

The Vegan Diet Versus a Healthy Human Diet

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The vegetarian orientation among humans arises from two sources: lack of available food other than from plants, and certain religious views – in particular Buddhism with its notion of reincarnation in which an individual may return as a more or less “advanced” form of sentient being as he or she makes his or her way toward enlightenment. In this Buddhist view, one does not want to be eating one's fellow travelers on the road to Nirvana, and so, all “sentient” beings are removed from what is eligible to be consumed.

If one is a devout believer in the Buddhist position, for which there is scant evidence to say the least, end of discussion. One accepts on faith at least the vegetarian restriction on eatables, and at best the more restrictive Vegan view.

But many who subscribe to vegetarianism in its extreme Vegan form are not in any way Buddhists. We can examine the ways they justify their perspective:

1) Animals are sentient beings and the lives of all sentient beings should be respected and protected. The problem with this thesis is that all organic phenomena have sensory apparatus that orients them to the resources that they need to survive and propagate. In this regard, where do we draw the line between plants and animals – an artificial distinction to begin with. Plants orient to light and nutrition in the soil, and some generate toxins or thorns to ward off predators. There is even interesting evidence that plants respond positively to some kinds of music!! What is sentient and what is not? It is in fact a distinction among species without a real difference. All organic life uses whatever senses it possesses to consume resources of one kind or another and in doing so competes with other organic life to survive and reproduce. From a resources perspective, all organic life is competitive and predatory, and humans are just one kind of predator with an omnivorous diet which includes a great variety of plants and animals and animal and plant by-products.

2) There is not enough food to feed the world population and eating animals, which are the most consumptive of resources, should be avoided. This seems to be a socially sensitive position and one that recognizes the limits of planetary resources, but it elects to ignore the real problem – human overpopulation of the planet. By making adequate room for feeding more humans – a dubious need for either the species or the planet, this view ignores the fact that eventually the human population will reach the point where it exceeds even the plant based resources of the Earth.

3) Humans are closely related to chimpanzees and chimpanzees are vegetarians; so, humans at some point lost their dietary way and need to get back to their essential diet based on plants. This view overlooks two important facts: Many species that are closely related genetically differ significantly in their diets [depending on the environment in which they are located], and modern evidence on humanoid species place more than enough evolutionary distance between chimpanzees and Homo sapiens to allow for significant dietary changes. Moreover, evidence for the diets of early humans indicate that they were omnivorous, and in many cases even more focused on the consumption of animals than modern humans.

4) Consumption of the by-products of animals [milk, eggs, honey, etc.] must be avoided because in taking these by-products humans diminish the life and reproductive possibilities of these animals. Once again, all organic life is competitive with respect to resources and as such is predatory with regard to other organic forms. Most importantly, there is no real difference between the by-product of an animal [milk] and the by-product of a plant [seed]. To consume the seed of a plant is to limit that plant's reproductive possibilities and so is predatory – not respectful or protective of its life. Logically to disallow one is to necessitate disallowing the other. And that leaves both animals and plants off the list of human consumables. Logically, Vegans would have humans live on air, and even here humans are competing with others for a natural resource!

5) Consumption of meat is bad for human health. How do Vegans account for arctic cultures where traditionally humans have lived almost exclusively on meat and animal by-products for ages – and remained healthy and vigorous? How do Vegans account for the fact that on average humans in vegetarian cultures are smaller in stature with shorter life spans than humans in wild meat eating cultures? Veganism seems to receive support from the scientific finding that eating a lot of domestically raised meat correlates with significant health problems. But extrapolating from modern domestically raised meats to all meat is not warranted. Humans have consumed wild animals and fish whenever they could take them for all of their existence with animal products being the majority of the diet whenever possible – without negative consequences. So, it could well be that it is the kind of meat that is now being produced domestically that is problematic and not meat in general. And this is the conclusion that research is now substantiating. The protein and especially the fat of animals raised and finished domestically on diets very different from their wild diet [which is much more varied and free of pesticides, hormones and antibiotics] may well be the source of modern health problems – not meat in general.

If a Vegan diet is good for human health, why is it that this diet has been found to provide such limited amounts of some of the essential nutrients humans require that if Vegans are not very careful they can easily suffer from the many negative health conditions that result from malnutrition. Clearly a strict Vegan diet is on the very edge of what constitutes a healthy human diet, and the very nutrients that it fails to provide are those abundant in animal products.

Conclusion

If people want to eat in accord with a Vegan diet, that is their option. But there is nothing substantial to be found in the efforts of Vegans to justify their diet on the grounds that it is the primordial diet of humans, that it avoids consumption of sentient beings, that it magically circumvents the fact of human predation, or even that it is a fundamentally healthy human diet.

What is needed to rescue the modern human diet from its unhealthy state is not a conversion of humankind to Veganism. Rather, the solution needs to primarily include the following:

- 1) Modern industrial agriculture and aquaculture must cease their production of unhealthy plant and animal products under the excuse that they must generate increased food quantity to feed an ever expanding human population.
- 2) Food processors must stop producing and promoting products for the grocery store shelves and fast food outlets with nonsense calories based on simple carbohydrates and excessive fat. And these food processors must stop infusing their products with explosive amounts of salt and sugar.
- 3) As a world society, we need to unbuckle the strangle hold that the combination of population growth and our commitment to an unsustainable ever expanding world economy have on modern humanity. Together, these two socio-economic forces are driving our current negative form of industrial agriculture and food processing, which in turn are wreaking havoc on both the ecology of the planet and the health of the planet's human population. It is possible for any species to be too successful, and so to undermine the ecology upon which it depends. We must reduce the number of humans probably by half [to 3.5 billion] in order to live on a resource sustainable planet.

And yes, if we implement the above changes, we will be able to treat the domestic animals that we raise for meat and animal by-products with respect and at least some semblance of a natural existence. Humans are omnivores and compete as predators for resources. To be healthy we do not need to deny these biological fundamentals. We just need to stop accepting the food status quo, find balance in all aspects of our lives, and summon the courage to tackle socially, economically and politically the huge set of food and food related adjustments identified above if humans are to secure a future healthy existence.