



A Meaningful Life

by **Matt Ball**

**Making
a Real Difference
in Today's World**

*Everyone who wants to make
the world a better place
faces the same challenge:*

*Opening people's hearts
and minds to new ideas.*

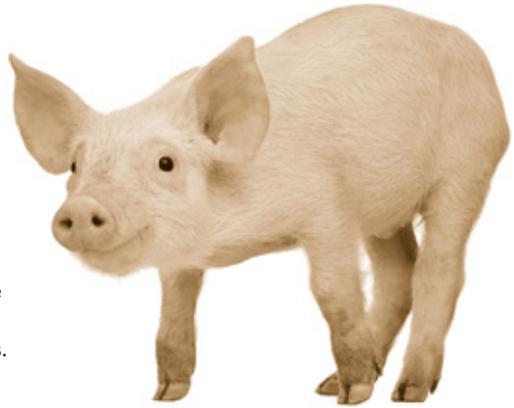


The Bottom Line

Those who are successful in making the world a better place are students of human nature. They understand that each of us is born with a certain intrinsic nature, raised to follow specific beliefs, and taught to hold particular prejudices. Over time, we discover new “truths” and abandon others, altering our attitudes, principles, and values.

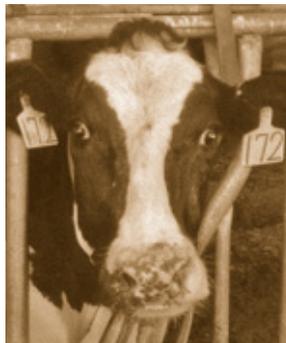
Even though we can recognize that our belief system changes over time, at any given point, most of us believe our current opinions are “right”—our convictions well founded, our actions justified. We each want to think we are, at heart, a good person. Even when, years later, we find ourselves reflecting on previously held beliefs with a sense of bemusement (or worse), it rarely occurs to us that we may someday feel the same way toward the attitudes we *now* hold.

Effective advocates understand this evolution of people’s views, and, furthermore, recognize they can’t *change* anyone’s mind. No matter how elegant an argument, real and lasting change comes only when others are free to explore new perspectives. Of course, there is no magic mechanism to bring this about. The simplest way to encourage others to open their hearts and minds is for *our* hearts and minds to be open, believing in our own potential to learn and grow. I believe sincerity and humility are imperative for advocates, because no one has all the answers.



Recognizing this, I worked for years to set aside everything I thought I “knew” in order to find what is fundamentally important. I now realize that virtually all our actions can be traced to two drives: a desire for fulfillment and happiness, and a need to avoid or alleviate suffering. At the core, something is “good” if it leads to more happiness, and something is “bad” if it leads to more suffering. This may seem simplistic at first, but it really does allow us to cut through confusion, providing a straightforward measure by which to judge the consequences of our actions and evaluate our advocacy.

In his book *Painism*, Richard Ryder points out, “At its extreme, pain is more powerful than pleasure can ever be. Pain overrules pleasure within the individual far more effectively than pleasure can dominate pain.” Because of this, I believe that reducing suffering is the ultimate good, and must be our bottom line.





Principles of Advocacy

If you are reading this, you are obviously concerned about more than just your own immediate pleasure. The question then is: How can we best make a difference in a world where suffering is so widespread?

A basic understanding of human nature shows that all of us have an affinity for the known and immediate. Most people working for a better world concentrate on those closest to them, geographically or biologically. Even those who look beyond species often focus on either the familiar or the fantastic, with a majority of resources spent on cats and dogs, endangered species, or campaigns focused on high-profile animals.

Furthermore, we all want to feel that our efforts have accomplished something concrete, that we've been "victorious." It often doesn't matter how significant the accomplishment is—or even if the world is truly better off—but only that something tangible has been achieved.

Taking into account these predispositions and our bottom line of reducing suffering has led Vegan Outreach to formulate two guiding principles to maximize the amount of good we can accomplish:

Set aside personal biases.

Rather than focusing on what appeals to (or offends) us personally, we challenge ourselves to approach advocacy through a straightforward analysis of the world as it is, striving *solely* to alleviate as much suffering as possible.



