

What do Bill Gates, eggs and “Soylent Green” have in common?

The other night I don't know what possessed me to re-watch *Soylent Green*, a 1973 dystopian sci-fi pic starring Charlton Heston and featuring Edward G. Robinson in his final screen role. The movie is sort of a protracted “Twilight Zone” episode with the punchline that in 2022, New York becomes so crowded and impoverished that people are subsisting on synthetic wafers called “Soylent Green.” Except it turns out that—Spoiler Alert!—Soylent Green is made from people.

Nobody can remember what real food used to taste like, so Edward G. Robinson's character reminisces: “I was there, I can prove it! When I was a kid, you could buy meat anywhere! Eggs they had, real butter! Not this crap!”

Fast-forward from 1973 to 2013 and we now have multi-zillionaire Bill Gates teaming up with Silicon Valley pal Peter Thiel (the PayPal originator) to bankroll “Beyond Eggs,” a project breezily described as follows:

“Why would anyone want to make an egg replacement in the first place? Beyond the ethical **quandaries** of the current food industry, extracting protein from meat and other animal-based products is horribly inefficient. By the time the world's population reaches 9 billion in 2050, we'll need better ways of making edible protein. Animal agriculture is also one of the leading contributors to climate change.

More sustainable solutions like Beyond Eggs reduce the need for chicken feed, including corn and soy, which means less carbon emissions. Along with the current cooking and baking substitute, Tetrick's team is also developing egg-free mayonnaise and a formula for scrambled eggs.”<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/silicon-valleys-fake-eggs-are-better-than-the-real-thing>

Global philanthropists are also bankrolling a new product to be dubbed “Beyond Meat.”

The ingredients can be grown in a variety of countries that now face critical food shortages and can be produced more cheaply than eggs. And, best of all, says the originator, Josh Tetrick, they have bested Mother Nature by creating a tasty versatile protein source that contains no cholesterol or saturated fat!

Says Tetrick: “What we want to do eventually is find a way to work with farmers in the developing world to enable them to have new cash crops that can be used. Then we become the kind of company to be feared by the bad guys in the industry.”<http://www.sott.net/article/266209-Let-them-eat-fake-Artificial-egg-made-from-plants-backed-by-Bill-Gates-set-to-revolutionize-cooking-goes-on-sale-at-Whole-Foods>

By “bad guys” what is presumably meant are agribusiness conglomerates that abuse animals, pollute the environment, hasten “climate change,” and clog people's arteries with fat and cholesterol.

Trouble is, while eating lower on the food chain may have its merits—especially if you subscribe to the zero-sum, Malthusian view of the world that is taken to an absurd extreme in *Soylent Green*—there's not much evidence that phony eggs will

enhance people's health.

In a recent article in *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* entitled "Egg consumption in relation to risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes: a systematic review and meta-analysis" it was shown that egg consumption had absolutely NO relation to cardiovascular risk. <http://ajcn.nutrition.org/content/early/2013/05/15/ajcn.112.051318.abstract> This squares with a lot of recent research that confirms that cholesterol and saturated fats from meats and full-fat dairy DO NOT clog arteries and lead to heart attacks and strokes.

In fact, the "Incredible Edible Egg" is nature's perfect nutritional package, containing all the nutrients in correct balance to nurture the growing embryo.

Additionally, eggs are nature's best source of lutein, essential for eye health, and choline, critical for brain and liver health.

If there's one immutable law, it's the Law of Unintended Consequences. Well-heeled philanthropists who are looking to save the world sometimes do more harm than good.

From a nutritional perspective, deleting one major source of cholesterol and fat from the diet of millions of people worldwide might have far-reaching unforeseen health consequences.

From a micro-economic perspective, is it a good idea to replace traditional Third World agriculture such as community-raised chickens with new "designer" seed crops? Like GMOs, these new "productive" plants are patentable and profitable for their makers. They create dependency of local farmers on distant companies.

In the guise of staving off starvation, we're turning lesser-developed countries into vassals of the technologically ascendant West. Self-sufficient farmers with barnyard chickens will lose out to vast industrialized enterprises with large fields, sophisticated imported farm equipment and giant processing plants for rendering inedible crops into synthetic foods.

How is that progress? Admittedly, we're not turning people into high-protein wafers—at least not yet.