

Sample translation from

Once upon a time we ate animals

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Introduction

Inventing a new colour

Three centuries ago the Enlightenment took place and burning people as witches or condemning them for their beliefs became illegal. Over 150 years ago (around eight generations, by my reckoning) slavery was abolished all over the world, and it became illegal to brand other human beings, hold them against their will, misuse or mistreat them in any other way. Around 100 years ago (five generations) women in the West were given the vote and formally became equal to men. You and I live in similarly turbulent, important and exciting times.

Our age will go down in history for the immense social, economic and cultural changes which are now unfolding *right now*, at this very moment that you are reading this book. It is a transformation that is taking place all over the world in all kinds of places, and it won't be long before it suddenly strikes you. You will see it in the things you buy, the work you do, the way you raise your children; even in the way you think and feel. And when it gets to that stage it will almost be as if things were never any different.

You and I are part of the generation working together in large areas of the world to make unnecessary animal suffering a thing of the past. This means that while the consumption and use of meat or other animal products may still go on in the near future, it will become more difficult and much more expensive. It will be a choice that differs from the norm; a choice rejected by most people. Whether you support a huge change or you are against it, it is already happening: you cannot halt it, for we are in the midst of it.

Try to imagine you are standing on a green hilltop, and you are trying to move an enormous heavy boulder. You push against the boulder with both hands, dig your heels into the grass, tense your abdomen and legs... It doesn't work, the boulder stays where it is and you, you swear, you puff, you groan, you think it might be impossible – then suddenly it starts to roll. Slowly at first, then faster, then faster still, until the boulder rolls so fast that you know it can never be stopped. We have now reached the tipping point of this boulder. We are all on the edge of this shift from a slow-paced to a fast-paced movement, a movement that can no longer be stopped.

We're on a roll

Veganism is one of the fastest growing movements in the world. More and more scientists and futurists predict that eating meat and dairy will be

banned or become taboo in the near future. A growing number of people are saying that veganism is one of the last remaining options we have to combat climate change, and their message is being heard. In the 1990s there were about a million people worldwide who ate no meat or dairy or did not use any animal products – often because they were saddened by the plight of animals, sometimes because they believed it was bad for the environment or their body. By 2015 this number had increased to around 750 million.

In 2008, the city of Ghent in Belgium was the first city in Europe to promote a weekly meat-free day in schools and other public institutions. This idea had already gained some traction in the US; the next city to implement this was in the UK, and by 2019 forty cities worldwide were taking part in the scheme, and this number continues to grow.

In 2018, Australia – the country that at the start of the 21st century consumed the most meat in the world – had one of the fastest growing vegan markets on the planet. More and more Aussies are choosing soy over steak. The country came in third, behind the United Arab Emirates and China, where more and more people also want to eat vegan.

In the United States not only have sales of meat alternatives (such as soy burgers and plant-based “meat” pieces which have a taste and texture reminiscent of chicken breast) increased enormously in recent years, but sales of dairy alternatives such as coconut yogurt and almond milk have also risen. By 2020, these alternatives will make up 40% of all milk-style drinks, compared to 25% in 2016. Sales of cow’s milk meanwhile dropped. Dairy Farmers of America, the largest milk cooperative in the United States, and the supplier of 30% of the country’s milk, made a billion dollars less in 2018 than the year before. This trend isn’t solely limited to the US, but has also been noted in the Netherlands, the UK, Germany, Australia, Italy and Canada. In January 2019, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency published new national health guidelines which no longer recommended cow’s milk as part of a balanced diet. What do they recommend instead? Plant-based, protein-rich foods.

The global egg industry is also beginning to notice the sudden sharp drop in the demand for animal products: Cal-Maine Foods, a huge American egg producer, recently reported its first annual loss in more than ten years. Shares plummeted; the company CEO said that the losses were due to the increasing popularity of egg alternatives.

In light of this, smart business people would do better by investing in the vegan food industry, for example, in markets such as ‘nut cheese’. By 2024, its estimated global market value will be close to \$4 billion dollars, with annual growth of about 8%. Or they should invest in milk made from oats,

soy, rice or almonds. After 92 years, Elmhurst, one of the oldest dairy producers in the eastern United States, recently made the decision to switch to producing only plant-based milks – the company’s CEO says this is the best way to prevent future losses.