Recognize our severely limited resources and time.

It is an inescapable fact: when we choose to do one thing, we are choosing not to do another. There is no way around it. Instead of choosing to "do something, do *anything*," we challenge ourselves to pursue actions that will likely lead to the greatest reduction in suffering.



Why Vegan Outreach?

Based on these two principles, Vegan Outreach seeks to expose the cruelties of factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses, while providing honest information on how to make cruelty-free choices. Our emphasis on ethical eating is derived from our principles of advocacy, not vice versa. No philosophy, lifestyle, or diet has *any* value in and of itself. Rather, the significance of promoting cruelty-free eating is that it allows us to alleviate as much suffering as possible, for three reasons:

The Numbers

Ninety-nine of every hundred animals killed annually in the United States are slaughtered for human consumption. That comes to ten billion land animals—far more than the world's entire human population—raised and killed for food each year in this country alone.

The Suffering

If these billions of animals lived happy, healthy lives and had quick and painless deaths, then a concern for suffering would lead us to focus our efforts elsewhere.

But animals raised for food must endure horrible cruelties. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of advocating on behalf of these animals is trying to describe the suffering they endure: the confinement and overcrowding, the stench, the racket, the extremes of heat and cold, the attacks and even cannibalism, the hunger and starvation, the illness, the mutilation, the broken bones and failing organs, etc. Indeed, every year, hundreds of millions of animals—*many times more* than the number killed for fur, in shelters, and in laboratories combined—don't even make it to slaughter. They actually *suffer to death*.



Chickens raised for meat (above) and eggs (below).





People read about the plight of today's farmed animals and the compassionate alternatives to meat, eggs, and dairy.

The Opportunity

If there were nothing we could do about these animals' suffering—if it all happened in a distant land beyond our influence—then, again, our focus would be different. But exposing factory farming and advocating ethical eating is, by far, our best option for making a better world. We don't have to overthrow a government. We don't have to forsake modern life. We don't have to win an election or convince Congress of the validity of our argument. We don't have to start a group or organize a campaign. Rather, every day, *every single person* makes decisions that affect the lives of farmed animals. Informing and inspiring people to open their hearts and minds to making compassionate choices leads to many fewer animals suffering.

Nearly everyone wants a better world. We oppose injustice and violence and wish we could do something to stop it. What

can we do about starvation and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa? We can donate money, write letters, or try to get the government to intervene and give more aid. All of those efforts, though well meaning, are often far removed from having a proportionate or long-term impact.

Focused, effective animal advocacy, however, allows us to have an immediate and profound influence every single day. Preventing animals from being bred for factory farms may not appear to be a particularly exciting or inspiring goal, especially compared to the plight of individual animals or the urgency of the latest tragedy. But if we are to alleviate as much suffering as possible, we need to maximize our impact: through vegetarian advocacy, every single person we meet is a potential victory!



Variations on a Theme

The logic outlined on the preceding pages seems straightforward to me now, but I didn't arrive at these conclusions overnight. Before founding Vegan Outreach and seeking to maximize our impact, Jack Norris and I followed the “do something, do *anything*” philosophy, trying to fight many different forms of animal exploitation through various methods of advocacy—from letter writing campaigns to scores of protests and everything in between, including civil disobedience.

Even within the realm of exposing factory farms and promoting vegetarianism, there are many different options. Vegan Outreach seeks to reach as many new people as possible with our illustrated booklets, which provide detailed and documented accounts of the realities of modern agribusiness, along with honest and useful information about making compassionate choices. Similarly, the Christian Vegetarian Association's booklet *Are We Good Stewards of God's Creation?* reaches out to many people through their existing ethical framework. This allows CVA to advocate to a vast audience for whom other approaches may be less effective.



Above: Having provided copies of *Why Vegan?*, Eugene Khutoryansky offers our *Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating* to some attendees of the Houston International Festival. Below: Students receive *Even If You Like Meat* from Bri Gibson at New Jersey's Montclair State University and *Compassionate Choices* from Barbara Bear at Colorado's Metropolitan State College of Denver.



