Malcolm **Hamilton**
University of Reading

Eating Death

Vegetarians, Meat and Violence

Abstract

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Vegetarianism has long been associated in popular imagination with pacifism and non-violence due to the prevalence of ethical motives underlying it. If this is so ethically motivated vegetarians might be expected to be more sensitive about and opposed to acts involving violence than either vegetarians motivated by health concerns or the meat-eating population in general. This article seeks to test such an expectation, reporting findings from a study using in-depth interviews with vegetarians variously motivated by ethical as well as health and other concerns, and with meat eaters. Respondents were asked their views about capital punishment, nuclear weapons, abortion, boxing, foxhunting, shooting and angling for sport. The data are used to assess theories of vegetarianism that emphasize meat as a symbol of violence and/or of domination and oppression. The findings present a varied and fairly complex picture with opposition to foxhunting and "blood" sports being considerably greater than among other vegetarians and meat eaters, to capital punishment and nuclear weapons less clearly so and to boxing and abortion not noticeably different. In fact a strong anti-authoritarian and anti-regulatory orientation among ethically motivated vegetarians appears to override potential opposition in these cases.

Introduction

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A major motive underlying vegetarianism is ethical: opposition to the killing of animals for food and/or the treatment of them in the production of meat. In a worldwide, but largely North American postal survey carried out by Amato and Partridge (1989) 67 percent stated ethical reasons as a significant motive for following a vegetarian diet, 38 percent stated reasons of health, followed in frequency by spiritual and religious reasons (17 percent) and gustatory or esthetic reasons (12 percent). Clearly there is an overlap in these figures which is due to the fact that many vegetarians cite more than one reason for their dietary regime. Many combine both ethical and health reasons. Other surveys have sought to identify, where, possible, primary motives and to differentiate these from genuinely mixed motives. Vegetarians are more likely to express a single reason for becoming vegetarian than for their maintenance of the diet. In a survey of 125 vegetarians carried out by the author in 1992/3,[1] 31 percent stated primarily moral reasons for originally adopting vegetarianism, 36 percent health reasons and 48 percent other reasons including gustatory, social, ecological, economic and a variety of others. In a poll carried out in North America in 1992 by a market research company, reported in *Vegetarian Times* magazine,

46 percent of the 601 respondents cited health reasons for their vegetarianism and 20 percent ethical reasons and animal welfare.

Rozin *et al.* (1997), in their study of the process of becoming a vegetarian in the United States, gave respondents a list of twenty possible reasons for their conversion to and maintenance of a vegetarian diet—30.8 percent agreed that a major reason was that meat consumption requires the killing of animals, 27.9 percent with the statement that meat consumption increases the pain and suffering of animals and 25.0 percent with the statement that it violates animal rights. Smaller numbers agreed with other statements expressing moral concerns about meat consumption—29.8 percent agreed with the statement expressing the view that a vegetarian diet was more healthy than a diet containing meat and 20.2 percent with a statement expressing the view that a diet containing only moderate amounts of meat is unhealthy.

These figures are, clearly, rather variable which reflects, perhaps, the different localities in which the surveys were carried out and/or the different dates at which they were conducted, and so on. That ethical motives are one of the two most important for adoption of vegetarianism, cannot, however, be in doubt.

Associations between vegetarianism and a dislike of violence towards other creatures and a reverence for all life, or at least all sentient life, are fairly commonplace. The case for vegetarianism made by its advocates has generally emphasized the ethical dimension and abhorrence of violence and a lifestyle that necessitates violence towards any form of life, or, at least, sentient life. Philosophical arguments for vegetarianism include anti-speciesism (Singer 1976), respect for animal rights (Regan 1984) or a sense of community and identity with the animal world (Clark 1984). It is doubtful, however, whether many ethical vegetarians have adopted their dietary practices solely as a result of reading and being convinced by the arguments of Singer, Regan or Clark. More likely their adoption of this form of diet owes more to the gut reaction they have to the graphic depiction of the treatment of animals in these works and, even more so, through exposure to such impressions in the media and elsewhere, or simply as a result of personal experiences, reflections and feelings.