Plant-based alternatives to meat are also doing well, so well in fact that traditional meat producers have decided to invest en masse, often buying out vegan companies. For example, Tyson Foods, the biggest meat producer in the US, has already invested in the most popular meat alternative in the American market: Beyond Meat. Canada’s largest meat distributor, Maple Leaf Foods, bought the popular plant-based brands Field Roast and Lightlife Foods. Nestlé, the biggest food and drink company in the world, took over Sweet Earth Foods – a company that only makes plant-based products (and was set up by a former CEO of Burger King). Danone took over plant-based pioneer WhiteWave, whilst Unilever bought The Vegetarian Butcher.

De Volkskrant considered the million dollar sale as symbolic of the ‘rise of meat substitutes’ and noted that multinationals ‘and even meat producers’ are currently starting to get in on the vegetarian market. International business magazine Forbes did not hesitate and advised investors to ride the plant-based wave, with a headline reading ‘Here’s why you should turn your business vegan’.

The world turned upside down

The business world is not the only thing that has experienced an enormous transformation in recent years, with significant changes also taking place at an individual level. Recently, 39% of Americans have consciously decided to eat less meat or become flexitarian, primarily because they believe it is better for their health. They have shifted from traditional pork and beef products to ‘Beyond Sausage’, a meat alternative with a consistency similar to that of pork but with less fat and sodium, as well as more protein than in actual meat, or to the ‘Beyond Burger’, another of the company’s products, which counts Bill Gates, Leonardo Di Caprio, Twitter founders Biz Stone and Evan Williams and meat processing giant Tyson Foods among its shareholders.

In Germany, a country known for its love of sausages, 41% of consumers ate less meat (and more meat alternatives) in 2018 than in previous years. That same year, Dutch people spent €80 million on meat alternatives; ten years earlier, this figure was €62 million. Researchers predict that over the next few years Dutch consumers will opt more and more for plant-based food alternatives.

It certainly looks this way, as most people who have a partial or completely plant-based diet are young – and in the years to come they will be the ones in charge of buying the groceries. In 2017, 42% of all vegans in the UK were between the ages of 15 and 34; in Australia most of them belong to the ‘millennial’ generation, and in other countries, too, the vast majority of vegetarians and vegans belong to the new generation of consumers. Children and teenagers increasingly opt for a plant-based diet because they have concerns about the climate, they disagree with the way animals are used to make food or simply because they like the taste of meat and dairy alternatives. A plant-based lifestyle is currently not the social norm since the number of older consumers who eat animal products is still larger than the younger demographic who have a plant-based diet. This visible shift, however, suggests that the growth of the vegan market will be explosive in future.

In this book I will show you the lifestyle changes you can expect in the years to come. I will show you the world of the future. Not the distant future: a future that you and your children (if you have or want any) will live to see. This future will be very different in many ways to the world you grew up in and live in now. Much sooner than you think we will eat differently, work differently, use different things, take different school trips and pamper different pets. Above all, we will think differently about what is good and what is evil.

Sigh

When we look back on all these changes in our old age, I suspect that, in retrospect, we will heave a sigh about how long it took for us to make the switch. Too long in fact. For a long time we knew that the way society treats animals and the planet was not OK. We saw documentaries about it, or videos online, or we read about it in books and newspapers, but most of us did nothing with the information.

I am guilty of this too. I became a vegetarian when I was 16; I stopped eating meat, but I kept eating dairy and eggs and using leather and other animal products. I didn’t want to eat meat anymore because I loved animals and didn’t want them to be killed just because I happened to like how they taste, and also, in all honesty, I wanted to be ‘different’ from my friends at school. My vegetarianism was both a way of shaping my own identity and also a kind of self-conceived charity work: some people wiped the bums of the elderly, while I switched a late night kebab for a cheese toastie. I considered this a supreme sacrifice, a good deed that exempted me from thinking more profoundly about all the complex things relating to our food

system. Or maybe I was just too young to be aware that simply cutting meat out of my diet would not solve all the problems that I have written about so fervently. I have no recollection of ever asking myself how the cheese on my toastie or the mayonnaise I dipped my fries in was made, or how my new pair of cowboy boots, with the fabulous pointed toes and a perfect slightly worn look, were made from the skin of cows.

