

# Carnism as a key factor of an unsustainable and unequal food system - Towards the transition to plant-based University

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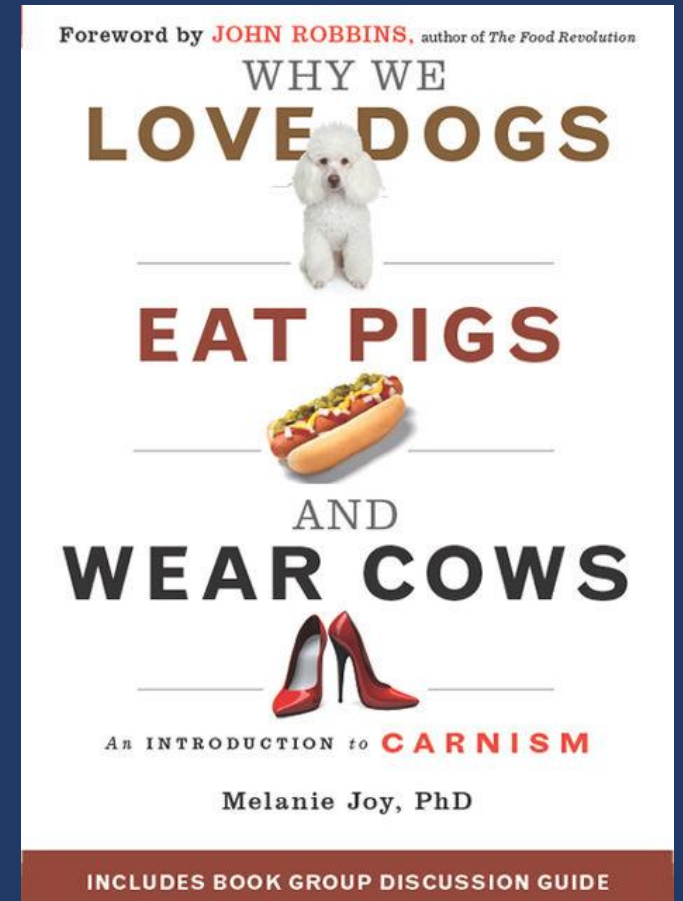
How many of you are acquainted with the term *carnism*?



# Carnism

The term was introduced for the first time in 2001 by social psychologist, Melanie Joy. So the term is relatively very new, although it describes a very old phenomena.

Maybe it is not a coincidence that the term appeared just now, as we need it nowadays much more than ever, because carnism has reached its apogee in the developed countries, and it poses nowadays a threat to our societies and our planet.



# Carnism

Carnism is one of the most popular (and thus invisible) belief systems in our world that conditions people to eat certain animals (and certain not) due to their culture, traditions or religion (for example eating a cow vs eating a dog).

Eating animals by humans is generally considered a normal thing, that is rarely questioned and it is performed by the vast majority of people.

As such carnism is not conspicuous – what is attracting notice and attention is the opposite, much rarer attitude: refraining from eating meat and animal products.

Most people do not know about this and do not care about this, and I was myself in this group, too.

# Carnism

- Carnism is also morally ambiguous and inconsistent with the values held by the majority of humans – most people do not support cruelty, violence, aggression and killing.
- Hurting or killing a dog is a crime in our society, but hurting or killing a calf or a chicken is not. It is a normal operation.
- As such carnism is supported by a variety of defense mechanisms which are both of social and psychological nature.
- One of its defense mechanism is that it was not named for a very long time – and what is not named is invisible, does not exist. Carnism is then an invisible belief system, as its victims are.
- The basic belief of carnism is that eating animals is „natural“, „normal“, „necessary“, and (sometimes) „nice“, known as the „Four Ns“.
- Carnism also uses myths and fairy tales, often visible in the advertisement of meat and animal products.

# Carnism

Carnism shows our double standards towards animals and simple division of animals into three groups:

- invisible and eaten (the biggest group and the biggest interaction (on a plate))
- pupils, pets, loved and adored
- wild animals, admired on films, in zoos, in dolphinaria (30-min. „Reiwa”, a documentary film about hunting dolphins in Japan, killing them or catching them and placing in dolphinaria)



# Planet of cows

The report *Biomass Distribution on Earth* (Bar-On et al. 2018) assessed that

- c. 60% of all mammals are farm animals (animals raised for food)
- c. 36 % are humans, and
- just 4% are wild animals.

We are the planet of cows (Smil 2017).





# Carnism

- Our modern societies accept, legitimise and institutionalise the cruelty towards animals on a massive scale. We made this cruelty a social norm.
- Industrialised animal farming is one of the leading causes of deforestation, water and air pollution, environmental destruction, species extinction.





# Consumption of meat

- **Poland:** around 1860 – 12,8 kg per person per year, around 1900 – 20,9 kg, around 1930 – 33,7 kg, around 1950 – 39 kg, around 1980 - 82 kg
- **France:** around 1830 - 21 kg per person per year, around 1860 – 25,1 kg, around 1900 – 35,1 kg, around 1950 – 62 kg, around 1980 - 130 kg.
- **Great Britain:** 1830 – 18 kg, 1860 – 27,5 kg, 1900 – 55 kg, 1950 – 62 kg, 1980 – 82 kg.

