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The relationship between humans, animals and the environment: the overconsumption of meat

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Abstract

The relationship between humans and the rest of the natural world, animals included, has been subject of profound and radical changes through the course of history. In this context, what once was a deep connection based on respect and even adoration, started to evolve into a sort of slave-master relation, in particular from the moment when men from gatherers became first hunters and then shepherds and farmers, thus discovering the benefits derived from agriculture and animal domestication.

In this dissertation an overview of these changes to the present day is provided, when the worsening of the environmental crisis and the threat of climate change which are affecting the whole planet are something that can no longer be ignored.

Through the analysis of the works of activists like Jim Mason, Jonathan Safran Foer and Melanie Joy, I discuss the strong connection between the increase in meat consumption derived from the sector of the intensive livestock farming, and the aggravation of the global warming conditions. In particular, I examine the cultural origin of the worldwide development of the intensive livestock sector, namely the ideology of carnism, deeply rooted in our society.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to report how the current lifestyle of the great part of human societies, especially the western ones, is no longer sustainable.

Introduction

The purpose of this final thesis is to provide an analysis of the development of the relationship humans established towards animals and the rest of the natural world, focusing in particular on its worsening through environmentally unsustainable practices as the intensive livestock farming system.

This dissertation is divided into three main chapters. In the first chapter, I provide an overview of one of the biggest challenges we have to deal with these days: climate change and the resulting environmental crisis. In this regard, the sector of the intensive livestock farming is considered the human activity which mostly affects global warming. I discuss the major characteristics of the intensive farming in comparison to the extensive one, its birth and development throughout the 1900s, and its role regarding the current biodiversity crisis.

With reference to the book of the activist and advocate Jim Mason *An Unnatural Order: Roots of Our Destruction of Nature*, I analyse the development of the relationship between humans, animals and nature over the course of history. In particular, I focus on the moment when human communities started to develop activities as agriculture and pastoralism. According to Mason, the origin of animal domestication coincides with a significant breakup concerning the sense of fraternity humans once felt towards animals, which has been replaced by a sense of superiority and mastery over nature.

The second chapter focuses on the theory of carnism, a concept developed by the psychologist Melanie Joy in her book *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*. I examine the ways through which

the carnist system comes into operation. According to Joy, carnism has been able to convince people that eating meat is something normal, natural and necessary, and it has been interiorized by the great majority of people through the psychological processes of objectification, deindividuation and dichotomisation of animals. After analysing Joy's theory, I provide for a general framework concerning the condition of farm animals in CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations), specifically of cows, pigs, poultry, and also aquatic animals.

In the third chapter I focus on some key concepts developed by the American essayist and activist Jonathan Safran Foer in his book *Eating Animals*, in particular on the cultural and emotional power of food. Food is strictly connected to our memories, our culture and our habits, and hoping that people will stop consuming meat is a quite utopian expectancy, at least with regard to the present day. The point I want to emphasise in this last section is that there exists an alternative to the intensive livestock farming system. It is an alternative which is somewhere between the total exploitation of animals and the planet, and the absolute exclusion of meat from the diet: organic farms and ranches adopting an extensive farming system.

1. The development of livestock activities and their relation to the ecologic crisis

1.1 Climate change and the meat industry

One of the big questions in the climate change debate: are humans any smarter than frogs in a pot? If you put a frog in a pot and slowly turn up the heat, it won't jump out. Instead, it will enjoy the nice warm bath until it is cooked to death. We humans seem to be doing pretty much the same thing.

Jeff Goodell

When we talk about climate change, we refer to the exponential increase of the average temperatures which affected the planet Earth, especially since the second half of the twentieth century. It concerns a mutation having an anthropogenic origin, caused by a rising level of greenhouse gases emissions. The latter are considered the root cause of the so called greenhouse effect. Greenhouse gases are not harmful per se. On the contrary, they naturally occur within the atmosphere, and it can be stated that they play an important and vital role in preventing an otherwise disproportionate lowering of global temperatures. The problem arises the moment when, in addition to greenhouse gases of natural origin, it starts to develop a more and more massive production of gases derived from human activities, resulting from an excessive use of fossil fuels in particular. Therefore, while greenhouse gases turn out to be strictly necessary in order to guarantee life on Earth, if they start to be significantly incremented as it is happening because of human intervention, the result can only be a

breaking of the natural balance through the raising of temperatures, which inevitably lead to global warming. The most notorious activities which contribute in an overwhelming way to the warming of our planet are undoubtedly the electric energy consumption, the heating of buildings and the transport sector. However, while the heating is responsible for about the 24% of the total amount of greenhouse gases emissions, and the transport sector accounts for about the 18%, there is a specific activity which impact more than all the other and, for this reason, must not be underestimated. We are referring to the industrial food production and, more in detail, to the meat industry.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the world's meat consumption increased five times more in the space of fifty years, from 1950 when forty-five million tons of meat were consumed, to 2000, the year in which the consumes reached two hundred and thirty-three millions of tons, moving to two hundred and eighty millions through the first decade of the twenty one century. Continuing at this rate, it is estimated that by 2050 it will be reached the incredible record of four hundred and sixty-five million tons of meat.

Even though we are used to thinking about developed countries, the United States in particular, as the main responsible, we should remember that also several developing areas such as East Asia or Latin America play an important role, having doubled their meat consumption in the last decades, in order to try to stay ahead of the western world.

The consequences of this rise in global animal protein demand surely overcome the boundaries of the livestock farming. The excessive growth of the meat market which we are witnessing, to which a dramatically increase of animals for slaughter is followed, continues to reveal itself not adaptable to the rhythms of our planet and its natural environmental equilibrium.

1.2 Intensive livestock farming: a definition

When we refer to the meat industry in connection to the issues of sustainability and global warming, we relate specifically to the so called intensive livestock farming. It is a typology of animal husbandry aimed at obtaining the maximum profit, so the greatest amount of meat, eggs and dairy products possible, with the lowest waste of resources in terms of prices and spaces. It can be considered diametrically opposed to the extensive livestock farming. Within the context of an extensive type of farming attempts are made to breed the animals in a natural way and to ensure an appropriate living space, usually by allowing them to live free range or semi-free range. Basically, they are free to graze. Also the nourishment results as much natural as possible and befits the dietary needs of the animal, which feeds mostly on forage. The breeds are autochthonous and not specifically selected in order to produce meat and milk. In addition, antibiotics and supplements are administered only if it is effectively necessary, in case of disease or of specific deficiencies.

This model of breeding benefits from the natural resources of the territory in a way that preserves the harmony and the balance of nature, trying to reduce as much as possible the impact on the environment and, in doing so, not to be interested just in the pure profit.

Extensive livestock farming is the best way to produce meat without damage nature, by creating proper agroecosystems in which the animals play a fundamental role.

All these qualities, which denotes a certain degree of environmental and animal wellness, are systematically lost when we take into consideration an intensive type of farming. In this case, the animals are treated as mere productive machines and their number is extremely high. In order to cut the

costs derived from the use of spaces, some restriction systems are adopted. Overcrowded hangars and cages, which often avoid even the most basic movements, are the most common solutions. Obviously, such conditions require a massive use of antibiotics and preventive drugs in order to compensate all the diseases and the deficiencies that the animals have inevitably to face. Indeed, they could face health problems attributable to infections, to the scarcity or even absence of sunlight, and problems related to bones and joint conditions caused by the narrowness of spaces. Furthermore, the spreading of diseases results particularly significant, considering the high concentration of animals in spaces outrageously small.

The nourishment consists primarily of the so called compound feed, namely a combination of fodder which usually includes additives and other chemical substances. It is particularly condensed, in order to allow a faster stimulation of the growing of the animal, which has to reach the proper weight for slaughtering within the shortest possible time.

Currently, about the 90% of the global meat production derives from an intensive type of livestock farming, while just about one tenth of the total comes from a more sustainable breeding as the extensive one.

1.3 Birth and development of the intensive livestock farming

In order to understand the birth and the development of the intensive livestock farming we have to go almost a century into the past, precisely in 1923 in the East Coast of the United States. Celia Steele, a modest breeder from Delaware, accidentally received a load of five hundred chicks instead

of the fifty she ordered for her little poultry unit. The woman decided to take advantage of this careless but fortunate delivery, even though the small area of the henhouse was not sufficient to guarantee a decent vital space to all those animals.

Obviously, even the nourishment radically changed and became subject of experiments. The breeder could not feed the animals with the fodder she used to feed the few animals she had until that moment, and she tried to include some dietary supplements, as vitamin A and D, to the regular corn. The use of these supplements was crucial, and thanks to them the experiment succeeded. Indeed, the addition of vitamins in the food enabled the animals not only to survive, but to grow properly, even though the scarcity of sunrise and an environment too restricted to allow a natural bone development.

In light of the success of this first experimentation, Celia Steele decided to expand her henhouse once more. Three years later, in 1926, the woman boasted the possession of ten thousand chickens, which became more than two hundred and fifty thousand in 1935. These seem to be inconceivable numbers if we consider that, in those years, every poultry breeder owned merely twenty chickens on average. However, ten years later the region of Delaware was going to be the leading country in the poultry production and today, in Sussex country alone, about two hundred and fifty millions of battery chickens are produced every year.

Aside from becoming the main economic activity, poultry production also turned into the primary source of pollution. Because of the massive presence of these industrial farming, most of the groundwater in the region is highly contaminated by the presence of nitrate.

Therefore, we can state that starting from the experience of Celia Steele the seed of intensive livestock farming started to be planted.

In 1928 the then presidential candidate in the United States, Herbert Hoover, promised “A chicken in every pot”, at a time when mass meat production was not real yet and chicken meat was still considered a luxury good.

Soon after, starting from the 1930s, a proper industrial zootechnic project was brought forward, by experimenting several innovations that could have made it possible. The so called hybrid corn, which is able to feed an incredible number of animals at a very lower price, was introduced, and it was also introduced the artificial light in order to modify the growth cycles in a profitable manner. Indeed, it was proved that hens which are constantly exposed to artificial light can produce more than three hundred eggs per year, against the one hundred eggs they would lay naturally.

In the 1940s, the poultry industry sector succeeded in giving birth to a new breed of chicken from which it could be possible to obtain more breast with the lowest use of feed ever. Besides the aid of genetics and breed crosses, this trial worked also thank to the decision to add to the feed some specific drugs which chemically stimulated the growth of the animal in the shortest possible time: from the 1930s to the 1990s the weight of battery chickens increased by 65% on average, while their feeding requirements and the marketing timeline decreased by approximately 60%.

The experiment was so profitable for the poultry industry that, from the 1950s, there would have been two different categories of poultry: the first constituted by these meat hens, the so called broiler, while the second one was composed by the chickens reared for laying.

However, it is around the 1960s that the intensive livestock farming started to proper develop and to take place at a global level, not just for what concerns the poultry sector but also regarding pig and cattle farming. It was made possible in particular because of the massive diffusion antibiotics. This type of drug gave the opportunity to encompass a great number of animals

in very restricted areas, safeguarding them from the risk of infection attributable to the close proximity.

Furthermore, if before the animal farming breeds where various, each of them having its own features and perfectly adapted to their belonging region, soon after the spread of industrial farming, this biodiversity slowly disappeared, leaving its space to the genetic uniformity of these new animals, manipulated by humans.

In this regard, we are talking about a proper biodiversity crisis.

1.4 Livestock activities and the biodiversity crisis

The variety and richness derived from biological diversity is essentially the product of all the evolutionary processes and natural selection, which has always allowed the different species to adapt properly to every change in environmental conditions.

Biodiversity is fundamental to the planet and to all the living organisms, human beings included, and, therefore, it must absolutely be safeguarded. A broader biological diversity means a greater degree of adaptability to ecological changes of the different ecosystems. On the contrary, the more the biological diversity is limited, the more the ability to react to potential negative stimulus ceases, whether they have natural or anthropic origin. In this case, the risk of extinction of several species and the disappearance of natural habitats is frightfully real, and the consequences would endanger not only the living standards of people, but also the human survival itself.

Particularly in the outer years, the threat of a biodiversity loss is increasingly becoming actual. The large part of the responsibility is, of course,

attributable to human actions, environmental pollution and global warming among the major causes.

Throughout the centuries, men have undoubtedly benefited from biodiversity, exploiting it as much as possible. At the same time, this has led to a reduction of the biological diversity, in particular through a proper requalification of several ecosystems, readapted according to human necessities and transformed by a massive development of intensive agriculture, farming and fishery. Therefore, we can state that ecosystems are victims of unprecedented transformations designed to fulfil human's needs, from food and water to energy, which produces an inevitable pressure on natural resources.

