

Advanced Composition for Non-Native Speakers of English

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Why Should You Become a Vegetarian?

Vegetarianism has become the most popular diet among the young generations facing the new millennium. This discipline eliminates the intake of meat and in some cases also the consumption of dairy products and eggs. Are there enough reasons to make you change your eating habits? My purpose is to prove that vegetarianism is the diet that offers more benefits to our health, spirit, and society.

Nowadays, health is the number one individual and governmental concern. Health is a fragile factor, and its behavior relays mostly on the nutritional quality of the food we ingest. A balanced non-vegetarian diet allows the consumption of all four main food groups including meat and other animal by-products that are important protein and fat sources. Most of us consume more proteins and fats than we need. An excess of proteins can cause kidney failure and/or osteoporosis, and a high-fat diet can eventually lead to heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diabetes. On the other hand, vegetarians get protein from grains, beans, vegetables, and low-fat food. This is how they reduce the risk of most diseases caused by fats. It is a myth to believe that vegetarians don't get enough proteins or that their diet is not balanced because they don't eat meat. The key is variety and accurate combinations of energy and protein sources.

If I were asked to describe a vegetarian, I would immediately mention they are very disciplined people. It has been proved that there exists a remarkable correlation between the people who succeed and people who follow a disciplined lifestyle. People who are faithful to the disciplines they have acquired show integrity, a remarkable behavior, and they are usually in a good mood. Vegetarians, always concerned about quality and discipline, develop a greater social responsibility that motivates them to improve their environment.

Moreover, environmental issues have been capturing public attention because of their relevancy and increasing deterioration of our quality of life. If you are concerned about the environment, consider that massive meat production can have a negative impact on tropical rain forests, soil stability, and air and water quality. Large extensions of forests have been cut and changed into grasslands that provide cattle with food. To conserve grasslands, fertilizers and other chemical substances are used; consequently, soil and water resources are polluted. Even though there are methods that avoid this kind of deterioration, producers prefer to ignore them so they can keep satisfying the increasing meat demand without affecting their production rates.

Vegetarians' life spans are increased and through this discipline they learn to live quality in all the possible aspects. Besides, their beliefs are congruent with their lifestyle and they take responsibility and action for problems within their own bodies and in their surroundings. Take a look at yourself. Is your health at risk? Have you been able to reach your goals? Are you a factor of change and improvement within your society? You must at least try becoming a vegetarian now that you know it is a tempting challenge and an exciting experiment that has advantages and no risks. Do it for your body, for your lifestyle, or for your environment, but do it. Stop letting others have all the credit, the fun, and the quality.

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Why People Should Ride a Bicycle for Short Distance Trips

A bicycle is a mechanism that has transported man for many decades. Nowadays, bicycling is a great way to move from one place to another in short distances. I believe you should use a bicycle for short distances to protect the environment as well as your health. The purpose of this essay is to explain why people should ride a bicycle for short distance trips. By riding a bicycle, people can decrease gasoline consumption, improve the quality of their lives, and protect the environment.

The first reason to use a bicycle for short distances is that you can cause a decrease of pollution. Because many people use their cars to move short distances, they increase the rates of pollution causing more pollution problems to our environment. That is why the use of a bicycle for short distances is a really good idea to help lower the rates of pollution.

The second reason to use a bicycle for short distances is that you can help lower gasoline consumption. If you use a bicycle or a car to move to a place that is near your home, you will decrease the gasoline consumption of your car. This can save you a lot of money because the price of gas is expensive. Maybe, it is the laziness of some people who use their cars to drive to places that are near their homes. However, this habit of driving causes an increase of gasoline consumption.

Finally, the most important benefit of riding a bicycle on short trips is that it can help you have good health. When you ride a bicycle, you use your legs to move, and this physical exercise is aerobic which means that your heart is pumping blood throughout your body, so it fortifies your heart, lungs, and other important parts of your body.

These are some excellent reasons to ride a bicycle. Although using a car is acceptable for long distances, we need to remember that a bicycle will help us even if we are moving only short distances. I think that we need to make a distinction when it is better to use a car or a bicycle. We need to keep in mind that riding a bicycle will provide us with health and other benefits. A bicycle can save us money in gas and also decrease the rate of pollution. That is why if we use a bicycle, it can improve the quality of life of the person who owns it.