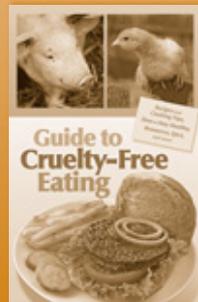
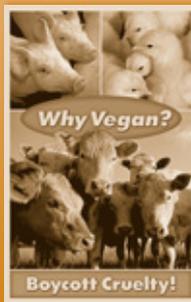
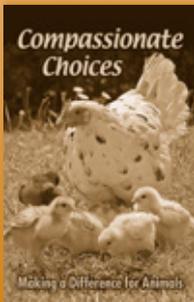
Right: Joe Espinosa wears a “body TV” while handing out copies of *Why Vegan?* at a festival in Chicago.

Others focus on harnessing the power of video footage, such as *Meet Your Meat* (Meat.org). Certain groups take out free spots on public access TV; others, like Compassion Over Killing, air commercials. Some activists wear a “body TV,” which presents a powerful message and attracts people who may otherwise ignore leafleters. The Internet also offers new and exciting advocacy opportunities. Many regional groups provide important resources and information, from publishing local shopping and dining guides to organizing social gatherings and building supportive communities.

We need everyone’s efforts if we are going to bring about change as quickly as possible. There is much to do: we must reach and influence those who might be willing to go vegan; reach and influence those who might be willing to go vegetarian; reach and influence those who won’t (now) go veg, but who might eat fewer animals or stop buying meat from factory farms—and support all these people as they continue to learn and grow.



Outreach to each of these audiences is necessary if we are to help a large and diverse society evolve to a new ethical norm. No single tactic or message will be optimally effective for everyone. This is why Vegan Outreach produces a range of literature (shown below). With these tools, anyone, in any situation, can be a highly effective advocate for the animals.



Vegan Outreach produces a variety of advocacy booklets: *Compassionate Choices* (with fewer graphic images and the friendliest cover; useful for displays, talks, tabling, leafleting), *Even If You Like Meat* (designed primarily for leafleting colleges), and *Why Vegan?* (for situations where people won’t be put off by the word “vegan”). Our informative follow-up, *Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating*, provides detailed nutrition information and advocacy advice.

Advocacy for Maximum Change

Vegan Outreach works for maximum change—the greatest reduction in suffering per dollar donated and hour worked—by presenting the optimal message to our target audience. Of course, with an infinite budget, we could provide a customized message to everyone. Given our limited resources, though, Vegan Outreach focuses on young adults—particularly college students—for three main reasons:

The Relative Willingness and Ability to Change

Obviously, not every young adult is willing to stop eating meat. But *relative to the population as a whole*, this age group tends to be more open-minded and in a position where they aren't as restricted by parents, tradition, habits, etc.

The Full Impact of Change

Even if young people and senior citizens were equally likely to change, over the course of their lives, youth can save more animals. They not only have more meals ahead of them, but also more opportunities to influence others.

The Ability to Reach Large Numbers

Whether on a college campus or outside a concert, for a relatively small investment of time, an activist can hand a copy of *Even If You Like Meat* or *Compassionate Choices* to hundreds of young people who otherwise might have never viewed a full and compelling case for compassion.



Below: Casey Constable hands Vegan Outreach booklets to the crowd at a Warped Tour concert in San Antonio, Texas.



Choosing the optimal message is vital. Some argue that we should appeal to self-interest by attributing great health benefits to a vegan diet. But consider, for example, how much money and time respected health organizations have spent on the ineffectual campaign to convince people to simply add more fruits and

vegetables to their diets. Furthermore, claims that veganism prevents or reverses heart disease or that meat causes colon cancer can be met not only with examples of vegans who died of those diseases, but with counterclaims that soy causes breast cancer, that the Atkins diet has been proven superior, or that people with a certain

Left: A couple of students read *Even If You Like Meat and Compassionate Choices* at the University of Arizona.

blood type can't be vegetarian. No matter the underlying truth, the public will believe the claims that support the status quo and the path of least resistance.

