



The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability

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Part memoir, nutritional primer, and political manifesto, this controversial examination exposes the destructive history of agriculture—causing the devastation of prairies and forests, driving countless species extinct, altering the climate, and destroying the topsoil—and asserts that, in order to save the planet, food must come from within living communities. In order for this to happen, the argument champions eating locally and sustainably and encourages those with the resources to grow their own food. Further examining the question of what to eat from the perspective of both human and environmental health, the account goes beyond health choices and discusses potential moral issues from eating—or not eating—animals. Through the deeply personal narrative of someone who practiced veganism for 20 years, this unique exploration also discusses alternatives to industrial farming, reveals the risks of a vegan diet, and explains why animals belong on ecologically sound farms.

The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability Details

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From Reader Review The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability for online ebook

Damien says

Lierre Keith is a sick person. She was probably sick before she became a teenage vegan, and probably made herself even sicker by crying over baby ants. For 20 years she (by her own admission) was an ignorant vegan. So ignorant, that if I had met her then I would have laughed her out of my vegan club (if I had one that is). Now she is just an idiot, a very sick idiot who feels better now that she eats nothing but meat. Natural meat according to her, since her body is incapable of digesting plant life. But that is okay, because the plants send her all the chemicals she needs from them.

According to Keith, vegetarians don't know that COWS EAT GRASS. And THAT is the basis of "The Vegetarian Myth". Well, practically every book I have read about veganism has flat out said that cows should eat grass, and NOT the grains that are being fed to them in factory farms. She also tells us that vegetarians think the lions of the Serengeti can survive on grass because they have seen house cats eat grass! Every vegan I know has pretty much accepted the fact that natural carnivores eat other animals, and none of them are as horrified as she was in her 20 years of vegan sickness. Yes, we all know that death exists, that it is a part of life, that there is no way to escape it. I can't imagine what kind of vegetarians actually did allow her into their club but I'd just as soon feed them to the lions of the Serengeti than have to hear the nonsense that she claims they said.

So she was an incredibly stupid vegan who hung out with other stupid vegans and decided to assume that all vegans were just as stupid. None of the vegans I know, and I know A LOT, every said any thing as stupid to me as she has written.

A third of this book is written like REALLY BAD Goth poetry- SERIOUSLY!- while another third of it is mostly quotes from others and looks as if she copied it all from some nerd's homework. Most of it is a diatribe against agriculture, which for the most part I agree with. The remaining third is so incredibly insulting, I'm starting to wish the people who pried her added thumbtacks to the vegan whipped cream! She is implying that vegans are totally responsible for agriculture, and in turn, slavery and deforestation. She further implies that the Mississippi River would be a crystal clear wellspring of life joyous life if it weren't for wheat and soy and that vegans are responsible for the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico. She doesn't for once mention that industrial pollution of several major cities from Minneapolis to New Orleans could possibly have any thing to do with it. So she doesn't flat out say that it's all the fault of vegans and vegans alone, but it's obvious that she's baiting the reader to make the connection.

Her logic is full of holes and contradictions. She tells us we can't be herbivorous because our digestive system is not like a cow's. Then tells us that our bodies are exactly like carnivores, from mouth to rectum. Then tries to sidetrack you by quoting scientific sounding mumbo jumbo that may or may not actually be true, about the amazing things that plants do- plants that no human really eats, I might add, to show you that vegetables also have rights.

She really seems to hate wheat. Actually, many vegetarians I knew since the 90s have explained to me how dangerous and destructive wheat is, long before I met vegan raw foodists, way before the current gluten free trends of this year. I think that permaculture is the best solution that the world has today, and that we need to be in a symbiotic relationship with animals, but I'm not going to use that as an excuse to eat them. And many vegetarians these days are limiting their intake of soy.

There might be people whose physical constitution actually does require excessive protein and other stuff that comes from dead animals, but I'm not one of those people. But then again, I never doubled up on grains and soy products. Instead, I increased my intake of fresh raw fruits, lightly cooked green vegetables, wild edibles and herbs and spices. The more healthy my organic vegan diet, the better my body has felt. But like I said, Lierre Keith is a very sick person.

And if I think she was an idiot the first 36 years of her life, why should I believe any thing she learned in the last 10? Chapter 4 is one long "Doctors Michael and Mary Dan Eades say this" and "Drs. Eades say that". I have a hard time trusting any nutritionalist, let alone a pair whose names remind me of Donnie and Marie, who have commercials trying to sell you a cooking machine called the Souz Vide. Oh, and she even reveres Dr. Atkins. She literally puts the word "revered" before his name.

She claims that vegetarians refuse to use manure to fertilize their crops. Which is a flat out lie. If any thing, they refuse to get manure from factory farms, and then there are strict vegans who decide not to care where the manure came from FOR THE TIME BEING. If animal rights people are putting up shelters for animals like cows, pigs, sheep etc., what makes her think we treat their shit as being so sacred that we won't use it now that we know we need it? Even Hare Krishnas, who refuse to kill cows, tell us that cow manure is just what the soil needs.

According to Keith, 40,000 year old cave paintings of bison prove that our ancestors ate meat. Okay sure. I guess we also ate our own hands and lots of erect penises too. Another fun fact: as soon as our fruitarian ancestors dropped from the trees, they used their opposable fingers to pick up rocks to bash in skulls and eat brains. That's what made us humans, you know. All the vegetarian books compare our bodies to natural carnivores and natural herbivores and claim that humans are closer to herbivores in general. Keith takes us one step closer by comparing us to dogs and sheep to show us that we are almost identical to dogs. (Yay! Score a point for gangstah rap!!) However, she skips over our similarities with other primates with a swift vagueness that is suspicious.

If somehow this book can influence enough people to end factory farming soon, then let them all eat as much meat and creme brulee as they want. I will even help her to end industrial agriculture, so long as she keeps her talking to a minimum. I would be happy to see the entire farm land east of the Mississippi River allowed to turn back into a prairie. So would most vegans I know.

I first wondered how this book saved Derrick Jensen's life, since he never was a vegetarian and never intended to be. Now I know; since it goes on and on about how bad wheat, corn and soy are, maybe he thinks these things were killing him but now he'll never touch the stuff again. In fact, she hates wheat, corn and soy so much I've concluded that all she ate as a vegan for 20 years was nothing but wheat, corn and soy; with maybe a few fruits and vegetables as condiments, maybe? I'm also willing to bet that she is probably allergic to gluten, which is probably why it made her sick.

One thing that she got right was the myth that all the grains fed to factory farmed animals could actually be used to feed the world. Maybe the math does add up, but none of us intelligent vegans ever thought that it was more than hypothetical, or we really weren't concerned about those starving people, or we knew that capitalism would not let it be possible even if we really wanted to give it to starving third world countries. The worse part about this book is not what she says, but all the important things she never bothers getting around to saying.

