



## Interview with David Irving



David Gerow Irving is the author of *The Protein Myth* ('significantly reducing the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes while saving the animals and building a better world'), which was published by O Books in September 2011 - see [www.earth-books.net/books/protein-myth-the](http://www.earth-books.net/books/protein-myth-the)

David has also written poetry, fairy tales, plays, short stories, essays, newspaper articles, and magazine articles - and a novel *The Voice in the Stone*, about the 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart. Two other novels are in progress, and one of these, *In the Shadow of the Innocents*, tackles the subject of vivisection. The other, not yet titled, debates various gnostic and Christian themes.

David is a vegan and an animal rights activist. His writings on various animal rights issues have appeared in *Cyrano's Journal*, *Thomas Paine's Corner*, *All-Creatures.org*, *Press Action*, *Radical Noesis*, *Dandelion Salad*, *The Animals Voice*, *New Dawn magazine*, and in other blogs and journals.

An accomplished musician, he is a composer and has played French horn with various ensembles. He was a member of the 7th Army Symphony, the Graz Opera and Philharmonic Orchestra (Austria), and the Oakland Symphony.

David grew up in a small town in Indiana called Bluffton (US), but currently resides in the upper Catskill Mountain region of New York, having previously lived in Boston and San Francisco, and also in Austria. He attends to and is attended by his four cats, Lewie-Lew, Goldie Boy, Looney, and Spatsie.

You can watch a short video of David talking about *The Protein Myth* on YouTube - it's entitled *Who are we?* and can be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fi\\_hWmCgl-Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fi_hWmCgl-Q) He has also made an anti fur video *America, humane or inhumane, our choice* using his music and text: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffs1uoVOehY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ffs1uoVOehY) Or find both by searching for 'David G Irving'.



### What led you to write *The Protein Myth*, and how much research did you have to do?

I started writing *The Protein Myth* in November of 2008. The day before I began I had not the slightest intention of writing a book, and certainly not a book related to nutrition. The next day I was busy making notes and plotting out chapter titles. I was suddenly launched on a book-writing venture that would last close to two years.

Obviously something had taken place the night before. And what happened was that by chance I had tuned into a Public Broadcasting System TV programme where a man by the name of T. Colin Campbell, who I would later learn was one of the top scientists in the world in his field of epidemiology, was talking about his book *The China Study*. This book offers scientific evidence of how we can greatly reduce and in many cases practically eliminate the risk of the major killer diseases that include several forms of cancer, heart disease, heart attacks, stroke, diabetes, and other chronic conditions such as macular degeneration and Alzheimer's Disease. In fact, at the exact moment I tuned in, Campbell was talking about how the risk of breast cancer could be vastly reduced.

Now that really grabbed me and sat me bolt upright because, just two or three days before, a close friend had called me to tell me she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. When something like that happens, you'd love to be able to offer some help, but all you really end up doing is just trying to be supportive. Then from out of the blue here was this person talking about practically eliminating the risk of breast cancer. And furthermore a close friend of mine, who had died of the disease ten years earlier, might have been spared all the suffering she went through, which was intense, had she known this information. So Campbell captured my attention all right, and fast.

So what was this magic elixir that could heal these terrible diseases? It turns out that their primary cause is none other than the consumption of animal protein.

Well, I had been a vegan since about 1985 or 1986. And I was naturally aware of many health benefits associated with a vegan diet. But I had not the slightest idea that eating animal

protein was so directly tied to the major killer diseases. This realisation was a Eureka moment because it fitted so perfectly with my animal rights activism in which I had been engaged for several years. Suddenly I had come face to face with a brand new way to not only help animals - by getting the message out that consuming animals was dangerous to our health which, if listened to, could mean a vast reduction in the number of animals slaughtered for food - but also to help human beings at the same time by trying to get them to recognise the dangers of consuming animal products.

