

# COMMENT

## CLIMATE CHANGE



LATHAM HUNTER

### Producing meat heats the planet

And it wastes precious water, so why don't we tax meat?

I teach Critical Thinking too. Granted, every humanities course worth its salt should teach critical thinking, but in an age when humanities courses are no longer trusted as a valuable route to employment, and "critical thinking" has been identified as a kind of Holy Grail of employability, it's perceived as efficient to do away with piffle like history and Shakespeare and get right to down to business (literally): just teach the critical thinking part! In 12 weeks! No probs!

In putting the course together, I decided to take students' most familiar and trusted things to demonstrate that most of us coast through life not really understanding the things we think we know. In order to identify a problem and solve it, in order to understand cause and effect, you have to approach it from all possible angles via a range of perspectives: democracy and social justice, public health, the economy, globalization, gender, arts and culture, the environment... Do they know about the threats to democracy posed by their phones? The environmental cost of their clothes? The labour issues raised by posting on Facebook? I'm not exactly the bearer of glad tidings, but remember, it's ignorance that's bliss, not awareness.

I think the most difficult classes (for me, at least) are the ones on food. We methodically go through the ramifications of what we eat, and no matter what perspective we take, we keep coming back to one incontrovertible truth: meat is a major problem. From a public health perspective, meat boosts our rates of heart disease and cancer. Two slices of bacon a day increases your risk of cancer by 18 per cent. If your daily diet looks something like bacon at breakfast, deli meat or a hotdog at lunch, and a hamburger or steak for dinner, you're 54 per cent more likely to get cancer.

From a humanitarian perspective, the meat industry is devastating. Pigs, for example, are more intelligent than dogs and have the emotional capacity of a three-year-old, and yet they are confined to lives of misery and torture — 95 per cent of the meat we consume is factory-farmed, where animals are kept in tiny boxes, and they never see the sun.

Environmentally, meat wreaks havoc in myriad ways. While it takes 70 litres of water to produce a pound of apples, it takes a staggering 6,800 litres to produce a pound of beef. Producing a half-pound of hamburger produces the same amount of greenhouse gas emissions as driving a 3,000-pound car nearly 10 miles. Global meat production is responsible for at least a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions; some research suggests it's closer to half.

The globalization of a meat-oriented diet has had particularly damaging consequences for California, where half of the United States' produce is grown. California's alfalfa crops consume more water than any other plant there because it needs to feed local livestock, but even more so because it's being shipped to feed Asian livestock — 100 billion gallons of water per year goes to China as alfalfa. And this in a time when California has been ravaged by drought for almost four years now, to the extent that its governor has declared a state of emergency.

My students can't remember a time without daily reminders of human extinction on the horizon. They take on the cost of eating meat quite readily — they're used to getting bad news. They agree the profits are stunning and undeniable — meat is bad for us, bad for animals, and bad for the planet. Really bad. But no, they probably won't give it up. Why not, I ask them? The answers vary: "What I do by myself won't make a difference." "I'm too lazy." "I like the way it tastes." This semester, during a kind of depressed, uncomfortable silence, one young man spoke into the quiet: "All our lives we've been told how teamwork is so important. No one's ever taught us how to lead."

The climate change talks in Paris will probably spend a lot of time on dubious solutions like cap and trade. I'll bet that a meat tax won't come up at all. I'd urge Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to recognize that if anything really effective is going to be done, it's going to take leaders with the nerve to do it, even in the face of strong public opposition, and do it big, because no matter how obvious the evidence and solutions, precious little will be changing if it's up to the rest of us.

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## LIFE ON THE EDGE

### Pepperoni is DEATH, but I'll take the risk

If people in Italy stopped eating cured meats, half their vocabulary would disappear



PAUL BENEDETTI

Excuse me while I bite into this smoked meat sandwich. I'll be finished in a moment — perhaps in more ways than one.

Oddly, ever since the World Health Organization announced that salted, cured and smoked meat were just slightly less dangerous than a plutonium hat, my wife has been feeding me a pretty-much all-cold-cuts diet.

Yesterday, when she placed before me a plate full of sliced double-smoked kielbasa — for breakfast — even I began to get suspicious.

Of course, I'm kidding. My wife wouldn't even touch kielbasa, never mind slice it.

The point is the WHO made waves when they announced that red meat, and particularly processed meat, might be bad for you. Wow, shocker.

I mean, did anyone ever think that eating a five-inch-high pastrami sandwich was good for you? Let's face it, how could a "meat tower" with mustard on it, be health

Salted cured pork holds an esteemed position in Italy, just below the prime minister.

food?

But let's look at reality. People all around the world eat smoked and cured meat. For the Italians, it's practically one of the food four food groups — pasta, wine, salted pork and cannoli.

Salted cured pork holds an esteemed position in Italy, just below the prime minister. If popularity ruled politics, a giant prosciutto would run the country. It is said, perhaps apocryphally, that the Inuit have 100 names for snow, but it's true that Italians have at least as many for salted pork. Salami, prosciutto, cacciatore, salame, pepperoni, pancetta, coppa, rotola, capicollo, bresaola, lardo, culatello, mortadella, salmon, salsiccia, soppressata, speck, sopressa, vielline, and many others.

If people in Italy stopped eating cured meats, half their vocabulary would disappear!

One has to wonder how a whole country raised on "salumi" or cured meats even exists today. By the WHO's reckoning, pretty much everyone in Italy, except for the vegans there, should be dead by now. And even that one guy probably sneaks a slice of hot salami when no one's looking.