Rebecca McNutt says

While I can definitely appreciate the outlook of this book (I think veganism is just a bunch of hype myself and don't understand the appeal), I still don't think it's right for a book to judge people like this for their personal lifestyle choices. If you want to eat meat, go ahead. If you want to be a vegan, go ahead. There's nothing wrong with either. The problem becomes when you stoop to harsh judgement without any mutual respect, hating people and criticizing them simply for a difference of opinion. Written by an "ex-vegan", *The Vegetarian Myth* does make some valid points about some of the underlying hypocrisy of veganism and the importance of sustainable agriculture, but these things are lost beneath the book's treatment of vegans as

ignorant, and also by the superior attitude it takes over an issue that is very much opinion-based.

If the author wanted to write about agriculture and sustainable meat farming, then perhaps the vegan/vegetarian insults would be best left behind. If the author wanted to belittle vegans and vegetarians, it would at least make more sense if the book had been more clear about its intent. Still, I don't like books that try to target people for their personal beliefs. While I think veganism is a bit half-baked myself, vegans and vegetarians have their own opinions and beliefs and as long as they don't try to push that onto others, why do they deserve to be written about as if they're totally clueless and stupid? Isn't there room for everyone? Or is that too idealistic in today's heavily polarized world? If anything, *The Vegetarian Myth* was just depressing and failed to get any sort of message across other than a very serious apparent grudge, which is too bad because it had some decent stuff in there that could have been focused on more.

AJ says

Oh boy...

To say that I hated this book would be incorrect. It's not that there's much in this book to hate, it's too vacillating, confusing, and utterly contradictory for that. Simply put, this book is under-researched and laden with unsupported statements, speculations and anecdotes. The only thing to hate about this book is that people will read it, trusting Keith to have given them good, true, useful information, and go on to make bad dietary choices.

The first problem with this book is that it almost never attacks veganism. It does attack many things: agriculture, big corporations, industrialization, environmental destruction, factory farms, and low fat diets (to name just a few). I think you'd be hard pressed to find any veg*ns who don't also believe that most, if not all, of the above mentioned have terrible ramifications and should be prevented. While not all US veg*ns are committed to ending the destruction of our planet, I think that many become enlightened as to the problems with many of the systems of our US culture and become committed to ending them.

So really, this book could have been called "The Agriculture Myth," but that wouldn't have generated as much shock value or sold as many books.

Keith does a makes a lot of radical statements, and then goes on to list many unrelated (and mostly un-referenced) "facts" that don't substantiate that claim, implying that the "facts" directly support her radical statements. For example, she states that veg*ns eat grains, grains are made out of carbohydrates which are turned into glucose and lead to diabetes. This implies that all veg*ns are at high risk of developing diabetes. Is there any peer-reviewed study referenced that makes this statement directly? Of course not. She leaves it to you to jump the gaps between her unsupported statements to make your own conclusions.

Keith also likes to take facts to their logical extremes. Eating plants destroys microorganisms and insects, therefore veg*nism is a product of death. So you may as well eat meat. Annual grains destroy soil and lead to monocrops of annual plants. Hence anybody who eats grains is directly causing the destruction of topsoil. Humans can't eat cellulose, and cows can, therefore humans should eat cows and not plants. I would say that this is a faulty philosophical system at best. It's also a great way to build up big straw-person arguments to support a point.

The "Nutritional" chapter of this book was really the worst of it, and here's why. According to Keith - who

assumes that the plural of anecdote is data - here are approximately some of the problems I, a vegan, should be suffering from:

memory loss, depression, anorexia, diabetes, vitamin deficiency, "holes in [my:] brain", exhaustion, breast cancer, Alzheimer's, bad teeth, digestive inflammation, rage, bone and joint problems, menstrual problems, fibroids, cysts, giving birth to babies with birth defects, thyroid problems, coldness, dry skin, early death and suicide

Whew. Unfortunately for her thesis (and fortunately for me), I do not and have not suffered from any of the above ailments. I'm sorry that Keith suffers from terrible health issues, but to assume that everybody has the same life experiences as her is incorrect. To assume that her health issues were directly related to veganism is also probably incorrect, but not being a doctor or nutritionist, I'm not qualified to make that claim. (Nor is she.)

Keith also drags out a lot of those tired, old, debunked stereotypes about veg*ns. You've heard them. We don't eat any fat or protein. We're sick all the time. Male veg*ns grow boobs because they eat too much soy. Really?

At one point Keith rails against conflating correlation and causation, on approximately page 164. I agree. I'm a scientist and a natural skeptic, and I know a thing or two about statistics. Rewind to page 151:

"[E:]pidemiologists do know that multiple sclerosis... is most prevalent in cultures where wheat and rye are staple foods." Did you catch the correlation being confused for causation in that statement? It's not blatant, but subtle and implied. Fast forward to page 172: "The past fifteen years have seen a reduction in fat consumption of almost 25 percent... Did you get healthier? Or did you notice that the incidence of diseases commonly blamed on animal products has gone from high to epidemic?" Maybe Keith just doesn't realize that those correlated facts aren't necessarily directly related, but she goes through such great pains to tell us how smart and enlightened she is that I'm sure she realizes it.

There are some truly baffling statements in this book. "Anorexics have holes in their brains; so do eaters of soy." Needless to say, that statement wasn't followed up by a reference. Also, "remember the many happy endings provided by another estrogen mimic [she is referring to soy isoflavones:], diethylstilbestrol, aka DES." Soy products aren't synthetic estrogens, so why compare them like this?

Keith also imparts on veg*ns the mindset of the naive, the hopelessly child-like and the ignorant. Such a patronizing attitude is insulting and hostile. I don't know what Keith hopes to gain from making such an attack, and it is clearly not backed up by any peer reviewed scientific research, but Keith's own prejudices.

This book is just plain bad. There is no general thesis, no cohesion, just a long, rant-filled look at how terrible veg*nism (but more likely, Big Ag) is. If you were to take the points in this book to their logical conclusion, you would have to eat a diet composed entirely of raw meat that you hunted yourself from indigenous animals that forage on polycultures of perennials. Good luck with that.

