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POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On Fat and Fatter

Ralph Reiland ("Cultural Revolutions," August) find himself in the same camp as the AIDS activists in insisting that political philosophy dictate physiology. The AIDS activists say "AIDS is everyone's disease" because they can't stand the idea of a virus disproportionately affecting them. Reiland pooh-poohs mountains of evidence of obesity's harmfulness (heavily documented in my book *The Fat of the Land*) because he's afraid it will be used to implement public policy he doesn't care for.

For more than a century, insurance actuaries have noted that, on the whole, the fatter you are, the more often you'll be sick and the sooner you'll die. They adjusted their premiums accordingly. And in recent decades, epidemiologists have quantified what the actuaries have always known. The new government standard considers unhealthy a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or above. (BMI is your weight in pounds multiplied by 705, divided by your height in inches and again by your height in inches.) Studies in the United States and throughout the world have shown BMIs above 25 to correlate with premature heart attacks, stroke, cancer, diabetes, myriad other illnesses, and overall premature death. Over half of Americans have a BMI above 25.

Consider the three largest American obesity studies of the 1990's. The largest, released in January and comprising over 300,000 men and women, found that longest life was associated with the leanest bodies, specifically with a BMI between 19 and 22. Thirty- to 44-year-old men averaging six feet tall who were just 39 pounds overweight (a BMI of 25.3) increased their relative chance of death by 50 percent. The second-largest study, of female nurses, found a slight correlation between premature death and higher BMIs at less than 25, and the correlation increased appreciably at 25. The third-largest, of Harvard male alumni, found that the thinnest one-fifth lived the longest. Their average BMI was 22.5.

William Castelli, former director of the longest-running study of men's

health, the Framingham Heart Study, put it bluntly: "The lower your weight, the better off you are." (Obviously this excludes starvation or anorexia, but this would be a BMI of well below 17.)

If Reiland had bothered to read my book instead of just attacking it, he would know that it deals with the lone source he cites to make his case, Glenn A. Gaesser, at great length. Gaesser, who is the first to admit that his findings are out of sync with those of the top obesity researchers in the country, is a major proponent of the "fat but fit" philosophy. But while it's true that a 350-pound woman who walks a mile a day is better off than one who doesn't, there is no substitute for weight loss.

This was shown in a study published in the December 27, 1995, *Journal of the American Medical Association*. One group of men pursued a moderate nine-month weight loss regimen, eventually losing an average of 21 pounds; another group remained obese but engaged in regular aerobic exercise. In nearly every measured risk factor for heart disease, the benefits of weight loss outweighed those of exercise.

But what of those obese persons who proclaim on the basis of a few blood tests that they are in fine health? Gaesser writes of "Lucy" who, though 206 pounds at only five feet, five inches, "has excellent levels of cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure."

The trouble is that Lucy is only 30. Give a few medical tests to a four-pack-a-day smoker at the same age and you can expect her to pass with flying colors, too. Just as almost nobody dies of lung cancer at 30, almost nobody dies from obesity at such a young age. It's only after menopause, which usually takes place around the late 40's or early 50's, that a woman's risk of dying of heart disease starts to go up. Let's see how Lucy is doing when she's up to 300 pounds at age 50. We might have to visit her at the cemetery.

Even Gaesser admits that excess weight is deadly. He states, for example, that abdominal fat appears to be responsible for "such killers as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes." But anyone who's extremely fat carries a large portion of it in the abdominal area; men in general

carry most of their fat in the abdominal area, and so do many post-menopausal women. Gaesser is essentially saying that bullets are harmless—so long as they don't strike you.

The evidence is incontrovertible. More fat equals shorter life and more illness. There's plenty of room to argue about what should be done to curtail the obesity epidemic, but it is very real and very deadly.

—Michael Fumento
Arlington, VA

On Christian Vegetarianism

Many of us eat without giving a thought to the miserable lives and violent, bloody deaths of the animals on our plates. Christians have a choice. We can add to the level of violence, suffering, and death in the world, or we can attempt to withdraw our support for violence and bloodshed wherever and whenever we find it.

More than eight billion animals are killed every year for food in this country. The vast majority are raised on "factory farms." Every one has the capacity for pain and suffering, just as our own cats, dogs, and other companion animals do. I have been to slaughterhouses and farms and can tell you that conditions are ruthlessly violent and inhumane—the antithesis of Christian charity. Christians can easily follow the compassionate Christ by adopting a vegetarian diet.

When considering Jesus' vegetarianism, remember that Jesus spoke in Aramaic, the Gospels were written in Hebrew generations after the Resurrection, and the earliest translations we have are Greek translations from the fourth century (more than 300 years, two translations, and many transcriptions post-Resurrection). When discerning the true nature of the historical Jesus, one must rely on more than strictly biblical accounts.