Intensive livestock farming plays a primary role within the context of a biodiversity crisis, since it is accountable for the growing of the major causes related to the loss of biological variety, including global warming, pollution, invasion of alien species in different habitats, and overexploitation of lands and natural resources.

Historically, animals have almost always been bred both for meat and dairy products, and for the managing of cultivated fields, thanks to manure and to livestock ability to tow agricultural machineries. Since the storage for food products and the modes of transportation could not benefit from a particular technological development yet, breeding farms were located in close proximity to human settlements, and they provided food on a local level.

In general, the geographical location depended on the type of animal species. Monogastric animals, like pigs and poultry, have always been considered farmyard animals. Therefore, they were looked after by men close to domestic properties, and they strictly depended on their owners, who ensured them food and protection from predators. On the contrary, areas reserved to ruminants, like sheep and cows, have always been of large

dimensions and designed for livestock grazing. It was, or it is still today if we look at the few remaining traditional farming, a type of breeding which required regular travel, both daily and seasonal, and sometimes breeders had to move thousands of kilometres.

Nowadays, livestock farming can no longer be considered an activity primarily related to resources, but to demand. Traditional farming depended on the resource availability of the area in which it was located, while modern extensive farming is essentially based on the amount of demand of a certain product. Consequently, their geographic location has undergone numerous changes, mainly over the last decades.

All this can be considered the key to understand the relationship between the modern biodiversity crisis and intensive livestock farming. The latter, in taking over certain areas, inevitably destroys whole ecosystems and natural habitats of several species.

As we can see, today the predominant farming system is the extensive one. It is a system far from the realities of pasture, stables and granaries, which considers the animal as a proper machinery within a factory, whose only reason to exist is that of offering low-cost meat, eggs and dairy products. All this regardless of the conditions in which animals find themselves and, above all, of the tremendous environmental impact that this type of no longer sustainable production is having on global scale.

1.5 The origin of animal domestication

The theme of animal domestication, and therefore of the historical development of the relation between humans and animals, has been analysed in particular by the activist and advocate Jim Mason, who always

focused his attention and his career on the evolution of the connection among men and the natural environment, and on how this influenced the development of human culture and civilization. Mason became famous thanks to the book *Animal Factories*, which co-wrote in the 1980 with another activist and essayist, Peter Singer.

In 1993 he published his book *An Unnatural Order: Roots of Our Destruction of Nature*, which examines the cultural consequences of the development of agriculture and animal domestication.

According to Mason, there is a moment in history when men decided to have the right to rise above nature. From that point forward, all the living beings which did not belong to the human species were categorised by default in two antithetical groups: the good ones and the bad ones. Obviously, the good animals were the ones who could be exploited in order to assist human prosperity, while the ones belonging to the second category were considered obstacles to people's well-being.

This anthropocentric picture of the natural world primarily originates from the moment when men started to adopt a more settled way of living, which inevitably lead to the increase of conflicts and pressures due to the presence of excessively large groups. As a consequence, these concerns have prompted humanity to crave a total mastery of nature. In becoming essentially agricultural and settled, human society found itself to refrain from freedom, and from a balanced relationship and a sense of belonging to the rest of the environment. The natural world started to be perceived as chaotic, disorganized, conflictual, and in need of human intervention to restore the proper order.

In this context, the concept of breeding intended as domestication and subjugation of farm animals, plays a very relevant role.

As Mason states, western societies have always benefited greatly from the exploitation of certain animals. Western agriculture took largely advantage of the strength of horses and oxen to pull ploughs, in order to gain a productivity absent in any other part of the world. Horses were fundamental to the transportation of both people and heavy cargoes, thereby giving a great deal of help concerning mobility. Furthermore, domestic animals represented an assured food supply, which could become movable through transhumance. These livestock displacements allowed trade with distant areas and migration to as many other regions, having meat and dairy products available at all time.

However, animal domestication has also involved several costs, as the destruction of several fertile lands disproportionately used for grazing. Basically, animals have mainly devastated the soils in which they were bred, rather than increase their productivity potential, turning fertile lands into dry fields.

In ancient times, many villages in the Middle East were abandoned, and several scholars are prone to thinking that the responsibility should be attributed to sheep and goats, which graze and eat everything that grew from the soil. Since wellness was measured by the number of animals possessed by people, the flocks tended to be more and more enlarged and, gradually, they ended up to literally modify the lands in the vicinity of villages. Trees could not grow anymore, and pasturelands tended to disappear, considering that seedlings and grass were instantaneously eaten by ovine and caprine. Together with the depletion of soils, also the productivity of cultivated lands decreased.

Throughout the centuries, communities have always been cyclically forced to abandon the areas in which they settled during a certain period of time, since lands were systematically destroyed by the excessive graze of animals and, therefore, they became unlivable.

The costs of animal domestication are much more relevant than people could think: desertification and its impact on the whole planet are irreversible. When studying the great ancient civilizations, as Sumerians, Greeks or Egyptians, we have to keep in mind that their greatness derives also from intensive agricultural practises of exploitation. From an ecological point of view, there is the need of a more honest and exhausting reconstruction for what concerns our cultural heritage.

Besides the material costs derived from the introduction of an agricultural society, we need to take into consideration also the cultural ones, highlighted by Mason. Domestication did not help human beings to look benevolently at the rest of the natural world, neither it encouraged a certain degree of harmony. On the contrary, from a certain point of view, domestication should be considered as a sort of spiritual bankruptcy concerning western culture.

The western pastoral *modus operandi* played a central role in relation to the birth and management of the agricultural society. To Mason, its ruthless, arrogant and cruel attitude allowed itself to submit not only animals but even other societies: western agriculture developed by dominating and conquering lands and communities, and this militaristic aspect has always been mistaken for a sort of superiority. Of course, several other societies developed an agricultural tradition and had the ability to control nature but, contrary to the western one, they never had the assured conviction of the existence of a total human supremacy over nature.

According to Mason, western theological systems have always stated that humanity is something estranged from the rest of the natural world. As a consequence, there is no room for any form of sense of fraternity or community regarding animals and the environment, and therefore the exploitation of other living species to the advantage of men is not cause of conflict. On the contrary, it has always been considered not only morally

right, but even sacred and, thereby, something to comply with. Western domestication and the development of agriculture succeeded in inhibit any feeling of empathy towards all the living beings, from the moment they denied the presence of a commonality between humans and the rest of the natural world, which existed only to be exploited in favour of human wellbeing.

Within the context of ecology and religion, we should also mention the American historian Lynn White. In 1967, White wrote the article *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, published in the academic journal *Science*, in which he described Christianity as “the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen. [...] Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia’s religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.”¹

However, White highlighted the fact that even in western history we can find examples of spiritual revolution, as the one impersonated by Saint Francis, whose intent was that of reintroduce a more balanced relationship between humans and the rest of God’s creatures, trying to spread an idea of equality and democracy.

¹ White, Lynn, “The historical roots of our ecological crisis”, *Science*, 155, pp. 1203–1207, 1967

1.6 The change in the relationship between humans and the natural world

In Mason's perspective, animals have always represented a sort of vessel that allowed humans to better understand the rest of the natural world. In a certain way, animals symbolise nature by giving it a sort of personality.

From a psychological point of view, it is interesting to note how people tend to relate to animals several overwhelming passions, from sexual desire to anger. As mentioned before, since we are brought to develop a negative view and to think of being superior to the other species, we feel as we should dispose of certain primitive feelings. Animals have always incarnated the most mysterious and obscure human's fantasies, making them tangible. In this sense, domestication made a significant contribution to animal devaluation. When the first shepherds and farmers started to develop and intensify the animal exploitation, they needed to rearrange the way animals had been seen until that moment, namely as some sort of powerful spirits and core of the natural world, sacred to gatherer societies. At a certain moment, there had been the necessity to introduce new believes, in order to lower the importance and the sacredness given to animals and, therefore, to allow and naturalize their exploitation, in favour of an expected improvement of men's quality of life.

At the time when ancient religions thrived, humans felt themselves completely absorbed within the natural world that surrounded them, as they were a whole with the environment and all the other living species. The world was something alive, not just a container of animals sent for slaughter and materials to use. Men considered themselves as part of the system, and not as a superior species that should look down the natural environment as something separated and inferior. The world was permeated by primitive

powers and spirits, embodied by any natural subject. In this context, we could talk about animism, a very ancient type of religion, which conferred to every single natural agency, from objects to creatures, a distinct spiritual essence. All things had a soul, they were animated and alive. Men did not simply live in contact with nature, but rather in and with it. Food and raw materials were not yet the result of the control and the exploitation of lands, plants and animals, but the product of a respectful co-existence. Men seemed to feel a sort of reverential fear towards animals, both because they were fascinated by their aspects and behaviours, and because animals were thought to have powers not possessed by human kind. Indeed, the first artistic expressions of our species mostly represented animal figures.

The transition from gatherer societies to societies based on shepherds and farmers started about ten thousands years ago. So, for the better part of their existence, humans maintained a very positive and empathic relationship with nature, which is now dormant.

However, Mason points out to us how the alleged importance of hunting since the beginning of human existence has always been particularly emphasised in films, books and other forms of popular entertainment. Basically, it is believed that a predatory instinct shaped human existence.

According to several anthropologists, men started to eat meat occasionally by taking possession of some animal carcasses killed by the real predators. For million of yeas, human's meat consumption only depended on carcasses and on some sporadic killing of rodent and other small animals found during gathering activities.

On account of this fact, then why are we induced to think about hunting and meat consumption as the main factors related to human formation? Why did we overestimate hunting to the point that the main cultural figure has been represented by a predator man having a sort of killer instinct? We

necessarily need to find an answer to these questions if we aim at improving our relationship with the rest of the natural world.

This vision in favour of hunting activities started to develop mostly because of several anthropologists and science communicators, who emphasised the importance of hunting compared to any other mean of subsistence. Of course, after the Ice Age some European communities turned into specialised hunters as some parts of tundra started their transformation into fertile plains. However, that is not enough, given the great variety of human's lifestyles conducted in every other ecosystem. All this can be related to the theme of eurocentrism: we tend to think that humanity in its entirety and culture in general originates from Eurasian hunters from the time of Ice Age. This Eurocentric preconception is powered by the fact that the most part of European cave art at that time represented men and large animals like deer and buffalo, and these scenes have been easily interpreted as hunting scenes. As always, Europe has been considered to be a perfect illustration of what happens in the rest of the world, assuming that everything that occur within the European perimeter can be expanded on global scale.

Furthermore, several scholars believed humans belong to the category of the so called beasts of prey. They selected the baboon as the closest animal to the human species in the evolutionary chain, in order to study the behaviour of our ancestors. On the contrary, more recent and authoritative studies have largely proved that the origin of human species belongs to the Great Apes as gorillas and chimpanzees. The firsts are strictly vegetarians, and the latter mostly look for and eat plat-based food.

However, the baboon model was very successful among some researchers, since these animals embodied all the characteristics they wanted to find at the core of human nature, namely aggressiveness, machismo, territoriality, bloodlust, and, of course, the fact of being carnivore.

So, the reason why baboons have been firstly chosen as a model to understand human nature is because, in some way, their temperament represented and strengthen the dominant culture. A culture for which humans are murderous apes who have always hunted and eaten meat, war and violence are inevitable because of a genetic issue, males have dominion over females, animals and nature, which are oppressed.

The baboon model and the myth of men as great hunters represent a sort of secular myth of creation concerning social Darwinism. If we are brought to think that aggressive and murderous hunters are at the root of the entire humanity, then the diseases of modern society as war, conflicts, and the mastery of men over nature, can be considered simply as the essence of the world and the natural development of things.

The consequent struggle derived from trying to reach the top of the social ladder implies not only that there are men better than other, but also that humans in general are better than any other form of life on Earth. Thus, violence and exploitation perpetrated by men are not limited to intraspecies relationships among nations, sex and races but they also embrace the relationship men establish with animals and nature. The myth of the hunter contributes to rationally justify human intervention within the world, mostly for what concerns animal exploitation related to food production. Indeed, it states that man evolved from apes thanks to killing and eating meat and, in doing so, it ensures the sanctity of these two acts.

For these reasons, according to Mason our culture embodies some presumed values in defence of killing and animal consumption, and there is no doubt that these values, which originates from the carnivore cultural tradition, largely contributed to the overestimation of hunting throughout the process of human evolution.