Vegetarianism divorced from a specific religious creed is a relatively modern phenomenon. There was a strong vegetarian movement in Britain and parts of Northern Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Another rise in vegetarianism dates to the latter half of the twentieth century. Though still only involving a relatively small minority of the population, vegetarianism has been increasing in a number of countries in recent decades. Although difficult to estimate, various surveys have put the number of vegetarians between 4.5 and 7 percent of the population of the UK. If one includes those who eat fish but not red or white meat the figure

rises to around 12 percent. The number of vegetarians would appear to have approximately doubled in the UK during the last fifteen years or so.[2] In the Unites States, the only other country for which reasonably reliable figures are available, estimates based on self-definition vary between 3 and 7 percent and while some reports consider its current popularity to be a passing fashion associated with 1960s alternativism, others have seen it as a trend that may well strengthen (Maurer 2002).

This rise in vegetarianism has been attributed by some to fundamental changes that have taken place in attitudes towards the relationship between humans and animals and between humans and nature.

Vegetarianism, Violence and Reverence for Life

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Contemporary thought about the relationship between humans and nature and specifically between humans and other animals has tended to depart markedly from the traditional, some would say Christian or Western, view that nature and animals can legitimately be freely exploited for human purposes. Much contemporary environmentalism and ethics considers that nature and animals have rights, or, at least, should not be exploited in an unrestrained and unlimited manner.

This non-anthropocentric ethos is, perhaps, a product of the conjunction of massive urbanization and removal of the majority of the population from the experience of animal husbandry and the slaughter and butchering of animals; the concealment of the truth about meat, that it is actually animal flesh, through its sanitized packaging and marketing. This conjunction is a very recent phenomenon; earlier urbanization was not accompanied to the same extent by concealment which is a consequence of modern means of distribution and marketing through supermarkets and hypermarkets. This has removed most of the population from the experience of witnessing death and corpses at a time also when funerary practices and modern culture similarly seem to seek to deny the reality of death.[3] Vegetarianism, also, can be seen to some extent as a reaction to the application of technology to the production of meat which, of course, involves the treatment of animals, those things with which we increasingly recognize a kinship, almost as if they were inanimate objects. I refer to factory and battery farming, to the severe restraint placed upon animals in such production methods, their treatment as mere pieces of biological equipment used for the manufacture of protein. Again this confuses categories and boundaries.

Eder perceives an anti-industrial and anti-bourgeois ethos in vegetarianism which he characterizes as one of the escape movements that have accompanied modernity from the beginning. Rather than crudely anti-industrialist, however, vegetarianism has been part of a counter current

within, and integral to, modernity which seeks to constitute it alternatively (1996, p. 136). Certainly, urbanization, industrialization and technology upset the order of the world and have led to a decline of the anthropocentric view in which animals existed to serve the needs of humans. A new basis of order is required, a new conception of our relationship with nature and with the animal world. The response has been, on the part of some at least, to elevate animals to the status of equality with humans. Science denudes nature of human significance; some seek to recover this significance through ethics.

Ethical vegetarianism may express for some, then, the conviction that to be fully human is to have reverence for all life, especially sentient life. Part of this involves a rejection of violence. As Twigg (1979, 1983) points out, ethical vegetarianism has traditionally been associated with pacifism (Hitler was, of course, an outstanding exception in this regard) as well as a host of unorthodox, radical and oppositional stances. In this it is as much motivated by the need to define what it is to be human as it is from concern with the welfare of animals. As Tester (1991) argues, animal rights, although assimilating animals to the category of the human and vice versa, is also, and perhaps more importantly, about differentiating humans from animals as moral creatures who are alone capable of compassion.

We might go further than this, however, and consider whether for many vegetarians meat may be a symbol of violence. Avoidance of meat would, then, not only remove the vegetarian from complicity in acts of violence against animals but also express the rejection of such violence and an affirmation of commitment to the preservation of life. The avoidance of meat for many motivated by a concern with animal rights might be seen as constituting a form of boycott and is often assumed to be so by non-vegetarians. By not purchasing meat they do not contribute to the demand for it and perhaps a few less animals are slaughtered as a consequence. This has the attraction that it appears to be an entirely understandable and rational action, even if one does not agree with the ethical stance. But all this is, of course, very dubious. It is unlikely that the action of boycotting meat makes any real difference and vegetarians know it.