Meat consumption has rapidly grown in Europe after the second world war – for example in France and in Poland it doubled in years 1950-80.

# Examples of carnism

- saving colorado potato beetles („potato bugs”), a major pest of potato crops, from death
- crying over the wasp that fell into coffee and then was killed by a colleague

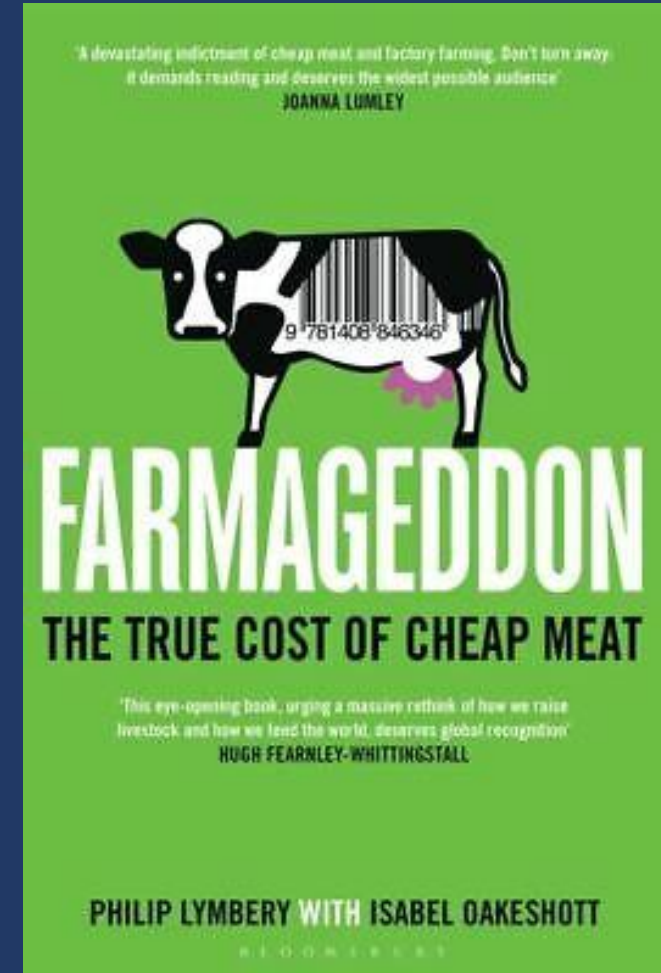
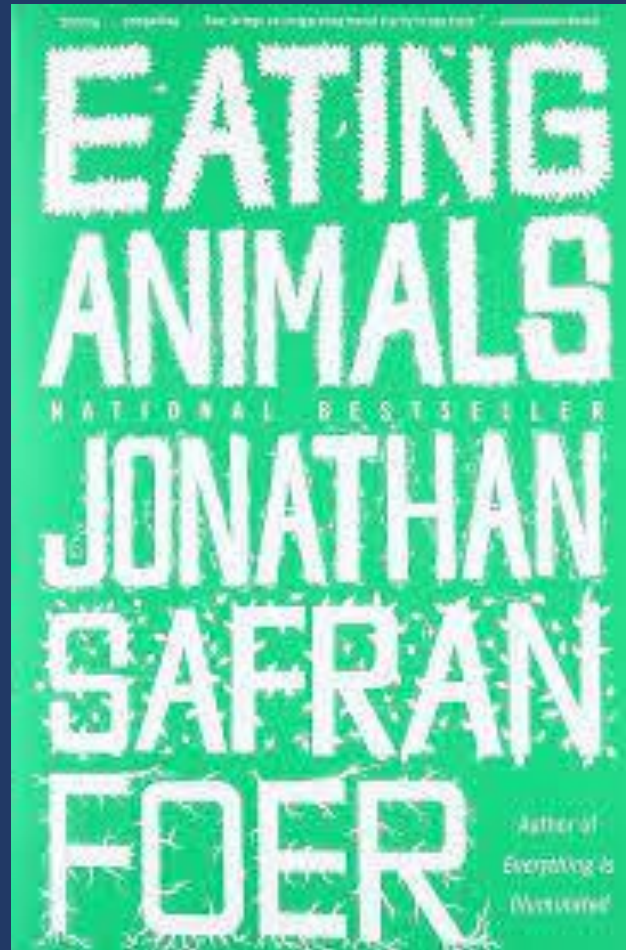


# Next steps

We are all carnists on a bigger or smaller scale. Carnism is deeply rooted in our culture and our way of thinking and perceiving the world. What can we do?

- First step is to recognise the carnism, be aware of it, and be aware of the effect that it has on the world.
- Second step – empower and support these that are not carnists. These groups are often silent, invisible and vulnerable as their awareness is not yet awareness of the others, and thus their choices might seem to be bizarre.
- Third step – shift the dominant narrative in our food culture.

# Some books



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