Nowadays the secular myth of creation comes to the aid of carnivore societies concerning a particular issue. The great part of meat consumers,

indeed, would never be willing to personally kill the animals they eat, unless they find themselves in a particular and desperate need – which would be, however, a very unlikely situation. In the old days hunting and slaughtering activities were accompanied by specific rituals aimed at mitigating the discomfort derived from those practices. Obviously, today we do not directly assist at the killing of the animals and their transformation into meat ready to be cooked and eaten. We have a mildest awareness of it, but we prefer not to dwell on details and think about it, in order not to be uncomfortable and lose appetite.

To facilitate the concept of animal killing, and in particular to make acceptable the existence of the intensive livestock farming system, we tend to keep certain stories alive, such as the fact that the human being is a beast of prey, as the philosopher Oswald Spengler used to argue. Ideas like this have the frightful power to affect our perception of the natural world around us and our role within it.

The key to understand these fundamental concepts lies in the hunting-based myth of creation, which states that men evolved thanks to the development of hunting activities, therefore elevating hunt and the very fact of eating meat as something sacred and mythical.

1.7 The development of hunting activities

We saw how, in Mason's perspective, the supposed importance assigned to hunting can be seen as the product of an exaggeration, and that planned and organised hunting is something more recent than it was supposed to in the past. However, we should wonder why gatherer communities, who used to

live peacefully and without any sort of concern, suddenly decided to start hunting large sized and potentially dangerous animals.

A great number of scholars, first and foremost Joseph Campbell, explained how the Ice Age led to an incredible expansion of prairies and savannas, which became the major sustenance site for herds of horses, deer or cattle. Obviously, being in open grasslands, they were an easy prey for the gatherers, who had the basic fundamental skills to hunt.

It is probable that some tribes turned into skilled and specialised hunters of specific animal species, while it is likely that others started to follow the seasonal migrations of some herds. In doing so, those communities succeeded in tackling their nutritional requirements, and were made to travel long distances.

When humans were still adopting a strictly vegetarian plant-based diet, they preferred to remain within very familiar ecosystems. Those were habitats rich in well-known plants and vegetable in general, and communities tended to be anchored within their territory, without moving excessively.

Then, as specialised hunters, some tribes started to move over long distances and through completely unknown ecosystems, in order to follow and monitor animal herds. In this way, they were never short of food and other materials. On the contrary, this new way of living allowed them to survive during the coldest periods of the year and in the coldest places in the world, where plants and vegetables in general were almost absent.

Those are the major reasons why some groups of gatherers became predominantly hunters along time, together with an increase in population and in social competition, other factors which lead some communities to move.

However, this materialistic explanation should be accompanied by a more cultural one, which takes into account what could have happened inside the minds of those human beings.

According to Mason, it is very likely that hunt fascinated certain men because, in a certain way, it represented some sort of dominant values, which affected the relationship with women and animals in particular. Men could have started to hunt in order to increase their status inside their own communities.

Women and animals have always been associated, since both categories were able to provoke a certain reverential fear and wonderment, and it is no coincidence they constituted the two major themes within the context of primitive art. On the ground that women gave birth and were usually occupied with the searching for food, they felt a sense of belonging in the community. Their roles ensured them a sense of security and identity, and automatically conferred them a defined social status. On the contrary, men always had to make by their own a proper identity and a certain status, which could define them and that developed through precise activities. Mason's hypothesis is that men may have felt not only intimidated by the supposed natural powers of women, but also jealous: they did not possess naturally any sort of power, and therefore they had to create their own, starting to aggressively declare and flaunt a presumed superiority.

For instance, men tried to rebalance their masculine power through the creation of certain secret rituals from which women were banned, in order to generate an air of mystery and increase a craved authority and power within the community. Of course, those rituals were almost always related to hunting.

Men were impressed by animals not only because of their aspect and strength, but mostly because of their perceived supernatural powers. Therefore, hunting represented not only a capture of food, but rather the

conquering of the powers of the animal which had just died. Killing an animal and eat its flesh ensured the acquisition of those powers.

To men, hunting and the sharing of meat constituted a great opportunity in order to counterbalance the powers of nature. In addition, hunting started to provide them an eagerly-awaited social status as food procurers.

Gathering activities carried out by women surely ensured much more food compared to men's hunting practises, but they were not as exiting and thrilling as the latter. Male hunters were promoting a positive and powerful image of themselves by giving a dramatic connotation to hunting activities, rather than focusing on the quantity of food provided every time.

This mixture of excitement and tragedy definitely conferred a status and a prestige to hunters, whose undertakings produced a sort of distraction from the ordinary everyday life, mostly composed by plants, seedlings, roots and fruits gathers.

Even though what actually guaranteed the survival of communities were all the vegetable products, men were starting to gain more admiration compared to women, who were dealing with much less more exciting activities.

In order to understand the contemporary issues and the environmental crisis we are living in, it is important to figure out the evolution of the relationship between humans and nature, animals included.

When humanity used to live wholeheartedly inside nature, men almost felt a sort of reverential fear and wonder in respect of the rest of the living world. Even though they could not define nature through concepts or words, they loved it unconditionally. According to them, the natural world was something beautifully alive, filled with fascinating living beings, spirits and incredible powers.

This reality seems consistently far away from the vision of nature we have at present times, in which the natural world is mainly perceived as a sort of storage from which humans are allowed to draw on whenever they want, looking for resources.

1.8 The beginning of agriculture and pastoralism as the beginning of a new relation with nature and animals

Usually, we are driven to think about agriculture as a simple body of knowledge acquired through time about lands, plants and animals. In this sense, agriculture and breeding are considered specialized professions, or even pure and genuine lifestyles. Those are the aspects of agriculture of which we are fully aware.

However, Mason points out how, hidden under those considerations, there is an aspect of which we are not fully conscious, namely the effects of agriculture on human's mind and culture and, consequently, on the relationship with nature and the environment, which have been manipulated and exploited for thousands of years. In a certain way, agriculture turns nature into something readapted to human needs. It could be considered as an activity which perfectly reflects centuries of control and exploitation of plants, animals and natural processes. It could be said that mastering and fighting nature is something consolidated, and that it deals with a so deep-rooted position that we barely are aware of its consequences. Even though we are not proper farm workers, we are surrounded and steeped by agricultural culture, and this also determines our approach and thinking concerning the rest of the natural world.

Influenced by this culture, it seems to be though that the only thing that matters in relation to a certain land and a certain ecosystem is the soil quality and productivity, and that the land exists exclusively with the aim of serving humans.

During the last ten thousand years, the majority of human activities has been guided by one fundamental strategy, namely to intensify food production in order to feed an increasing number of people. As already mentioned, this is the main purpose of the modern intensive agri-food system, designed to mass production of agricultural and animal products.

Mason takes as an example the central area of the United States, within the state of Iowa. Formerly, the region used to be surrounded by the Great Plain, which went on for about two thousand kilometres. Nowadays, the vast grassland has been replaced by fields aimed at producing cereals, soy and hosting butchering animals. Neighbouring towns provide all the required machineries to work the soil and grow grains, together with those necessary to the killing of pigs and cows, and to the processing of their meat.

Not even a single farm animal can be seen grazing outdoors in the fields. Indeed, even though the great presence of wide-open spaces, the largest number of those animals is locked up in high-technology structures, where everything from food and water to light and air is controlled and monitored artificially by machines.

Not too long ago, herds of animals used to wander around and graze across plains, together with hundreds of other creatures. Now, the landscape is completely different and only composed by industrial premises, which show up among monoculture fields of grain and soy. At times, it is possible to prominently smell an awful rancid scent coming from one of the livestock holdings in the area. It is a noxious smell, completely different from the one related to healthy animals fed with hay and pasture raised. On the contrary,

animals within intensive farmhouses are constantly fed with a mixture of grains, soy and other high-energy plants.

In a certain way, it is a place in which energy and nutrients coming from the environment are condensed by animals and turned into meat, eggs and dairy products. This is the modern intensive agriculture, where the world intensive has been proudly coined by the agri-food sector itself.

During the past, agriculture also generated a sort of ideology of dominance, namely the supreme right guaranteed by God to humans, according to which the natural environment could be exploited at men's liking and advantage. Not only agriculture helped to create this set of ideas, but it also strengthened it, by giving it the solidity it possessed nowadays.

To Mason, it could be stated that agriculture is responsible for the creation of a sort of monster, since humanity, and especially western cultures, not only exercise its power over nature and animals, but also over other human beings, their lands and their own cultures.

We could affirm that agriculture properly developed about ten thousand years ago, after the end of the last Ice Age. From that moment, humans started to sow and gathering wild plants seeds, taking care of their growth and harvest.

In that same period, some began to take care of wild flocks of goats and sheep, and consequently of herds of cows, pigs and several other animals.

Further for some time, humans continued to look for fruits, seeds and berries, and to hunt animals in order to provide themselves with food and other materials. However, gathering activities were eventually replaced by agricultural practices. The complete control over lands guaranteed an improved supervision over food supplies. Societies started to intensify methods of production concerning food and several other resources.

One of the major reasons is associated with the increasing in the population density, since the number of people within certain areas started to rise steadily, especially in ecosystems rich in rivers, lakes, swamps, animals and plants. Indeed, human communities tended to settle down in regions abundant of food and resources of all kinds.

Over the course of time, several communities became more and more dependent on those areas, to the point that they gradually abandoned the nomadic lifestyle, typical of the constantly moving of gatherer groups.

Certain regions, which were particularly rich in sustenance, attracted an increasingly great number of people, who started to be less and less able to travel long distances in order to provide food. These agglomerations of people became quickly particularly significant. This led to competition concerning food and resources, which consequently resulted in an intensification of food gathering and production, together with a greater accumulation with a view to dry spells. Some semi-sedentary gatherers started to cultivate their own piece of land, in which edible crops were presumably growing naturally. At first, it is likable that they were limited to eradicate cyclically non-edible weeds, but subsequently they probably began to widen their crops by spreading seeds and sprouts, and to relocate these activities near water sources and villages.

Pastoralism, as well as agriculture, could be considered as a consequence of the demographic growth of certain areas. In this case, we deal with areas in which communities started to exert a greater control over flocks and herds, and it can be considered as an intensification of hunting activities. Hunters learned to kill systematically and selectively, and this led to a primal herd management. Besides animal selection, shepherds also started to control the movements of those herds, in order to lead them to the best grazing areas.

Gradually, those first shepherds learned the necessary techniques to master the movements, the growth, the diet and the productive lives of animals. Of course, by being in close proximity of the same animals every day, humans could be more familiar with them and were able to memorize their behaviours, which have been exploited to men's advantage.

As far as we know, the first animals to be domesticated have been sheep, followed by goat and, consequently, by pigs and bovine animals. In general, nomadic groups were used to domesticate sheep, goats, cattle and large animals that travel in packs, while settled gatherer-cultivator communities primarily domesticated poultry, pigs and small animals which could be easily kept inside villages.

So, while cultivators were busy trying to domesticate plant species, groups of hunters-shepherds started to domesticate their prey in order to intensify food production.

The early farmers succeeded in improving new varieties of plants and animals, and some centuries later there came a very crucial event concerning the process of agricultural intensification, namely the exploitation animal traction related to wagons and ploughs. Thanks to the strength of domestic large animals as cows or horses, it could be possible to benefit from new areas intended for agricultural activities, and to easily carry heavy loads into granaries.

Very slightly, almost imperceptibly, it was emerging a new way of living. There's a strong support to think about the beginning of agricultural activities as a rapid and sudden change, a brilliant invention which spread worldwide the moment it started to develop, and that involved the complete annulment of the earlier lifestyles.

Certainly, the development of agriculture has to be considered an event which has had far-reaching consequences over the whole planet, its

environment and the human's perception of nature, but it must be kept in mind that it is something that occurred and evolved in the space of thousands of years.

1.9 The concept of misothery

The term misothery is derived from the Greek misein, to hate, and therion, beast or animal, and literally means hatred and contempt for animals. Since animals are so representative of nature in general, misothery can mean hatred and contempt for nature, especially its animal-like aspects.

Jim Mason

The word misothery has been coined by Mason. The author specifically chose this term for its similarity to a much more familiar one, namely misogyny. Misothery and misogyny are not just formally comparable. They are similar also concerning their meaning, since both words provide an attitude through which a specific category comes to be devalued, and even despised. As misogyny devaluates the role and dignity of women in favour of a supposed male supremacy within the context of a patriarchal society, misothery devaluates the role and dignity of animals and nature in general within the context of human supremacy.

