

**A Plant-Based Lifestyle Isn't Radical, It's Urgent and Simple**  
From [Marc Bekoff, Psychology Today / Animal Emotions](#)  
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*We can build a more peaceful and healthy world right now, so let's start eating for the future we want today. A more compassionate world is just a meal away. —Zoe Weil*

*A vegan mindset has wide-ranging positive effects.*



*Zoe at age 16 with her friend Wooly Baba*

Zoe Weil, founder of the [Institute for Humane Education](#), wrote a thought-provoking essay that raises an important question that radiates into many others [[If You Love Pets, Why Do You Eat Pigs?](#)]. It made me come to realize, once again, that choosing a plant-based [diet](#)—a [vegan ethic](#)—isn't radical but rather an intelligent personal choice that has wide-ranging positive effects including our health and well-being and the health of our planet.

Zoe is correct when she writes, "Our relationship with animals is full of contradictions," and one of her underlying messages asks us to consider how we deal with the [cognitive dissonance](#) associated with treating companion animals in far more compassionate ways than so-called *food animals*. She also correctly notes, "Vegan diets are easier than ever, and we can speed the process of building a more compassionate world."

Here are some of the issues at hand.

- *Who*, not what, we eat is a moral question.

- What matters is that nonhumans can feel, not how intelligent they are.
- There aren't [degrees of sentience](#). An individual's pain and suffering is *their* pain and suffering; within and between species comparisons are meaningless.
- People who claim they love animals and harm and eat them need to deal with the [cognitive dissonance](#) they experience, if they do so.
- From a [United Nations Climate Action essay](#): "[Plant-based foods](#)—such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, peas, nuts, and lentils—generally use less energy, land, and water, and have lower greenhouse gas intensities than animal-based foods."
- Science shows our [meal plans are destroying our planet](#) and biodiversity.
- A new [study](#) shows that people who choose a plant-based diet suffer less if they contract COVID. The study authors write, "Our data presented that there is a relation between plant-based diet index and lower risk of hospitalisation in [COVID-19](#) patients, possibly through boosting the immune function. These findings indicate that following a plant-based diet can ameliorate COVID-19 disease symptoms and signs."
- A Stanford study of [identical twins](#) indicates that a vegan diet [improves overall cardiovascular health](#) when compared with an omnivorous diet.
- Vegan diets are easier than ever, and we can speed the process of building a more compassionate world. Going vegan can be rapidly done (going "[cold tofu](#)" rather than cold turkey) if one chooses to do so. Being vegan has always been easy and as a world traveler it's never been even a slight problem.

### Going plant-based is not radical—it's good for our well-being and for the planet

How do people who eat meat deal with cognitive dissonance? Zoe relayed this story to me, and I know of many similar ones. She wrote, "When I was in Costa Rica with a group, one woman said that our night watching turtle hatchlings crawl to the ocean by moonlight was the highlight. She was so careful not to hurt a little turtle. Meanwhile, every meal she ate was meat, dairy, and eggs."

I also know people who say, "Oh, I know animals suffer, but [I love my steak](#)." Many don't want to talk about this paradoxical ethical dilemma and continue to eat animals knowing they're consuming misery. They offer weak excuses such as "I just can't stop eating meat even when I think about the misery for which I'm responsible." Sure they can, it's not all that difficult.

Choosing to eat meat can be very [ethically and emotionally challenging](#). As Zoe writes, "Eventually, I came to understand that my choices had consequences and that when I allowed my desires to eclipse my values by eating animals, I was actively participating in the suffering of those I claimed to love."

Some people conveniently "unmind" animals and [ignore their feelings](#) and the nonhumans become "things." They not only deny sentience to the animals they consume but also deny that non-animal alternatives are readily available, even "fake meats." It's sad to ponder that "[demand for animal products](#) is projected to increase by 50 percent from 2013 to 2025, and 70 percent by 2050" (Moses Seenarine, *Meat [Climate Change](#)*)

When Dr. Jane Goodall is asked what she thinks about animal factories, she responds with three words: "[Pain, fear, death](#)." Factory farms are one of the most unethical developments in human history. During their years of confinement billions and billions of animals suffer. At the same time, this is in principle one of the easiest ethical issues to resolve; we can shift toward a plant-based diet. She also stresses that [we need to take action now](#), not when it's more convenient.

## Where to from here?

The important point, supported by a good deal of research, is that we and our planet would greatly benefit from choosing plant-based diets. They're easy to come by and very tasty. But what if meat-eating became a thing of the past? Experts begin to imagine a time when eating animals is a thing of the past. In her challenging book titled [Once Upon a Time We Ate Animals: The Future of Food](#), futures-anthropologist [Roanne van Voorst](#) "offers a clear and compelling vision of what it means to live in a world without meat. Simply put, it means a lot and everyone can benefit from "going plant-based."

It might take some people longer than others, but that's okay as long as the movement is in that direction. People who have already made that choice can work with others who haven't and be role models for what is possible, and many would argue is necessary, for their own and our planet's health and well-being. The more people who make this choice the more mainstream it will become, and we can only hope that the words "radical" or "extreme"—the words I've heard described for my dietary choices—drop out of conversations about the food people choose to eat.

Our meal plans, lifestyles, and relationships we have with other animals [surely are not sustainable](#) and future generations will pay a huge price for our indiscretions. We and other animals are suffering from how we live and who we choose to eat right now, and time isn't on our side. Let's give future generations the best chance they have to continue to enjoy our planet, which currently needs all the help it can get. Let's not steal their futures from them because of our harmful choices, we can begin to change immediately and rather easily.

## References

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