Katie says

I'm reading this book because I am a seeker of knowledge and I appreciate Truth, even in painful forms. That having been said, this book was not logical at all, and contained twisted truths at best. The examples given are highly emotional, yet utterly ridiculous anecdotal evidence that the author was a non-educated vegan, and

instead of eating healthy, whole foods, she admittedly ate bread for every meal (pg. 69), and had very poor health overall (she mentions alcoholism and mental illness in addition to reproductive and skin disorders, which she apparently did not seek medical treatment for). She uses this as evidence that humans are meant to eat meat, when in truth, she had been a vegetarian who never ate vegetables. Admittedly, there are vegetarians and vegans out there who share her mistake, but the vast majority have made the decision to go vegetarian because they are highly educated about being conscious consumers and advocates of their own health. She attempts to make vegetarians look like bumbling idiots, by making arguments like vegetarians think "Someone should build a fence down the middle of the Serengeti, and divide the predators from the prey." (pg. 7) This is a ridiculous concept, and the vast majority of vegans would be highly offended at being villainized to the extreme of libel.

Instead of arguing the compelling arguments of Dr. Neal Barnard (Physicians Council of Responsible Medicine) or T. Colin Campbell (The China Study), she instead makes fun of a caricature of the idiot vegan. Her arguments include such concepts as [we exploit and kill trees by not eating and pooping out the seeds, as trees intended by making fruit, so we are really raping and killing plant life, therefore, what is the difference if it is a tree or a cow? You can not kill and rape a tree and say that I may not use a cow.] She says that deforestation to produce grain is killing our planet and the topsoil, which is the truth, but she doesn't address the fact that 90% of the grain produced goes to feed livestock. She says that if we all ate vegetables, we would have to clear the planet to farm, but the fact is, we already produce more food than could feed twice the number of people on our planet, we just use it to feed our meat, and the rest sits in the supermarket until it spoils and must be thrown out. Surely you've heard the statistic that it takes 15 lbs of grain to produce 1 lb of beef. She does not address that at all. She mentions it in her introduction, but does not address it.

Anyway, I could write an entire book refuting her uneducated arguments, but the fact is, hundreds of those books are already published. If you are curious, read her viewpoint, but I beg of you, don't abandon logic because you want her to be right. Her arguments just don't stand up. At times they even made me laugh out loud.

else fine says

This was one of the more controversial books we carried this year. A quick look at the online reviews will tell you the same thing - people are worked up about this thing. Lierre Keith is a brave, brave woman. I wouldn't want to pick a fight with every vegan in the world at the same time.

What I think has been lost in the furor is that her point - the heart of her point, at any rate - is very simple, and very hard to argue with. We take turns eating and being eaten - we consume today, but will be consumed in our turn. If you stop to think about this simple fact, and how it weaves all of us on earth together into an unending cycle of renewal and need, it can give you shivers. It's holy. And it's an idea that encourages us to be more reverent towards all of our food - not just the food with faces, but all of it, the seeds and fruit and leaves, and even the soil itself, richly and deeply alive.

To be reverent and respectful is to think about where your food comes from. It's not enough to give up animal products and think you're doing the world any favors. Monocrops and industrial agriculture, reliant as they are on huge amounts of water, fossil fuel, and chemicals, are not sustainable. And they're slaughtering animal and insect life all around them, so that even your vegetarian meal carries a heavy toll. And who is growing and processing your food, and how? How much fossil fuel is used to get it to your plate? It's at the very least a gross mistake for vegans to feel that their dietary choices have exempted them from considering these things. At worst it's a self-serving lie.

Honestly, I don't care if people are vegan or not. I have known healthy vegans and seriously emaciated unhealthy vegans, who really just needed to eat a steak or something. Keith's nutritional arguments in favor of meat eating are well constructed and meticulously footnoted, but I think it's a little beside the point. Which is hard to argue with: we are not, as a people, healthy, and we are quickly fucking up the earth.

There are some flaws in the book. People have taken issue with her flowery, personally revealing narrative, but I thought it was lovely and compassionate. She could have drawn from a wider range of books for her research, but that's a minor quibble. A larger point of issue is her attack on agriculture. It seems clear that the advent of large scale single crop agriculture brought with it a decline in ecological and human health. But the hunter gathering model, which she favors, isn't an entirely unagricultural enterprise. Many such societies managed certain resources - plants, berries, shellfish - for maximum yields, or controlled the environment in other ways, like by burning. If this is the model to strive for - semi-wild, with a diversity of plant and animal life mixed in (including meat and dairy animals) - then what we're looking at is starting to sound a lot like permaculture. Right? Maybe I'm just being too picky about terminology.

Anyway, there is a great deal to chew on in this book. I can see it stimulating some great discussions, and helping spur people to action. It's unfortunate that the online discussions I've seen have sort of devolved into mudslinging, though given the deep philosophical feelings of the vegan community, it's not surprising.

Rebecca Loring says

This book would be funny until you realize that people will read this and believe Keith's claptrap. Talking about the unfairness of eating "apple-babies and rice-babies" because it's preventing apples and rice from propagating is laughable.

If that's not bad enough, she cautions people against a vegan diet because two years into hers she developed mysterious health problems. Her conclusion: that vegan and vegetarian diets are dangerous. She evidently knows nothing about the millions of vegetarians around the world leading perfectly healthy lives.

Sure, it would be nice to eliminate mono-crop farming, and we should work towards that goal, but that's not an excuse to eat factory-farmed, tortured, and abused animals.

Keith is just a wanna-be vegetarian trying to justify her urge for meat. This book should be filed under "Humor" instead of "Nutrition." Shame on her.

Scott Cameron says

This book took me by surprise, to put it mildly. More like it slapped me in the face. After learning that the author is a former vegan and a self-described "radical", my expectations for intellectual rigor and the pursuit of the hard truth were fairly low. But what I got was quite the opposite.

I loved this book. I can't remember the last time I read something so thought provoking and invigorating. Lierre Keith's writing is wonderful and at times borders on poetic. Throughout the book she intersperses bits and pieces of her own personal story with manifesto-like rage and opinion, solid critical thinking, common sense, and a ton of thorough research to back it all up. She not only understands and respects the scientific method, but powerfully uses it to dismantle a significant amount of conventional thinking (and less conventional vegan beliefs). Somehow along with relating her personal experience she is able to cut her way through subjectivity and emotion right down to the bone where she proceeds to pick over the true nature of things. She claims to be deeply committed to justice, fairness and morality and she proves it page after page by pursuing the naked truth and assessing the state of things based on what she actually sees not what she wishes or feels. There actually isn't that much of her personal story in the book but the language is so alive and passionate that by the end I felt a connection with her as a person and admired her very much (even when I disagreed with what she was saying, which I did in some cases near the end of the book). Her story about the day she gave up veganism nearly brought me to tears.

The Vegetarian Myth is sort of like an angry, R-rated version of Omnivore's Dilemma, although that probably doesn't entirely do it justice. I don't share Ms. Keith's views on certain subjects and found the last chapter of the book to be slightly detached from reality in terms of what can really be expected of human beings in this world, but by the time I got to that part I already admired the book and the person so much that it didn't really matter anymore.