Usually, when we want to despise or talk bad about somebody else, in some cases we describe them as animals or beasts, especially when we want to blame them for selfish or cruel behaviours. Furthermore, if we look up in the

dictionary, we will note that one of the meanings of the word animal is related to a rude, ignorant and irrational person.

As Mason states, we are dealing with a belief system which served to replace the respect, the amazement and the awe humans once felt about animals and nature with the idea that animals are in some way inferior, or even not enough evolved to feel physical and psychological pain.

Animal domestication played a very important role within the context of misotheism. Before domestication, gods were represented by supernatural spirits in the form of animals, which were looked with admiration by men. All living beings had a soul. After domestication, gods started to assume an anthropomorphic shape, and animals began to be seen with disregard and to be considered as an inferior species compared to the human species, the only one supposed to possess a soul from that moment.

The transformation of animals from powerful spirits to objects and products ready for human consumption and utilisation involved the establishment of a certain number of negative views related to nature, which even today affects the relationship humans engage with the environment and the rest of the living world.

2. The ideology of carnism

2.1 The development of the theory of carnism

When we talk about carnism, we refer to an ideology, related to an excessive consumption of animal products, focusing especially on the consumption of the meat of certain categories of animals. It can be considered as an invisible belief system which influence people to eat specific groups of animals.

The term was coined by the American social psychologist Melanie Joy. She is the founder and president of the non-profit advocacy group Beyond Carnism, an organisation which promotes animal rights through public talks, media campaigns and social activism.

Joy first introduced the word carnism in her 2001 article “From carnivore to carnist: liberating the language of meat”. However, the concept received little attention at that time, and was then revisited in 2009 in her book *Why we love dogs, eat pigs, and wear cows*, in which the psychologist analysed the so called meat paradox, namely the fact that people tend to express love, care and affection towards certain animals, while eating others.

“That experience led me to swear off meat, which led me to become more open to information about animal agriculture—information that had been all around me but that I had been unwilling to see, so long as I was still invested in maintaining my current way of life. And as I learned the truth about meat, egg and dairy production, I became increasingly distraught. [...] I wound up confused and despairing. I felt like a rudderless boat, lost on a sea of collective insanity. Nothing had changed, but everything was

different.”² In this interview from 2015, Joy recalled the moment when she definitely stopped eating meat. It happened by accident, for no moral or ethical reason, but because of a food poisoning contracted from a spoiled hamburger. This fact led her to reevaluate her perspective regarding the issue of meat consumption and animal treatment, and to become firstly vegetarian and then to make a gradual transition to veganism.

According to Joy, since carnism is something invisible, people are rarely aware of the fact that eating meat is a proper choice rather than a matter of fact. Usually, we do not effectively think of the reason why we eat certain animals and not others. However, when eating animals is not a necessity, then it should be considered as a choice, and choices are the product of personal belief. One of Joy’s central focus is the fact that if we continue to be unaware of the way in which carnism affects our behaviour, we will never be completely able to make conscious food choices, since without consciousness there is no free choice.

It is usually quite difficult to come across the term carnism, since it is the dominant belief system. Carnism is extremely widespread, its principles and practices are considered common sense and basically the way in which things are, rather than a diffuse variety of options.

In order to discredit this vision, Joy provides the example of vegetarian subjects. When we think about a vegetarian, we do not simply think of a person who does not eat meat. On the contrary, we usually think of someone whose choices reflect a certain philosophic vision and a specific belief system, in which killing animals for human purposes is considered as something immoral. So, if a vegetarian is someone who believes killing animals and eating meat is something immoral, how should be called someone who considers this to be moral? If vegetarian is the definition for

² Joy Melanie, “From cuisine to corpses to carnism”, *AsiaOne*, 2015

a person who does not eat meat, what should the definition for a person who does eat meat be? Usually, we use the term meat eater or meat consumer, but since a vegetarian is not only a vegetable eater, and eating vegetables is something who originates from a specific belief system, we should find another definition. The term “meat consumer” tend to isolate the action of eating meat, as if a person who eats meat would operate outside a certain belief system, and as if the very act of eating meat was a behaviour able to persist independently from that system.

Actually, there has to be a determined belief system behind the choice of eating pigs and not eating dogs.

In much of the modern industrialized world, people eat meat not because of necessity, but rather because they choose to. Eating animals appears as something humans always did, and it is the way in which things are. We do not consider meat consumption in the same way as vegetarianism, namely a choice based on certain assumptions concerning animals and the environment. We rather consider it as the most natural thing to do. According to Joy, we eat animals without thinking about what we are actually doing, since the belief system behind this behaviour is invisible. This is what carnism is.

By that logic, who eats meat can no longer be considered just an omnivore, since an omnivore is simply who has the physiological ability to ingest both vegetables and meat. So, terms like carnivore or omnivore are able to describe only the biological constitution of an individual, and not the personal choices which are made.

However, we have always been keen to consider the traditional ways of living as if they were universal values, while they should be seen just as belief and behaviours taken forward by the majority of people. In this regard, Joy gives the example of geocentrism, under which the Earth was located at the centre of the universe and all celestial objects orbited it. As we know, this

belief was so profoundly rooted – and profoundly erroneous at the same time – that to protest against it meant to risk life. What people usually call “normal” can be considered just as an extremely rooted and widespread set of ideas, to such an extent that they came to be taken as common sense. The “normal” is treated as a simple fact, a rule, and not as a mere opinion or choice. When an ideology is so much deep-rooted, it basically becomes invisible, and by being invisible it can continue to be ingrained. If certain ideologies keep being anonymous, people cannot talk about them, since they do not officially exist. As a consequence, if people cannot talk about a certain set of ideas, those ideas cannot be questioned. According to Joy, this is the primary reason why carnism has never been completely identified. “We assume that it is not necessary to assign a term to ourselves when we adhere to the mainstream way of thinking, as though its prevalence makes it an intrinsic part of life rather than a widely held opinion. Meat eating, though culturally dominant, reflects a choice that is not espoused by everybody.”³

2.2 How carnism comes into operation.

Joy refers to carnism as a violent ideology, since it is based on physical violence, and if we removed violence from the system, it would cease to exist. Indeed, meat cannot be produced without killing.

Nowadays, at the time of the intensive livestock farming system, carnism revolves around intensive violence. Violence has to be taken to a certain

³ Joy Melanie, “From Carnivore to Carnist: Liberating the Language of Meat”, *Satya*, 2001

level in order to slaughter an adequate number of animals and to allow the meat industry to maintain its gains.

Carnism develops through so much violence that the vast majority of people would never dream of witnessing the different stages of slaughtering activities, and when that happens, the brutal act can cause a state of shock in the viewer. When showing a documentary concerning meat production to her students, Joy herself claims that she has to be very cautious: the psychological and emotional environment within the class must be secure, in order not to traumatize her students.

Over her entire teaching career, Joy affirms that she never saw someone who did not shudder or sadden during the screening of those images. That is because people feel compassion for the other living beings and, generally, do not want to cause suffering to their fellows – humans or animals. Therefore, within the context of the so called violent ideologies, people allow practices which would go against their very nature, without effectively realizing what they are doing.

We saw how a system's main protection consists in making itself invisible. Violent ideologies as carnism do not make themselves invisible just on a social and psychological basis, but also on a physical level. Although billions of animals are slaughtered every year worldwide, the great part of the consumers of that meat has never – and never will – assisted to any of the several steps of the meat production processes.

Joy recalls when she spent a day in a petting zoo set up in front of a local market. She noticed the event drew a quite large crowd, and everyone was so excited to pet as many animals as possible. It seemed like everybody, from children to adults, felt the need to have a physical contact and connection to those animals, claiming how adorable they were.

Still, those people were the same people that came into the market to buy cow, pig and chicken meat without hesitation, right after they cuddled cows, pigs and chickens in the pen.

Clearly, the majority of people is so convinced of the correctness and the naturalness of eating the meat of the same animals they would cuddle, that they probably are not even completely conscious of what they do. In a certain way, violent systems as carnism induce people to accept specific myths around which revolves a particular ideology, and to not pay attention to all the possible contradictions those systems might generate by inhibiting any sort of critical thought.

In this regard, Joy drew up the so called “Three Ns of Justification”, according to which eating meat is Normal, Natural and Necessary. The three Ns have always been brought up to justify every exploitation system in history. Usually, those myths are hardly questioned when a system is at its maximum, while at the time it starts to fall apart, they are recognized and unmasked.

However, the three Ns are so rooted in society, and in particular in our social conscience, that they have the ability to mechanically drive our actions, without our even knowing it. In the context of carnism, they have the function of relieving the moral discomfort which would otherwise result from the very fact of eating meat: if we have an acceptable excuse, we will feel far less guilty concerning our actions and behaviours. So, emotionally speaking, the three Ns operate as a sort of tunnel vision by covering up the inconsistencies and incoherencies of our attitude towards animals, and justifying them on occasions when they are revealed and come to light.

2.2.1 Normal

The first justification in Joy's analysis claims that eating meat is something normal. When the guidelines of a certain ideology are considered to be normal, it means the ideology has been naturalised, and its principles start to be treated as social norms.

Norms are social constructs, suggesting people how they should behave so that the system in charge is able to maintain its status quo. We basically follow a line of action we did not directly choose and, at the same time, we are not fully aware of that. Within this vision, what we call freedom of choice, in the end it is nothing but the outcome of a series of options accurately selected by the system.

In particular, it has been taught to people how human life is superior to that of all the other living beings, to the point that their survival is subordinated to human's necessities.

Furthermore, norms generally tend to benefit conformism and to disadvantage those who move away from social standards. Indeed, Joy notices how it is a whole lot easier to obtain access to meat, rather than to its herbal alternatives. Meat is easily available everywhere, while all the possible alternatives have to be sought, and their search frequently turns out to be difficult and unsuccessful.

It is the case, for instance, of a lot of restaurants in which it is still arduous to find vegetarian or vegan options, and vegetarians often find themselves forced to justify their choices, as if they had to apologise for causing nuisance. This is precisely because eating meat is something considered to be normal.

Norms are inherent in our traditions and in our day-to-day conduct. The more a certain behaviour is long-lasting and ingrained in the system, the less

it is doubted and questioned. We could take the Thanksgiving day as an example: the great majority of people would not even consider the option of not eating turkey meat that day. When it comes to traditions, people tend to be even more frowned upon a possible calling into question.

2.2.2 Natural

The great majority of people believe eating meat is a completely natural activity, since humans have been hunting and eating meat for centuries, even if, as we said before, our nutrition has been primarily vegetarian for the longest time.

However, according to Joy, when it comes to acts of violence like consuming meat, we must make a distinction between what is natural and what is justifiable. What is natural turns into something justifiable through the so called naturalisation process. In other words, when a set of ideas is naturalised, it means that there exists a common belief according to which the principles associated with that ideology are in some way connected to the law of nature, or law of God, depending on whether the belief system is based on science or religion.

Naturalisation supports a certain ideology by giving it an apparently strong and logical foundation, and therefore it is able to reflect how things are supposed to be according to the common belief. The very fact of consuming meat is simply considered an act which is in conformity with the natural order of things.

According to the supposed natural order of things, animals naturally exist in order to be eaten by humans. We refer to the animals we eat as they were

designed by nature for that purpose, by calling them breeding animals, dairy or beef cattle, laying hens.

However, the pretext of an assumed biological superiority declared by certain groups has always been adopted to justify violence towards other individuals throughout history. Just think of black people, which were considered to be naturally suited to slavery, or Jews, which were deemed to be mean and greedy by nature, and even women, naturally inferior and subdued to men. According to Joy, the way we treat and think about animals is precisely another example to add to this list.

Of course, one of the main justifications within carnism concerns the natural order of the food chain. From an anthropocentric point of view, humans are considered to be on the top of the chain. However, even if a chain had a top, wouldn't it be taken by carnivores, rather than humans?

The three major disciplines which support the process of naturalisation are history, religion and science. The first usually provides us with a series of selected historical facts which should prove that a certain ideology always existed, by making it seem like eternal, as if things have always been as they currently are, and they always will be. The second one claims that ideology comes directly from God's will, while the third one empowers the ideology to have a biological fundament.

Therefore, we could say that naturalisation has the ability to make a certain ideology historically, theoretically and scientifically indisputable. Looking at the relevance of religion and science within the context of the naturalisation of an ideology, we can figure out why spirituality and intelligence have often been the most significant characteristics through which a specific group defines itself as naturally superior to the others.

