentivises people to follow such moral codes. Moral codes that we need the “pack” to follow in order to safeguard our interests as individuals.

So using premeditated killing as an shining example, if people are deterred as a “pack” or population to commit it, we vastly reduce the chances of each, separate, self-regarding, human losing their luxury of life. These moral codes are in place as a contract between a group of humans, so that we protect the interests of ourselves as individuals.

EATING MEAT IS ETHICAL

(Section 2 of 4)

A morally codified contract of which livestock are not party to —

Just as I've finally rounded off that point on life entitlement and moral codes, you may now be wondering; what the heck does that have to do with arguing that meat eating can be ethical? Well, allow me to tell you why, my friend.

We've created these moral codes – a contract between humans – designed so that they benefits us all on an individual level. But in all honesty, it's not a contract or set of codes that I remember the animals of which we eat being a party to. I don't remember livestock signing up to such a moral contract, That may sound blunt, but it's completely true.

They have no commitment to abide to moral codes that stand against killing humans – or any commitment to us of any kind whatsoever for that matter. Hence why I lack sympathy for those who put themselves in a position to be killed by animals, such as lions or tigers.

Humans should be well aware that other species live outside of our human moral structure. Animals have no morally codified commitment to us, and nor do we to them. I mean, even other animals have no problem killing other animals. It's the food chain. A fact of life.

Some would argue that the distinction of excusability between humans killing and other organisms killing is down to the fact that the homo sapien is a morally superior being. They hold an understandable 'humans know better' kind of view. But I don't believe this should be seen as the case.

Humans have a superior moral structure, rather than superior moral standards —

Although humans have a much more robust and superior capacity to utilise consciousness, this shouldn't automatically mean that we are somehow morally superior.

Rather than being humans that possess some sort of moral superiority, I instead view humans of having a much more superior moral structure. A superior structure to protect us as a "pack" of self-regarding, survivalist individuals. It's our moral structure that's more robust, not our moral standards.

But in response to that, people may argue that our moral structure is "superior" and more robust because of the fact that we are morally superior beings. That point would make a good counter. But if I may, I'll counter that counter with my very own Cadbury's counter.

Our moral structure is indeed "superior". But it's superior to us, as humans. Designed for the benefit of humans. It's bespoke to humans. On top on that, it's also true to say that the question of moral – of what is right and wrong – is purely subjective.

Generally speaking, a cow's idea of going about its business morally clearly differs from that of a human. A balinese monkey's idea of whether it's moral to steal a tourists' sunglasses, differs from that of the majority of humans.

Moral codes formed by rational consensus to protect against 'extremists' —

Absolutely, moral standards are subjective even amongst humans ourselves. Where a Jihadist suicide bomber genuinely believes that they're morally right to kill in order to end up in "paradise", the majority of humans instead believe that such an act is morally abhorrent.

Because morals and ethics are subjective, even amongst humans, we could actually say that there's no such thing as a universally human right and wrong. We could say there's no right and wrong right and wrongs.

A view on what's right and wrong is determined by each human on an individual basis. But on the majority, as a human society, we still create and abide by moral structures that apply to us all as a "pack". Why is that?

I the reason we do is because this provides us with (and albeit ever changing) consensus of what we hold morally right or wrong. A consensus on how the majority of humans agree that we can safeguard each of our luxuries of life.

For example, a Jihadist might be fine with murder, but the majority of individuals aren't. Our moral codes reflect this to protect the majority of so-called "rational" individual humans.

We can't realistically tell someone else that they're immoral as morality is a decision for the individual. But we can still devise and conform to a moral consensus of codes and principles that protect and benefit the majority of us as "rational" self-regarding, survivalist, human individuals.

So in a way, we do technically marginalise and actively aim to rid the morals held by a small number of individuals. But those small number of individuals consist of the likes of non-repenting murderers, terrorists and rapists.

However, we accept and concede to this fact in order to support a moral structure of codes and principles that ultimately protect the self-regard and basic survivalism inherent to us as a majority of "rational" individual humans.

But again, this moral structure of codes is not a contract in which the animals we eat are party to. It's a structure which solely suits the "rational" human.

Of course, the subjective nature of human morals will always harbour those who believe that it's immoral to eat meat, and to them, it will always be immoral to eat meat.

However, until the animals we eat sign up to this moral structure, I will always argue that it's indeed possible to be an ethical meat eater. It is certainly possible to both remain ethical and eat meat. And believe me, membership of the ethical meat eater club is absolute bliss.

THE QUESTION OF ANIMAL SUFFERING TO AN ETHICAL MEAT EATER

(Section 3 of 4)

Imposed conscious suffering yields only negatives and no "rational" benefits —

I could have probably left my argument on why it's ethical to eat meat right there, without even tackling the subject of animal suffering. You may have not even thought of using such a subject to try and poke a hole in my logic. But you're a smart person so I'm sure you did.