A fuller understanding of vegetarians' attitudes to meat and how they are related to violence was one of the aims of a qualitative study of vegetarians and consumers of meat carried out in the Reading area in 2000. The data from this study give some support to the ideas outlined above.

The Research Project

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The aims of the project were to investigate, using in-depth interview techniques, a range of attitudes and beliefs of vegetarians concerning their dietary practices, to meat and also various aspects of their broader beliefs

and ideas relevant to their vegetarianism. It was also decided, for purposes of comparison, to interview meat eaters.

An opportunistic/snowball sample of forty-seven vegetarians, including some vegans and nineteen meat eaters were interviewed and the interviews recorded. The vegetarian sample included two vegans, thirty lacto-ovo vegetarians, two lacto vegetarians, ten fish-eating "vegetarians",[4] 1 fruitarian and two lapsed lacto-ovo vegetarians one of whom subsequently eliminated red meat from her diet. There were eighteen men and twenty-nine women from 15 to 65 years of age with the modal age in the 41–50 range. They had been vegetarian from three to fifty-six years. They were predominantly well educated and middle class. While motives were often multiple, seventeen had originally adopted vegetarianism (or veganism) primarily for ethical reasons (either killing or treatment of animals or both), ten primarily for reasons of health, six for both health and ethical reasons about equally, five primarily due to a dislike of meat and five primarily for other reasons. Four had been brought up vegetarian.

Previous research has shown that when a vegetarian diet is adopted from a particular motive it is not unusual for further reasons to be added later on (Amato and Partridge 1989; Beardsworth and Keil 1992, 1993). This was the case with the sample used in this study. A large proportion had changed their motives, either adding to or replacing their original motive. Twelve respondents (seven lacto-ovo/vegan/fruitarian and five fish eating) stated no change of motive over time. Sixteen (fifteen lacto-ovo and one fish eating had added motives to their original motive.[5] Six (three each of lacto-ovo/vegan/fruitarian and of fish eaters) had dropped an original motive. Three (all lacto-ovo) had both added one or more new motives and dropped others. Eight (seven lacto-ovo/vegan/fruitarian and one fish eating) had dropped their original motive(s) and acquired entirely new ones.[6] Motives added and subtracted varied greatly. Very often health-oriented vegetarian had come to accept the ethical arguments against eating meat or had simply come to dislike it. Some of those originally motivated by ethical considerations had since changed their views about this but had come to believe that a vegetarian diet was healthier or, again, had developed a dislike of meat. Some simply retained the vegetarian diet from sheer habit. The picture is, therefore, quite a complex one.

Apart from those who had been brought up vegetarian, all had previously eaten meat, in most cases extensively, and the majority had liked and enjoyed many, if not all, types of meat before becoming vegetarian. Some had never really liked or enjoyed it much and for them adopting a vegetarian diet was no sacrifice at all. Most were very or fairly strict about conforming to their diet. A few were rather lax in this respect either eating meat on occasions or not taking care to avoid meat derivates such as gelatine, animal fats and rennet.

Meat consumers were very similar to the vegetarians in educational background and class position; thirteen were male and six female. They were somewhat more evenly spread with regard to age. A high proportion were keen meat eaters consuming substantial amounts.

The length of interviews ranged between thirty and ninety minutes, averaging for vegetarians about sixty minutes and for meat eaters about forty minutes. Vegetarians were asked about their motives for avoiding meat, whether these had changed over time, how they originally became vegetarian, and so on. In addition to their attitudes to and feelings about meat generally they were asked about situations of exposure to meat they had experienced or what they thought their reactions might be should they encounter such situations. These included being given a meal containing meat, inadvertent ingestion of meat, having to purchase or handle meat, entering or seeing into a butcher's shop, and so on. They were asked about their feelings regarding particular forms of meat, cuts of meat, type of animal etc. Also, they were asked about their views on a number of issues relating to the taking of life, violence and aggression; nuclear weapons, capital punishment, boxing, abortion, foxhunting, shooting, angling and fishing for sport, and the genetic modification and use of animals for spare parts surgery. A number of other topics were covered related to other research questions, details of which it is not necessary to report here but which involve environmentalism, biotechnology and broadly the issue of anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric orientations.