Why I am a Vegetarian

Until about 1977, I was a "meat and potatoes" person. My mother was sure to prepare my favorite dish, pot roast, whenever I came to visit with my wife and children. It was a family tradition that I would be served a turkey drumstick every thanksgiving. Yet, I have not only become a vegetarian, but I now devote a major part of my time to writing, speaking, and teaching about the benefits of vegetarianism. What caused this drastic change?

In 1975, I began teaching a course, "Mathematics and the Environment" at the College of Staten Island. The course uses basic mathematical concepts and problems to explore current critical issues, such as pollution, resource scarcities, hunger, energy, and the arms race. While reviewing material related to world hunger, I became aware of the tremendous waste of grain associated with the production of beef. (Over 70% of the grain produced in the United States is fed to animals destined for slaughter, while an estimated 20 million of the world's people die annually due to hunger and its effects.) In spite of my own eating habits, I often led class discussions on the possibility of reducing meat consumption as a way of helping hungry people. After several semesters of this, I took my own advice and gave up eating red meat, while continuing to eat chicken and fish.

I then began to read about the many health benefits of vegetarianism and about the horrible conditions for animals raised on factory farms. I was increasingly attracted to vegetarianism, and on January 1, 1978, I decided to join the International Jewish Vegetarian Society. I had two choices for membership: (1) practicing vegetarian (one who refrains from eating any flesh); (2) non-vegetarian (one who is in sympathy with the movement, while not yet a vegetarian). I decided to become a full practicing vegetarian, and since then have avoided eating any meat, fowl, or fish.

Since that decision, I have learned much about vegetarianism's connections to health, nutrition, ecology, resource usage, hunger, and the treatment of animals. I also started investigating connections between vegetarianism and Judaism. I learned that the first Biblical dietary law (Genesis 1:29) was strictly vegetarian, and I became convinced that important Jewish mandates to preserve our health, be kind to animals, protect the environment, conserve resources, share with hungry people, and seek and pursue peace all pointed to vegetarianism as the best diet for Jews (and everyone else) today. To get this message to a wider audience I wrote a book, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, which was published in 1982. (A second expanded edition was published in 1988.)

Increasingly, I have come to see vegetarianism as not only a personal choice, but a societal imperative, an essential component in the solution of many national and global problems. The U. S. Surgeon General has indicated that 68% of diseases in the United States are related to poor diets, and this is a major factor behind soaring medical expenditures, which are projected to reach 20% of the U. S. GNP shortly after the end of the century, a key reason for the tremendous debt the U. S. faces. Also, livestock agriculture is a major contributor to many current environmental and public

health threats, such as the destruction of tropical rainforests and other habitats, global warming, soil erosion and depletion, water shortages, air and water pollution, and the proliferation of antibiotic-resistant, disease-causing bacteria.

I have recently been spending more and more time trying to make others aware of the importance of switching toward vegetarian diets, for them and for the world. I have: appeared on over 60 radio and cable television programs; had many letters and several op-ed articles in the Staten Island Advance and other publications; spoken frequently at the College of Staten Island and to community groups; given many talks and met with three chief rabbis and other religious and political leaders in Israel, while visiting my two daughters and their families in the last few years. I recently started a "Campaign for a Vegetarian-Conscious Israel by 2000". In 1987, I was selected as "Jewish Vegetarian of the Year" by the Jewish Vegetarians of North America. Recently, I have been using email and the internet, especially my connection with the Virtual Yeshiva, to continue my efforts to help increase awareness of vegetarianism.

I have always felt good about my decision to become a vegetarian. Putting principles and values into practice is far more valuable and rewarding than hours of preaching. When people ask me why I gave up meat, I welcome the opportunity to explain the many benefits of vegetarianism.

While my family was initially skeptical about my change of diet, they have become increasingly understanding and supportive. In 1993, my younger daughter was married in Jerusalem at a completely vegetarian wedding.

Recently, I have noted some signs of increased interest in vegetarianism, and many people are concerned about dietary connections to health, nutrition, animal rights, and ecology. One person who became a vegetarian after reading my book in Israel is now in the United States studying nutrition and exercise, hoping "to become the Richard Simmons of Israel."