The WHO announced that salted and cured meat are a "level-one carcinogen" along with asbestos, smoking and — I'm not making this up — plutonium. Personally, I can't remember the last time I had an asbestos sandwich, but I take their point. Or do I? The WHO's list of "provable carcinogens" includes (and again, I am not making this up): alcohol, salted fish, wood dust, being a chimney sweep, sunshine, house painting, air (well, OK dirty air), working night shifts, eating fresh red meat, working at a steel foundry, birth control pills and being a hairdresser.

If you add the list of "probably carcinogens" and then "Reasonably Anticipated to be Human Carcinogens" like "frying foods" and "mobile phone use," then pretty much everyone I know should be dead by now. After reading the list, I did think that I have been living a far more exciting and James Bond-like life than I realized. More than once I have drunk alcohol, stayed up late, breathed Hamilton air and then fried bacon while answering my cellphone! I know, call me crazy, but hey, I like to live on the edge.

Then there's the reality that a lot of other stuff is probably carcinogenic: watching Transformer movies, hipster beards (come on, anything that ugly has to be dangerous), listening to Rush Limbaugh, that totally unidentifiable cream filling in Christmas chocolates and headcheese. (Have you ever taken a good look at that stuff?)

Of course, once you get past the semihysterical headlines warning people that Pepperoni is DEATH, you get to the facts. Eating processed meats increases your relative risk of colon cancer by 18 per cent. But the key fact to remember is that your absolute risk of getting colon cancer is already low — about 5 per cent in your lifetime, so eating four slices of bacon or a hotdog a day raises that risk to — hold on to your BLT — 6 per cent!

Me, I'm willing to risk the 1 per cent increase so that I can have the occasional salami and prosciutto panino, a foot-long The Arbor in Port Dover, a hotdog at a Tiger-Cats game and a Schwartz's Deli Montreal smoked meat sandwich.

I might cut back on my chimney sweeping, though.

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## CHRISTIANITY

### What if the spirited ways of Pope take root?

Fast-growing Africa is expected to have 500 million Catholics alone by 2050



THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA — I am not Catholic.

And, like you, I have my images of fatherhood.

The better ones have more to do with the holiness of, say, my boy with a ball and a catching glove on our sun-filled front lawn than with the Holy Father coming to visit.

But he, Pope Francis, has captured my imagination (how could he not?) with his recent five days here in East Africa, his first trip to this continent, and his message of grace and miracles.

In truth, I can easily picture Francis as someone else, a common man who, it seems to me, might rather enjoy an evening with his friends, or making love with his wife, or tramping through some woods with his dogs; human and humane, the sort of man to sit and laugh the night away with while listening to his wild stories.

Instead he rides in the back of a small Kia while the world runs alongside in its bizarrely-juxtaposed ways: politicians in their black SUVs, security with their helmets and guns (10,000 police were summoned in Kampala and Nairobi), crowds following in a different way, like sheep, really, in need of a shepherd, (300,000 for one open-air mass in Kampala, then 150,000, for youth, in another.)

Or Francis stands tall and tirelessly in his Popemobile, dispensing hope with every wave and look, there, now in the slums of Nairobi, in Kangemi, a sea of tin-roofed shacks as far as the eye can see, homes without even basic sanitation, its resident children, plainly-clothed in their very best for today, waving back to him, jumping and clapping in ecstatic frenzy.

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Pope Francis, in his Popemobile, is surrounded by some of the 150,000 who attended a gathering for youth in the Kololo district of Kampala, Uganda, last Saturday. An earlier gathering with Francis in Kampala drew 300,000.

"I am here because I want you to know that I am not indifferent to your joys and hopes, your troubles and your sorrows," is what Francis says to the slum's residents before railing against the forces of "urban exclusion." His voice might as well be the voice of God and his every breath might as well say, "Come children. Come to my beautiful home."

Oh, you're divorced? "Come home." You've had an abortion? "Come home." You're gay? "Who am I to judge? Come home." You're a starving beggar in the slums of your own private choosing? "Do you think any of this is a surprise to me?"

This, for the children. Of course, it was after the Enlightenment when the West got so grown-up and sophisticated that it stopped believing in childish things like grace and miracles, ancient miracles like the calming of a stormy sea, or the healing of the blind and leprosy, or the raising of the dead (for heaven's sake, we're in the 21st century) of some God-man.

But Francis seems to be saying this is the very point of it, that of course these are stories that only children (and poor children at that) could ever fall for, that we're all beggars, really, in need of the same bread. And if you can't make yourself that small and humble (and honest and brave), then you'll never really understand much.

Not surprisingly, then, for all its apparently worn and archaic concepts of human

sin and divine forgiveness, the Catholic Church, along with broader Christianity, is on the move. It's moving especially across the global south. In 10 years, Asia is expected to have almost as many Christians as Europe, and South America will double North America.

Fast-growing Africa, where clerics now thank "the white fathers" for missionizing their continent, is expected to have 500 million Catholics alone by 2050.

Meanwhile, this pope — he's No. 266 — continues his spirited ways to show God as a loving father, and mother, appealing to faiths outside of Catholicism, if not to people of no faith at all, with the message that the weak will someday inherit the Earth, that the hungry will be filled, that the pure will have vision and the peacemakers lifted up.

So what if such an unlikely scenario might someday, somewhere come to pass? What if this old adult world of supply and demand and survival and acquisition will one day (unless we turn things around) blow up, burn up or just roll up and say "That's all, folks"?

And, yes, what if this gives way to something beyond our wildest dreams?

Thomas Froese writes about news, travel and life. Read him at www.dailydad.net or www.thomasfroese.com

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