Eating Violence

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Few of the vegetarians interviewed in this study gave as a reason for their vegetarianism the desire to save the lives of animals by not contributing to the demand for meat or, at least, as a direct or particularly significant reason, for not eating meat. Far more prominent in their responses to questions about this was the desire not to participate in the practice of meat eating and what goes with it—the violation of animals' rights in the treatment they receive in meat production, the killing of animals for food, and so on. In other words, they were well aware that their abstention from meat consumption made little difference to the market for meat and meat products but simply did not wish to be personally involved in it.

Very significant in this respect is the fact that most vegetarians will refuse to eat meat when it is offered to them as part of a meal. When asked whether they would eat or refuse a meal containing meat in social circumstances where it was very difficult and embarrassing to refuse, nearly every respondent said they would refuse to eat the meal.

One or two said they might find the social embarrassment too much to

cope with and make themselves eat what was offered to them. One respondent who had lived for a time in Spain explained that there it was so rude to refuse food that she felt constrained to eat meat on occasions.

> It depends who it is. Um, in Spain it was actually so rude to refuse the food … and, um, and there was generally an option between goat's cheese and a bit of ham and I can't, I can't eat goat's products at all—any of it—so I ended up choosing the bits of ham because at least, you know, I could swallow them without gagging. So, um, you know, it's just respect really. So, yeah, I think if I was in a situation—um, I mean if it's any friends or any acquaintance that I even vaguely know, and, um, I think I'd say, no I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I am vegetarian, um, and I don't want to be rude but I'll leave that aside. Um, if I was in a situation where I was invited into a home for a special something, um, and it was—they were Muslim or something and it would be considered highly rude to turn down, um, I'd probably eat it. Yeah. I might. I don't know; it depends again what the situation is. (FC2)[7]

Another respondent who had lapsed, for a variety of reasons, from lacto-ovo vegetarianism to eating fish, reported a situation while travelling in the United States where social pressures overrode principles and partly precipitated the lapse into fish eating.

> In the southern states it's quite difficult to be a vegetarian. We actually were invited out with some friends and we thought we were going to have dinner at their house and then it turned out we were going to a restaurant. So we were very relieved that we didn't have to say well actually we are vegetarian because that would have been sort of embarrassing. They took us to a restaurant and we thought well this is the late eighties and we thought by then there was probably something that we could eat, but it was fried chicken, a Kentucky fried chicken place, and so we had the fried chicken and it was delicious and [my wife] sort of didn't approve and I sort of had this sort of feeling … I can't pretend anymore and I've just done it. Somehow I was such a total hypocrite that there was no sort of place to go back now. There was absolutely no justification for it other than the fact that it was embarrassing. It was there. Somehow for me it felt almost like I had sinned and I couldn't be redeemed again. So I might as well carry on sinning. (LC5)

In circumstances such as these, however, most respondents said they would not eat the food or eat only those parts of the meal, that were not meat even if this would cause considerable embarrassment. For some it was virtually impossible for them to eat the meat.

> I just find the idea of eating a dead animal just horrible. Even to be polite socially I just couldn't do it. If I went round to somebody's for dinner and they didn't know I was vegetarian I could force my way through an omelette or something but I couldn't eat a sausage or a steak. I just couldn't. I would have to say look I'm sorry but I just can't eat this. (SB1)

> I wouldn't no, no, um, um, I don't think in any circumstance I'd eat meat out of politeness or courtesy, um, and I always sort of make the effort to tell people that I am vegetarian before I—sort of you know try and pre-empt that situation but, um, if that situation arises, I mean I wouldn't have any qualms about, you know, just eating nothing rather than eating meat if that's the only thing on offer. (SB6)

Where the idea of eating meat has become abhorrent it is understandable that vegetarians will refuse to eat a meal despite the social embarrassment that this might involve. In fact the overwhelming reason for refusing to eat a meal with meat in it was this sense of revulsion at the idea of eating meat. This is why most respondents said they would refuse to eat it even in a context where no diminution of suffering or saving of animal life could conceivably result. Why it becomes abhorrent in the first place is another issue which is examined elsewhere.[8]

