

Part 5, Chapter 52: Pigs (Pork)

In the Bible the people of Israel were admonished to not eat pork according to traditional Rabbinic law. At the time one reason was because of the risk of health issues—because of the, not then known, risk of Trichinosis.

Trichinosis is a parasitic disease caused by roundworms of the *Trichinella* type. During the initial infection invasion of the intestines can result in diarrhea, abdominal pain, and vomiting. Migration of larvae to muscle, which occurs about a week after being infected, can cause swelling of the face, inflammation of the whites of the eyes, fever, muscle pains, and a rash. Minor infection may be without symptoms. Complications may include inflammation of heart muscle, central nervous system involvement, and inflammation of the lungs.^{1}

In biblical times, and even a hundred years ago in this country, pigs, like chickens, were raised outdoors in open conditions. They were as healthy as pigs could be, as a natural garbage disposal. (This was according to my late grandmother. “There’s a reason pig food is called ‘slop’” she would often say.) They weren’t suitable as a food source then; they are vastly far less suitable as one in the modern world. Yet, shockingly, pork is still very much a part of the Standard American Diet.

Even before reading John Robbins book, I could see very readily why you wouldn’t want to eat pork—and we **absolutely** don’t, at least not any more. I used to ignore Emmale’s aunt’s comments on eating pork. Being a Seventh Day Adventist, eating pork is ABSOLUTELY prohibited in Emmale’s aunt’s religion. Of course we have modern cooking methods so the risk of Trichinosis is pretty remote. Still, there are so many other issues. Emmale’s aunt is right: Eating pork IS a very bad idea.

While I continued to eat pork at the time, when I was a teenager I had a friend who had a pet pig. That pig was considerably more intelligent than the dachshund we had at the time—which in her own right was quite intelligent. Stacy—that was the pig’s name—left a lasting impression.

John Robbins calls pigs “the most unjustly maligned of all animals.”^{2} When my parents lived in Davie, Florida—where I raised the ducks—we were down wind from a pig farm south of us. When the wind blew from the south, I can say, with certainty, that whatever this farmer raised, I didn’t want to eat it. Still, it’s not like their environment, which I came later to discover when I visited this farm, was their choice.

Most of us think of pigs as dirty, filthy and disgusting animals. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I discovered with Stacy. I’m reminded of a poignant quote:

Whenever people say “We mustn’t be sentimental,” you can take it they are about to do something cruel. And if they add, “we must be realistic,” they mean they are going to make money out of it.—Brigid Brophy^{3}

Such is the fate of farm animals. I suppose one can get used to any atrocity. An extreme example, and doubtless a politically incorrect one: The holocaust—and how many German

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soldiers had to keep telling themselves that they were 'just following orders'? (The bigger question is how many didn't?) But at what cost to their sanity I have to ask? Too, at what cost to our sanity as a society from the way that pigs, and other farm animals, are treated? Even more so, at what cost is the transmuted energy that they suffered when their flesh becomes part of us?

To call a man a pig, or a woman a sow, is one of the worst insults in our common speech. This fact testifies not to the nature of pigs but to our beliefs about them and only shows how far out of touch we are with these animals. The commonly held image of pigs as greedy, fat, and filthy creatures, gross beasts who eat anything that isn't fastened down, and who selfishly indulge their basest instincts without a trace of sensitivity, could hardly be further from the truth.^{4}

To be sure, the entire concept of pigs choosing to live in filth was because of an ancient European concept that "the filthier the state in which a pig was kept, the better tasting the pork would be."^{5} Try not to think about what's in the 'filth' that transfers to the pig. In the modern world, unfortunately ...

Some of today's pig factories are huge industrial complexes, with over 100,000 pigs. You might think that would require an awful lot of pigpens. But the pigpen, like the chicken yard, is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. Every day, more and more of these robust creatures are placed in stalls so cramped that they can hardly move.^{6}

Inside the real world of pig farming—and this is one of the kinder scenes. Most scenarios are far worse.

Forget the pig is an animal. Treat him just like a machine in a factory. Schedule treatments like you would lubrication. Breeding season like the first step in an assembly line. And marketing like the delivery of finished goods.—Hog Farm Management, September 1976^{8}



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The problem isn't necessarily with the local farmers, no more than it may have been with certain German guards in World War II.

