

1967 - More About Milk

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The facts of dairying

Someone once said on the radio that there is no more unnatural animal than a dairy cow. She is unnatural because man has turned the original cow into something which nature never intended her to be. By devious devices we have turned her into a milk machine — and it is these devices and the consequences in which we are particularly interested.

Mammals produce milk to feed the young of the species up to the age of weaning, when the milk ceases to flow. This is what happens in nature; why does it not happen with the dairy cow?

Various methods are used to thwart the natural course of events, so that much more milk is produced by the cow than would be the case if nature had her way. This alone might not be objectionable provided the methods used did not cause suffering, did not insult normal and natural instincts, and did not require slaughter.

A cow cannot produce milk unless she is first made pregnant. This is done, mostly by artificial insemination, at a time to suit human market requirements. When the calf is born it is taken from its mother, sometimes at birth, more usually a few days later. If mother and calf were left alone together, then as the calf approached the age of weaning, the mother's milk would begin to decrease and finally the flow would cease.

But this is not what we require. We require the mother's milk for ourselves, in as large a volume as possible. So the calf is taken away.

Bull calves — the greater proportion of calves born in the national dairy herd — were usually slaughtered for veal, but nowadays the number killed so young is decreasing, because more and more are being imprisoned in broiler pens for intensive rearing into beef.

Forceful separation of mother and baby calf brings a certain amount of anguish to both, and a cow will often cry out bitterly for some days and nights after her calf is taken from her.

By milking the cow dry at each milking, the flow of milk — or the lactation period — is prolonged for some months. The volume of milk is increased by feeding her with concentrates and special feeds.

To start a new lactation, the procedure is repeated; the cow is again made pregnant, her calf taken away, and the milk-inducing technique again put into operation.

At the end of her useful milk-producing life the cow is usually thanked for her services to mankind by being killed off and her body sold as pieces of beef.

These methods are necessary if dairying is to be carried on as a commercial concern — and no one is much concerned to carry it on in any other way.

In 1961, the *Daily Express* printed an article in favour of the broiler pen, and the author asked: "How many people who object to this (broiler) method know that last year 800,000 calves were slaughtered within a few days of birth, largely so that we could have their mothers' milk?" Since then, the number slaughtered very young has gone down by half by 1965.

The connection between milk and the demand for beef was pointed out in the *Daily Mail* in December, 1965: "...we are moving into an era where the calf is the primary object and the milk the by-product. ...The beef-milk expansion could easily lead to an increase of 500,000 cows by 1970. They would produce approximately the same number of calves *each year*, mostly for beef..."

The moral issue raised by the dairy farm is therefore this: is it right to use animals in this way, as though they are machines without nerves or feelings — even motherly feelings — just so that we can have the mothers' milk and the calves' body?

To put it another way, because we claim to be more intelligent and more noble than animals, we cannot escape the obligation to act in a manner befitting our higher intelligence and our greater nobility. This is the meaning of *noblesse oblige*— that we diminish *ourselves* when we inflict upon others, men or animals, unnecessary hurt and suffering. We inflict suffering upon animals and we inflict damage upon ourselves.

The Context of the Moral Issue

Ethical consideration arise from the context of certain inward and subjective promptings which lead certain people to conclude that the relationship between men and animals has more significance than might at first sight appear. Such people believe that men and animals share this planet for what is basically the same purpose. That is, that on a different but parallel path, animals like men are here for some evolutionary purpose. We cannot put that purpose into precise words, but there are guiding lines. We know, from inward promptings, that sometimes we are living a better kind of life than we are living at other times. It is justifiable and correct to take as a starting point that actions which are selfish or self-interested do not result in raising the mental or spiritual level at which we live. Further, that certain kinds of action which precisely because they are unselfish and compassionate do result in raising our mental and spiritual climate, and do result in a more satisfactory inward life.

There is nothing which so reveals the character of a man as the way in which he behaves toward those over whom he possesses power — the Nazi concentration camp is an extreme example. If we take this one stage further we can see that over the world of animals — sometimes called our lesser brethren — we have by our superior intelligence obtained almost absolute power. Because we have so much power over them, they are like a litmus paper dipped into our character. How we treat them must reveal a good deal about our nature.

In general, we act towards animals with selfish interests in mind. This is not true over the entire field, but it is true over a very wide area. We use them so that the end-product is something we want, regardless altogether of what may be the true role of these creatures on earth. Such thinking does not stand still — the growth of factory farming is an example.

A Humane Alternative

Behind all forms of consideration for animals there is the feeling that the relationship between men and animals has a genuine significance for man himself. Different people respond to this feeling in differing ways — the vegetarian, for example, responds by trying to make his food as humane as possible. The process is a continuing one, there is no rigidity, but there is direction. This is the reason for the emergence of efforts to produce and humane alternative to animal milk for human consumption.

In the past, vegetarians accepted animal milk as a legitimate vegetarian food simply because the facts were not properly known; and because, therefore, animal milk *appeared* to be free from slaughter. But we can see, once we have examined the facts, that commercially-produced milk is as much a product of slaughter as meat itself. We can see that "Why Kill for Food?" incorporates "Why Kill for Milk?" We can see that there are not two separate questions, one of meat and one of milk, but that there is one question only — the question of the meat-milk continuum. The emergence of humane alternatives to animal milk is making it easier to accept the consequences, but habits are slow to change. Many vegetarians even not appear to be stuck with milk in much the same way that smokers are stuck with cigarettes.

Rigidity of outlook is a dangerous state. Life is a flux, and it is the direction in which we move that really counts. Milk did not at one time present us with a problem, but having learned the facts, it *does* present us with an inescapable problem. The consequences of ignoring it do not merely add to the burden of suffering and violent death inflicted upon animals — they prevent our own spiritual evolution.