Those who cite biblical justification for eating the flesh of animals should remember that Paul's letters and the Hebrew Scriptures have been used since time immemorial to justify many merciless, cruel, and unchristian activities, including child and spousal abuse, slavery, witch burnings, and the persecution of scientists such as Copernicus and Galileo. It is unfortunate that Christians continue to misappropriate the Bible to

justify actions and activities so antithetical to Christ's call to mercy and compassion.

Christians must transcend our bias on the basis of species, in the same way we have transcended earlier biases based on race and gender. Human beings are not the only of God's creatures who deserve consideration.

For more information on Christian vegetarianism, readers can visit our website at www.jesus-online.com. As we do to the least, we do to Him.

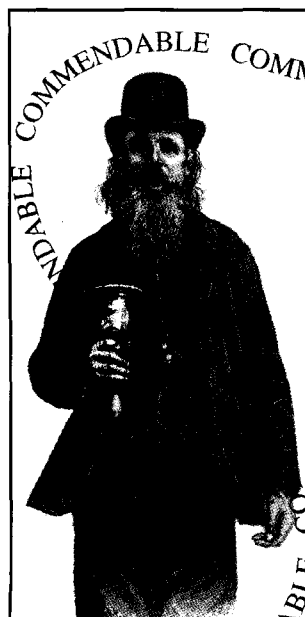
—Bruce G. Friedrich
Vegetarian Campaign Coordinator
People for the Ethical Treatment
of Animals
Norfolk, VA

Mr. Richert Replies:

I'm not surprised that Mr. Friedrich didn't respond to any of the points in my article ("Of Steak and Suicide," August). After all, his is a typical bad faith argument: he knows that Christianity does not require vegetarianism, but he's willing to invoke the moral authority of the Church in a crusade that would ultimately undermine Christianity itself. PETA's "Jesus Was a Vegetarian" website quotes extensively from the Bible, but when confronted with biblical references that run counter to his argument, Mr. Friedrich declares that "one must rely on more than strictly biblical accounts." For Catholics such as Mr. Friedrich and myself, chief among the

extra-biblical sources should be Sacred Tradition and the teaching authority of the Church, both of which sanction the humane use of animals for food, clothing, labor, and mutual pleasure. But instead, Mr. Friedrich turns to texts written by Gnostics and Jewish ascetics, which are clearly contradicted by St. Peter's vision in Acts 10.

Long-time readers of *Chronicles* will remember Stephen R.L. Clark's "Conservation and Animal Welfare" (June 1996), an intelligent exposition of our "bargain with domestic creatures" and of the duty that we owe to animals, wild and tame. Alone among conservative publications, *Chronicles* has consistently upheld the traditional Christian view of stewardship of the land and its creatures. I share Mr. Friedrich's dislike of factory farms and modern slaughterhouses, and at the conclusion of our interview, we discussed the numerous problems with treating animals as an "industrial product." But while I would prefer to return to the family farm, the local slaughterhouse, and the animal husbandry practiced by my ancestors, Mr. Friedrich made it clear that he would oppose those institutions as vigorously as he opposes factory farms. His understanding of "Christ's call to mercy and compassion" is a monumental impiety which substitutes his peculiar view of the equality of species for 2,000 years of Christian doctrine, and condemns all who came before him—including, perhaps, Christ Himself, whom Mr. Friedrich admits may have eaten meat—to the liberal hell of insensitivity.



Robert Nisbet, *The Sociological Tradition* (Transaction). This classic work examines the origins of sociology in French counterrevolutionary thought.

Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and His Time* (Little, Brown). Jefferson becomes more conservative in each successive volume of Malone's monumental six-volume biography.

Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (Harper San Francisco). The autobiography of the founder of the Catholic Worker movement reveals how wrong conservatives have been about Day, and how much the Catholic Worker movement has changed since her death.

THE ICC, the International Criminal Court—the proposed judicial arm of the New World Order—is one step closer to becoming a reality. For five weeks this summer, the United Nations engaged in a protracted, angry, and dangerous debate on the establishment of the ICC. In the mainstream Western media, the ICC was portrayed as a permanent war crimes tribunal, a perpetual Nuremberg court. But in the plenary assemblies and conference rooms, a debate raged over the anti-family “social engineering” agenda which a few developed countries (notably Canada) were trying to foist on the rest of the world.

