COMS 1301 Sample Speech

Leo Tolstoy once said “A man can live and be healthy without killing animals for food; therefore, if he eats meat, he participates in taking animal life merely for the sake of his appetite” (Tolstoy, n.d.). Many people and organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) agree. According to PETA, over 42 million cows are slaughtered in the United States each year for consumption and treated cruelly throughout their life (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals [PETA], n.d.b). But eating meat is not just an ethical concern; meat-based diets also affect human health and the environment. Animals are frequently pumped with artificial hormones and antibiotics—activities which potentially threaten human health (Ballaro & Sprague, 2009). Additionally, American livestock consume “five times as much grain as the U.S. human population” (Corliss, 2002). Conversely, the same amount of grain “could feed 800 million people” (Corliss, 2002). To counteract these problems, people must stop eating meat and switch to a vegetarian lifestyle.

People choose a vegetarian diet for many reasons, including health. Heart disease is still the number one killer in the United States and more than 900,000 Americans die of it each year (Carter, 2006). The Mayo Clinic notes that atherosclerosis—the most common form of cardiovascular disease—is “…often caused by an unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, being overweight and smoking” (Mayo Clinic staff, 2011). Diet and nutrition are two of the factors that we can most easily control to reduce our risk of heart disease and heart attacks. Meat consumption plays a large role in heart health. PETA says that “meat, eggs, and dairy products are high in cholesterol and saturated fat” (PETA, n.d.a). According to Kara Pound (2010), Americans consume
eight ounces of meat per day, which is 45% more than the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends. In the past 50 years, consumption of meat has quintupled and is expected to double by 2050 (Engelhart & Kohler, 2010). These numbers have frightening implications. A federal study of AARP members found that men with heavy red meat consumption increased their chances of death by heart disease by 27% and women raised their chances by 50% (Aubrey, 2009).

Food-borne illnesses are also a concern for meat-eaters. Many of the meats we eat are contaminated in the processing plants where they are assembled for grocery stores. According to federal health estimates, “foodborne diseases sicken 76 million people, cause 325,000 hospitalizations, and kill 5,000 Americans every year” (“Slaughterhouses and Processing”, 2009). Additionally, in 1996, the USDA found alarmingly high amounts of beef were contaminated with numerous diseases, including salmonella (“Slaughterhouses and Processing”, 2009).

While many may dismiss these numbers, the fact remains that meat-borne illnesses have a devastating effect on people’s lives. Barbara Kowalcyk is one example. In July of 2001, Barbara, her husband, and their 2-year-old son, Kevin, had hamburgers during a family outing. Kevin soon became violently ill and after twelve days of suffering, the young child died. The culprit was meat tainted with E. coli O157:H7 or Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome, a condition with no known cure. In a quest for answers, Barbara came across large oversights in the food industry and began petitioning for Kevin’s Law, which calls for better food safety legislation (Kowalcyk, 2009).

These numbers are alarming and raise the issue of animal treatment on meat farms. Animals are forced to live in harsh conditions which in turn upset the quality of
meat. Many are kept in cages so small that they cannot turn around or lie down. They are also subject to numerous painful experiences including branding, dehorning, and castration, often without painkillers (PETA, “Cows”, n.d.b). Animals are also deprived of exercise and “fed drugs to fatten them faster and keep them alive in conditions that could otherwise kill them” (PETA, “Factory farming”, n.d.c). It is also estimated that 90% of broiler chickens have difficulties walking due to genetic manipulation (“Animal welfare”, 2009).

Regardless of how one feels about animal treatment on farms, studies do show a link between animal treatment and quality and safety of meat products. According to Lewis Smith (2005), “It boils down to the fact that when livestock are unduly stressed, they undergo physiological changes that can increase their chances of catching and spreading diseases. And the quality of their meat may decline, as well” (p. 2). The high stress levels of animals tend to make meat dark, firm, and dry. This meat often lacks taste, spoils easily, and is more likely to cause food poisoning or other illness (Chambers & Grandin, 2001).

Going vegetarian not only prevents cruelty to animals, but also helps the environment. Livestock accounts for 18% of greenhouse gas emissions and play a major factor in worldwide deforestation, habitat loss, freshwater depletion, and pollution (Engelhart & Kohler, 2010). According to Michael Bluejay’s guide on vegetarianism, “Since 1967, the rate of deforestation has been one acre every five seconds. For every acre cleared for urban development, seven acres are cleared to graze animals or grow feed for them” (Bluejay, n.d.). This level of consumption is devastating to the environment, but eliminating meat from one’s diet can help. Some studies suggest that
switching to a vegan diet is a more effective way to curb climate change than driving a
hybrid car (Engelhart & Kohler, 2010). Michael Bluejay (n.d.) also says “A nationwide
switch to a pure vegetarian diet would allow us to cut our oil imports by 60%.”

People, animals, and the environment all benefit from a vegetarian diet. Better
health, safer conditions for animals, and reduced greenhouse emissions are just a few
reasons to make the switch. Eliminating meat from one’s diet is difficult for some, but
the choice is well worth the effort.
References