Joy presents the example of the philosopher René Descartes, who got to the point of nailing a dog on a table and dissected it alive, in order to prove that

animals, unlike humans, were nothing but soulless machines by nature, and that those painful wailings could be equated with the noise of watch springs when it is torn apart.

2.2.3 Necessary

The third justification in Joy's analysis concerns the fact that eating meat is necessary, according to the common belief. It is strictly linked to the thought that meat consumption is something natural: if it is biologically natural, then it must also be necessary to human survival.

As in all other violent systems, this belief persuades that killing a certain category of individuals is necessary in order to guarantee the common good, and that the survival of a precise group depends on the slaughter of a different one.

If we are prone to think that eating meat is a real necessity, then the whole system appears as inevitable. Indeed, if we could not survive without meat proteins, then it would not be possible to end carnism.

The paradox is that even if we know that it is possible to survive without meat, we act like it is not. This is an implicit widespread conviction, which is usually revealed only when it is called into question.

As Joy states, there are several myths linked to the necessity of eating meat, which are carried out by carnism. One myth is related to the fact that eating meat is presumed to be necessary for human's health, and it continues to persist, although part of the scientific studies have been saying otherwise during the last decades. More than anything, there exists a common fear of having protein deficiencies due to low meat intake. It is a fear which is primarily common among men, since animal proteins have always been

associated with strength and musculature, power and manhood. On the contrary, vegetables usually have a negative connotation in this context, and tend to be feminised, representing weakness and passivity.

Another myth is based on the belief according to which, if we stopped eating meat, the entire planet would be overrun by cows, pigs and chickens, and all the other breeding animals which would no longer be slaughtered for their meat. According to this myth, it seems logical that we should continue to slaughter animals in order to justify all the killings which have occurred until now. Once violence establishes itself this deep, it seems impossible to imagine a system without it.

However, if we stopped consuming meat, we should simply and above all stop producing and breeding farm animals, so that we would not be overwhelmed by their continuous increase.

A third myth concerning the necessity of carnism argues that slaughtering animals is a sort of economic imperative and that the whole economy would collapse if we ended this practice. As a matter of fact, it is more likely that the economic status quo was the one to collapse, rather than the economy itself in its entirety. And, Joy wonders, even if the whole economy depended on carnism, would this dependence be a serious justification to this type of violence?

Usually, history shows us that every time people start to perceive a certain ideology as a violent system, they look for a change. For this reason, carnism tries to stay hidden and anonymous, and its myths have to remain untouched.

2.2.4 The fourth N

In addition to the three Ns of justification, a study conducted by the Department of Psychology of the Lancaster University in 2015 showed how there could be a fourth justification N, which has not been captured by Joy's scheme. Indeed, we have to consider that, for the majority of people, eating meat is primarily something Nice, and that the enjoyment draw from its taste can be considered the fundamental barrier to a change in the lifestyle and the adoption of a meatless diet.

The study examines even more deeply the psychological mechanisms people usually adopt in order to overcome the meat paradox and to continue to eat meat. As we saw, researches showed how people tend to use a strategy which defines the consumption, and often even the overconsumption, of meat as natural, normal, necessary, and also nice, and therefore to defend their will to continue to eat meat.

It is possible that Joy simply ignored the Nice justification, since it represents a very low moral defence. However, according to the study, it is very likely that people tend to utilise the apparently more meaningful first three justifications in order to cover the very fact that they do not want to stop eating meat mainly because they love the way it tastes.

In this study, researchers tried to understand to which extent the four Ns of justification affect people's decision to continue to consume meat.

It appeared that meat eaters usually built a defence mechanism which exempt them from any sort of moral analysis. This mechanism triggers when someone else bring up moral justifications, animal suffering above all. In this context, the four justification Ns are considered to be a defence mechanism and a reaction which tries to justify who wants to persist in eating animal products without feeling guilty about it.

The study revealed that the individuals which mostly use the four justification Ns tend to include very few animals in their circle of compassion and moral concern and to objectify them, thus making them devoid of intelligence. Researchers demonstrated that those individuals have not ethical concerns regarding their food choices, are not worried about animals well-being, and are not willing to reduce the consumption of animal products, which they usually consume very frequently.

The four Ns are called into question by the major part of all those who defend meat consumption. According to the study, by rationalising their choices, they are able to justify and continue a practise which is more and more object of public scrutiny.

I consider the Nice Justification to be the strongest one, and it is rather odd the fact that Joy did not mention it at all. It is undoubtedly true that eating meat is believed to be something absolutely normal, natural and necessary by a considerable number of people – usually, people claim that it is just the consequence of the natural food chain, and that meat proteins are indispensable for the correct functioning of our body. However, I think that the main reason why we eat meat is simply because we like its taste, and all the justifications Joy mentioned are truthful, but they appear secondary if we compare them to the forth one.

2.3 Legitimation and institutionalisation

The main purpose of the myths we have just analysed is to legitimise the dominant system, allowing it to continue to operate undisturbed and unnoticed. Usually, if a certain ideology is legitimised, it means that basically

all social institutions approve and support it, by spreading and vehicle the justification Ns through various social channels.

Among all the means of communication and institutions of our time, mass media and the legal system are the ones which affect the most the process of legitimation concerning a certain ideology.

Indeed, by embedding the system's principles at its core, the law allows the institutional existence of the ideology. Within the context of carnism, animals cannot be defined as "legal entities" having the same rights as humans, and their legal status ensures the continuity of meat production in livestock industries, even through highly questionable methods.

For what concerns mass media, we can say they are one of the primary information sources of the majority of the population, a sort of intermediary between the institutions, meaning the ideology, and the consumers. Usually, media do no inform us about facts concerning the meat industry, how animals are treated and the contribution of the intensive livestock farming to the current environmental crisis. On the contrary, through the practice of omission, media seems to help and support the invisibility status in which carnism finds itself.

In addition to omission, sometimes media adopt the practice of prohibition. Indeed, it can happen that certain information against the carnist system coming from, for instance, animalist groups, is censored, while, the few occasions when something particularly negative concerning the zootechnical sector draws media's attention, it is treated as if it was an isolated incident, rather than a condition which takes place more often than people could ever imagine. However, when that happens, people's indignation focuses only on the industry which is under indictment at that moment, and not on the whole system. Again, it occurs because the principles of carnism are treated as if they were the objective reality, rather than a simple set of options.

It is true that the most recent years have shown an increase in doctors and nutritionists on television suggesting us to consume less meat. However, they are still isolated cases. In most situations, media deliver to us the Ns of justification, while we are in the comfort of our own home, watching television.

As we said, carnism is an institutionalised system. The livestock industry is one, if not the one, of the most profitable sectors controlled by a quite small company group, having incomes of tens of billions of dollars per year. It has become a well-established reality through the takeover of all the companies related to the sector, from agrochemical societies selling pesticides and fertilizers, to supermarket and restaurant chains.

2.4 The illusion of free will

“It is impossible to exercise free will as long as we are operating from within the system. Free will requires consciousness, and our pervasive and deep-seated patterns of thought are unconscious; they are outside of our awareness and therefore outside of our control. While we remain in the system, we see the world through the eyes of carnism. And as long as we look through eyes other than our own, we will be living in accordance with a truth that is not of our own choosing. We must step outside the system to find our lost empathy and make choices that reflect what we truly feel and believe, rather than what we've been taught to feel and believe.”⁴

In our western cultural context, almost every one of us started to eat meat involuntarily since weaning. In a certain way, our relation with meat is

⁴ Joy Melanie, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*, San Francisco, Conari Press, 2009

decided starting from that period, before continuing without interruption throughout our life, and that continuous flow is what helps us to understand how carnism is able to affect and undermine our free will. Basically, our choices are driven by thought and behavioural patterns which have been established long before we became conscious, aware and independent individuals. And even after, it is essentially impossible to exercise free will if we continue to be stuck and operate within the system. In order to take action, free will needs us to be aware and to eradicate our unconscious common ground. This can be done only if we succeed in getting out of carnism, thus allowing ourselves to make informed choice, rather than to act and see the world through a lens determined by the system in which we are absorbed.

2.5 Interiorising carnism: the cognitive triad

Joy proposes a parallelism between the carnist system and the reality described in the cult movie Matrix, namely a rooted and virtual reality in which people contributed to the system's legitimisation by accepting it as genuine and authentic.

According to Joy, carnism works in the same way as Matrix, by inducing people to deny and justify the system at the same time. Being absorbed by the system, we tend to see the world around us through its lens and, consequently, we are led to act like the system wants us to, rather than we actually would. Basically, we have interiorised carnism by being passive consumers and allowing it to insinuate in our conscience.

Concerning certain issues, carnism tend to both hide and falsify the reality of the situation. The widespread and rooted myths about meat do not reflect reality, and the problem arises when we interiorise them, altering our view of things. Even though animals are living beings and individuals just like us, we have a tendency to consider them more as living things, and to make substantial differences among their species, especially for what concerns human's meat consumption. When it happens to occasionally stumble into breeding animals as pigs, chickens or cows, the majority of us probably do not think of them as sentient beings, and the first thoughts related to them are those concerning their supposed dirtiness and edibility. By doing so, we are adopting three specific defences, which together form the so called cognitive triad.

Joy defines these three stages as objectification, deindividualization and dichotomisation. In psychology, they are considered as normal defensive processes which, however, can risk of being taken to extremes if they are disproportionately adopted, as it happens within the carnist system. These defensive mechanisms are unconscious and internalised for the most part, and they play a big role in shaping our perception and awareness of animals.

2.5.1 Objectification

Through the mechanism of objectification, we go so far as to consider a living being as an object.

One of the most powerful tools by which the objectification process can be developed is language. It is not uncommon for slaughterhouse workers to call the chickens "roast chickens", the cows "beefs" or "steaks", and the pigs "bacon" while those animals are still alive and they have not yet been turned

into the final product. And it is not rare that even people in general make jokes like that when they see some farm animal. Somewhat, carnism needs people to use this sort of objectifying language towards animals in order to legitimise itself, and to ensure that we firstly think about something which has always been tasty and inanimate when we look at a roasted chicken or a steak – to be clear, a *it* rather than a *he* or a *she*.

As we already saw, objectification is reinforced not just through language, but also through the work of institutions and legislation. From a legal point of view, animals are more similar to properties than to individuals, thus they can be sold, bought and traded as they were proper objects.

Furthermore, objectification plays an important role at the very moment we take a sit at the dinner table. When we are about to eat a steak, we do not immediately think about the animal from which that meat has been produced. Instead, it is more likely that we visualise the steak only as food, and concentrate on its fragrance and its flavour. When in front of a piece of meat, be it raw or cooked, we usually directly skip the perception process through which we associate that meat with an animal that was once alive. Obviously, we all are aware of the fact that the steak, just like any other type of meat, comes from an animal, but when we eat it, we tend not to think about it, as if it had always been something inanimate. Probably, if people thought about the living animal while eating its meat, they would feel uncomfortable and, in some cases, they would not be able to do it. For this reason, most people try to avoid eating meat which resembles the animal from which it was obtained, thus avoiding body parts such as the head.

Objectification can be considered another mechanism thanks to which our guilty conscience is reduced. Indeed, by automatically thinking of animals as objects, we can afford to treat them as if they actually were, without being overwhelmed by guilt.

2.5.2 Deindividuation

When we adopt the deindividuation defence, it implies we tend to think about certain individuals only within a group context, as if they did not have their own individuality and personality outside of it, and as if every group member had the same characteristics as the others. Usually, the more the group is numerous, the more we are led to use the deindividuation defence and to consider the whole group above the single individual.

Deindividuation fails in recognising the individual, at the point that the whole group is seen as an undifferentiated unit. Basically, this mechanism describes the perception we have about animals.

When we think about the farm animals reared for their meat, from chickens to cows and pigs, we usually do not think of them as individuals having their own personality and identity. Instead, it is more likely that we consider them as a vague and indistinct group, even an abstraction.

According to this thinking, every cow, pig or chicken is exactly the same as every other cow, pig or chicken on Earth. However, things could change if we personally knew even just one of those animals. In order to prove her theories, Joy interviewed and asked questions to a wide range of people, included her students, slaughterhouse workers, butchers and meat consumers in general. The majority of the interviewees who happened to meet a livestock animal claimed that, since then, they have been unable to eat that specific animal, whose name they knew by now. The most sensitives even affirmed that they started to feel uncomfortable eating the meat of the same species of that farm animal. In this perspective, we all surely know someone who has a pet rabbit and, therefore, would never eat rabbit meat, or someone else who go horseback riding, and that would be disgusted at the thought of eating horse meat. This is because a connection was

established, but if they did not own a rabbit or a horse, they probably would not mind eating them, and would adopt the deindividuation defence.