Yet, McDonald's is rapidly expanding in many countries, including Israel, China, and Russia. So there is much that still needs to be done. My hope is to be able to keep learning, writing, and speaking about vegetarianism, to help bring closer that day when, in the words of the motto of the international Jewish Vegetarian Society, ". . . no one shall hurt nor destroy in all of God's holy mountain." (Isaiah 11.9)

'Monsanto: An evil company?'



I have often wondered whether a company can truly be evil. Not a company run by evil people, but a place where decades of evil have seeped right into the corporate fabric.

Almost ten years ago, at a Business for Social Responsibility conference in Los Angeles, I attended a presentation by Monsanto. The company made the case that genetically modified foods would cure world hunger. GMOs, Monsanto asserted, would spark the next green revolution. I walked out of the session depressed and upset, wondering why Monsanto had been given a platform at the BSR event. I didn't renew my membership.

Monsanto got its start making saccharin. In 1948, the company started making a powerful herbicide; a by-product of the process was the creation of a chemical that would later be known as dioxin.

On March 8, 1949, a massive explosion rocked a Monsanto herbicide plant. Court records indicate that 226 plant workers fell ill. In the 1960s, the factory manufactured Agent Orange, which later became the focus of lawsuits by Vietnam veterans contending that they had been harmed by exposure.

Monsanto has manufactured plastics, resins, rubber goods, fuel additives, artificial caffeine, industrial fluids, vinyl siding, anti-freeze, fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides before deciding to leave the world of chemicals and instead become a life-sciences company. But Monsanto's history still haunts us: left in its past is the potential responsibility for more than 50 Environmental Protection Agency Superfund sites and dozens of toxic chemicals that most likely are still circulating in our bloodstreams.

Today, Monsanto, according to a report in Vanity Fair ([Monsanto's Harvest of Fear](#)), has moved on to harassing farmers who (they believe) refuse to abide by an agreement not to collect any of the seeds generated by plants that Monsanto considers its intellectual property:

"Ever since commercial introduction of its G.M. seeds, in 1996, Monsanto has launched thousands of investigations and filed lawsuits against hundreds of farmers and seed dealers. In a 2007 report, the Center for Food Safety, in Washington, D.C., documented 112 such lawsuits, in 27 states. Even more significant, in the Center's opinion, are the numbers of farmers who settle because they don't have the money or the time to fight Monsanto. "The number of cases filed is only the tip of the iceberg," says Bill Freese, the Center's science-policy analyst. Freese says he has been told of many cases in which Monsanto investigators showed up at a farmer's house or confronted him in his fields, claiming he had violated the technology agreement and demanding to see his records."

As if it's not already difficult enough to survive as a farmer. The dairy industry, according to the article, gets similar treatment:

"Jeff Kleinpeter takes very good care of his dairy cows. In the winter he turns on heaters to warm their barns. In the summer, fans blow gentle breezes to cool them, and on especially hot days, a fine mist floats down to take the edge off Louisiana's heat. The dairy has gone "to the ultimate end of the earth for cow comfort," says Kleinpeter, a fourth-generation dairy farmer in Baton Rouge." But Monsanto doesn't like the label on Kleinpeter Dairy's milk cartons: "From Cows Not Treated with rBGH." Giving consumers that information has stirred the ire of Monsanto. The company contends that advertising by Kleinpeter and other dairies touting their "no rBGH" milk reflects adversely on Monsanto's product.

In light of the article, Monsanto's pledge, "Growth for a Better World," makes for curious reading:

"We want to make the world a better place for future generations. As an agricultural company, Monsanto can do this best by providing value through the products and systems we offer to farmers.

With the growth of modern agricultural practices and crops that generate ever-increasing yields, we are helping farmers around the world to create a better future for human beings, the environment, and local economies."

I doubt that many farmers would agree. Is Monsanto evil? I'm not sure that there is enough evidence to convict, but it's certainly a candidate for my list of the world's 10 worst companies.

[Click here](#) to read the full story in Vanity Fair.