It took me over fifteen years for me to actually start asking these questions. I was in my 30s when I read an article about dairy cattle farming. It was a Sunday afternoon and I was sitting in my favourite coffee spot in Philadelphia, a place that only sold ‘good’ coffee and ‘ethically-produced milk’. I enjoyed my cappuccino, thought about what I would cook for my husband that evening, and thumbed through the *New York Times*. I accidentally stumbled across an article which said all young bulls born on dairy cattle farms were slaughtered right away, as they served no purpose. Standard procedure. ‘Bulls don’t give any milk’ I read, ‘and so they are a waste product in the production of milk.’ Later I learned male chicks suffered the same fate: as soon as they have hatched they are minced alive or gassed, as they can’t lay eggs and are considered a ‘waste product’ of the egg industry.

I must have come across such information before this point. The article’s message was not new; the information was not printed as ‘news’ either. It was somewhere on one of the last pages of the thick weekend supplement, in an article about the American dairy industry’s annual investment figures. The ‘waste product’ comment was barely an afterthought. I remember that I closed the paper and stared long and hard at the tiny bubbles in the foam of my cappuccino. I also remember feeling confused. Surely what was written in the article couldn’t be true? But what if it was? By buying this ‘good’ cappuccino with the ‘ethically-produced’ foam, had I indirectly contributed to the slaughter of a perfectly healthy young bull? Why for that matter had I not been aware of this during all my years as a vegetarian? What kind of sick system was this that labelled perfectly healthy animals as *waste*?

That afternoon was the start of my own lengthy personal investigation into the topic of ‘veganism’. A scientific investigation of the animal product economy, but also a personal search for my own role in it.

In this book I will tell you about my quest. Not because I want to lecture you: I have wondered for a while now if my current (vegan) diet and lifestyle is ‘better’ than the way I lived before. Clothing made without animal products is not always more environmentally friendly than its animal-based equivalents, to name but one dilemma I face. I also find it very difficult to have to turn down a dish which has been lovingly made but which is not

vegan friendly. Then I'm torn between the desire to be polite and pleasant and 'normal' and my choice to no longer contribute to a system that I do not support– and I have to make a decision that will leave me feeling awful either way.

I am also not telling you about these personal struggles of mine because my story is so important or special, but precisely because my story is *not* that special. I expect my story might be very similar to your own, whether it's a process you've already gone through, are going through now or have yet to go through. If you recognise yourself in my story then the research that I have done might help you understand why you have made decisions that have supported a brutal system, whilst you consider yourself a kind-hearted person. Just like me.

Paradox

It is perhaps the greatest paradox of being human: simply because of our humanity, we often behave inhumanely. Most people consider it a scary fact that sea levels are set to rise and cause deadly flooding in other countries as a result of our food choices. Yet this is what is happening right now.

We also reel at the idea that animals suffer unimaginably because we want to use their meat, milk, eggs or skin. But this happens too. Relatively recently a spokesperson for the United Nations called the way that we breed, keep and slaughter farm animals as absolute 'torture', and you and I are against torture. We would never shove an electric pole into the nose or anus of an animal. We would never twist a cow's tail if we knew it causes a huge amount of pain, we would never castrate a male piglet without anaesthetic and we would never breed chickens that are so big they can barely walk. We would never slice up, gas or shoot healthy animals. But this is what we do on an almost daily basis by financially supporting the meat and dairy industry

The idea that *every week* more animals are killed for human consumption than humans who have died in *all wars in human history* combined is something we can hardly imagine. It is also something we don't want to imagine at all. It sounds so...absurd, doesn't it? Every time I read and re-read the sentence above, which I typed myself, I immediately feel this urge to rid myself of this image, to quickly move on to the following paragraphs, to the next section of this introduction where things get a bit more pleasant again. But what it says is true: every week we kill more animals than there have been humans killed in every war in human history.

According to researchers, 108 million people died as the result of war in the 20th century (including both world wars). Estimates of the number of people killed in wars during the whole of human history vary between 150 million and 1 billion.

Exact numbers of the number of animals we slaughter also vary wildly, but the most conventional statistics I can find – those published by the dairy and meat industries, – put the total number of farm animals slaughtered each year at 66 billion. This is just the number of cows, pigs and other farm animals, and does not include the number of fish we catch for food. Figures for fish and other aquatic animals are estimated at about 150 billion a year. If we count up all the animals we like to eat in vast amounts – fish, chickens, pigs, cows, goats, sheep – then we reach a figure of 150 million *per day*. These statistics, however, do not include the millions of animals that are killed in laboratories each year, or those that are killed for their fur, or the male chicks and young bulls that are killed straight after they are born (because ‘waste products’ are not included in these statistics). This also does not include animals who die in rodeos and bullfights each year, or racing horses and dogs that are put down after races, or animals that die young in zoos and aquariums because they are kept in captivity, or because they are considered ‘surplus’.