Joy asked the interviewees how they would feel if they ate the meat of an animal they care for. The majority, butchers included, answered that they could not even think about something this macabre, and that they would feel as they committed a proper murder. Once we give a name to an animal and get attached to it, it becomes a full-fledged family member.

Among the meat eaters who have been interviewed, someone even claimed that there is no need to establish a personal connection with a certain animal in order to understand its individuality. According to them, it would be sufficient to think about or to see hundreds of animals locked into cages and pens, to understand that each of them has its own individuality and personality, and that, if we were able to make this connection, we would finally place them at the same level of any other domestic animal.

By acknowledging the individuality of all animals, we would have the power to stop the deindividuation process, thus reducing the emotional distance required to hurt and kill them.

Within the context of deindividuation, psychologists found out a specific relation between the number of individual victims of a certain event, and the emotional response of who is aware of it.

It emerged that, the more the number of victims is high, the more people tend to deindividuate the single victim, and to be less sympathetic. On the contrary, when the victim is just one single individual, human or animal, people usually feel much more compassion.

This explains how the majority of us do not pay much attention to the billion of animals slaughtered all over the world every year, but at the same time, we feel touched when we hear a news report concerning one single animal.

2.5.3 Dichotomisation

When we use this type of defence, we incorporate individuals within two strict different groups or categories, which are usually one opposed to the other.

Dichotomies are not just simple classifications, which can be useful to adopt in the every day life, in order to organise information. On the contrary, dichotomisation led us to separate the world into rigid and inflexible categories, allowing us, for instance, to mentally and emotionally separate individuals into groups and to feel significantly different emotions towards each of these groups.

Concerning meat, the mechanism of dichotomy moves into action when we place animals into two main categories: edible and non-edible animals. Additionally, we can create couples of subcategories within the two main ones. The subcategories related to the edible animals are those including domesticated animals and herbivores, while wild animals and carnivores are two subcategories belonging to the non-edible group. Moreover, people usually refuse to eat the animals they believe to be intelligent, like dolphins or monkeys, while eating without concerns those which are considered not so clever, like poultry or cows. Someone is also able to make distinctions between animals they consider tender, like rabbits, and animals considered to be goofy and weird, like turkeys. The ones belonging to the first category are considered non-edible, while the others are destined to take part of the edible group.

As for other myths and defence mechanisms, the main purpose of dichotomisation is to remove the discomfort which might emerge from the very fact of eating meat. Therefore, to make dichotomisation work, it is

sufficient that we believe these categories to be accurate, regardless of whether it is true or not.

Dichotomisation allows us to eat a certain animal on the pretext that, after all, it is not so intelligent or cute, so it can be categorised into the edible group, and then we should not feel guilty about it. On the contrary, we feel as we were justified.

Obviously, the categories in which we place all the different animals are not often very accurate, especially for what concerns the edible ones. For instance, researches have been proved that pigs are even more intelligent than dogs, but they are still considered stupid and dirty and, in some way, they deserve to be eaten.

In order to maintain the carnist system intact, we need to preserve all the false belief regarding the animals we eat, otherwise we could not consider them edible anymore.

2.6 Technology at the service of the cognitive triad

Nowadays, technology plays an important role within the context of the emotional and psychological separation between humans and animals. It contributes to the vision of animals as objects and abstractions, making them simple and soulless production units.

Thanks to modern technology, it is possible to produce meat on large-scale, even at world level. Billions of animals are slaughtered and eaten worldwide every year, and the modern techniques make sure that the majority of us have never witnessed, and never will, to a single stage in the meat production process.

Alongside the fact that this production process is something far away from us and our everyday reality, the massive meat production has made us more and less violent towards animals at the same time. In other words, we are capable of killing far more animals than in the past but, in parallel, we are much less comfortable in doing so. In this sense, the role of technology is that of increasing the distance between our moral values regarding meat consumption and our actual behaviour, helping the system to hide the first ones.

2.7 The identification process: empathy and disgust

“We love dogs and eat cows not because dogs and cows are fundamentally different—cows, like dogs, have feelings, preferences, and consciousness—but because our *perception* of them is different.”⁵ By distorting our perception of animals, the cognitive triad also prevent us from identifying ourselves with them. Identification is a very powerful process through which some individuals are able to see something of themselves within other individuals, and vice-versa. Of course, if we think of animals as inanimate beings, abstractions or as elements which can be placed into fixed and rigid categories, then we significantly reduce the identification process. As a consequence, the less we identify ourselves with the others, the more we will be unable to empathise with them since, according to the principle of similarity, individuals tend to feel empathy towards those who they perceive as more similar to them.

⁵ Joy Melanie, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*, San Francisco, Conari Press, 2009

The degree of empathy we feel towards somebody else, animals in this case, is regulated by the intensiveness through which we identify ourselves with them. Similarly, the amount of empathy makes a difference in establishing the level of disgust we would or would not feel in eating them.

In other words, the more empathic we feel in respect of a certain animal, the more we will be disgusted only to think of eating it. We could even consider it as something immoral.

Talking about morality, empathy and disgust are two strongly connected feelings, since empathy lies at the root of the moral sense, while disgust is categorised as a moral emotion. Therefore, it becomes clear how people can be literally disgusted at the prospect of eating something which they consider morally outrageous. Let us, for instance, consider again the example of the major part of rabbits and horses owners, except for the ones who are vegetarian. Almost certainly, they consider morally outrageous feeding on rabbit or horse meat but, at the same time, they regularly consume the meat of other animals without concerns. Their identification process works only in respect of two of the animal species which are considered to be edible.

In the first pages of her book, Joy illustrates the example of dog meat. Let us assume that someone cooked a meat-based meal for us and, in the middle of the dinner, he or she claims that we are actually eating dog meat – not cow, pig or chicken meat. Obviously, the reaction of the majority of us would be one of anger and disgust, and we would even start feeling sick. Then, assume that our host reveals us this was just a joke, and that the meat we are eating is just regular cow meat. After that, it is possible that we feel uncomfortable at the emotional level anyway, and it will take a while to get over of this feeling of discomfort.

Considering a dog and a cow, we are more prone to identify ourselves, and therefore to be more empathic, with the first, to the point that eating its meat could be considered an immoral action.

What changes is our perception. We react differently to different types of meat because our perception changes in relation to the species an animal belongs to.

2.8 The irrationality of carnism

“What I've found is that, because most people are deeply disturbed by and feel guilty about eating meat, and yet at the same time fear *not* eating it, they defend themselves from having to acknowledge such conflicting feelings. These *psychological defenses* include *denial* (“Animals don't really suffer when they're raised and killed for meat.”); *justification* (“Animals are meant to be eaten by humans.”); *dichotomization* (“I'd never eat a dog, but I love bacon.”); *avoidance* (“Don't tell me that; you'll ruin my meal.”); and, most importantly, *dissociation* (“If I think about the animal when I'm eating meat I feel disgusted.”). [...] When people break through their dissociation, the feelings that typically emerge are empathy—and therefore disgust. That's why people tend to be disgusted by the idea of eating “unusual” animals, such as dogs and gorillas; they haven't learned to dissociate from these kinds of meat. It's also why vegetarians usually find all meats disgusting.”⁶

Sometimes, it is possible that we could feel disgust for the meat of the animals belonging to the edible category, for which we should not have

⁶ Joy Melanie, *Strategic Action for Animals: A Handbook on Strategic Movement Building, Organizing, and Activism for Animal Liberation*, New York, Lantern Books, 2008

feelings like that. When that happens, disgust breaks down the defensive barriers created by the system. In this context, the defence mechanism of rationalisation enters the picture as a defence reserve, by making us rationalise what is irrational.

Through rationalisation we are able to give a rational explanation and interpretation to something which is not actually rational, thus allowing the system to remain intact.

Concerning carnism, the rational defence comes into play the times when the emotional distance we usually feel towards the animals we eat falls apart, and leaves room for disgust. When the process takes place and we happen to be disgusted by meat, we automatically tend to not consider the possibility that the cause could be the very fact that we are eating a living being. On the contrary, it is more likable that we deviate from our moral discomfort by blaming meat consistency or by stating that a certain type of meat could present a health risk. Joy's research showed how some interviewees claimed to be disgusted by animal products with high percentage of fats as bacon, while they were not disgusted by fat vegetable foods as fried potatoes. Others expressed their disgust towards rare meat, stating that they could never eat something that bleeds all over their plates.

It is interesting to notice how rational beings as humans are able to support such thoughts without realising their lack of logic. However, all the paradoxes which emerged from Joy's interviews make sense if we contextualise them within carnism, since its purpose is that of distorting the truth, giving people a limited view of what actually revolves around meat industry. Since the system itself is irrational in the first place, we interiorised this feature.

In general, it is cultural prejudice, rather than logic, the key element which explains why the different cultures see the eating of certain animals as a taboo. In some of them, animal species belonging to the macro-category of

edible animals are perceived as non-edible, thus proving that, in some cases, cultural prejudice can take over rationality. There is no logical explanation for which us in the West do not eat insects as scorpions, worms or grasshoppers – of course there are some exceptions, but the majority of us would be disgusted at the very thought of dead insects on their plates. In some parts of Brazil, certain domestic animals as chickens, which possess all the features of the edible animals, are treated as pets, just like our cats and dogs. Joy also gives the example of California, wondering why people choose to eat only the imported escargots, and not those already present in the country, which belong to the same species. In the light of Joy's researches, the only explanation we can give to those behaviours is that emotions are usually stronger than rationality when it comes to decide which animal species should be eaten and which not.

2.9 The scheme behind carnism

“Why must the system go to such lengths to block our empathy? Why all the psychological acrobatics? The answer is simple: because we care about animals, and we don't want them to suffer. And because we eat them. Our values and behaviors are incongruent, and this incongruence causes us a certain degree of moral discomfort. In order to alleviate this discomfort, we have three choices: we can change our values to match our behaviors, we can change our behaviors to match our values, or we can change our *perception* of our behaviors so that they *appear* to match our values. It is around this third option that our schema of meat is shaped. As long as we neither value unnecessary animal suffering nor stop eating animals, our

schema will distort our perceptions of animals and the meat we eat, so that we can feel comfortable enough to consume them.”⁷

Carnism is both a social and a psychological system. It is based on the so called carnist scheme, which includes the cognitive triad and the several defences and belief we discussed.

In general, a scheme is a mental classification system which interpret the information that we come across in our daily lives. Consequently, we see the world around us through their lens. The way in which we classify animals determines the way we relate to them. When we have to do with a piece of meat coming from an animal we do not classify as edible, we automatically picture the animal alive in our mind, tending to be disgusted at the thought of eating it. On the contrary, when we are about to eat meat coming from an animal classified as edible, what we see is simple food, thus skipping the perception process which connects the meat to the animal.

Our carnist scheme is the one that has the power to establish which animals are edible and which ones are not, defining the way we feel while eating – or not eating – a certain type of meat.

The most essential thing to realise about schemes is that they filter the information they classify. In a quite simplistic manner, Joy proposes a theory for which we are more prone to take account of and notice primarily what corroborates our pre-existing ideas. In this context, the carnist scheme dictates what we observe, our perception of it and the way we keep track of it.

During her teaching years, to confirm the assumption that we usually tend to stick to information which confirm our pre-existing beliefs, Joy asked all her students to compile a list outlining all the characteristics they attributed

⁷ Joy Melanie, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*, San Francisco, Conari Press, 2009

to dogs and pigs, and their relation with both species. The outcomes have always been quite similar for every class: dogs were usually classified as intelligent, affectionate, friendly and protective, while pigs were described as stupid, ugly and dirty. Dogs were seen as friends and family members, while pigs were considered just food. Then, Joy asked them to justify their answers. According to the majority of students, pigs were stupid by nature, even though researches have shown that they are even more intelligent than dogs. They stated pigs are dirty since they roll around in the mud, for they like to get dirty. Actually, pigs use to take mud baths in order to eliminate parasites and keep their skin clear. A pig in the wild or organically-reared would then wash itself with water and scratch on tree stumps, but the majority of them are forced to live in confined spaces, in which manure and filth accumulate, and the animals can do nothing about it.