The big question that rose in my mind was why had I not heard about this earlier? Why did none of my friends or anyone I knew know about it either? It was apparent that this information was being ignored by our healthcare organisations and ignored to the detriment of the public health. I resolved to try to find out why.

So *The Protein Myth* evolved out of all of this. Because I am not a nutritionist, I had to become a kind of reporter, and that meant doing fairly extensive research. That was necessary if I hoped to establish any credibility. So I insisted that everything I put down had to be absolutely fact-based in a way that could be checked by anyone.

Just one more thing, incidentally, my friend who was diagnosed with breast cancer has survived and is doing very well.

**Your book is a shocking revelation about major organisations hiding the truth from the public about healthcare, disease prevention, and diet. Please tell us a little more about *The China Study*, and why it is so important in revealing the untruths you have written about.**

*The China Study* offers scientific evidence that is absolutely irrefutable, that consuming animals is the major cause of our killer diseases, though I would learn that other scientists try to refute the evidence anyway (unsuccessfully) simply because they are so addicted to eating animal foods. So it is a source of facts which can be used to point out that the way we use and exploit animals is not necessary. For example, factory farms produce food that kills people and makes others very sick. A book like *The China Study* proves that, and shows that

we can stop eating those killer foods and be much healthier. And once we start on this trail it leads into other areas. For example, these factory farms also make people who consume their products complicit in the cruelty that produces them, which is something most people who consume animals would rather not think about. Still, it can hardly be denied.

We can also discern from the evidence in *The China Study* that animal research is really unnecessary because the chief rationale given to the public for experimenting on animals is the idea that animal researchers are just totally engrossed in finding cures for society's killer diseases. Besides the fact that this is a big lie anyway, once we learn that we can eliminate these diseases by eliminating animal protein from our diets, the rationale for animal research disappears fast, as does the need for \$20 billion dollars a year that animal researchers and their sponsoring institutions, mostly universities, get from the National Institutes of Health.

### **What implications does it hold for us if healthcare organisations continue to discredit and ignore research such as *The China Study*?**

I think it's similar to why people resisted accepting that the earth was round. The same for why it was so difficult to accept that the earth rotated around the sun. There are many answers to questions like these that often boil down to issues of money and power. And, of course, it falls to those who are out in front in whatever area it may be, to find a way to communicate what they know to those who would rather tarry behind in the comfortable past. Often the consequences are disastrous when the old insists absolutely it is going to prevent the new from forging ahead, no matter what the consequences may be. Today in America, for example, there is tremendous resistance to the animal rights movement in the halls of government. That's where corporate interests are on patrol, determined to protect the profits they derive from cruelty-based operations like factory farms, fur farms, and animal research laboratories.

### **Is it as simple as dwindling profits, lack of knowledge, biases, conflict, and poor management, that information concerning health and diet is kept from the public?**

All of those, certainly. I found that stubbornness, resistance to change, an 'I'm right, you're wrong' mentality, turf ownership, and politics and money, are the primary factors. Money especially looms large. For example, Bristol-Myers Squibb gave the American Heart Association \$600,000 to use the AHA logo to promote their statin drug Pravachol. Statins, however, a cholesterol-lowering drug, have some very serious side-effects and their effectiveness has also been legitimately called into question. Yet it's the responsibility of our healthcare organisations like the AHA to provide the public with information about the risks of drugs like statins. But how likely is the AHA to say anything negative about statins after getting \$600,000 from Bristol-Myers Squibb? And a visit to the AHA web pages confirms such suspicions. They have nothing really bad to say about statins. So who can trust what the American Heart Association says about statins once we realise that they have essentially been paid off by Bristol-Myers Squibb?

In 2009 Pfizer Pharmaceuticals gave the American Cancer Society an unrestricted grant of \$1.7 million dollars. Pfizer, besides making drugs like Lipitor, also makes cancer drugs and breast cancer drugs. Does anyone think the ACS is going to go out and tell women they can vastly reduce their risk of breast cancer by eliminating animal products from their diets which will lower their estrogen blood levels and thereby significantly reduce the risk of getting breast cancer? Not after getting \$1.7 million from Pfizer, they won't. It's obvious payola.