Of course, if you were to ask to the average individual what is important, personal health would come before factory farming. As advocates, however, we're not trying to reinforce people's existing concerns and prejudices. Rather, our goal is to reveal hidden truths and have people open their hearts and minds to the idea of expanding their circle of consideration. Although few turn away from a graph of heart-attack statistics or relative water usage, and many turn away from *Meet Your Meat*, it isn't because the latter is the "wrong" message. Rather, unlike abstract statistics of waste production or cancer rates, revelations of obvious cruelty cannot be debated, ignored, or forgotten; they have a personal, emotional impact and demand a real response.

Exposing what goes on in factory farms and slaughterhouses surely won't persuade everyone at this time. But it is far better if 95% turn away revolted and 5% open their minds to change than if all politely



Above: A student activist leaflets the University of Florida's busy Gainesville campus. Below: A group of San Antonio concertgoers consider *Why Vegan?*

nod in agreement as they continue on to McDonald's for a "healthy" chicken salad.

Despite the efforts of thousands of people over the course of decades, trying to appeal to everyone hasn't worked. It's well past time to give up the idea that there is some perfect, noncontroversial, self-centered argument that will magically inspire everyone to go vegan.

If our goal is to advocate for the animals, that's what we should do—*because it works!* Pointing out that eating meat causes unnecessary suffering is honest, straightforward, and the only argument people can't refute or nitpick. Showing people the plight of farmed animals is a highly effective means of creating fundamental, lasting change. Again and again, revealing factory farming's hidden but undeniable cruelty to animals has proven the most compelling reason for changing one's diet—and *maintaining* that change—





On the Long Island campus of Stony Brook University, a student receives a copy of *Even If You Like Meat* from Rob Gilbride.

in the face of peer pressure, tradition, the latest fad, etc. Because of our efforts at exposing the animals' plight, awareness is now growing every year: factory farms—unknown to most people only two decades ago—are now commonly condemned as ethical abominations, with new ballot initiatives, laws, and corporate reforms abolishing the most egregious abuses. Every year, Vegan Outreach's hundreds of leafleters find increased interest in our booklets. We regularly receive feedback like, "I had no idea what went on! Thank you so much for opening my eyes!"

And yet, there are many, *many* more people to reach. The simplest way to get information to people is to stock displays of Vegan Outreach literature at libraries, music and bookstores, co-ops and natural food shops, coffeehouses, and sympathetic restaurants.

Youth, though, is where the animals get the biggest bang for the buck. Vegan Outreach's **Adopt a College** program (VeganOutreach.org/colleges), a network of activists leafleting local campuses (and concerts and other venues), serves to reach out methodically to our prime audience. This is the first systematic, nationwide plan to create maximum change by taking the animals' plight to the most receptive people. We *know* this works, and you can join the others who are part of this

powerful, efficient, effective activism. You don't need to start a group, or publish a web site, or organize anything—you just need to devote some of your time or money to making a difference; we'll provide all the materials and guidance you need. Going out to leaflet for the first time might seem intimidating, but most activists get over their nervousness once they hand out their first few booklets. They'll also tell you how rewarding leafleting can be. Vegan Outreach is often able to put new activists in touch with experienced leafleters, which can make it even easier to get started.

Being a part of Vegan Outreach will vastly increase your ability to make a difference. Whether you leaflet or finance the distribution of our booklets, for every person you help convince to go vegetarian, you *double* the impact of your life's choices. If, for example, you provide booklets to sixty new people tomorrow and just one decides to go vegetarian, you will have changed that person's life forever. More importantly, you'll have saved, with just a small investment of time or money, as many animals as you'll save with *every* food choice you make during the rest of your life!

In other words: if we agree that being vegetarian is vital, then we *must* recognize that taking part in effective animal advocacy is many, *many* times more important.

Effective Advocacy = Focus

Anyone who has been vegetarian for more than a few minutes knows the many roadblocks—habit, tradition, convenience, taste, familiarity, peer pressure, etc.—that keep people from considering the animals' plight. Many people are looking for an excuse to dismiss us. Knowing this, we can't give anyone any reason to ignore the terrible and unnecessary suffering on factory farms and in slaughterhouses.