Even if an individual pig raiser feels an empathy with the animals in his charge and has a desire to do things in a more natural way, he is today practically forced to go along with the agribusiness momentum.^{9}

It's even worse when it comes to pig reproduction. Pigs are, of course, not offered the option of natural selection. Still, as John Robbins describes 'breeding' practices—it's horrific:

They've got it down to a science. First of all, piglets are taken away from their mothers much earlier than would ever occur in any natural situation. Without her babies to suck the milk from her breast, the sow will soon stop lactating, and then, with the help of hormone injections, she can be made fertile much sooner. Thus, more piglets can be extracted from her per year.^{10}

Other than the fictitious Borg on Star Trek, I can't imagine anyone treating human beings this way. Still ... it's all about 'profit', isn't it? John Robbins gets into this discussion in far more detail. Suffice it to say: Imagine being a woman whose only purpose is to produce babies. Once they are born ... the 'state' takes over, taking them away from their mother, and the process starts all over again—over and over again until the woman dies. It sounds like a science fiction nightmare—and it is. It gets worse. Beyond forced pregnancy, imagine having another woman's fetus implanted over and over again for no other purpose than to produce even more babies. Finally, until a point of exhaustion and death occurs,

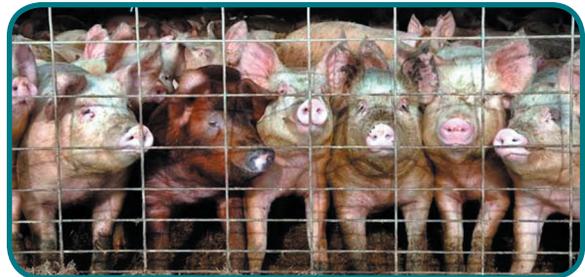
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keep pumping this woman full of hormones to facilitate her as a baby factory. Such is the life of a sow in a factory farm. Of the pigs raised for slaughter:

They are crammed for a lifetime into cages in which they can hardly move, and forced against their natures to stand in their own waste. Their sensitive noses are continuously assaulted by the stench from the excrement of thousands of other pigs. Their skeletons are deformed and their legs buckle under the unnatural weight for which they have been bred. Their feet are full of painful lesions from the concrete and slatted metal floors on which they must stand.

I have looked into their eyes and I can tell you it's a terrifying sight. These sensitive, tortured creatures have been literally driven mad.^{11}

Too, as if these atrocities were not enough, from an article published by ThinkProgress, "Five More States Consider 'Ag Gag' Laws To Silence Factory Farm Whistleblowers"^{13} to go along with the states where these laws already exist.



As state legislatures began their 2013 sessions, a flurry of new "ag gag" bills to protect factory farms from potential undercover whistleblowers have been introduced in 5 states. This week, the Indiana Senate is debating a proposal to criminalize taking photographs or videos inside an agricultural or industrial operation without permission.

Ag gag laws are already on the books in Iowa, Missouri, Utah, North Dakota, Montana, and Kansas. If Indiana and the 5 other states mulling these bills follow suit, the facilities producing 99% of American meat will be completely shielded from the public eye.^{14}

For those of us that absolutely will not eat pork or pork products any more, I suppose we should be thankful that John Robbins was able to do his research when he did. At the time John Robbins wrote his book, many of the atrocities that are common practice now were just starting, including stacking pigs in cages on top of each other in even more egregious and unsanitary conditions.

As if the way these animals are treated isn't bad enough and as if it's not worse that the government is openingly trying to keep these horrors out of the public's eyes, the industry goes so far as to boldly market all out lies about what these animals endure.

The National Pork Council and related organizations spend millions of dollars a year to convince the public that today's pigs are as happy as can be with the way they are raised. In May 1987, the Council officially and unabashedly proclaimed that pork producers "have historically treated their farm animals with the utmost care and respect." Each year, the Pork Council sends an official American Pork Queen out across the country to enlighten schools and community groups about the joys of modern pork production. Speaking about her work, one year's American Pork Queen, Pam Carney, explained:^{15}

Well, I kind of told about myself from the perspective of being a pig ... You see, we are getting a lot of questions from people now who are for animal rights and who are worried about pigs being put into small pens and farrowing crates. So, I talked about how much we pigs like the new confinement barns as opposed to living outside in the natural environment, because a herdsman can keep a close eye on us, watch for disease, give us warmth, good feed, and clean water.^{16}

The fact is, nothing could be further from the truth. One can only imagine the toxicity of the pig's flesh being raised in the conditions of a modern factory farm. To close his discus-

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sion on pigs (and I've only scratched the surface), John Robbins asks the following:

Could it be, then, that when we eat the flesh of animals who have been treated with such complete contempt, we assimilate something of their experience and carry it forward into our own lives? Could it be that eating the products of such an insane system may contribute significantly to the feeling pervading mankind today that this earth sometimes resembles the lunatic asylum of the universe?^{17}

He has a point. Experientially, I think John Robbins is absolutely correct on this point.

When it comes to pork, there is only one solution: Avoid it like the plague that it is. Keep in mind, indeed, that when pork is eaten, all the inherent toxicity and suffering that the animal endured becomes part of you. That just doesn't seem like a very wise food choice.