Is it unethical? Is it immoral? Of course it is.

The only real way to deal with these conflicts of interest is to make rules and laws prohibiting drug companies, or any commercial enterprises, from giving money to healthcare organisations. How can our healthcare organisations function independently if they accept contributions from corporations? Unfortunately, we know that the US Congress is not going to do its job by passing legislation that would prohibit these good-old-boy ways of doing business.

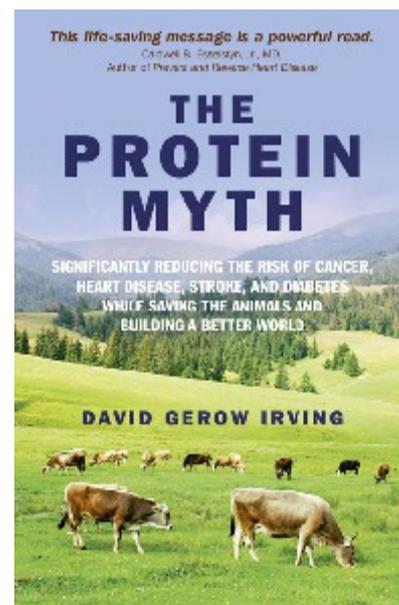
### **Do you think that in uncovering these untruths our societies will make progress, or will there be increased confusion and/or rejection by people, maybe because certain things are unable to be shown scientifically?**

I do believe we will make progress, but the progress is frustratingly slow. Some people talk about violence as a means for coming to the aid of the animal population which is so vulnerable, lacking in protection, bullied, exploited, and killed without mercy by corporate powers. I can't agree with that. That would just be counterproductive. The problem is horrendously large. I mean, we slaughter between 56 and 59 billion animals just for food around the world every year. And people generally are satisfied to go somnambulant along their chicken McNuggets way. That's why I believe the change must come through a shift in consciousness, and that is where I focus my energies. I have seen an actual shift in consciousness in my own lifetime in the 1960s. This is the kind of shift we need, and then things can change rapidly. That should be the focus of the animal rights movement, I believe.

### **Is it enough for individuals to be aware of the increasing evidence of disease in order to switch to a plant based diet, or do we need additional motivation and encouragement?**

There's no question to me that the more we know about disease formation as a product of consuming animals the more people will pay attention. I understand that an article just appeared in *Scientific American* that points out the real dangers of meat consumption, but I haven't read it yet. Here and there signs of change do appear. Even the establishment healthcare organisations have changed. They all used to recommend that the public consume two to three portions of dairy products a day, and the same for animal products, with no prohibitions on any kind of meat. Today, because of greater nutritional awareness, they all recommend that the public consume two to three portions of low-fat or no-fat dairy products and the same for meats, provided that it is lean, while avoiding processed meats. So change has happened. Of course, not even close to enough. With increased evidence and pressure, our healthcare organisations will eventually be forced to admit just how dangerous animal products really are.

### **Although you've generally quoted American statistics in your book, do you think that these are equally valid in other parts of the world?**



No I don't. Unfortunately, the habits of the Western world are spreading to the developing nations so that eventually they will apply. There is already much evidence that the diseases of affluence of the Western world - cancer, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes - are spreading to the developing nations where progress is being equated with the consumption of animals. McDonald's fast food eateries are already everywhere, and the same for the others. And that's bad news for the health of the people living in those countries.



Clip from David Irving's talk on YouTube

**From a purely health point of view, and disregarding the ethical aspect, do you think eating only small amounts of animal produce is harmful too? For example, something like the 'Mediterranean diet' where abundant plant foods and fresh fruit are complemented by moderate or low amounts of meat, fish, dairy produce, etc.**

The best we can do, I think, is to take the actual evidence seriously. T. Colin Campbell says that "rising plasma cholesterol levels in China were associated with a greater prevalence of stomach, liver, colon, lung, breast, and blood cancers", and that "even small intakes of animal products ... were associated with elevated concentrations of plasma cholesterol and increased prevalence of these cancers".