The World According to Monsanto' - Exposing One of the Most Evil Corporations on Earth

- **The Real News Network, June 23, 2008**
[Straight to the Source](#)

Monsanto is a world leader in industrial agriculture, providing the seeds for 90 percent of the world's genetically modified crops. In an interview with The Real News Network, filmmaker Marie-Monique Robin discussed her recent film 'The World According to Monsanto' in which she exposes many of Monsanto's controversial practices, from concealing knowledge of toxicity of PCBs to producing genetically modified seeds and related herbicides.

Monsanto has a long history of manufacturing dangerous products. In 1949, an explosion in Nitro, a Monsanto factory in the US, caused 228 workers to develop an extremely disfiguring illness caused by dioxin, a highly toxic by-product of 2,4,5-T, a powerful herbicide manufactured in the factory.

Monsanto's product Roundup, an herbicide which Monsanto advertised as biodegradable, is still sprayed on crops by unprotected farmers in Paraguay even though Monsanto has already been convicted twice of false advertising for the product.

Robin also denounces Monsanto for not only denying that it ever heard of Agent Orange, a herbicide sprayed by the US Army on crops during the Vietnam war and which Monsanto had in fact manufactured, but also for manipulating scientific studies to hide links between Agent Orange and cancer.

According to Robin, Monsanto has bought fifty seed companies in the last ten years. In a clip from Robin's film, physicist and ecologist Dr. Vandana Shiva warns: "Once [Monsanto has] established the norm that seed can be owned as their property, we will depend on them. If they control seed they control food. It's more powerful than bombs. This is the best way to control the populations of the world."

In a Monsanto declassified file is found the sentence, "we can't afford to lose one dollar of business" even as toxicity of PCBs was discussed. This, Robin says, sums Monsanto's philosophy rather well.

Watch the full interview here: "[The World According to Monsanto](#)"

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Why People Shouldn't Watch Too Much Television

Watching television is an experience shared by most adults and children. It is cheap, appealing, and within the reach of the general public. In this way, TV has become an important mass media around the world. Sadly, this resource isn't used in a way that people could get the best possible benefits from it. The purpose of this essay is to persuade the reader that people shouldn't watch too much television because the content of many TV programs is not educational; it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities; and it negatively affects people's mental development.

The first reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because the content of many TV programs is not educational. Nowadays, we can see movies, series, and shows that present scenes of violence, sex, and drugs. This has established wrong concepts among the audience that influence them into having a negative behavior. Moreover, the impact this tendency has on children is worse because they grow up with the idea of a world where women must be slender and blonde to stand out, where problems can only be solved with money and violence, and where wars are inevitable.

The second reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities. The time we spend watching TV could be applied to useful activities like exercise, reading, interacting with friends and family, activities that are a crucial for a healthy lifestyle.

The third reason why people shouldn't watch too much television is because it negatively affects people's mental development. According to several scientific studies, watching TV for prolonged periods of time has a negative effect over the intellectual development of children and leads to deterioration of the mental capacity in older people by causing both attention and memory problems in the long term.

In conclusion, people shouldn't watch too much television because the content of many TV programs is not educational; it makes people waste time that could be used in more beneficial activities; and it affects people's mental development. However, this doesn't mean that we should ban TV, but if we are going to watch it, we should do it with moderation. Television is a resource that we should learn to use through the right selection of programs by taking an active and critical attitude towards it.

This essay introduces a longer report on vaccination safety:

Vaccination Myths

© by Alan Phillips

www.unc.edu/~aphillip/www/vaccine/dvm1.htm

Contradictions between Medical Science and Immunization Policy

When my son began his routine vaccination series at age 2 months, I did not know there were any risks associated with immunizations. But the clinic's literature contained a contradiction: the chances of a serious adverse reaction to the DPT vaccine were 1 in 1750, while his chances of dying from pertussis each year were 1 in several million. When I pointed this out to the physician, he angrily disagreed, and stormed out of the room mumbling, *"I guess I should read that sometime..."*

Soon thereafter I learned of a child who had been permanently disabled by a vaccine, so I decided to investigate for myself. My findings have so alarmed me that I feel compelled to share them; hence, this report.

Health authorities credit vaccines for disease declines, and assure us of their safety and effectiveness. Yet these seemingly rock-solid assumptions are directly contradicted by government statistics, medical studies, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports, and reputable research scientists from around the world.

