

To Be or Not To Be...A Vegetarian

Sorry, this essay isn't about Hamlet's most famous words in one of Shakespeare's most famous plays; it's about meat, or rather, the lack thereof. This essay is all about why YOU should stop eating meat. Albert Einstein once said, "Nothing will benefit health or increase chances of survival of life on Earth as the evolution to a vegetarian diet." Vegetarians live a healthier, clear minded life that helps themselves, the animals, and the planet in a way completely different (and better!) than that of an omnivore. One will learn why vegetarianism is better for you, reduces the number of tortured animals, reduces famine, is more cost effective, and can help you live longer.

75% of people become vegetarians to stop animal cruelty. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer says, "The question is not 'can they *reason*?' nor 'can they *talk*?' but, 'can they suffer?'"(Singer, 7). 25 billion animals are slaughtered each year for human consumption (Vegetarian Times). These living, breathing, thinking, feeling beings are being injected with hormones, crammed into cages, and deprived of exercise and sunlight so we can have their butt for dinner. Is it really worth it? Where is there room for a chicken to stretch its wings or for a pig to roll in mud or for a cow to graze on grass? Feedlot animals are living in their own feces, and to compensate for the living environment they live in, they are injected with large amounts of hormones and antibiotics (Food Inc.). Feedlot animals would not survive if not for the antibiotics. These animals are basically living a dying life. They have a better time squished

between two hamburger buns than living their life on these 'farms'. Let a chicken be a chicken and embrace its chickenness!

We could eliminate famine by cutting meat from everyone's diet. Dr. Walden Bello once indicated that "all the grains grown to feed cattle could feed all the starving people in the world" (Happy Cow). Before coming across this I had never really thought about this being a possibility. Sound familiar? 70% of all grain produced in the United States is fed to animals raised for slaughter (Vegetarian Times). Livestock animals consume five times as much grain as is consumed directly by the American population (Vegetarian Times). Ecologist David Pimentel even said, "If we consumed all that grain directly, we could feed nearly 800 million!" Plus, "if we chose to export the grain it would boost the US trade balance by \$80 billion a year" (Vegetarian Times). Why are we sacrificing so much grain on animals that live terrible lives to become food when nearly half of it is thrown away? (Huffington Post). It's your choice: would you rather have an absence of famine in the world, or eat a sad, sick animal?

The cost of meat may seem cheap in stores, but we are paying for it at the cost of our environment. There is no doubt about it; livestock take up land, and a lot of it. Ever think about how much land is actually used to create that McDonald's hamburger? Every second, one football field of rainforest is destroyed in order to produce 257 hamburgers (Happy Cow). Two thirds of Central America's rainforest has been destroyed in part to raise cattle for meat (Happy Cow). Eating meat affects not only our forest land, but it also supports global warming. We have so many animals on this planet that all the bowel functions emitted from the animals is actually so large that it is harming our planet. The manure that farm animals produce emits

methane, nitrous oxide, carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases (Choseveg). Since there are so many of these animals the outcome is very large and very dangerous. Also, burping and flatulence from ruminant animals like cows and sheep give off large quantities of methane (Chooseveg). Not to mention that all the fossil fuels it takes to get the meat from the butcher to your grill doesn't help the earth.

The burning of fossil fuels releases CO₂, one of the primary gases responsible for global warming. In addition to fertilizer manufacturing, the meat industry uses fossil fuels to heat the buildings that house the animals, to produce of all the crops to feed to the animals, and to transport, process, and refrigerate all of the meat (“Is Vegetarianism Good for the Environment?”).

Mat McDermott, specialist in the environment and energy policies, states that “if we started a ‘no meat’ policy now, in 2053 the amount of cropland saved would have returned to forest (more trees!) and would soak up so much of the emissions from the farm animals that the effects of climate change would drop by 70%.” Let’s be realistic here, not anytime soon will a law forbid the consumption of meat. Thinking of this, Mat McDermott defended himself by saying, “Even if people stopped eating just beef, the extra land converted back to forests or even to the production of biofuels, the effects of climate change will drop significantly, possibly by half.” After all the calculations are done and checked, it has been concluded that eating one pound of hamburger is equal to the environmental damage of driving your car for three weeks (Happy Cow). Don’t you want your children to have a nice, clean earth? Killing trees and

polluting the planet? No big deal! At least you got your Big Mac. Wouldn't you enjoy the satisfaction of a no-meat diet by knowing you are helping to improve the planet for the future?

Becoming a vegetarian isn't all about the impact on others; it's also about the impact on yourself. Because meat production is so inefficient (high land-use and energy-use), "it is more expensive to produce and thus more pricey (per calorie) on store shelves" (IDbate). Meat eaters take in far too much fat and cholesterol, and not enough fiber and vitamins. Too much fat and cholesterol in your bloodstream means that arteries won't open properly and that your muscles won't get enough oxygen with the end result of low energy. Of course, there is expensive medicine to help with these problems, or you could save your body by simply cutting out meat from your diet. There is more than just this way to make your body feel healthier. When an animal is tortured or killed, hormones are released into their blood stream to help them cope with the pain (Happy Cow). If the notion of 'you are what you eat' applies, you are eating pain, suffering, and sadness. As you can imagine, those hormones are now in your bloodstream, taking a toll on you. Imagine how that'll make you feel!