If you let these facts sink in then you will probably feel the same emotions I feel every time I do so: pity, disbelief, disgust, and shame. This ability to feel compassion makes us as humans civilised; many believe that this ability is what separates us from animals.

I would also argue that this ability to feel compassion makes our behaviour equally *uncivilised* at times. We turn a blind eye to cruelty, not because we don’t care, but precisely because our deep human values are inconsistent with how we treat animals in our time. The information we are fed about this, which comes to us via newspaper articles, shocking video images that appear on social media, and now via the words written on these pages, makes us so uncomfortable that we can do nothing other than immediately distance ourselves from it. We ignore it; we act as if it’s not happening. I fear this was the reason I previously ignored dozens of articles about the dairy industry, before the news truly sunk in, that afternoon in a café in Philadelphia. It was too much, it was too terrible, it seemed illogical that we – as intelligent, decent, caring people! – could do this.

Tacit evil

Yet we still do it. Historian Yuval Noah Harari wrote in the *Guardian* in 2015 that the way we treat industrially farmed animals is one of the greatest

crimes in human history. With this statement I don't think he wants to deny that terrible crimes have been committed against humanity, and it's also not useful or appropriate to compare the fates of Holocaust or other genocide victims with those of animals that have fallen victim to our lifestyle: it's not a competition of suffering, after all. His statement does point to a shocking conclusion however: most of us are sponsors of criminal activities, whether we are aware of it or not. While it is true most of us do not harm any animals personally, we do pay others to do it for us. We do it every time we buy a box of eggs, or a pot of yoghurt, or a steak. We do it every time we see an article or video that exposes the abuses in the meat and dairy industries and simply click away. We don't *mean* any harm by this, and we also don't *feel* like we are causing harm when we do this. We justify this denial with the idea that there is no other way and this is simply how the world works.

Yet if we avoid thinking about bad things, this results in a tacit acceptance of what goes on, and this is dangerous if this is the norm, as it leads to enormous suffering. Seen in this light, our silent generation is guilty of massive-scale animal abuse that takes place every second of every day, and we are equally guilty of the destruction of the planet, caused by the emissions created by industrial livestock farming.

Now.

Now.

And now.

Albert Einstein said: 'the world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it'. The philosopher Hannah Arendt added to this sentiment by stating that the greatest evil in the world is done by people who don't necessarily think about whether what they are doing is bad, but who simply go along with what others do and with what the norm is.

Before all this moralising starts putting you off, don't worry, this book goes much further than simply listing accusations about the way our society treats animals and the planet. Others have done this before me in the form of books, articles, reports and documentaries, and I feel that repeating what they have said will not help you or me to think about the way we live and consume (if you are interested however, you will find a list of reliable sources at the back of this book).

We aren't lacking knowledge on the subject – if we are open to the idea, all the information has been available for free for a long time now. We also clearly don't lack the ability to empathise - you may have noticed it just now,

when I persuaded you to take part in my thought experiment about war victims and slaughtered animals.

I believe what we are lacking is a clear idea of what the alternatives might look like. From my point of view, what we are missing is a serious exploration of a future world in which most of us live a plant-based lifestyle, where we no longer use animals for food, clothing or other items.

Learning to see new colours

It is not that strange if you can't imagine something like this to be possible, let alone what such a world might look like. Try to imagine an entirely new colour, or a new taste, or a new smell. Something that no one has ever seen, smelled or tasted!

Give up; it's virtually impossible.

The most our brain can do is try to mix colours or smells or tastes that we already know; that give us an idea of a combination that has never been made before. A new combination, however, is not something completely new.

We also encounter the same problem when it comes to a plant-based lifestyle, and I believe this is the second reason why I must have come across this information for so long without having it affect me. I had to shrug my shoulders because I couldn't think of a solution for it: that's the way things have always worked, that's just the way it is, right?

For a long time it was, yes. Just like me, you have been brought up in an age where using and eating animals is seen as completely normal. They are part of our clothes, our shoes, our candles, our apple juice, even our condoms! We grew up in an age where our parents, doctors and teachers taught us that meat and dairy were not only good for our health but were *necessary* for a healthy lifestyle. Research has proven this wrong, but we'll come back to that later. It is difficult, however, to suddenly stop believing something that you have believed for so long, especially if you are lacking an alternative vision of how you can still eat good food and stay fit and healthy.