In fact, infectious diseases declined steadily for decades prior to vaccinations, U.S. doctors report thousands of serious vaccine reactions each year including hundreds of deaths and permanent disabilities, fully vaccinated populations have experienced epidemics, and researchers attribute dozens of chronic immunological and neurological conditions to mass immunization programs.

There are hundreds of published medical studies documenting vaccine failure and adverse effects, and dozens of books written by doctors, researchers, and independent investigators that reveal serious flaws in immunization theory and practice. Ironically, most pediatricians and parents are completely unaware of these findings. However, this has begun to change in recent years, as a growing number of parents and healthcare providers around the world are becoming aware of the problems and starting to question the use of widespread, mandatory vaccinations.

My point is not to tell anyone whether or not to vaccinate, but rather, with the utmost urgency, to point out some very good reasons why everyone should examine the facts before deciding whether or not to submit to the procedure. As a new parent, I was shocked to discover the absence of a legal mandate or professional ethic requiring pediatricians to be fully informed, and to see first-hand the prevalence of physicians who are applying practices based on incomplete--and in some cases, outright mis-information.

Though only a brief introduction, this report contains sufficient evidence to warrant further investigation by all concerned, which I highly recommend. You will find that this is the only way to get an objective view, as the controversy is a highly emotional one.

A note of caution: Be careful trying to discuss this subject with a pediatrician. Most have staked their identities and reputations on the presumed safety and effectiveness of vaccines, and thus have difficulty acknowledging evidence to the contrary. The first pediatrician I attempted to share my findings with yelled angrily at me when I calmly brought up the subject. The misconceptions have very deep roots.

...(If you want to read the following report, go to the website quoted on top of the page.)

Best known for his novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), [George Orwell](#) (pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair) was one of the most notable political writers of his day. The following short piece has been drawn from Chapter 31 of Orwell's first book, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), a semi-autobiographical account of living in poverty in both cities. Though the word "beggars" is rarely heard nowadays, the "ordinary human beings" he describes are, of course, still with us. Consider whether or not you agree with Orwell's [thesis](#).

Why Are Beggars Despised?

by George Orwell

It is worth saying something about the social position of beggars, for when one has consorted with them, and found that they are ordinary human beings, one cannot help being struck by the curious attitude that society takes towards them. People seem to feel that there is some essential difference between beggars and ordinary "working" men. They are a race apart--outcasts, like criminals and prostitutes. Working men "work," beggars do not "work"; they are parasites, worthless in their very nature. It is taken for granted that a beggar does not "earn" his living, as a bricklayer or a literary critic "earns" his. He is a mere social excrescence, tolerated because we live in a humane age, but essentially despicable.

Yet if one looks closely one sees that there is no *essential* difference between a beggar's livelihood and that of numberless respectable people. Beggars do not work, it is said; but, then, what is *work*? A navvy works by swinging a pick. An accountant works by adding up figures. A beggar works by standing out of doors in all weathers and getting varicose veins, chronic bronchitis, etc. It is a trade like any other; quite useless, of course--but, then, many reputable trades are quite useless. And as a social type a beggar compares well with scores of others. He is honest compared with the sellers of most patent medicines, high-minded compared with a Sunday newspaper proprietor, amiable compared with a hire-purchase tout--in short, a parasite, but a fairly harmless parasite. He seldom extracts more than a bare living from the community, and, what should justify him according to our ethical ideas, he pays for it over and over in suffering. I do not think there is anything about a beggar that sets him in a different class from other people, or gives most modern men the right to despise him.

Then the question arises, Why are beggars despised?--for they are despised, universally. I believe it is for the simple reason that they fail to earn a decent living. In practice nobody cares whether work is useful or useless, productive or parasitic; the sole thing demanded is that it shall be profitable. In all the modern talk about energy, efficiency, social service and the rest of it, what meaning is there except "Get money, get it legally, and get a lot of it"? Money has become the grand test of virtue. By this test beggars fail, and for this they are despised. If one could earn even ten pounds a week at begging, it would become a respectable profession immediately. A beggar, looked at realistically, is simply a businessman, getting his living, like other businessmen, in the way that comes to hand. He has not, more than most modern people, sold his honor; he has merely made the mistake of choosing a trade at which it is impossible to grow rich. (1933)