Students said that dogs can be dirty too, but not as always as pigs. Then, they thought about it and admitted the pigs they saw, usually only in pictures, were never really dirty. Joy asked them how they could possibly know for sure that dogs have emotions, and students provided her with some examples concerning their own dogs. Subsequently, she asked them if pigs had emotions. Given their positive answer, Joy asked why we eat pigs and not dogs. Someone said we do not eat dogs since dogs are individuals and have a personality. However, Joy made them think about the fact that there is no logical reason to assume that dogs have a proper personality and pigs do not. When she asked them where did they get all their information concerning pigs, almost all of them replied they got them mostly from television and society in general. Then, students claimed they would feel guilty about eating pigs if they considered pigs to be intelligent and sensitive. However, they stated that pigs are reared to be eaten, and that is just the way things are.

Throughout this conversation, some students admitted that sometimes they have come across information which discredited the common ground for which pigs are stupid and dirty. Still, that information has rapidly been forgotten, since the carnist scheme always tend to restore all the pre-existing ideas we have concerning animal categories and roles.

The fact that the carnist scheme is so capable of distorting information ensures the fact that we usually do not notice several absurdities behind this system. It becomes clear if we think, for example, of all the advertisings that we happen to see on television or to read in magazines, publicising the products of some industry within the meat sector. Usually, those commercials show us happy animals which are free to graze and run in the open air. We probably hear a voiceover claiming that those animals are fed only with carefully selected natural and organic fodder. Not to mention all the publicity campaigns showing smiley animal figures which cannot wait to be eaten.

Obviously, such advertisings provide a total distortion of the truth, since all those sponsored meat factories are part of the intensive livestock farming sector, a reality far from farms, fields and nature, although they want consumers to believe otherwise.

2.10 The invisible animals

The reality behind the factories from which we buy our meat is much more different from the one provided by media. The majority of the farm animals are not joyous animals which run around large and grassy areas and sleep into comfortable stables. Despite this widespread representation, small

farms based on extensive breeding are a rarity nowadays. On the contrary, it is much more likely that almost all the animals we eat had spent their entire life in an enclosed and confined space, crammed on one another, risking infectious diseases, and being treated with violence. As we already said, the main purpose of the intensive livestock farming is that of producing their product at the lowest possible expense and for the highest possible gain. The more animals are killed per-minute, the more profits are made. Taking care of them constitutes an obstacle to profits, therefore the thousands of animals held in these structures are treated as production facilities, with no one to cure and feed them in an adequate manner. It is not unusual for them to die even before reaching slaughterhouses.

Invisibility is a great mean used by carnism. Meat factories are usually located in isolated areas and, obviously, we are not allowed to have access to any of them. Because of this, the great part of videos which testify the conditions of livestock farming comes from investigations held in secret and without any authorization. It seems that carnism does not want us to witness to how the system really works and to possibly start questioning its methods. As long as the majority of us is disinformed about the subject, there will never be awareness about the reality of meat production and an overcoming of the schemes of carnism.

In a certain way, we – or at least some of us – have a certain degree of awareness: we know that a large portion of meat production system is a dirty business, but we prefer not to dig too deeply into the issue.

2.10.2 Pigs

If we observe pig's behaviour in their natural environment, we will notice, for instance, that they are not as lazy as the conventional wisdom thinks. On the contrary, they are able to travel even fifty kilometres in a day and to create very strong relationships with their own kind. They are usually friendly and affectionate even with humans, thus becoming a potential great pet – indeed, we could even know someone who chose to take a pig as pet. However, the majority of pigs is destined to spent almost all life stuck in farm sheds, and to eventually find themselves crammed into overcrowded trucks heading to slaughterhouses.

In intensive livestock farming or, as Joy defines them, CAFOs (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation), pigs are castrated and their tail is cut off without anaesthesia, soon after their birth. This practice became necessary, since certain pigs can get to the point of developing a sort of neurotic behaviour and bite off the tails of their fellows, if they find themselves in situations of extreme psychological stress – as it happens within the context of CAFOs. This condition has been called Porcine Stress Syndrome (PSS), and it is comparable to the human post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Pigs tend to be driven insane, as it happens to men who experienced solitary confinement or tortures in prison.

For what concerns pigs born into CAFOs, they are allowed to be breast-fed only for few weeks, while in nature this practice lasts for months. However, some of them are destined to die during the first weeks: there are too many animals, and the limited number of employees is unable to provide the proper care.

Usually, the facilities which host the animals are filthy, soaked in noxious gases generated mostly from pig's manure. As a consequence, both animals

and workers usually suffer from chronic respiratory distress and pulmonary diseases in general.

When pigs are conducted in slaughterhouses, the operators try to cram as many animals as possible inside the trucks, in order to save money. This overcrowded journey can last hours or even days, and it is probable that some animals die along the way. Then, those who survive and get to the slaughterhouse should be tasered before being killed but, sometimes, it may happen that some of them are still alive while their throat is cut off, or even later, when they are dropped into boiling water in order to remove the fur. This is often caused by the fact that the stunning and sticking processes have to be as fast as possible in order to slaughter the highest number of animals and, therefore, they are not always properly accomplished.

2.10.2 Cows

Within a natural environment, cows are usually meek, sociable, playful and particularly emotive, enough to develop a whole series of gestures and vocalizations in order to communicate their psychological and emotional state to their similar. Usually, most of their daily routine is based on eating grass and ruminating.

Obviously, things change when we refer to cows bred and raised in CAFOs, even though cows are luckier than pigs, in a sense. Indeed, cows are usually allowed to live in the open air for about six months, a period in which they are bred by unrelated farmers, a practice quite inexpensive.

Usually, practices as castration, marking and dehorning are carried out without the application of anaesthesia, as in the case of pigs.

The natural weaning of a veil lasts about from six to twelve months, while in CAFOs it takes place within six months. It involves a great stress-related psychological factor for the animals. After weaning, veils are placed into tight pens, and forced to consume feed consisting of medicinal products and supplements, in order to fatten them up within the shortest possible time.

When cows are about to be slaughtered, they are electrically prodded, stunned, drained of blood, gutted and skinned. As with pigs, some cows can be not completely stunned, thus constituting a danger to workers, since they could struggle, get rid of hooks and fall on operators. All too often this does happen, as the journalist Joby Warrick explained in his article published in the Washington Post *They Die Piece by Piece*. "It takes 25 minutes to turn a live steer into steak at the modern slaughterhouse where Ramon Moreno works. For 20 years, his post was "second-legger", a job that entails cutting hocks off carcasses as they whirl past at a rate of 309 an hour. The cattle were supposed to be dead before they got to Moreno. But too often they weren't. «They blink. They make noises» he said softly. «The head moves, the eyes are wide and looking around». Still Moreno would cut. On bad days, he says, dozens of animals reached his station clearly alive and conscious. Some would survive as far as the tail cutter, the belly ripper, the hide puller. «They die» said Moreno, «piece by piece»."⁸

For what concerns dairy cattle, they are bred in dairy enterprises and can either spend their life chained in dark and small stables or in overcrowded pens for fattening. Cows are hooked up to milking machines most of the time, injected with growth hormones and artificially inseminated in order to maximise milk production. All these processes stress the animals and overload their bodies to the point that they can experience inflammations and infections in the udders such as mastitis. On account of these strenuous

⁸ Warrick Joby, *They Die Piece by Piece*, The Washington Post, 2001

activities, their diet has to be supplemented with protein-rich fodders, which are usually meat-based and even composed of bone-meal.

However, the leading cause of their emotional stress is probably due to the fact that they are separated from the veils soon after their birth, so that the milk can be destined to human consumption. Under natural conditions, veils are breastfed for a year, while in dairy industries they are immediately taken away from cows. Male veils are destined to be slaughtered and to become calf meat, while females are exploited to produce dairy products in their turn.

The natural average lifespan of a cow is about twenty years old, while the intensive sector considers them to be unproductive even since they reach four or five years of age, thus sending them to slaughterhouses.

2.10.3 Poultry

Probably, chickens are the farm animals towards which we feel more detached. We usually consider them quite ugly and stupid, so much that some of us could even think they do not feel any sort of physical pain. Actually, they are intelligent and sociable animals. We could even hear of someone who has chickens or turkeys as pets, claiming that those birds play with them and look for affection just like any cat or dog.

However, poultry is the second most widely consumed meat worldwide – the first one is pork.

Under natural conditions, life expectancy is about ten years for chickens, while in CAFOs they only live a few weeks before being slaughtered for their meat. This is mainly due to the fact that chickens are fed with fodders filled with drugs, supplements and growth hormones, thus growing exponentially

within a very short period of time. It is not unusual for them to have their legs dislocated or snapped, due to this unnatural weight which also causes chronic joint pain.

Chickens spend their short life in overcrowded sheds. Having no room to breathe, they can develop psychotic behaviours and even turn into cannibals. Usually, most part of the beak is cut off with a burning blade, to ensure that the volatiles do not peck each other to death. It is a very risky procedure, which can cause infections and neurological diseases.

Within poultry industry's slaughterhouses, production is even more rapid than the one concerning cows and pigs. Besides, poultry are usually still conscious when operators put them on the manure belt and their throat is cut off.

Laying hens are usually born in hatchers and exploited for egg production. Male chicks have almost no economic value for the industry and, as a consequence, they are often shredded alive in meat grinders or even directly thrown into garbage bags. On the contrary, all female chicks are stuffed into battery cages in which they are forced to stay as long as they are able to lay eggs. Intensive farmed chickens lay much more eggs compared to the extensively reared ones, and when they are no longer able to produce a profitable amount, they are sent directly to slaughterhouses. Usually, it happens when chickens are barely one year old.

2.10.4 Aquatic animals

Fishes are probably the animals towards which we feel most detached. Some of us do not even consider them as living beings composed of meat, and it is not so uncommon to hear somebody asking a vegetarian if he or she eats

fish – being then quite surprised and confused when the answer is negative. Sometimes, if a vegetarian refuses a seafood dish, he or she could even hear the words “You can eat it, it’s fish, not meat!”.

Many of us do not think about fishes, shellfishes and crustaceans as proper animals, made of flesh and having a nervous system. We usually do not even take into account the fact that they could feel pain or have any sort of intelligence, even though researches conducted by neurobiologists have amply demonstrated that. Besides, we are not used to consider aquaculture on a par with the intensive farming of land animals, although both systems cause extreme suffering to animals and significant damages to our environment. Aquacultures are basically the CAFOs of marine species. In this case as well, animals are reared and crammed in overcrowded pens which can be affected by the proliferation of diseases and parasites. To control their growth, fishes are provided with hormones and antibiotics, substances which inevitably break down in the marine ecosystem.

Different killing methods can be applied to farmed fishes: electric shock, freezing while they are still alive, asphyxiation or impalement. For what concerns fishes captured through commercial fishing, they are usually left out of water until they suffocate. Commercial fishing is responsible for the extinction of a large amount of marine and non-marine species worldwide, having a great environmental impact. Indeed, the most widely used fishing practise is that of trawl fishing or bottom trawling, which takes place by dragging a large net underneath the water line.

“Imagine being served a plate of sushi. But this plate also holds all of the animals that were killed for your serving of sushi. The plate might have to be five feet across.”⁹ In addition to the targeted fishes, the nets accidentally capture a huge amount of other different marine species – dolphins,

⁹ Safran Foer Jonathan, *Eating Animals*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2009

seabirds, sea turtles, and other fish species. Commercial fishing constitutes a great and serious danger to marine biodiversity, representing a sort of undersea deforestation.

People usually tend to remain quite impassive in front of violence linked to seafood production. Some of us could feel uncomfortable or even traumatized in witnessing to the killing of a pig or a cow, and then being completely indifferent to the killing of a fish. According to Joy, the invisibility process usually adopted by the carnist system is secondary if we take into account marine species. I think the explanation to our indifference is quite simple: sea animals are among the most different species in relation to humans. Molluscs and crustaceans appear to us as some kind of insects and, together with fishes, they do not emit any sort of sound when they experience physical pain. Thus, they appear to us more as proper fruits of the sea, which we pick up in the same way we would pick fruits from a tree.