Ms. Keith talks a lot about the adult knowledge that life and death are inextricably connected, and there are descriptions of sustainable human-managed systems respecting and honoring this idea that are just truly beautiful to behold. This book captures that beauty and elegance better than any I've read so far (including Omnivore's Dilemma, which I love) and is compelling enough to be truly life changing. It's not a message I will soon forget.

Ryan Holiday says

Tim Ferriss (highly) recommended this book to me. I've always felt that there is nothing more impressive than seeing someone turn over a long held belief in light of new evidence. That's essentially the premise of this book-a 20+ year vegan finds it impossible to keep denying that meat is a natural part of the human diet and that it's certainly more "natural" than the heavily processed grains and crops that vegans eat. Her solution is sustainable farming and agriculture, harkening back to the dawn of domesticated animals. She's a bit crazy (interspersed with her predictions about factory farming are calls for "the revolution" and rants about patriarchy and too many citations of Wikipedia articles). I've rolled back my grain and carb consumption since I read this and felt shockingly better. I like to judge books by the questions that stick with you after. One of hers: hunter gatherers work somewhere around 15-20 hours a week to acquire food and did so for hundreds of thousands of years. So what makes a society turn to agriculture-where they work 40+ (really unlimited) hours to get less nourishing food? Her answer, after looking at the examples of other species who get high on things in their natural environment, is that carbohydrates are a drug we began addicted to. Still mulling it over. This book was a nice counterweight to Eating Animals by Jonathan Foer.

Emily says

Well, that was...interesting...

Lierre Keith is a self-described radical, meaning that she basically wants to remake the world from (literally) the ground up. She lays out her idealized - well, not civilization because that's a bad word - but lifestyle for the world. While there are nuggets of value and interest in this book, they are mostly hidden in piles of sentimental, inflammatory, and repetitive filler.

The over-the-top sentimentality is eye-roll-inducing. Crying over slugs dying instead of eating your garden? Really? Plants "make meaning...are capable of agency and courage and self-awareness." Huh? Inflammatory language abounded, too. The book would have been stronger, in my opinion, (maybe even two stars) if she had just stuck to the facts on the topic at hand rather than waxing eloquent about the "love for all beings" and how her "prayer pulses in me like another heart" or ranting about how "the brilliance of patriarchy is that it sexualizes acts of oppression."

Structurally, it's not an easy book to read, either. There is no index, so when I wanted to go back and see what she said about celiac disease or irrigation I had to do a lot of flipping and skimming. The three loooooooooong chapters really needed to be split into several smaller chapters or at least to have section subheadings on them.

The main thrust of Ms. Keith's book is about our food choices and their consequences. I actually agree with her up to a point; many of us don't fully consider the moral, political, or nutritional implications of what we put into our mouths. Especially in first world countries, we consume far more than our fair share of the world's resources and have completely lost touch with where our food comes from and how it gets to us. As a recovering vegan herself, Ms. Keith specifically targets the three main rationales for following a vegetarian or vegan diet.

In a nutshell, moral vegetarians believe that killing is wrong and, therefore, eating meat is akin to murder. They believe that animals shouldn't have to die to feed them. Ms. Keith points out that even a vegetarian diet results in deaths: rodents caught in farm machinery, insects killed by pesticides on crops, even microbes in the soil and plants themselves are alive. All life, she claims, not just animal life, is precious, but for one being to live, something else must always die. We must come to grips with the fact that we must kill in order to eat. But she doesn't stop there. According to her, agriculture itself is responsible for most if not all the evils in the world: imperialism, class distinctions, misogyny, and slavery to name a few. Not to mention the damming and draining of rivers and wholesale destruction of natural habitats and ecosystems. "Soil, species, rivers. That's the death in your food. Agriculture is carnivorous: what it eats is ecosystems, and it swallows them whole." So participating in modern agriculture by eating annual grains like wheat is condoning thousands of years of oppression and male domination as well as the death of the earth itself.

Then there are the political vegetarians who don't eat meat because they believe an animal-free diet is best for the environment and the only way to feed the number of people on the earth. Here Ms. Keith again lays the woes of the world at agriculture's feet. But she legitimately points out that modern farming takes a great deal of fossil fuel, a non-renewable resource, in the form of fertilizers, so being a vegetarian doesn't solve that problem. The farm subsidies that promote the production of huge surpluses of corn, for example, are problematic from a nutritional standpoint as well as for their effects on poor farmers in other countries. She starts to hint here about her ideal solution by praising Joel Salatin's ten-acre perennial polyculture in Virginia and bemoaning the fact that there are about six billion too many of us on the planet.

Finally she attacks vegetarianism from a nutritional angle, using her own twenty-year history of failing health on a vegan diet as the example. I actually thought this was her strongest argument as she makes good use of many scientific studies and demonstrates how vital nutrients are extremely difficult to include in a strictly vegan diet. For example, cholesterol, protein, saturated fat, vitamin D and vitamin B12 are all

required by our bodies for growth and repair and come mostly from animal sources. Low tryptophan, also difficult to get on a vegan diet, can lead to severe depression. On the flip side, I know several vegetarians who are very healthy. One is even a triathlete (Hi, Nicole!). While I have my doubts about a strict vegan diet, I'm not convinced a well-balanced vegetarian diet is not nutritionally sound.

Ms. Keith frequently refers to becoming an adult, using our "adult knowledge", completing our "adult task" of saving the planet. But to be "adult" I think a solution needs to be realistic and have at least a snowball's chance in hell of being successfully implemented and what she outlines just doesn't. She advocates humans "stepping aside" and allowing the earth to return to its natural state from 10,000 years ago, tearing down dams, and ceasing all agricultural pursuits. Her three specific suggestions at the end of the book are: 1) don't have any children; 2) don't drive a car; and 3) grow your own food. I've already spent way too much time on this review, so let me wrap it up by just saying suggestion 1 is not a solution. Suggestion 2 is great if you're in a position to do it, but many people simply aren't. (I noticed that Ms. Keith's bio mentions that she lives in both western Massachusetts and northern California. Now that's a tricky commute on a bike or on foot.) Suggestion 3 is likewise fabulous if you have the climate and space to do it, but again many don't. And they all still have to eat, too. There may be six billion too many of us on the planet, but which ones are you going to resign to starvation to achieve your Garden-of-Eden utopia?

My grandpa used to say, "You have to start with the world where it is, not where you want it to be." Ms. Keith doesn't seem to have grasped that concept, despite good intentions and a deep desire to save the earth.

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Bryce Lee says

This is a must read for anyone who considers vegetarian/agricultural eating to be either morally or nutritionally superior or even comparable to a preagricultural/hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Lierre also makes a devastating case for the insustainability of agriculture.