Nevertheless, I could be liable to shooting myself in the foot here by bringing it up. But don't you worry, my intellectual friend – as a fellow inherently self-regarding individual, I don't intend to be inflicting such a shot on myself today.

Using my logic, you might wisely ask that if animals are not party to human moral codes – codes of which frown upon inflicting suffering against other humans – do I therefore advocate that imposing suffering on animals is ethical? The answer is no, and here's why.

One key reason for why I steadfastly stand against the physical suffering of animals is because there are simply no benefits that we derive from it.

From eating meat, we derive nutritional, economic benefits and psychological (of the 'rational' kind) as humans, depending in which part of the process we are placed.

However, we derive absolutely no ('rational') benefit from inflicting suffering on animals. Actually, we could say that by inflicting suffering we actually create psychological negatives.

Enjoying animal suffering is actually a sign of danger to the "rational" individual —

For sure, it's true to say that there are a small number of humans in the world who do 'enjoy' harming animals. But the reason why we frown upon those people is because the harming of animals usually resembles and reflects a general lack of empathy.

When a human takes no issue in harming animals because of their lack empathy, this is usually a sign of the behaviours that are found in murderers. And these behaviours, again, link back to ourselves as self-regarding, survivalist individuals.

Why would we encourage the kind of behaviours which could actually threaten us as self-regarding human individuals? Why would we want to fuel pro-suffering behaviour and a lack of empathy when you bear in mind their sadist-esque roots? Roots that often lead to murderous acts against humans.

Lack of empathy is a key ingredient that goes into making a murderer. And on that point, some would claim that this lack of empathy could also apply to those who allow the death of an animal so that it can be consumed. They'd question where our empathy, as meat eaters, was/is for that dead animal. Another fair query, but another misplaced one.

Empathy only applies to the living, not the deceased —

To have empathy is to comprehend, understand and share someone or something else's feelings. So seen as a dead being cannot possess feeling, the question of empathy in this case is mute. Deceased livestock cannot feel, so therefore we cannot empathise.

But going back to a situation where livestock are living and breathing, you can indeed apply the issue of empathy as logically as you like.

You can apply empathy for a living animal when it's the subject of physical abuse. You can apply empathy for livestock when they're packed in pens so tightly that there's barely room to swing a cat. And certainly, you can feel empathy for a cat which has to endure the terror of being swung about in a pen full of livestock.

In these scenarios and the like, we're able to enact an ability to understand the unpleasantness and suffering that an animal would almost definitely be feel and face if subject to poor welfare practices.

Animals are *not* aware of imminent death in abattoirs —

Furthermore though, if PETA were to stumble across this piece of writing, it would be no surprise to say that they'd be horrified as early as this essay's title. But once they'd managed to simmer down, they'd likely claim that we could link empathy to what occurs in our abattoirs.

For example and with no doubt, they'd ping over videos which claim that animals "may" know when "they're next in line to die". Videos that would likely trigger many of our abilities to empathise.

But when all is said and done, you can't hide from the truth that PETA misattribute the uneasiness of these animals in abattoirs. Uneasiness misattributed to animals somehow knowing that they are about to die. Beware – this is a powerful but bent tactic used to try capitalise on our emotions and make us forget the evidence that actually exists.

Instead, the absolute truth of the matter is that there's no acceptable evidence existing that proves that animals know that they're going to die as they step foot in a slaughterhouse.

Yes, if you watch such videos or have witnessed such animals in person at an abattoir, they can sometimes come across as looking uneasy and apprehensive.

However, evidence shows that this uneasiness is profoundly unlikely a result of them being somehow aware of their imminent death. In fact, if an animal appears uneasy, it'll be because they're in an unfamiliar environment.

For example, cattle are known to react with apprehensiveness when they're exposed to unfamiliar surroundings, smells and sounds. So if they do feel uneasy, it's not because they know they're about to die. They're (thankfully) ignorant of that fact.

But to avoid such apprehensiveness, a properly run slaughterhouse should be designed, run and staffed in a way that it doesn't impose any this stress onto animals.

More often than not in an abattoir that's well run, animals are usually happy to follow their meaty colleagues as they move on through the system. They're blissfully unaware that anything is about to happen to them.

When added together, all these facts combined lay the foundations to why I fully support any necessary legislation and regulation to ensure that animals are not the victims of any avoidable suffering – at the hands and behest of humans at least.

I mean, it'd be a tough ask to enforce legislation prohibiting a lion not to hunt and kill its prey. Not that we have a great issue with that in Britain anyway.

THE RANCID REALITIES OF A BAN ON EATING MEAT

(Section 4 of 4)

Militant veggies ignore the realities of actually banning meat eating —

In my mind, the points already set out (in Section 1 and 2) can stand on their own two feet as a solid argument to why meat eating can in fact be ethical. I don't need to go any further. However, that's not to say that there aren't other arguments that can supplement and support the ethics of meat eating.