As for diets like the Mediterranean, besides the dangers of animal protein, according to Caldwell B. Esselstyn Jr (famous because he and Dean Ornish proved that heart disease could be prevented and reversed through nutrition), oils recommended in these type diets are "every bit as aggressive in promoting heart disease as the saturated fat in roast beef. And even though a Mediterranean-style diet that allows such oils may slow the rate of progression of coronary artery disease, when compared with diets even higher in saturated fat, it does not arrest the disease and reverse its effects." (See pp. 69 & 98 in *The Protein Myth*.)

So while surely nobody could specify exactly how much of these 'poisons' (animal protein) the body can tolerate, the evidence does indicate rather clearly that we would be much safer not to consume them in any amount.

**To what extent can we learn from the philosophers of the past to further our understandings of animal and environmental ethics in the future?**

It's fascinating to learn how some of the great historical figures thought, and we can see how they have often been conduits for the way we look at the present. We can go all the way back to the ancient Greeks where we find vegans living side-by-side with confirmed speciesists. Theophrastus, the vegan, for example, with Aristotle the speciesist. Some of the most

famous philosophers, like Immanuel Kant, were unrepentant speciesists while others like C.W. Hume deplored the mistreatment of animals. Focusing on speciesist philosophers of the past, like Kant, can give us tools for discrediting the doctrines they have passed on to the present. Take poor Descartes. I say poor, because everybody tends to beat up on him these days. Yet he contributed quite a bit to the way in which we view animals today as mere things. In the same way it's helpful to focus on those who tried to keep compassion towards animals alive during their lives, like Michel de Montaigne and Jeremy Bentham. The same applies to literary figures as well, or artists and religious leaders, and really anybody who had something to say about the way animals should be treated.

**How do you see the progress of humankind in seeing the interconnectedness of all species on earth, and how can we reconnect ourselves with nature rather than being outside it?**

Human beings have set themselves up as the masters of the world and the universe. In the process, we have created a divide between ourselves and nonhuman species. Several things happened along our evolutionary past that have contributed to creating this divide. These include walking more fully upright than other species, the loss of body hair, the possession of a more efficient opposable thumb mechanism, and the biggest divider of them all, the development of speech. That began somewhere in the neighbourhood of 120,000 years or so ago.

Fundamentally, though, the differences between our species and nonhuman species are differences of degree rather than differences of kind. Though we might like to escape the reality, we are as much of an animal as any nonhuman animal. The recognition that life itself is the grand miracle and that a mouse is as much of a miracle as a human being can go a long way towards reconnecting with nature and the earth and the universe. It can help us in giving up some of the arrogance that has become so much a part of human thinking and our way of living that, when we analyse it, is so destructive to ourselves and our planet.

**In your book you've mentioned Lao Tse, whose followers wanted to return to simplicity - what relevance do those teachings have for us today? Do you think that there are contemporary spiritual teachings that we as individuals or societies can take as our new values?**

I'm not really up on contemporary spiritual teachings. In general, I look more to the past in terms of finding 'something spiritual' for reflection. And that I find in any kind of teaching, religious or philosophical, that teaches compassion, concern for others, love, helpfulness, the desire to do good, and the oneness of life and the universe. These are the kinds of values that make up what might be called spiritual to me, and that's what I feel we should try to be open to - to let it in. Even more, we need to understand that these kinds of values should serve not just as a foundation for the way we relate to other humans, but to the nonhuman population as well. That, I believe, is the biggest change we need to make in terms of what might be called spiritual values or spiritual growth. Our values should encompass and take in all of life, and, for that matter, the universe. Otherwise, our focus is too narrow, too constricted.