The Persuasive Argument is Mightier Than the Pen

by Cal Cook

Writing essays may indeed seem more tedious than cleaning one's room, especially when the teacher gives the student a set structure which has to be followed. It is as though the teacher forces the student to perform an intricate, time-consuming dance, one with very exact steps, whereby each misstep is penalized with a whip mark from the teacher's red pen. The truth of this situation is actually quite different. While the pen may indeed be mightier than the sword, written words are not always applicable in daily situations. The focus should not be placed upon the writing of such an essay, rather upon the formulation of a well-structured argument, one that is thoroughly able to defend your own position, as well as to convince others that your position makes sense. Why? Because the ability to persuade other people to agree with your opinion is and will always be one of the most valuable skills you can possess, regardless of what you do or where you are in life.

A truly persuasive argument is more effective than a loaded pistol. Everyone knows that feeling of frustration when you want to do something, but someone else – parent, teacher, boss etc. – does not allow you to do it. What are your options, if you really want to get your own way? You can start with a soft touch, such as proposing a deal of mutual benefit. When refused, you can try bribery, extortion or blackmail. Then you can play hardball with kidnapping, emotional and physical torture. However, all of these methods, being short-term and abusive, are counterproductive in the long run and will only cause you more trouble. Ideally, you simply want this other person to change his own mind and sincerely agree with your opinion. And that is exactly what the persuasive argument can achieve.

A compelling, persuasive argument slices through disagreement like a sharp knife sliding easily through toasted pizza crust. Keep in mind that the knife does not get sharp by itself; you need to put some work into grinding and honing that fine edge on the blade. Formulating a truly persuasive argument also requires work: brainstorming all imaginable supporting ideas; selecting those that are most powerful and reliable; translating these supporting ideas into structured words. It is this preparatory work that imparts a clarity to your position which allows your conviction to shine through the words. You will find that there exist

opinions for which you are unable to formulate persuasive arguments, even as some knives, being made of cheap steel, will never hold a sharp edge long. Yet, if you put your nose to the grindstone with a worthwhile thesis in your hands, you can produce a persuasive argument that no crusty opposition can stop.

Persuading people to agree with your opinion is a task you will continually face for the rest of your life. First you confront parents, teachers and professors; then you will encounter bosses, bank representatives, policemen, politicians, public officials, fussy hairdressers and the list goes on and on. Even the presidents of powerful nations need to be able to formulate persuasive arguments; unfortunately, some presidents give us very good examples of arguments that are not persuasive. Finally, when your life on earth has come to an end and you have successfully employed persuasive arguments instead of bribery, extortion, blackmail and torture, you will be in fine shape to persuade your maker that your life has been an honourable one worthy of praise.

The splendour of Attic Greek oratory had its peak around 460 BC with Corax and Teisias, two of the first rhetors or teachers when the rule of tyrants gave way to a novel idea known as democracy. At that time, the mastery of the spoken word was openly recognized as being simply the one and only key to success in the fields of politics, big business and law. In today's world, behind its imposing façade of technological gadgetry, the ability to formulate a persuasive argument is even more important: people simply do not have the time to figure out an argument that is not immediately clear and convincing. In other words, they have neither the time nor the desire to saw on a pizza crust for hours with a dull knife. Do you?

Computer Games, Violence and Children

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Do computer games increase tendencies to violence in children? There is a growing body of opinion that the high level of violence depicted in many computer games does have a deleterious effect on children, contributing to the observed increase in violent behaviour exhibited by juveniles.

From a very early in their lives, children have been subjected to concepts of violence for centuries, if not for the entire history of civilisation. Fairy tales reek of violence, Grimms tales are usually quite grim, and many children's stories have overt themes of violence. As a child I read the Grimm stories, and a little later, all the Biggles books, in fact I believe I read every book by the late W E. Johns, but I am very distinctly a pacifist. Of course one case proves nothing. Is there anything different in the experiences of children today that explains the actual increase in juvenile violence?

According to an article in the June 1994 issue of *Psychology Digest*, a definite correlation has been established between the growing violence on television and in movies and the increase in aggressive behaviour of people in general, but especially in the young. Why should exposure to these depictions of violence have a greater effect than those of an earlier period? Perhaps a part of the answer rests with the level of reality in what is seen today.