If we want to be as effective as we possibly can be for the animals, it is essential that we recognize and avoid common traps. Remember: ***Our message is simple.*** We shouldn't distract people by offering every piece of information that strikes us as somewhat anti-meat. Nor should we try to address every tangential argument, letting our discussions degrade into debates over Jesus' loaves and fishes, abortion, politics, desert islands, evolution, Grandpa's cholesterol level, etc. Nothing can counter the fact that *eating animals causes unnecessary suffering.*

Similarly, we can't afford to build our case from questionable sources. Factory farms and slaughterhouses are hidden from view, and the industry's PR machine denies the inherent cruelties ("Animals are treated well, slaughterhouses are strictly regulated"). The public won't believe otherwise just because we say so. We must present them with well-documented information—from industry

sources or respected, nonpartisan third parties—and indisputable photos and videos.

It's also extremely important to consider how the public will respond to certain information. No matter how reasonable or powerful a claim may seem to *us*, and no matter how we think the public *should* react, we can't make claims that may be "misinterpreted." Even those from highly regarded sources can have disastrous repercussions. Health or environmental claims that primarily denigrate beef or red meat, for example, are often taken by the public as a reason to eat more chickens.

Our focus must remain on the animals, not ourselves or our particular diets. Our choices don't need to be defended; our lifestyle is not an end in itself. Living ethically is not about following a dogma, nor is it avoiding a list of forbidden ingredients. *It is only a tool for opposing cruelty and reducing suffering.* Remember, our goal is not to express *our* rage at animal abuse, or show how smart and enlightened *we* are. We don't want to "win an argument with a meat eater." We *want* people to open their hearts and minds to the animals' plight. It all simplifies to this:

- ◆ Buying meat, eggs, and dairy causes unnecessary suffering.
- ◆ Each one of us can choose not to cause this suffering.



Staying Healthy

While leafleting colleges across the country in the mid-90s, Jack was often told, “I was veg for a while, but I didn’t feel healthy.” This real-world feedback, still heard by leafleters today, stands in stark contrast to the “vegetarianism is a wonder diet/ meat is a deadly poison” message favored by some activists.

Even a moderate health argument doesn’t hold sway over most people—especially young people. But the health argument is worse than an inefficient use of our limited resources. When we recite amazing claims, the public often hears it as dishonest propaganda. This ultimately hurts animals, because most people will then dismiss all animal advocates. Those few who do try a vegetarian diet because of its purported “magical properties” will likely quit if they don’t *immediately* lose weight, increase their energy, etc. They will then tell *everyone* how awful they felt as a vegetarian, and how much better they feel now as a meat eater. Just *one* failed vegetarian can counter the efforts of many advocates.

The nutritional case historically presented by vegetarians was so bad that, in 2001, Jack became a registered dietitian in order to evaluate nutrition research firsthand and provide sound recommendations. If we want to do our best to prevent suffering, we must learn and provide a complete, unbiased summary of the nutritional aspects of an ethical diet, including uncertainties and potential concerns. Doing so leads people to realize we are not simply partisan propagandists, and it creates healthy spokespeople for the animals!



“Staying Healthy on Plant-Based Diets” is a detailed article on nutrition by Jack Norris, RD (shown above). You’ll find an abridged version in our *Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating* and the full article with references at VeganHealth.org

Lyn Cozart hands out copies of *Compassionate Choices* at the Columbia Heights metrorail station in Washington, DC.





Countering the Stereotype

Society's stereotype of animal advocates and vegans is a significant roadblock to widespread change. "Vegan" no longer needs to be explained when referenced. But unfortunately, the word is often used as shorthand for someone young, fanatical, and antisocial. This caricature guarantees that veganism won't be considered—let alone adopted—on a wide scale.

Regrettably, the "angry vegan" image has some basis in reality. Not only have I known many obsessive, misanthropic vegans, I was one myself. My anger and self-righteousness gave many people a lifetime excuse to ignore the realities hidden behind their food choices.

As a reaction to what goes on in factory farms and slaughterhouses, very strong feelings, such as revulsion and outrage, are understandable and entirely justified. The question, though, isn't what is warranted, but rather, what helps animals. I have known hundreds of outraged activists who insisted, "Animal liberation by any means necessary! I'm willing to do anything!" Yet few of these people are still working towards animal liberation today.