We are capable of being so much more than we are allowing ourselves to be. Albert Schweitzer, who I also mention in *The Protein Myth*, wrote about these kinds of values in what he called 'Reverence for Life'. They are also reflected in the lives of people I admire like Margaret Cavendish, Mahatma Gandhi, George Bernard Shaw, and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

**In your book you've created *A Road to a Solution for humanity*. How would you see individuals and societies begin to enact this?**

First we need to recognise the dangerous path upon which we are travelling, which relates very much to the way we treat animals. Those billions of animals we slaughter every year generate an enormous problem for the environment. Already 18% of greenhouse gases emanate from these vast herds of livestock, while their waste seeps into the earth and gets into our groundwater and pollutes our rivers and streams.

A United Nations report estimates that 38% of the available ice-free land is taken up with livestock already. And, you know, seven billion people now occupy the earth and another two billion will be added in the next 35 years. Meat and dairy production is expected to double during that time frame. So how much of the ice-free land surface is then going to be taken up by livestock just to feed our bodies? And 35 years after that? We're going to start having wars just to kill people off, so that the survivors will have enough land to live on. Of course, we won't admit that's why we're having the wars. They'll be based on some ideological principle.

Today, food industrialists take the land of developing countries to grow coarse grains for livestock that should be going to grow crops for people, and this results in significant poverty in the developing countries. Then there is the tremendous problem of factory farms and the cruelty that goes on there. When we look at ourselves and at our children, we all too often see obese bodies being destroyed before our eyes by consuming animal foods. In the meantime, a drug culture for treating the conditions associated with animal consumption makes us drug dependent. And while all this is going on, our universities are not exactly covering themselves in glory as they ignore the roles that we traditionally ascribe to them of arbiters of ethics and morality. They have become addicted to money as they reach out for these huge research grants to conduct unethical drug testing on innocent animals.

How can they rationalise making innocent animals pay for the drug, alcohol, and tobacco addictions that human beings have created for themselves? This is just so obviously unethical. Yet they deny they are doing anything wrong as they chalk up the dollars stained with the blood and torture of innocent animals.

We grow up in cruelty-based societies in which we are dependent upon animal cruelty to meet our needs. We use animals for food, for clothing, for household products, for hygienic products, for toxicity testing of products, for developing military weapons. We even use animal by-products in the automobile tyres we use to transport us around, in the film that we use for making movies, in the plastic we use to make bags.

What does this dependency on cruelty do to the human character? To answer that question, all we have to do is stop in our tracks and look all around. There we see the kind of world we have built. Violence everywhere, murder and bloodshed and war. There is a better way and it starts, I believe, with how we treat the other species with whom we cohabit our planet.

**You've written on animal rights topics for various blogs and journals. What aspects of animal rights (or human rights or environmental issues) have you been most interested and involved in?**

Without question vivisection and animal research. This is the key to all animal cruelty and exploitation as I see it, because it has played such a big role in creating our attitudes towards animals. I am making that case in a book I am just finishing titled *The smartest most cruel people the world has ever known: Animal Research from Aristotle to the 21st century*.

In [Vegan Views 125](#) (page 16) Paul Appleby responded to this interview by pointing out the limitations of the China Study. This led to further discussion in [Vegan Views 126](#) (pages 18-19) with David Irving responding, and Stephen Walsh commenting too.

**This is one of several Vegan Views interviews over the period 2011-2013. The others are freely available on the home page of the Vegan Views website [www.veganviews.org.uk](http://www.veganviews.org.uk) (mostly in pdf form).**

Jack Norris & Ginny Messina (vegan dietitians) V.V.127  
John Davis (International Vegetarian Union) V.V.126  
Angel Flinn (Gentle World vegan community) V.V.125  
David Graham (Vegan Organic Network) V.V.123  
Lee Hall (author and animal rights activist) V.V.122  
Patrick Smith (Veggies catering) V.V.121