Leaving this issue aside, then, where eating meat has not become so abhorrent the question arises why some vegetarians would still refuse to eat it when their primary motivation is ethical. The animal has already been slaughtered, the meat purchased and prepared. Refusal to eat it cannot change any of this. Eating the meat does not save the life of the animal that has already been slaughtered; nor is it likely to reduce the chance of an animal being slaughtered in the future. Is refusal a way, nevertheless, of making a statement, an expressive gesture of rejection of the practice of meat eating? Where there is a risk of embarrassing a host it seems unlikely that in such circumstances it would be important to make such a statement. In fact, most respondents expressed a strong disinclination either to cause any embarrassment or offence by eating whatever they could, pushing aside the meat on their plate and very apologetically explaining that they were vegetarian and simply did not feel able to eat it. Apart from a sense of disgust at the idea of eating meat respondents indicated simply that their refusal to eat meat was in some way bound up with the principle of avoiding meat while not being very clear exactly how. The difficulty that vegetarians have in consuming the meat, even at the risk of insulting the host, testifies to a more deeply rooted antipathy to the idea of consuming meat as an action which symbolizes complicity in what is immoral, even if the potential consumer could have no actual complicity in causing harm or inflicting pain upon the animal consumed.

Respondents were asked about their feelings and reactions to occasions when they had inadvertently eaten meat or how they might feel if they were to discover shortly afterwards that they had eaten something containing meat. The responses relating to such inadvertent consumption of meat, or to the idea of consuming meat inadvertently if they had not actually had this experience, shed further light on the question of vegetarians' disinclination to break their rule against consuming meat. Reactions included anxiety, anger, guilt, a sense of contamination, harm, unease, discomfort, queasiness, deep revulsion and sickness.

Most relevant to the discussion here are the feelings of anxiety, anger and guilt that resulted from inadvertent consumption.

Expressions of anger included the following examples:

> I think I would have been very cross, probably cross with—but it would depend on the situation. If I felt someone like my mother-in-law, for instance, had or even my own mother—because they're the only two people who I could think of who could possibly do something like that—had sort of put something into soup or something because she thought we wouldn't notice and she wanted to do a stock, say, then I would be very angry with that person for making me inadvertently break my principles. I would also probably be cross, well cross with myself perhaps for not realising or, you know, frustrated. I think, frustrated is a good word for it, but albeit, perhaps not deliberately, I'd broken something, you know, a promise that I'd made to myself—so cross and frustrated, thwarted. (LC1)

> Um, I was annoyed really. I was annoyed that, um, it was really there; ignorance I guess, that [was what] I was annoyed about. (SB19)

> I'd be pissed off, actually, that, um, that sort of thing had happened. But I wouldn't make myself sick or anything. I'd just be a bit annoyed with myself. (SB2)

The following quote illustrates the sense of guilt or failure was sometimes expressed.

> I think I'm more extreme in my reactions now than I would have been. I think initially it would have been the losing face aspect of it because "I'm vegetarian" whereas now although that's still important to me it shouldn't be. What's important is the health and the moral thing not what labels are; that's not important. (SB1)

Significantly none of the health-oriented vegetarians interviewed reported such feelings resulting from ingestion of meat. A few said that they had experienced or thought they would experience mild feelings of anxiety or

some discomfort. On the whole these were related to digestive concerns as the following quote illustrates:

> That, that has happened to me, um, not necessarily meat but um for example, um, about a year ago I think it was, um, I had some soup, um I was given some soup; told it was sort of vegetarian soup but then found out afterwards that it was actually made from chicken stock. Um, that didn't make me physically ill but it did make me feel a little uneasy. Um, again , my fear I think was that no matter how, you know, even there was obviously such a small, such a small meat content in that but my fear was still that my body had become totally, um you know, unused to, uh, digesting any kind of meat product. (SB6)

That some vegetarians felt either anger or guilt at the thought of even inadvertently consuming meat supports the idea that meat consumption is unacceptable quite independently of any consequences there might be for meat production or the welfare of animals, and suggests that there is a sense among some vegetarians at least that what is important is to observe certain rules dictated by their ethical stance. Breach of these rules, either intentionally or unintentionally, causes unease, anxiety, anger or guilt.

Domination and Repression

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As a symbol of violence meat may also symbolize domination. Fiddes has explored this theme in some detail (1991). According to Fiddes, meat symbolizes power over nature and the natural world. The high prestige of meat, especially red meat, is related to this capacity to symbolize domination of nature by humans and by culture. The recent rise in vegetarianism is due, therefore, to a weakening of the desire to feel dominant over nature; it is related to the rise of environmentalism, the desire to establish a harmonious relationship with nature in place of domination of it. Contemporary vegetarianism reflects this clearly in its emphasis on equality with animals, respect for their rights and so forth.