In addition to saving many resources, you can also save yourself. The New England Journal of Medicine also reported a study of 88,000 nurses by Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital that found those who ate meat everyday were more than twice as likely to get colon cancer as those who avoided meat. From that information it sounds to me like a vegetarian would live a longer, healthier life. Well, if you thought that too, you would be correct. You get around a decade of extra life by living a vegetarian life, and less disability at the end of your lifespan (Huffington Post). Did you know that heart disease is the leading cause of death in

America? The leading cause of heart disease is high cholesterol. The leading cause of high cholesterol is meat consumption (Huffington Post). Put two and two together for me and drag a conclusion together: Meat consumption is the leading cause of death. The gap between vegetarians and carnivores is so large it is basically the equivalent of a nonsmoker to a smoker. According to the American Dietetic Association, "Vegetarians have a reduced risk of heart disease, obesity, colon cancer, adult-onset diabetes, osteoporosis, gout, gallstones, kidney stones, lung cancer, and breast cancer." If you ask me, that's a pretty extravagant outcome for eating a sirloin for dinner.

Not only does vegetarianism improve your lifespan, it also helps you save money. A study has been conducted that concludes that vegetarians save money. On average (using grocery store pricing), a meat eater spends \$14.65 a day while a vegetarian spends a mere \$12.45 daily (Learnvest). Now it may not seem like saving \$2.20 a day is not a big deal, but over the course of a year, the average vegetarian could save between \$1,000 and \$3,300 dollars over the carnivore ("A Guide to Vegetarian and Vegan Living").

Escaping toxins is also a huge advantage of a no-meat diet. The EPA (Environment Protection Agency) estimates that nearly 95 percent of the pesticide residue in the typical American diet comes from meat, fish and dairy products. "Fish, in particular, contain carcinogens (PCBs, DDT) and heavy metals (mercury, arsenic, lead, cadmium) that can't be removed through cooking or freezing" (Vegetarian Times). The CDC reports that food-borne illnesses of all kinds "account for 76 million illnesses a year, resulting in 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths in the United States." According to the US Food and Drug Administration

(FDA), foods rich in protein such as meat, poultry, fish and seafood are frequently involved in food-borne illness outbreaks (IDebate). With all the fat taken in through meat consumption, dioxin poisons can get trapped in meat's fat cells and can be carried to us. Dioxins are the resultant of industrial production and are highly dangerous to humans. Because they are fat soluble, they are commonly found in meat. Was that piece of bacon you had really worth hospitalization?

I bet it is all pretty obvious now that eating meat isn't good for you, plus you can get all good nutrients from other types of food. At this time you are probably setting down this essay and freeing your fridge of meat, correct? If you aren't, well I am not quite sure you actually read this paper. Based on the evidence stated above, I see no reason why a person would go on as a carnivore, damaging the environment, animals, and themselves by meat consumption. Is that one moment of bliss really worth all the harm?

Bibliography

"ChooseVeg.com: A Guide to Vegetarian and Vegan Living." *ChooseVeg.com: A Guide to Vegetarian and Vegan Living*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 May 2013. <<http://www.chooseveg.com/global-warming.asp>>.

"Debate: Vegetarianism." N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.
<http://dbp.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Vegetarianism#Famine:_Is_vegetarianism_beneficial_to_the_global_fight_against_famine.3F>.

"Eating for Your Health." N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.peta.org/issues/animals-used-for-food/eating-for-health.aspx>>.

Freston, Kathy. "Why Do Vegetarians Live Longer?" *The Huffington Post*.

TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 22 Apr. 2013.

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-freston/plant-based-diet_b_1981838.html>.

"Frugality through Vegetarianism: How to Save \$2-\$3K Per Year & the Planet by Moving Away from a Meat-Based Diet." *Cost of Vegetarian Diet & the Cost of NOT Switching to One*. N.p., n.d. Web. 07 May 2013. <<http://20somethingfinance.com/cost-of-vegetarian-diet/>>.

"HappyCow the Healthy Eating Guide." *Animal Rights and Vegetarianism- Why Be a*

Vegetarian? N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

<http://www.happycow.net/why_vegetarian.html>.

"Knowledge Center." *LearnVest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Apr. 2013.

<<http://www.learnvest.com/knowledge-center/do-vegetarians-save-money/>>.

Robert Kenner. "Food Inc." Online Video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 17 July. 2012. Website, 6. May. 2013.

"Vegetarian Diet Could Cut Climate Change Mitigation Costs by 70%." *TreeHugger*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/vegetarian-diet-could-cut-climate-change-mitigation-costs-by-70.html>>.

"Why Go Vegetarian? | Vegetarian Times." *Vegetarian Times*. N.p., n.d. Web. 22 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.vegetariantimes.com/article/why-go-veg-learn-about-becoming-a-vegetarian/>>.