She gets a little off topic at a few points by letting her anti-masculinity and anti-religion views shine through. I don't really mind this, but I think it detracts from, rather than contributes to, the major points in the book.

Anyone who knows a vegetarian, is a vegetarian, or who lives in a society based on agriculture, must read this book.

missy jean says

Get ready for my longest review ever. And if you feel like following what I expect will be a lively conversation, I'm also going to post it on ourmotherskeeper.com.

I am giving this book 2 stars although on balance I disliked it. There were pieces and passages that I found lovely and illuminating, and they deserve a star. But on the whole, this book was packed full of false choices.

From the title onward, Keith aims her knife blade in strange directions. The foundational argument of this book is based on an anti-agriculture, anti-civilization critique. She clearly has a bone to pick with veg*ns, but

the whole first half of the book I kept thinking: If you really want to critique industrial agriculture, why focus on vegans? The vegans I know put way more thought into their food sources and choices than the average American does. The vegans I know are more likely to grow their own food or eat locally-grown food. It's not like vegans are the only ones eating industrial monoculture crops like corn and soy. In fact, I guarantee I eat less of those things than any of my neighbors. So why does the book have a smug, condescending, join-with-me-meat-eaters-of-the-world-in-laughing-at-the-ignorance-of-the-veg*ns tone?

In fact, I had a hard time figuring out who her target audience really was. Was she aiming her book at veg*ns with the hope of converting the back to meat-eating? (If so, maybe it would have been wise to be less assuming and insulting.) Was she aiming it at Americans who eat meat, the regular old factory-farmed way? (Which is the vast, vast majority of meat-eating Americans, and so maybe it would have been a good idea for her to spend a little bit of time on why the factory farming system is so bad—she acknowledges that it is in passing, but then assumes that base of knowledge from her readers. And obviously the deplorable nature of factory farms is not common knowledge, or else why would they still exist?) Or was she aiming for fellow anti-civ sympathizers?

Keith makes repeated references to the “ignorance” of veg*ans (“What vegetarians need to understand is...”) then follows them up with mind-numbingly obvious factoids. (Yes, veg*ns know that insects die in the agricultural process. Yes, vegans know that cows eat grass. These are not revelations.) I agree with her that most of us are woefully disconnected from our own food chains. Not just veg*ns though; the vast majority of people living in industrialized societies are. The parts of her book where she tried to help the reader connect with the roots and processes of plants and soil were, for me, some of the most touching and impactful.

In the end, the strength of Keith's argument rests upon her efforts to remake the world from the bottom up. Her vision may make sense in the context of a world inhabited by only 3 million people (I think that's the number she said would be ideal) divided into self-sufficient non-industrial bioregional communities. Perhaps post-apocalypse she and I could have a very different conversation. When you try to apply her arguments to the present day, though, unless you include a clause of voluntary human extinction, they don't make as much sense. What would Keith's non-agricultural vision of the world look like right now, applied to the 7 billion people who actually exist? What are concrete steps that people can take to eat in more ecologically friendly ways? (No, eating more steak is not an answer that works in the here and now.)

(Also and completely tangentially, I'm sorry if this is an unfair misreading of her point, but it's hard to take seriously her stated concerns about infant mortality and decreased human fertility due to soy consumption when her book also states the need to eliminate 99.9% of the people in the world in order for the world to survive.)

My overall sense is that this book will not produce very many anti-civ, anti-ag activists--because that is a really, really hard thing to commit to. Rather, it will create readers whose consciences are assuaged into meat-eating as an ethical choice--because that is an easy thing to commit to.

Every pro-meat eating argument starts with the disclaimer, “Of course, factory farming is reprehensible, but...” But most people don't go away from books like this committed to move to the country and raise their own animals. The diluted take-home message ends up being that our ancestors ate meat so we should too (a la paleos) or that you really can't live without animal products so you shouldn't bother trying (a la Weston Price Foundation).

In other words, when people read Pollan and Kingsolver and Keith, they may come away from the books with a sense that it would be more ethical for them to raise and slaughter their own animals--but of course

they can't do that [they have a job, after all] and so the message that remains is the moral justification for meat-eating. So maybe one year for Thanksgiving they buy a "humanely-raised" local turkey, and then feel that they have done their part. Or maybe they occasionally buy cage-free eggs at the grocery store, not realizing that's basically meaningless to the chickens involved. Then the rest of the time they continue to eat the daily special at the restaurant and rush to the grocery store to take advantage of "meat sales" and stop by McDonalds or Burger King on the way home from work.

Listen, this may be an unpopular veg*n position to take, but my beef (haha) is not with Keith's choices, necessarily. [Some more staunch animal abolitionists will probably disagree with me here, and I welcome hearing their opinions, too.] She decided to feed herself from the ground up, an effortful and responsible choice. My big issue is when she starts telling other people—people who don't have the resources, gumption, know-how or commitment to follow suit—that eating animals is going to save the world. There may be a handful of people [I know there are a couple of them who read this blog and will probably be commenting] who follow her lead. But most people will just order a steak the next time they're at a restaurant, and feel even less guilty about it.

And so this is exactly what I'm trying to say: In a world where the vast majority of people are not willing or able to live as full-time sustenance farmers, raising and slaughtering their own animals for food, a defense of "ethical meat-eating" is really no more than a defense of meat-eating. And the industrialized style of meat-eating is frankly indefensible.

Really, I have this lingering sense that the "ethical meat" argument must be a dream for the meat industry. It doesn't provide any solid critique of meat-eating as a general practice--and factory farms don't care if people have vaguely negative opinions of them, as long as everyone keeps buying their products. And because it is so difficult to avoid factory farmed "products," the "ethical meat" argument (and its inherent supposition that meat can, in fact, be ethical) provides people with some psychological wiggle room, keeping them from considering whether they should eat animals at all.

Ellen Young says

A 20-year vegan who started eating meat out of a desperate attempt to heal her constant and chronic health problems, the author had her eyes opened to both the damaging effects of a grain-based diet and the devastation agriculture has wreaked on the planet. And now she wants to let everyone know how she, and the vegetarians still practicing, got it all wrong. For one thing, she totally skewers the claims that eating a grain-based diet is better for the environment. The destruction of topsoil and entire ecosystems on behalf of wheat, barley, corn, etc. is a disaster on a par with global warming. I used to be vegetarian in my younger days, and I remember hearing that a huge amount of grain had to be fed to a cow to bring it to maturity, and that this was incredibly wasteful. This author points out that a cow is not supposed to be eating grain at all, since it's a ruminant whose natural diet is grass. And grass grows for free. But we don't let cattle freely graze because we need the land for agriculture, and since corn is so cheap to grow, it's given to the cattle instead of grass. Grass-fed beef doesn't present this problem of overconsumption. Also, the production of wheat, and therefore the bread on sale at the store, is highly dependent on fossil fuels because the topsoil is so depleted farmers use chemical fertilizers created by fossil fuels.