However, there are problems with Fiddes' interpretation. The reason that meat was a highly prestigious food, it might be argued, was that it was a high status food only consumed in any quantity by the wealthy and powerful. The mass of the population before the modern era rarely ate meat as the mass of the peasantry rarely do in underdeveloped countries today. In Europe, in the Middle Ages, meat, especially red meat, was associated with aristocracy, landed gentry and their militaristic and hunting culture. It was this, also, that tended to strengthen the association of meat with power and aggression. The decline of this way of life, and the cheapening of meat as a commodity

by modern production methods, increasingly devalued it as a particularly prestigious food, and its wider availability and consumption undermined to a considerable extent its special qualities associated with power. This was reinforced by urbanisation and concealment of slaughter and butchery.

The rise of vegetarianism may reflect a progressive movement away from the culture of violence in which meat played a role as a symbol of high status and all that went with it. It was not so much a symbol of power over nature but of the status and lifestyle that gave power over other human beings. As Eder puts it, the "vegetarian life is the negation of social power" (1996: 134). The heavy meat-eating military elite were the controllers of culture and society rather than of nature. Franklin (1996) has pointed out that during the eighteenth century in England the most avid foxhunters were cavalry officers who, at the time, were becoming increasingly anxious about the future of the role of cavalry in modern warfare. Their regiments encouraged them to hunt and gave them leave during the hunting season in order to do so. Franklin describes their way of life as a "vestigial culture of violence belonging to an earlier, less civilized epoch and an increasingly outdated military technology" (p. 440).

It is also significant, perhaps, that in India, where Hinduism places a strong prohibition upon the taking of life, including animal life, vegetarianism is central to the way of life of certain castes. It is the priestly Brahmin castes, in particular, which observe this practice while the traditionally aristocratic Kshatriya rulers and warriors, whose caste dharma involves the taking of life, are usually meat eaters. In a more egalitarian and democratic climate, power over and domination of others, even extending this to animals, are upheld less and less as ideals and increasingly seen as almost immoral. Sports such as boxing which entail very graphically the physical domination of the opponent are increasingly disliked and questioned.

We observe today many lingering associations in popular consciousness of meat, namely with masculinity, muscularity, vigor, strength, endurance and aggression. A vegetarian diet is sometimes thought to induce passivity, weakness and lassitude. Athletes and boxers, therefore, eat steaks to keep up their strength. For sports which involve maximum exertion, competitiveness and aggression a high proportion of red meat in the diet is often considered to be essential.

Vegetarians interviewed in this study, however, rarely espoused such views. Respondents were asked whether they thought meat in the diet promotes strength, vigor and even possibly aggression, and whether it is vital for those who expend great energy in work or sport. They were also invited to express their views on the opposite claim, sometimes made by vegetarians, that meat in the diet promotes lethargy and sluggishness due to its effects on the body, the difficulty of digesting it and so on. There was very little

support for either of these views or the general view that any particular component of diet is likely to have any effect on behavioral characteristics or personality.

Only four respondents expressed any agreement at all with the idea that meat can make consumers of it aggressive. One respondent was prepared to entertain the idea that something that had died violently when consumed might impart aggressive characteristics to the consumer.

> I wouldn't be too surprised actually by the idea that meat could make you more aggressive … I wouldn't be surprised in a way because you are eating something which itself is maybe generated from aggression, killing an animal. (SB2)

Another expressed the idea in terms of individual reactions to meat in their diet.

> Maybe in some people it does, I mean maybe some people's bio-chemistry is such that chemicals that you find in meat—you don't know, maybe it does have an adverse reaction just like alcohol affects people differently. Um, so I wouldn't dismiss that [idea] at all. (SB28)

A third respondent expressed views which suggest he espoused the view that diet can and does affect personal characteristics, dispositions and outlook in stating that he felt that since adopting a vegetarian diet he had personally felt less aggressive and more caring, but even then was not certain that this was due to the properties of meat or the absence of it in his diet.