These arguments may not fully form a foundation in itself to why meat eating is ethical. Rather, they make clear why meat eating is actually realistically closer to becoming ethical compared to if everyone stopped eating meat. Hence why they're definitely worth mentioning.

The likes of PETA will shame us meat eaters until the cows come home (hopefully in mince form), depicting us all as some kind of Hannibal Lecter 2.0. But even good, old Hannibal was an intellect.

PETA can kick and scream all they want about how cruel we all are. Earth has a meat eating global population that amounts to billions by the way. But amongst their raging racket, there's one question in which they ignore – what would actually happen if the world completely stopped eating meat?

I've listened to many vegans and veggies who, when posed this question, seem to think that these animals would just wander happily into the wild and job's a good'un.

They talk and act like these animals will just end up taking advantage of their new non-food stuff status by setting up an interspecies Sunday badminton league in the Scottish highlands or something.

But in truth, the reality would be much, much different and much, much worse. And by that, I don't mean they'd set up a squash league instead. Oh no, it's much worse than that.

If Indian cows could talk, they'd disagree with banning meat eating —

If you truly want to learn about the reality of what can happen if we stopped farming and eating animals, just go to India and ask a cow how it lives its life.

In many states in India, the slaughter of cattle is illegal. This is due to the deeply enshrined Hindu belief that cattle are sacred and holy animals. This stance means that 5 million stray cows roam the country. And believe me, they aren't touring about playing a first-to-21 court sport.

Instead, cattle find themselves attempting to safely navigate the precarious streets of India without being maimed. For a "*divine*" animal, they don't half spend a hell of a lot of time narrowly missing vehicles and rooting through filth and waste in order to try source food.

But that's not a reality which PETA seem to want to talk about. I suppose we wouldn't want to spoil their high horse narrative though, would we, my friends? Quality over quantity (of life) is just so overrated, isn't it, eh, PETA?

Thankfully, many of the other animals that would be set "free" wouldn't have to wade through rubbish to salvage their next meal. They'd likely just get their body brutally and painfully torn to shreds by a predator instead. Thank god for that, right?

I have to offer you my apologies as I don't mean to be overly sarcastic. Alright, alright – maybe I do mean to be. But it's all to zap the point across that groups like PETA need to seriously think about these realities, instead of living in some Quorn-infested fantasy world.

Farms are the true animal sanctuaries —

Even if you don't agree with my logic (as set out in Section 1 and 2) on why it's possible to be an ethical meat eater, it's surely sensible to accept that we're actually doing the animals we eat a favour by farming them.

As long as farming and slaughter doesn't impose suffering, it's terrifically true to say that we provide these animals with so many positives. Positives that they wouldn't come easy by if they had to fend for themselves.

We provide them with food and water. We provide them with shelter during cold winters. Our farm's economic incentives also mean that farms often aim to provide them with protection from predators such as foxes and other harms such as disease. What's not to love?

The "solution" to this (as some leak-lickers would say) comes in the form of sanctuaries. Just slap these animals in sanctuaries is the argument. It sounds nice. But once again, it's just another argument that's soaked in a sorry disconnect from reality.

Let's just look at the present state of animal sanctuaries as we stand now. Many are in a sad situation as it is. That's even before a situation where everyone doesn't eat meat.

In a world that eats meat, many sanctuaries find themselves in a serious financial struggle. Many rely on volunteers. Many rely on donations. Many rely on handouts.

So if the militant wing of veganism think it's as simple as shoving livestock into sanctuaries, they'd have one hell of a shock if this wish actually came true.

If sanctuaries struggle now, just imagine the chaos that would rain down if their sector were told they had to take on added swathes of such livestock. They just won't be able to handle the pressure.

In response, you'd expect PETA to argue that we could just reduce the numbers of livestock by putting a halt on breeding. But by arguing for this they completely contradict their whole viewpoint.

To livestock, farming is a blessing in disguise —

In agriculture, farm animals are bred more intensely than they would if left to themselves in the wild. So PETA's idea would certainly reduce breeding numbers. However, wouldn't this technically be reducing the amount of animals actually being given the chance to live a life?

They complain about the meat industry taking animal lives away. But by reducing the rate of breeding, they'd also be reducing the amount of animal lives allowed to be lived.

In that respect, farming actually helps animal life flourish. Farming and meat eating actually allows more animal life to exist than it would if universal veganism took over. The majority of farm animals wouldn't even have a life if we weren't then going on to eat them.

Essentially, the majority of the lives that the likes of PETA claim to be fighting for wouldn't even be lives if it wasn't for farming and meat eaters. So my fellow meat lovers, let's give ourselves a pat of the back for that one.

Whichever way you attack the subject, a population that enjoys meat (by majority) will always produce better results for animals than if we stopped eating meat altogether.

If you want to abstain from eating meat, you go for it. That's your prerogative. But don't demonise those who do eat meat. The anti-meat eating argument is not as strong as you may have first assumed. The realities of a total ban on meat eating would be much different to the vision that the likes of PETA are out there flogging.