As for the health effects of a grain-based diet compared with a meat diet, she lays out the substantial evidence that meat is far superior. There's no contest. This is a good companion book to *Good Calories, Bad Calories*

by Gary Taubes, which goes even further into the nutrition aspects of grains as opposed to meat. The author's heart is clearly in this book, as it was in her devotion to vegetarianism. It's really hard-hitting. She's on a mission to wake people up.

Virginia Messina says

(I reviewed this book back in the fall on my blog. This is a slightly tweaked version of that post.)

Lierre Keith suffers from numerous chronic health problems. Unable to secure a diagnosis for most of them, she decided that the vegan diet she had followed for twenty years was to blame. But she wasn't content to add a few animal products back to her diet. Instead, she set out to prove that healthy diets require copious amounts of animal foods and that small-scale animal farming is the answer to sustainability. To prove it, she has cobbled together information from websites (yes, she actually cites Wikipedia!) and a few popular pseudoscientific books.

I read the section on nutrition first. Since it's my area of expertise, I figured it would give me some idea of the quality of her research and analysis. But quality isn't at issue here because there *is* no research or analysis. Keith doesn't bother with primary sources; she depends almost exclusively on the opinions of her favorite popular authors, which she presents as proof of her theories.

For example, when she writes about evolution as it affects dietary needs, and suggests that "the archeological evidence is incontrovertible," she is actually referencing the book *Protein Power*, written by two physicians who have no expertise in evolution or anthropology. It's a neat trick, of course, because we have no idea where the *Protein Power* authors got their information. By burying all of the actual studies this way, she makes it laborious for readers to check her facts.

I doubt she did this on purpose. And I don't think she was being sloppy or lazy, either. She just doesn't understand how complex the research is and she certainly doesn't know much about basic nutrition. Worse, her conclusions are indebted to the Weston A Price Foundation, a non-credible group that bases its recommendations on the opinions of a dentist who wrote up his observations of indigenous populations in the 1930s.

As a result, we get page after page of contradictions, fabrications, and misinterpretations. For example, Keith is woefully confused about fats, believing that saturated fat is needed for absorption of vitamins and minerals and that humans have a dietary need for cholesterol (Neither saturated fat nor cholesterol are needed in diets; there is no RDA for either.)

Like most anti-vegetarians she is vehemently against soy, insisting that it reduces testosterone levels and therefore male libido (there is no evidence of this) and she speculates that African-American girls reach puberty faster because they are more likely to be enrolled as infants in food assistance programs like WIC and therefore, to be fed soy infant formula. It's true that African-American babies are less likely to be breastfed, but I couldn't find any indication that they consume more soy formula. And, it's not soy that produces abnormally fast growth in kids; it's animal foods. Recent research has linked animal protein to earlier puberty, and cow's milk to excessive growth in children. In contrast, preliminary research suggests that soy could slightly delay puberty in girls and also reduce their lifelong risk for breast cancer.

On page 227, she notes that "Mark Messina, a champion of soy, thinks the Japanese eat 8.6 [grams of

soyfoods] per day,” or less than a tablespoon. Really? Well, I happen to be married to Mark Messina, so I have a fairly good idea of what he “thinks” about soy intake. But even if I didn’t know him, I could read his 2006 analysis of soy intake data that was published in the medical journal *Nutrition and Cancer*. Apparently, Keith didn’t or she would have seen that Asian soy intake is the equivalent of 1 to 1 ½ servings or more per day. (She gets this wrong because she doesn’t understand the difference between grams of soy *protein* and grams of soy *food*.)

I’m less able to evaluate her discussion of the environmental consequences of animal farming, although it seems reasonable to assume that she gets as much wrong in this section. Notably, she points out that ten acres on Polyface Farm (much lauded by Michael Pollan as an example of sustainable animal agriculture) can produce enough food to feed 9 people for a year. But on his blog *Say What Michael Pollan*, mathematician Adam Merberg performs calculations which suggest that Polyface requires more calories in feed (for the chickens) than it produces in food. The numbers aren’t nearly as egregious as those for factory farming, but they suggest that there is no such thing as truly sustainable meat production. (For more on environmental questions associated with Polyface, I highly recommend Adam’s review of the *Omnivore’s Dilemma*)

But Keith didn’t give up veganism because of concerns about the environment; she gave it up because she didn’t feel well. And she mistakes her cravings for animal protein for an actual need for animal protein. When she decides to eat her first bite of tuna fish after 20 years as a vegan, she says “I don’t know how to describe what happened next. [...] I could feel every cell in my body—literally every cell—pulsing. And finally, finally being fed. Oh god, I thought: this is what it feels like to be alive.”

This, more than anything, shows that Keith’s conviction about her need for meat has to do with something other than nutrition—because food just does not work like that. Eating a bite of tuna—no matter how deficient you might be in a nutrient that it supplies—does not cause all of your body cells to start pulsing. It wouldn’t cause you to feel too much of anything. (At the very least, you’d have to digest and absorb it first!)

It’s true that some vegans are not healthy. They don’t eat enough fat or enough protein or calories or they refuse to supplement with vitamin B12. There is tons of bad nutrition info out there for vegans, some of it from pretty popular sources. But Lierre Keith insists that a vegan diet will damage us all--she is 100% certain of this--and it is simply not true. It’s not supported by nutrition science and it isn’t supported by simple observations of long-term vegans, not to mention vegan from birth kids.

Interestingly, she never tells us what she ate when she was vegan or what she eats now that she is an omnivore. Except to say that she used to eat “all carbohydrates” (All? No wonder she was sick) and that she now eats mostly animals and their secretions. And while she thinks she understands “moral vegetarians,” she reveals her total disconnect from a vegan ethic with three short sentences in the closing paragraphs of the book, “I have looked my food in the eye. I have raised some of it myself, loved it when it was small and defenseless. I have learned to kill.”

This is ultimately a sad book. Lierre Keith was desperate to find an answer to her health problems; she landed on vegetarianism and then spun a tale to support her theory. Her intent seems heartfelt; she sees herself very much as a savior of vegetarians and wants us to learn from her mistakes. And the book has been widely embraced by those who want to believe that meat-eating is healthy and just. The problem is that there is truly nothing in this book that accurately supports that conclusion.

