

Animal Welfare and the Origins of Meat

One of the most thorough surveys on modern attitudes to meat eating was performed on 3,000 residents in the United Kingdom plus a further 500 members of the Vegetarian Society (Richardson *et al*, 1994). The principal negative beliefs amongst the general population towards eating beef were that it will increase the consumer's cholesterol level and that it involves eating hormones. No negative beliefs were reported which were linked to eating chicken. Whereas, the vegetarians thought that eating beef and chicken were both strongly linked to animal cruelty. In fact this was the strongest belief that vegetarians had about those meats (Table 8).

Another survey, involving 174 vegetarian women aged 15 to 30 years old, also showed that Animal Welfare was the predominant reason for becoming vegetarian. Eighty one percent claimed that Animal Welfare was of "great" importance in that decision, whereas only 24% said that health reasons were of "great" importance.

Beardsworth and Keil (1991a and b; 1992) held detailed interviews with 76 self-defined vegetarians in the United Kingdom, and some of the comments were revealing. In connection with Animal Welfare one interviewee made the following point:

"I've always been fond of animals and when you reach the age where it is blatantly obvious that meat is animals, I didn't want any more to do with it."

Another interviewee changed abruptly to vegetarianism after seeing a television programme, as described as follows:

"..... it showed them electrocuting pigs and I sat down in the canteen at work the very next day, and everybody was saying how awful this programme was, and they were all tucking into bacon cobs. I'd bought one of these bacon cobs as well and I took one bite of it and it tasted awful and I thought, well if that pig's gone through all that for me and I've never touched it since. That was five years ago."

In connection with the origins of meat, one vegetarian explained:

"I was beginning to recognise what I was eating. And - it was flesh it was something that had been living, and it had blood running through it, and a heart pumping it round"

Many of us probably recall our first realisation that meat comes from muscle, and clearly for some this is a disturbing experience which they have to reconcile for themselves.

Most modern vegetarians share the outlook that humans, as individuals, are not innately cruel to animals or disrespectful of the environment. But, cultural values have forced society towards being cruel and wasteful. To some vegetarians and semivegetarians applying logic in resolving such problems is less important than feeling at peace with the world and fellow creatures. For example, by denying themselves the right to eat animals they do not stop animal slaughter but they do quell any personal anxieties about being responsible for an animal's death. The mind and conscience are eased. Perhaps more people are closer to this outlook than we realise. For example, when a large sample of meat-eaters in the United Kingdom were confronted with the hypothetical prospect of having to kill animals themselves in order to eat them, the majority said that they would cease eating meat altogether (Richardson *et al*, 1993).

In the same survey it was found that attitudes about cruelty to animals were focused on lamb, pork, beef and to a lesser extent chicken. Cruelty perceptions did not apply to meat products, fish or shellfish. Beliefs about eating fish were, however, linked to concerns about the environment.

There are pronounced cultural differences in attitudes to animals and animal welfare. Kellert (1988) classified the attitudes people have towards animals into nine categories (Table 9). Moral attitudes would equate most closely to concerns about livestock welfare, but animal welfare would to some extent feature in humanistic attitudes towards companion animals. In a comparison of Japanese, Germans and US Americans it was found that the moralistic attitude was very strongly developed amongst the Germans (Figure 1). The Japanese had a well-developed humanistic outlook and Americans varied according to which part of the country they were raised.

Table 8 - Negative beliefs about eating meat amongst vegetarians (listed according to order of importance)

Eating Beef	Eating Chicken
• Involves animal cruelty	• Involves animal cruelty
• Means eating hormones	• Means eating hormones
• Increases cholesterol levels	• Risk of food poisoning
• Risk of food poisoning	• Means eating antibiotics
• Means eating additives	• Means eating additives

(Richardson et al, 1994)

Table 9 Attitudes to animals

There are nine basic attitudes towards animals:

1. Naturalistic An interest and affection for wildlife and the outdoors.
2. Ecologistic Concern for the environment as a system, for interrelationships between wildlife species and natural habitats.
3. Humanistic Interest and strong affection for individual animals such as pets or large wild animals with strong anthropomorphic associations.
4. Moralistic Concern for the right and wrong treatment of animals, with opposition to presumed over exploitation and/or cruelty towards animals.
5. Scientific Interest in the form and functioning of animals.
6. Aesthetic Interest in the physical attractiveness and symbolic appeal of animals.
7. Utilitarian Interest in the practical value of animals, or in subordination of animals for some practical benefit.
8. Dominionistic Interest in mastery and control of animals.
9. Negativistic Avoidance of animals due to indifference, dislike or fear.

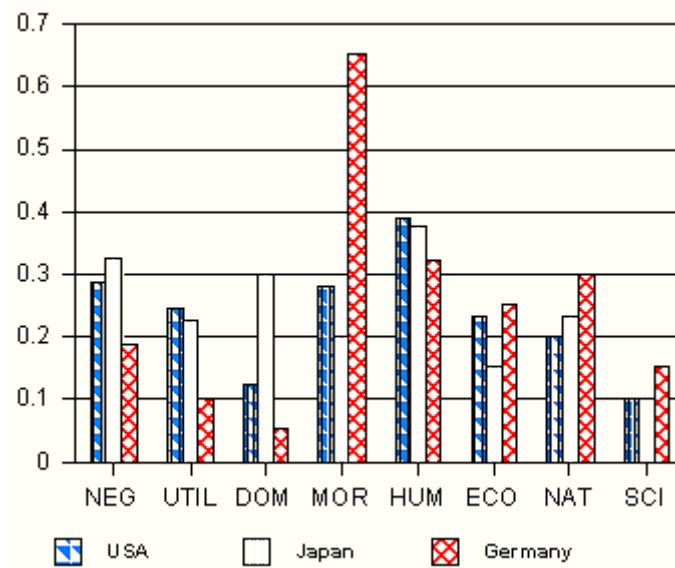


Figure 1 Different cultures have different leanings in their attitudes towards animals Kellert (1993)

In Australia, up to a third of teenage women experience difficulties in divorcing the image of the living animal and its production and slaughter from meat (Worsley and Skrzypiec, 1996a and b). Approximately half of the female interviewees said that they felt rearing animals to be killed was either "cruel" or "wrong". In the same survey, it was reported that about one third of the teenage women were in some way vegetarian, but, only 21% of the women looked upon themselves as being vegetarian or semivegetarian. This indicates that either they did not like or wish to label themselves as vegetarian or that they took abstention from meat consumption for granted without recognising that it was synonymous with vegetarianism. When the interviewees were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement "eating meat and animal cruelty are separate issues in my mind", 52% of the teenage non-vegetarian women agreed and 54% of the female semi-vegetarians plus vegetarians disagreed. This finding is important as it confirms that about half the young women who reduce their meat consumption believe that there are animal welfare problems in meat production. Only 26% of all teenage females in the survey agreed with the statement "I think meat production is done humanely". Animal slaughter seems to be a key issue. Seventy four percent of the semivegetarian plus vegetarian teenage women thought animal slaughtering was "awful". Thirty seven percent of the non-vegetarian teenage women reported that they were concerned about animal welfare issues but had not taken up the semivegetarian option.

Not surprisingly, the majority of teenage Australian males had a different outlook. Sixty five percent agreed that they were not bothered that meat comes from animals. Their appreciation of eating meat was stronger than concerns about welfare. Nevertheless, less than half (46%) of all the teenage males agreed with the statement "I think meat production is done humanely".