2.11 Witness and dissociation

“Think about it: virtually every atrocity in the history of humankind was enabled by a populace that turned away from a reality that seemed too painful to face, while virtually every revolution for peace and justice has been made possible by a group of people who chose to bear witness and demanded that others bear witness as well.”¹⁰

Joy strongly supports the power of collective witness, as opposed to collective dissociation. When we bear witness, we empathize and bridge the gap within our conscience, the one which prevent us from linking meat to its

¹⁰ Joy Melanie, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*, San Francisco, Conari Press, 2009

animal origin, and that allows carnism to last and persist. According to Joy, bearing witness connects us to the truth and unmask the violence the system tries to hide from us. Furthermore, collective witness is able to fill the gap within social consciousness, so that the public can be aware of what happens behind the system, and social practices can finally reflect social values. Since witness is a great threat to carnism, the system is structured in order to obstruct and avoid this process. On the contrary, collective dissociation is one of the main defences adopted by carnism. It is able to desensitize and emotionally disconnect us from our actions – in this case, from the very fact of consuming meat, thus dissociating us enough to support killings committed by other individuals. On account of this logic, dissociation makes us unable to operate according to what we genuinely feel. This implies that the more we bear witness, the more we are integrated both on a personal level, since we reconnect with our internal experience, and on a social level, since we connect our internal experiences with one another. Through these processes, we are able to cancel dissociation and try to build a more integrated society. However, a great part of people refuses to bear witness in relation to carnism. “Becoming aware of the intense suffering of billions of animals, and of our own participation in that suffering, can bring up painful emotions: sorrow and grief for the animals; anger at the injustice and deception of the system; despair at the enormity of the problem; fear that trusted authorities and institutions are, in fact, untrustworthy; and guilt for having contributed to the problem. Bearing witness means choosing to suffer. Indeed, empathy is literally “feeling with.” Choosing to suffer is particularly difficult in a culture that is addicted to comfort—a culture that teaches that pain should be avoided whenever possible and that ignorance is bliss. We can reduce our resistance to witnessing by valuing authenticity over personal pleasure, and integration

over ignorance.”¹¹ According to Joy, we have difficulty in bearing witness concerning carnism because truth is hard to accept. Some of us also feel powerless in the face of a such wide system, believing that our personal contribution would not affect the process in any way. Besides, Joy states that people tend to reject to witness the truth behind carnism because if we felt guilty and unauthorised to kill and eat animals, we would undermine our very human identity and sense of superiority towards all the other living beings, thus being no longer on the top of food chain. We would be forced to accept an interconnection between us and the rest of the natural environment.

Finally, the ultimate reason why we oppose to witness carnism is because we are worried and prefer to look the other way, thus creating a paradox. In order to overcome this paradox, we need to extend to ourselves the same compassion we feel towards animals, namely to witness the truth behind carnism while being witnesses of ourselves: we have to see ourselves as victims of the system. At the same time, it is essential to understand that we have the power to make our own choices, entirely guided by conscience and outside this coercive system.

At some point, Joy cited one of the most famous sentences of Paul McCartney: “If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be vegetarian”. The point of her argument is that people do not get to the bottom of the reality behind carnism and, most of all, do not want to know the truth, not fully reflecting about the fact that the meat they consume once belonged to a living being. It is what she calls *knowing without knowing*. I believe that people are more aware than she assumes. Eating meat is a completely conscious choice if we are fully aware of what happens behind

¹¹ Joy, Melanie, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows: An Introduction to Carnism*, San Francisco, Conari Press, 2009

the walls of the intensive livestock farming system and, once we are informed about the facts, there is no guarantee that we will stop consuming meat. I personally know people who became vegetarians after being properly informed, but that subsequently go back to eat meat, while others simply kept consuming it without any concern. Sometimes it is just a matter of habits, willpower and, most of all, of taste. As I said before, I think that taste is the most powerful variable when we talk about meat: the majority of us loves its flavour and, usually, when we think of our favourite dishes, almost certainly they are composed of meat. Throughout the years, I head dozens of people claiming how much they feel sorry for what happens to animals – many of them tried to adopt a meatless diet – but, in the end, they were unable to give up the taste of meat and their habits. It is undoubtedly true that bearing witness is fundamental in order to increase people's awareness and consciousness – every day worldwide hundreds of people who collide with the truth about meat industry decide to stop feeding the system and renounce to enjoy meat flavour. However, there are other thousands of people which decide to continue to consume meat anyway. I think that sometimes it has much more to do with our personal conscience and our degree of concerning about animals and the future of the planet, rather than our effective knowledge of the facts – and, in my opinion, this goes beyond the system per se. Once we are aware, our food choices represent the ethical and moral values we stand for, and for a great amount of people to comply with their desire for meat is simply more relevant than all the implications and consequences of that specific choice. What matters most is that we need to be informed, and we have the moral duty to inform the others, but awareness does not always necessarily imply the abandon of the system.

3. An alternative is possible

3.1 The ethic towards animals

“Once upon a time the dominant ethic toward domestic animals, rooted in the demands of husbandry and responding to the fundamental problem of life feeding on sentient life, was not don’t eat (of course), but neither was it don’t care. Rather: eat with care. [...] The eat with care ethic lived and evolved for thousands of years. It became many different ethical systems inflected by the diverse cultures in which it appeared: in India it led to prohibitions on eating cows, in Islam and Judaism it led to mandates for quick slaughter, on the Russian tundra it led Yakuts to claim the animals wanted to be killed. But it was not to last. The eat with care ethic didn’t become obsolete over time, but died suddenly. It was killed, actually.”¹²

There once was a dominant ethic in respect of domestic animals, namely the fact that people had to take care of the animals they ate. Of course, it was an ethic based on business rather than on moral. Animals were ensured with food and safekeeping and they served their owners in return. This kind of ethic perpetuated throughout thousands of years, evolving with different characteristics and features according to the cultural differences of the areas in which it developed, let us think about the prohibition to eat cow meat in India. However, at a certain point ethics has been almost completely abandoned and substituted with something else.

Some sort of ancient slaughterhouses started to develop between 1820s and 1830s in the United States. Professional butchers were being replaced by a whole team of workers, each one of them having his specific task. Every

¹² Safran Foer Jonathan, *Eating Animals*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2009

single stage of slaughter – exsanguination, limbs and tail transection, skinning, evisceration, etc. – was relied on a single worker. All this could be comparable to an assembly line.

Meat processes were empowered towards the end of 1800s, thanks to the advances within the sector of rail transportation and the invention of refrigerated lorries, which allowed to converge a great amount of livestock coming from increasingly long distances. “Today, it isn't unusual for meat to travel almost halfway around the globe to reach your supermarket. The average distance our meat travels hovers around fifteen hundred miles.”¹³

However, until the early 1900s, the majority of animals were still reared in farms and ranches. It was before we decided that we wanted to eat more meat, at a little cost compared to its amount. In order to do that, intensive meat industries started to supplant small-scale and organic farms.

3.2 Alternatives

Even though the intensive livestock farming sector took over for many decades, the reality of small ranchers did not completely disappear.

In several chapters of his book *Eating Animals*, published in 2009, the novelist and animal rights activist Jonathan Safran Foer interviewed the owners of some American organic farms and confronted them to the practices applied within CAFOs.

One of the most interesting interviews is that with Nicolette, the vegetarian wife of Bill Niman, founder of the Niman Ranch, established in 1969, in which cows and pigs are reared.

¹³ Safran Foer, Jonathan, *Eating Animals*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2009

Nicolette knew every single animal within the farm and was perfectly able to understand and satisfy their needs. She stated that farmers should guarantee a worthy living standard to their animals, allowing them to lie down on meadow, mate and raise their babies in a natural way. It is almost as if animals have concluded an agreement with humans, in which farmers commit themselves to guarantee to animals a better life in comparison to the one they would have in the wild – in this regard, Nicolette told that she happened to leave one of the gates open on several occasions, and none of all the animals walked away. After all, within the perimeter of the farm they are provided with water, hay and pasture. Throughout history, the great majority of farmers mentally felt the obligation to treat their animals properly, while nowadays this traditional care has been replaced with industrial breeding methods. The confidence and familiarity existing between a traditional farmer and his animals has been replaced by impersonal systems which host thousands of animals, which are therefore considered as simple machineries. In this sense, the farmer's responsibility towards his animals seems to be forgotten, and even denied.

Despite the fact that she is a vegetarian, Nicolette is not against the very fact of eating meat. Actually, she is against CAFOs practices, but considers meat consumption as a completely normal practise – how would Joy react to a vegetarian who states that eating meat is something normal?

Nicolette focuses on the fact that activists should encourage and support alternative patterns, as the one concerning sustainable farming, rather than trying to convince people to stop eating meat at all. I quite concur with this view. Attempting to convince people to adopt a completely meatless diet in order to solve the problem of the intensive livestock farming is quite utopian and unrealistic, at least for the moment. It would be many years and several generations before we could even think about a revolution of such gigantic proportions and consequences. In this regard, Safran Foer states: "If we are

at all serious about ending factory farming, then the absolute least we can do is stop sending checks to the absolute worst abusers. For some, the decision to eschew factory-farmed products will be easy. For others, the decision will be a hard one. To those for whom it sounds like a hard decision (I would have counted myself in this group), the ultimate question is whether it is worth the inconvenience. We know, at least, that this decision will help prevent deforestation, curb global warming, reduce pollution, save oil reserves, lessen the burden on rural America, decrease human rights abuses, improve public health, and help eliminate the most systematic animal abuse in world history.”¹⁴ For now, I think that activists should take into consideration that a great part of population would never be intentioned to give up on meat. They should also aim to spread a more sustainable way of eating animal products, and this can be done by convincing people to rely on small farms, thus switching from intensive methods to extensive methods. Obviously, this implies a substantial reduction of the quantity of meat consumed by each individual. However, intensive livestock farming is not something sustainable in the long term anyway, and sooner or later it will be doomed to disappear – otherwise, the planet will.

3.3 Food and memories

“Just how destructive does a culinary preference have to be before we decide to eat something else? If contributing to the suffering of billions of animals that live miserable lives and (quite often) die in horrific ways isn't motivating, what would be? If being the number one contributor to the most serious threat facing the planet (global warming) isn't enough, what is? And

¹⁴ Safran Foer, Jonathan, *Eating Animals*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2009

if you are tempted to put off these questions of conscience, to say not now, then when?”¹⁵

Our food choices are made more complicated by the fact that we usually do not eat on our own. We do not just feed. When we eat, we socialise, create social bonds and collect memories. Food, memories and family have always had a great connection. If we think about our dearest memories, or simply the present highlights of our week, we would probably think about the moment we go out for lunch eating sushi with our friends, or the times when we cook a probably meat-based meal with our family on Sundays. Most of us would even think that those occasions would not be the same if we renounced to any of those foods, and it would not just be a loss concerning taste. Indeed, in our view, this would probably represent a sort of cultural memory loss. Although the intensive farming can be considered something rationally wrong, food itself is not something rational: it is mostly composed of culture, identity and habits. However, as Safran Foer states, we should start to try to find new flavours and foods connected to our memories – this can be done also by trying to eat industrial animal products as little as possible. When we eat, we inevitably pick a side, and decide the relationship we are going to have with animals, the environment and the global market. Not taking a decision, namely eating like the majority of people, is actually a stance for itself.

¹⁵ Safran Foer, Jonathan, *Eating Animals*, New York, Little, Brown and Company, 2009

Conclusions

Livestock farming has been a fundamental feature concerning human societies throughout the course of history, from the moment when humans started to domesticate animals in order to improve their living conditions. However, especially over the last decades, livestock farming has exponentially intensified, allowing industrial animal products as meat, milk and eggs to become cheaper and more available at the same time, thus increasing more and more their demand and, therefore, their consumption. Nowadays the widespread of the intensive system is continuously giving a great deal of concern on issues such as animal welfare, food safety and, most of all, environmental impacts. The intensive zootechnical system is responsible for an inhumane treatment of farm animals, and for being the main cause of the worsening of global warming, crucially contributing to air, land and water pollution, and to a reduction in biodiversity. Factory farming is not a sustainable activity, and actions must be taken in order to prevent a proper and full-scale environmental catastrophe. In this regard, I think that activists focus too much on the very fact of consuming meat, trying to convince people to abandon animal products and to start adopting a vegetarian or even vegan diet, rather than inform them that alternatives do exist. Most of the times, it turns out to be an unsuccessful approach, since food – and consequently meat – does not represent simple nourishment. It is a combination of culture, emotions, memories, tradition, habits and taste, and the majority of people finds it difficult, if not impossible, to renounce to any of these elements, which are strongly present in meat-based dishes.

In view of this, I think activists should highlight the fact that there exist much more sustainable alternatives to CAFOs, which does not imply the total exclusion of meat from the diet, but rather its reduction: organic farms using

an extensive farming system. We all should try to reduce our contribution to the intensive livestock farming system as much as possible, and start to favour and prioritise a more sustainable way of obtaining meat and dairy products. It would constitute a radical and positive transition for us and the whole planet, a transition which must be implemented before it gets too late.

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