The discussion in Rome focused not on war criminals like Cambodia’s Pol Pot but on the inclusion of “enforced pregnancy” as a war crime and on the ICC’s commitment to a “gender perspective” in its deliberations. Both are code phrases, like those promoted by the influential Women’s Caucus at earlier U.N. conferences in Beijing, Istanbul, and Cairo. The first means “denying pregnant woman an abortion,” and the second means prosecuting “gender crimes” like discrimination against homosexuals. In addition, the U.N. globalists wanted complete prosecutorial independence for the ICC, something relatively useless in an active war zone, but just the thing for muscling small, traditional countries that still have legal restraints on “reproductive freedom” (more U.N.-speak for abortion).

On the one side of the debate were the so-called “soft-power” countries like Canada, Britain, and Holland, together with the U.N. “apparatchiks” and virtually all of the world media. On the other side, largely unreported, were the Holy See, most of the Catholic and Muslim countries of the Southern Hemisphere, and the United States. The maneuverings were often dishonest, with Canada in particular scheduling meetings that deliberately excluded Muslim countries, and interpreters were frequently excluded from the English-language deliberations. By the time the final document came up for a vote, however, the definition of “enforced pregnancy” was tightened up to condemn only the “forcible confinement” of a pregnant woman, previously raped in order to alter the ethnic

composition of a territory.

Given the “global juggernaut,” some 100-plus countries voted for the agreement, only eight voted against it (the United States, Israel, China, Costa Rica, Iraq, Libya, Qatar, and Yemen), and 60-plus countries abstained (mostly from the Southern Hemisphere). Secretary General Kofi Annan boasted that the U.N. had taken the first step toward a “global human rights tribunal”—which is to say, something more than the advertised war crimes court.

Before the Rome agreement becomes international law, however, it must be ratified by the governments of at least 60 countries. The “Law of the Sea” convention, a generation ago, took 12 years to get 60 countries signed on. In the case of the far more contentious ICC, some countries (like the Russian Federation) clearly agreed to it with no intention whatsoever of ratifying it. So it may end up simply lingering, like an unwanted houseguest.

Does this mean that the ICC agreement is toothless? No. For years, the Canadian government (for one) has tried to use international agreements to advance domestic agendas it could never get past its own parliament. At the 1994 Beijing Conference on Women, for example, the Canadian delegation was at the forefront of the attempt to enshrine “five genders” in international law; and some of the more notable Canadian “anti-spanking” court cases refer to the (anti-parental) U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, a document that has no binding legal force. Canadian Supreme Court Chief Justice Antonio Lamer has said that the court has a duty to enforce international agreements, “even if they have not yet been ratified.”

For those countries lucky enough to enjoy the rule of law, “customary international law” has always been incorporated into their domestic codes. But these days, thanks to the U.N. and its “soft-power” puppet masters, “customary law” is changing almost weekly. There is nothing to stop the existing ad hoc war crimes tribunals from using Rome’s incomplete “gender crimes” agreement to enforce gay “refugee reunification” rights. And with that international precedent, there would be nothing to stop an

immigration court judge, even in the United States, from ordering gay “family reunification” rights. Perhaps the judges might restrain themselves.

—Joseph K. Woodard

BILL CLINTON may be the most dishonored President in American history, but who is to blame for his ascension to the White House? George Bush, who waged an incompetent campaign for reelection? Bob Dole, tongue-tied and incomprehensible, unburdened by principle? Yes—but the fullest answer is more simple.

At the heart of it, Bill Clinton was elected because he’s us. Sadly, as his sky-high job approval numbers show, he is the cultural distillation of what we have become, the microcosm of our nation.

He was elected because he embodies the decadence of American society since the 1960’s, a decadence of leisure and consumption rather than work, of sex freed from procreation, of the yearning for recreation and visual pleasure. In earlier times, commerce served as a ballast. Before the 1960’s, business was square and seemingly getting more so. But then came the upheaval in the “knowledge sector,” the marketing of new ideas and information which has as its goal the unmooring of convention.

It is not coincidental that this sector, fueled by Hollywood, has heavily funded Bill Clinton. He owes his election not just to its money but to the adulation of those subtle and highly dexterous profiteering entrepreneurs whose adoption of the trademark “cool” has given us the situational ethics we admire . . . and in return for which Clinton, the ex-pro-lifer, became the morally neutered abortion and gay rights President.

Since the post-industrial culture we so passionately admire produced Bill Clinton, it is understandable that, in his disgrace, we take the hit for him now. If he lied to us, we yearned to be lied to. We have adopted the shrug as the symbol of our nation. When he came to us as a draft dodger, we shrugged; as an all-but-confirmed uncontrite adulterer, we shrugged. When he rented our national treasure for fundraisers, we shrugged. When he made a fool of his wife and