As recently as ten years ago, Australian television newscasts would display little direct violence. Now we see dead bodies and pools of blood on even the most conservative channels" and viewers, including children, know this is real, it is not fictional; and this reality appears to have a desensitising effect. Movies of an earlier generation may have depicted violence, but there was always a Hollywood *style* that prevented even the best films from ever seeming totally real. Contrast this with modern cinema, where computerised special effects, overwhelming Dolby surround sound, and an aggressive cinematic style make even the most implausible of plotlines seem totally realistic on the screen.

Now children have a good sense of fantasy and I believe this is why the portrayal of violence in the past has not necessarily contributed to creating a violent personality; the child has made the distinction between what is real and what is make-believe. In fact, the

introduction of some level of violence in a context of fantasy has a cathartic effect, channelling the natural violent tendencies present in most personalities into harmless outlets.

So where does this leave computer games? The same article in *Psychology Digest* suggests that it is the interactive nature of computer games that helps to desensitise the juvenile attitude to violence. The youngster can take actions and bring about a death, with blood spraying everywhere. In contrast, reading a book or watching a movie is a passive experience, in which the child can do nothing to alter the outcome.

However, this notion does not necessarily withstand examination. High levels of violence were established in television and cinema at a time sufficiently before the significant advent of highly violent computer games to separately observe the effects of the two influences. It has been clearly established in various studies, that violence on television and cinema screens has had a clear adverse effect on people over a wide age group. Now these sources are not interactive, so one must assume that it is the apparent (or actual) reality of the material that allows it to have its effect. There is no scope given to the young mind to clearly separate fantasy from reality.

On the other hand, video games are definitely in the realm of fantasy; the child can see the distinction from reality, and so might this not suggest that violent computer games may not make a significant contribution to violent tendencies in children? In fact, might these games instead provide a harmless outlet for the natural aggression that exists to some degree in the child's subconscious? The argument about the interactive nature of these games is also questionable. Children have indulged in play that involves death for ages. They fight battles with swords and guns and pretend to die. It is not that long ago that children had toy soldiers and set up complete armies that did battle (of course, some might argue that that form of juvenile experience may have helped lead to the two world wars!). They have toys that are replicas of weapons of war, and while, personally I am against the sale of these toys, it has yet to be conclusively proven that they have any real harmful effect.

So the verdict is still to be decided. Arguments can be made that violent computer games are harmful and lead to aggression:

equally, arguments can be made that these same games provide a harmless release of the aggressive instinct. In the meantime, Australian society has decided that computer games must be rated according to their suitability to various age groups. Software vendors are being given a difficult time. The process of classification takes time and costs money. And what is more, a classification can be made and it takes only one complaint that the classification is too conservative for the real possibility that the game will be re-classified to a more stringent category. This means reprinting of packaging, as the rating must be included in the printing of the box cover; adhesive labels are not allowed.

Are we over-overreacting? In a reaction against the real increase in violence within Western society, it is natural that people will wish to take action, and all sources that clearly depict violence are a natural target. Governments are also swayed by general public opinion" they are conscious of the polls" and may take lesser note of expert opinion. On this topic, expert opinion is clearly divided, making public emotional reaction an even greater force on government policy. But should public opinion, which is generally uninformed, hold sway? Public emotion, unsupported by fact, can be damaging if acceded to" take McCarthyism as an example. One point we must keep in mind with the rating of computer games is that generally it is just that, a rating. There appears to be limited possibilities that the system will prevent any significant numbers of program from being offered for sale in Australia; the system just means we must wait a month or two for local release after a game has appeared overseas. A rating appearing on the package does give the more concerned parent some guidef or formulating a decision on whether a given game will be a suitable purchase for their children or not.

It is not my intention here to plead for either side of the argument but rather to suggest that the debate is more complex than many people may realise. Ultimately parents buying a computer game must make their own decision on whether that game is suitable for their children, just a they decide whether they approve of war toys or not. It will be interesting to see the outcomes of further psychological studies over the next decade. Like it or not, the huge market for computer game means that computer violence is not going to pass away, at least not in the near future.

Reprinted from the October 1994 issue of PC Update, the magazine of Melbourne PC User Group, Australia