This book will outline that vision for you. I will construct for you a futuristic dreamscape of a more animal and environmentally friendly world with new colours, tastes and smells. I can tell you in concrete terms what we can and will do differently in the years to come. Once again: that huge boulder has already started to roll.

Over the course of this book I will introduce you to dozens of former pork, lamb, beef and dairy farmers who no longer wish to earn money

through the slaughter of animals and who have switched to plant-based farming. These farmers do indeed exist: I have spoken to them; I have seen their transformed businesses with my own eyes and everything I have learned in the last few years whilst researching this book has convinced me that many more will follow their example in the very near future. I will introduce you to monkeys and other animals who have obtained human rights, robot pets, and chefs and restaurant owners who no longer call their menus ‘vegan’ because a plant-based lifestyle has become such a normal thing in their lives that it no longer requires a separate label. I will introduce you to kitchen appliances that measure what nutrients your body needs and therapists who specialise in solving issues between vegan and non-vegan partners and family members. I will introduce you to *vegansexuals* – vegans who only date other vegans, houses that float on higher sea levels and villages that are hurricane resistant. I haven’t dreamt up any of these stories – these things were all taking place in 2019, all across the world, but perhaps you just weren’t aware of them yet because they were a little bit further from home.

Realistic futurism

It is important that you let this sink in: the story I will tell over the following chapters largely takes place in the future and has not been plucked from the more creative parts of my brain. Everything you will read over the pages to come has already been invented and implemented. It exists, but just not on a large scale yet. What I describe is futuristic, but also reality.

I am not only going to show you what a more animal and environmentally friendly world would look like, but I will also show you what the consequences would be for our economy, climate, health and culture once a plant-based lifestyle is more widespread. You will also learn that this new plant-based world is not perfect. In a world where animals are no longer abused for human use, we still have to deal with ethical dilemmas, only these will concern the way we treat other living beings than chickens, cows or pigs. Or they will concern the shame with which the new generation looks back on our complicity in large-scale problems surrounding animal welfare and the environment. We also won’t suddenly all be in perfect health when we switch to eating more plants than animals en masse (you will see that vegan food can be just as unhealthy as eating an anti-biotic ridden piece of cut-price meat). We will also be faced with new problems, such as the loss of certain products and professions – this will require new solutions, and I will show you a number of these in this book.

I will leave it up to you to decide what you make of this future world. I personally must admit that I found it less than ideal (at times I even found it downright terrifying), but in my eyes these new problems do not outweigh the many problems we as humans are facing in the current system. I am unable to reach any other conclusion after conducting extensive research and dozens of interviews with international experts in the fields of livestock farming, foodstuffs, climate and energy. In a world in which we no longer use animal products – in a world after the Protein Revolution – we will have a largely succeeded in combating climate change, people will be healthier on average and far, far fewer animals will suffer stress and pain.

The Protein Revolution

This is one of the future scenarios that will quickly unfold if we mobilise ourselves immediately and collectively. Perhaps reading this makes you immediately a little sceptical. There's a good chance you're thinking something like: 'I think it sounds good, but there's not much sense in me abruptly changing the way I do everything in my life, because the rest of the world isn't doing it and so nothing will happen in the end.' You wouldn't be the only one. This is, in fact, the most commonly used argument against any suggestion of changing things in our day-to-day lives. Yet the fact this argument is popular doesn't make it a strong one.

We know from history that social changes that were so vast and so radical that the people who lived through them could hardly even imagine them, happened anyway. Even when there were many people against those changes, when few wanted or dared go along with them initially. When laws on the equality of slaves were first being discussed, sceptics and opponents often argued that people would never accept such radical changes, arguing that such a transformation would seriously threaten the economy and would therefore be a serious danger to society – but luckily this did not hold those pioneers and activists back. The revolution came about anyway, after which the naysayers were suddenly shocked to find themselves among a small group of stuffy, old-fashioned law breakers that time had left behind. At the end of the book it will be up to you to decide which future scenario you find the most desirable and what role you wish to play in history (for you do play a role – in the game of life there are no holidays or sick days).

The book you are now holding in your hands is a lot more cheerful than most other futuristic books, since they often talk about the end of the world: an end where floodwaters engulf the earth or forest fires wipe out all trees, plants and other living beings. This book, however, is about a new beginning for the world. Your future starts on the next page.