Keith Akers says

This is an anti-vegan book which will be a difficult book for vegans to read. The text resembles more a stream-of-consciousness monologue than an organized discussion. The author is an ex-vegan, after having been a vegan for 20 years, and blames most of her numerous health problems (skeletal problems of some sort, evidently) and mental problems (depression, anger) on her vegan diet.

But this is an indictment not just of veganism, but of agriculture in general, and indeed our entire civilization, and needs to be read in that context. Obviously as a vegan I don't go along with the anti-vegan part, but there are also several significant things she has stated accurately. Her book would also have benefited from an editor and an index.

I want to examine the book's moral context, the author's treatment of nutrition, and the author's treatment of agriculture and ecology. Since this is a fairly minor book in the scheme of things (just a notch above "self-published") I also want to evaluate the significance of the book in the overall scheme of things. (Not to get ahead of the story, but it's more significant than it initially appears.) And one final introductory note: I unequivocally condemn attempts to suppress Lierre Keith's freedom to express her views.

Most vegetarians or vegans, even those wanting to understand "the point of view of the opposition," are not going to get past a couple of pages in this book. First, the author adopts a tone which is condescending and hostile, and seems to delight in causing mental anguish to vegans. Second, most informed vegetarians will be able to pick out a mistake or inconsistency here or there pretty quickly, so even if they can't instantly refute every assertion she makes, they will conclude that this book is not worth bothering with. This is a minor author, with a minor publisher, talking to a minor audience. (Sort of like me, actually.)

However, there's more to the book than an attack on veganism. There's also the environmental issues which she addresses, and in my mind this is far more interesting. She is against factory farming — she regards it as cruel and unnecessary, so her book can't be all bad. The book certainly is not a defense of conventional livestock production, nor even a defense of "happy meat" (animals reared in non-intensive situations). In fact, she is against all agriculture, a fact which may not sink in at first, but which she repeats in definite terms at numerous points throughout the book. "Agriculture has to stop. It's been a ten thousand year disaster, as all life on earth will tell us if we listen" (p. 255). This is a really radical position, to which I will return.

All food, she argues, requires death; even vegetarians have to kill plants (and sometimes insects and animals) to eat. It's not so much a food chain, as a food circle; even those at the top of the chain eventually die and are compost for the plants that start the cycle over. But what about the suffering involved in killing? Although she's not clear on this point, she evidently thinks that plants are just as important ethically as animals. She details all the way in which plants are like animals. She asks, evidently rhetorically, "At what point are you, vegetarian or carnivore, willing to acknowledge that plants are sentient?" (p. 90)

This view is problematic. Eating animals that have themselves consumed plants kills more plants than just eating the plants directly. But just think about the level of suffering: let's say you have a live chick, a handful of sprouts, and a blender. Evaluate your reaction as you think about putting the sprouts in the blender; if you are very sensitive, you may have some qualms as you do this. But now evaluate your reaction as you think about putting the chick in the blender. Which causes more suffering, do you think?

Her discussion on nutrition is largely found in the section on "nutritional vegetarians." She attacks the idea that vegetarianism is healthy.

She generally quotes sources friendly to the Weston Price Foundation point of view. If you look at the endnotes, you can see that she seems to be relying very heavily on a small number of sources for her information. In one case, there are 33 consecutive footnotes referencing Gary Taubes' book, "Good Calories, Bad Calories," with a single interruption; in another case, there are 31 footnotes from Richard Manning's "Against the Grain" which are consecutive except for a single interruption. There is no attempt to engage or refute any of the standard vegetarian evidence from, for example, "The China Study." She does, incidentally, actually refer to the China study once (the study itself, not the book by T. Colin Campbell), citing it second hand and apparently without realizing that its author was not only a foremost vegetarian advocate but this book is considered by vegetarians to be the latest and greatest defense of nutritional vegetarianism.

This leads me to my next topic, what sort of person is Lierre Keith? Since she has made her personal experience an issue, this is a legitimate subject. It appears that she hung out with some pretty strange vegan characters.

She does not seem to be familiar with the literature of people we think of as vegan leaders — people like T. Colin Campbell, Brenda Davis, John McDougall, etc. She does mention John Robbins, but does not attack any particular statement that he makes. Who does she cite, then, in order to refute? One source is David Wolfe, whose web site styles him as a "Health, Eco, Nutrition, and Natural Beauty Expert," and features ads for supplements and chocolate. She even describes her encounters with "breathatarians" able to live just on pure air — who turn out, of course, to be frauds.

During my 30 years as a vegan, I have encountered some pretty strange vegans and some pretty flaky ideas, but I have never encountered any breathatarians. So she apparently got through her vegan period without encountering any of the standard nutritional information that even groups like VRG and PETA are handing out (or if she did, she's not telling us about it). It is, of course, not impossible that her experience and information in these 20 years took her nowhere near this literature.

But it is certainly pretty atypical for an otherwise well-informed ex-vegan, who now is moved to write a book on the subject, to be so totally uninformed about the views of her opponents, to be so completely unfamiliar with vegan literature, and to have such consistently bad luck in her choice of vegan companions.

And what exactly caused her health problems? If during her vegan period, she had found a competent vegan doctor or dietitian (or any competent doctor or dietician willing to deal with her veganism), could she have been "saved"? She cites both some sort of skeletal problems (a B-12 deficiency?) and depression (too much sugar?).

O. K., even a doctor would be loathe to diagnose someone through the book they write. But if you are citing your own example as evidence, we need to know what the diagnosis was. She refers to "angry vegans" and attributes this to their diet and tryptophan deficiencies. But of course, without any information about her particular condition or her diet either, she can't really meaningfully claim that the problems she had have to do with veganism per se, rather than with (say) her faulty application of the dietary principles. We all know there are plenty of vegans out there that are eating really, really unhealthful diets, but this doesn't make a case against veganism any more than meat-eaters eating really, really unhealthful diets makes a case against meat consumption.

The author is really against agriculture, period, because it has sent us into ecologically unsustainable

overshoot. "We are a species on [ecological] overshoot, and have been for ten thousand years" (p. 119). "[Jim] Merkel [author of "Radical Simplicity"] . . . suggests 600 million as a sustainable number [of people]. My guess is his number is way too high" (p. 129).

The current world population is estimated at about 6.8 billion, but let's round that down to 6 billion. 600 million would be 10% of the current population, and that's probably "way too high." So that means that we have to (hopefully, nonviolently) reduce our population by over 90%. Indeed, if you look at the population before the advent of agriculture, which was probably the maximum number that could be supported on a hunter-gatherer type of technology, that was about 3 million. Even at 3 million, there was evidence of increasing conflict between humans over food resources (see "The Food Crisis in Prehistory" by Mark Nathan Cohen). To get back to that level — assuming that even 3 million hunter-gatherers is sustainable — would mean reducing our population by over 99.9%.