If we truly want to have a fundamental, lasting impact on the world, we must deal with our emotions in a constructive way. We need to ask ourselves:

- ◆ Are we willing to direct our passion, rather than have it rule us?
- ◆ Are we willing to put the animals' interests before our personal desires?
- ◆ Are we willing to focus seriously and systematically on effective advocacy?

It is not enough to be a vegan, or even a dedicated vegan advocate. We must remember the bottom line—reducing suffering—and actively be the *opposite* of the vegan stereotype. Just as we need everyone to look beyond the short-term satisfaction of following habits and traditions, we need to move past our sorrow and anger to optimal advocacy. We must learn "how to win friends and influence people," so that we leave everyone we meet with the impression of a joyful individual leading a fulfilling and meaningful life.



Right: Leslie Patterson leaflets UW Milwaukee.
Above: Adopt a College leafleters Ashley Watson, Rafael Fontes, Don Hughes, and Basla Andolsun.

An Activist's Life = A Meaningful Life

I'm not saying we should put on an *act* of being happy. Rather, as thoughtful activists, we can truly *be* happy!

Looking at the long arc of history, we see how much society has advanced in just the last few centuries. It was over two thousand years ago that the ideals of democracy were first proposed in ancient Greece, but only during the eighteenth century did humanity see even the beginnings of a truly democratic system. Not until late in the nineteenth century was slavery officially abolished in the developed world. In all of human history, *only in the last hundred years* was child labor abolished in the developed world, child abuse criminalized, women given the vote, and minorities given more rights.

Many people worked diligently to bring about those ethical advances for humanity. Because of the number of individuals suffering and the reason for this hidden brutality, I believe animal liberation is the moral imperative of *our* time. If we take suffering seriously and commit to optimal advocacy, we too can bring about *fundamental* change. We can already see progress in just the past decade—public



Matt Ball, the author of *A Meaningful Life*, with his wife and daughter, Anne and Ellen Green.

concern for farmed animals' interests and condemnation of factory farms, as well as more vegetarians, near-vegetarians, and vegetarian products. Our advocacy's focus, tools, and programs have also improved immensely during that time—Vegan Outreach's Adopt a College program, for example, was only launched in 2003.

Jon Camp hands out copies of *Even If You Like Meat* on the campus of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia.



Animal liberation *can* be the future. As the magazine *The Economist* concluded, “Historically, man has expanded the reach of his ethical calculations, as ignorance and want have receded, first beyond family and tribe, later beyond religion, race, and nation. To bring other species more fully into the range of these decisions may seem unthinkable to moderate opinion now. One day, decades or centuries hence, it may seem no more than ‘civilized’ behavior requires.”

We can be the generation to bring about this next great ethical advance. We should *revel* in the freedom and opportunity we have to be part of something so profound, something *fundamentally good*. This is as meaningful and joyous a life as I can imagine!

Fewer than four hundred years ago, the Inquisition sentenced Galileo to prison for pointing out that the Earth is not the center of the physical universe. With our efforts, society will recognize that humans are not the center of the moral universe, and will look back with horror and disgust on the subjugation of animals for food. This century can be the one in which society stops torturing and slaughtering our fellow earthlings for a fleeting taste of flesh.

It is up to us to make this happen.

We have no excuse for waiting—we have the knowledge, the tools, *and the truth*. Taking a stand against cruelty to animals requires only our choice. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, Jr.:

The arc of history is long
And ragged
And often unclear
But ultimately
It progresses towards justice.

We can each be a part of that progress!



In the end, in our hearts, we know that, regardless of what we *think* of ourselves, our *actions* reveal the kind of person we *really* are. We each determine our life's narrative. We can, like most, choose to allow the narrative to be imposed on us, mindlessly accept the current default, follow the crowd, and take whatever we can.

Or we can choose to actively author our lives, and live with a larger purpose, dedicated to a better world for all. We can choose to be extraordinary!

The choice is fundamental.

The choice is vital.

And the choice is ours, today.



For more information about Vegan Outreach
and how to get involved with our work,
please visit VeganOutreach.org

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