All right, let's get this straight. You're going to reduce the human population by 99.9%? Just how do you propose to do this? I'm happy to help out — I'm not having any kids. But even assuming that the entire world agreed to it, I don't see a realistic way that you could reduce the population by 99.9% or even 90% by nonviolent means without agriculture, at least as an interim measure, for quite a while. And as long as we have agriculture, what would be relatively more sustainable?

And if a hunter-gatherer utopia is her objective, what is this going to look like? Once we're back to 3 million humans, will there be books? Will there be civilization at all? Based on her other statements, one would assume not.

This is not an impossible vision — I think that Derrick Jensen (who enthusiastically endorsed the book) actually foresees something like this happening. But, don't we need just a few additional details here about what this means? Will there be health care resembling what we have today? Will there be birth control? Will there be industry or making of tools?

In other words, reducing the population to this level provokes a flood of questions that basically have nothing to do with the vegan question at all. If this is really her vision, then vegans are the least of her problems. I would have preferred her to talk, just a bit, about the future world of hunter-gatherers (or whatever) that she envisions. I really wonder if the people endorsing her book (or reviewing it) have really read it, except Derrick Jensen, with whose point of view the book really is consistent.

Now for the final question. How significant is this book? In the context of the public at large, not very significant at all. But most people are still pretty oblivious to the impending financial collapse and energy decline. We need to look at this as a contribution to the debate in the energy descent community. This is where vegans need to start paying attention: as a rule, most vegans are just as ignorant as the general public to peak oil and related issues, other than climate change.

This book echoes a lot of the ideas throughout at least the internet portion of the "Transition" movement (preparing for a low-carbon future). People are bad-mouthing veganism and talking about backyard chickens, goats, and all manner of other livestock. (Fewer people have actually tried this, and I think that these options are going to be less attractive once it becomes apparent what is really involved.) There is talk about "holistic resource management," meaning livestock management, which will actually increase the number of cattle on the land.

An emphasis on livestock agriculture in the energy descent is just a really unsustainable idea, and I'm not talking about just or even mostly Lierre Keith. This whole area just hasn't been thought out. People are just

putting out plausible-sounding arguments because it allows them to continue their meat-centered diets and still claim to be radical environmentalists.

Livestock grazing is as old as the hills and is the single most destructive form of human activity on earth. (See Akers, "A Vegetarian Sourcebook," 1983). Much of the biologically "productive" area on the planet has been degraded or destroyed by livestock agriculture. Look at much of the Sahara Desert, look much of the "desert" in the American southwest — this is a result of overgrazing. Vague and unsupported statements to the effect that "well managed pasture builds soil" or that "we need perennial polycultures" are not going to convince me.

This whole discussion appears to be a way to continue the nutritional status quo (everyone gets to eat meat, and lots of it) under a facade of environmentalism. So while the most interesting feature of Lierre Keith's new book to me is its radical demand for population reduction, I suspect that its appeal in the energy descent community will mostly be the appeal of continuing our meat consumption behind a "green" facade.

Leran Minc says

This is definitely an interesting read, but I found many things about the book itself problematic and generally disagree with her conclusions despite agreeing with some of her arguments. Until I find a superior book (which I hope will be easy to find) I would recommend conscious omnivores and vegetarians alike to read this book.

Let's start with her motivation to write the book. She was vegan for over 20 years and developed physical and mental health issues due to her diet. While it truly is sad that others, like Keith, have destroyed their bodies and in some cases their minds with a destructive diet, I don't think that applies to all vegans and certainly not to all vegetarians. She uses this to strike a very personal and often angry tone throughout the book that frankly detracts from the evidence she cites. I'm glad she does not hide her bias, but she certainly lets it cloud her thoughts. I have a real issue with people jumping from one extreme to another and this is a clear example of that. She goes from being staunchly vegan to staunchly anti-vegan.

My biggest issue is with how her anti-veganism manifests. Her main argument seems to be that civilization and primarily agriculture has been destructive to our planets and we should revert to a simpler life where we grow only historically locally available plants, raise only historically locally available animals, don't have children, don't drive and live in partnership with the natural world. As someone who trying hard to become more of a locavore, I am sympathetic to her desires, but find it unrealistic and absurd to live in a world as she describes it. Not to mention she splits her time between Massachusetts and California. So unless other people actively live in these two homes and she bikes between them, she is violating the kind of fossil fuel-free, small home, local world she seems to be advocating for.

What really hurts her argument are the tangents she goes on almost every few pages. She and I are both proud feminists, but despite agreeing that patriarchy has caused many problems, I see no need to link agriculture in its past, present and future forms as wrapped up with patriarchy and nor do I find it to be a compelling argument. At many parts of the book she breaks down into this nonsensical feminist tirade for pages at a time with no mention of food, vegetarianism or agriculture. While these movements and issues are linked in some ways, she is trying too hard to create connections and loses sight of her thesis.

Structurally, the book is also very clunky. She has only 4 "chapters" divided by moral, political and

nutritional vegetarianism and finally a concluding chapter on how to save the world. Each chapter is more like a section and her thoughts and arguments may have been more coherent if she imposed chapters on herself.

Not all was bad, for I gave this 2 stars, not 1! I think Keith does an incredible job arguing that agriculture based on annual grains that require significant augmentation of their soil, often with fossil fuels, is problematic. Perhaps as or more problematic than factory farms and certainly more problematic than incorporating animal products that were humanely, sustainably produced into your diet. She also makes the powerful argument that in order to sustain annual plants that may not be suited for the area they are grown in and certainly not in the scale they are grown, substantial life is lost. Much of this life is microscopic, but the death of these organisms and the ecosystem as large effects many other lifeforms plant and animal alike.

This brings us to what I think was the most profound argument of the book. Keith does a beautiful job in her Moral Vegetarian "chapter" reminding vegetarians, city dwellers and all of us about life cycles. The Circle of Life if you want to get all Disney about it. Plants eat animals as much as animals eat plants and each other. Being vegetarian does not remove you from this cycle, the plants you eat much eat and either you supply that food through fossil fuels (which were originally animals) or you supply it sustainably through animal waste, blood, bones and flesh. While I agree with her, I find her argument of this being "adult knowledge" unnecessarily condescending. That said,

I hope despite the issues I had with her book, that vegetarians and those considering the vegetarian/vegan path take to heart that regardless of our actions animals or the planet itself will be involved in supplying us our meals even if choose not to directly eat animals or fossil fuel products. Many of the issues she argues I think apply to vegans much more than they do to vegetarianism as a whole, but whatever diet choices we pursue, we can be extra conscious about how our food effects other animals and the planet and strive to be more local and less destructive with those choices.