> I feel different being a vegetarian … I've become much less aggressive, uh, and much more concerned with social issues, um, and much more aware of them. Now I don't know how much of that is a factor of growing older during the same period but, um, or how much is a factor reading literature connected to vegetarianism which tends to be very much in the green eco-warrior camp, um, but, um, I certainly feel much less aggressive and much more concerned with animal and human welfare. (VM3)

This respondent did not agree, however, with the idea that meat stimulated vigor, masculinity and strength.

> When I gave up meat I found that I still had drive but it was a more relaxed drive; there wasn't so much anger ah behind everything. (VM3)

Apart from one other respondent who expressed the vague feeling that meat might possibly stimulate aggression but acknowledged that without any evidence for this whatsoever he could only say that it was just a gut feeling,

none of the remaining respondents entertained the idea at all that meat was associated with strength, vigor and masculinity, and rejected outright the idea that it promoted aggressiveness. Several took the opposite view that meat tends to promote lethargy, but most were highly sceptical about this idea also.

Meat eaters were equally sceptical about such claims. Meat eaters were, of course, unlikely to agree with the suggestion that meat promotes aggression, but on the question of it stimulating vigor and strength only six agreed with this and one of those believed that on the other hand it tended also to be enervating as it is more difficult to digest. Another considered that it might have some such property but only slightly so, and one other was unsure about the idea. The rest simply rejected the idea that meat directly promotes strength and vigor or is necessary for athletic prowess, and so on, even if they thought it nutritionally valuable and contributory to overall general health.

Abortion

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The earlier survey carried out by the author mentioned above[9] showed a high level of pro-choice attitudes to abortion among vegetarians. It was highest among ethical vegetarians than for others (84 percent as opposed to 74 percent for health-motivated vegetarians and 65 percent for vegetarians motivated by other concerns) and much higher than for the non-vegetarian group in the sample which served a control group only 49 percent of which expressed a pro-choice stance.

These findings with regard to the issue of abortion might, perhaps, be surprising to some. It might be thought that to be against violence and the taking of life would mean being pro-life on the abortion issue.[10] Part of the explanation might be that vegetarians, typically liberal on most issues, are forced to come down on one side or the other on this issue and feel compelled to respond in a way congruent with their liberalism rather than with their opposition to violence. This does not explain, however, why their liberalism should outweigh their pro-life sentiments. Part of the explanation might be that vegetarians are not inclined to see the foetus as fully a person, just as many non-vegetarians who take the pro-choice stance do, and/or who do not, therefore, perceive abortion as an act of violence but rather as a clinical operation.

Data from the present study largely support this interpretation. Of the vegetarians in the sample twenty-eight expressed pro-choice views, five pro-life and eight were either undecided or somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between wholly pro-choice and wholly pro-life. Some of the responses to the probing question about whether a pro-choice could be

reconciled with the ethical stance on killing animals for food are quoted below:

Interviewer: So you don't think that right at conception or very soon afterwards, there is a child.

Respondent: No I think it's difficult. I would be open to persuasion but I would need to have it demonstrated to me that that was the case and I think that clearly it is a continuum and there is no one point at which a foetus becomes that thing. (LC1)

Interviewer: Pro life people would say there's life there that you are taking from conception.

Responden: Well, that doesn't bother me. It's not a viable life until the foetus gets to a point where it can survive outside the womb; it's not a viable life. You're taking away a life but okay it wouldn't have survived.

Interviewer: So it's the viability—that's the issue?

Respondent: Yes, I mean if you—I can't see the point of view of pro-life people where you are taking it back to the point where the embryo consists of half a dozen cells then I can't really have much sympathy with them. (LC4)

Interviewer: The pro-life people might be puzzled by your general opposition to taking life even of serial killers, and animals really, as part of vegetarianism, and yet—so your reply would be this is not a life, not in the same category?

Respondent: It's not a life … But it's not something which sustains life itself, has never had what I think is the start of life, the first breath. That's where I think I draw the line. I don't draw the line on saying when its twenty-three weeks or whatever. Why not twenty-four, why not twenty-two? There's very little difference in development. This doesn't seem a—it seems more of a political more than a sensible point about where does this child start. I can just—the child doesn't exist as a person until its cord is cut. (SB2)

Interviewer: Some people see it as taking life and for that reason are not in favour of it. Would you see it that way?

Respondent: No. I'm afraid not at that stage. It also takes away twenty years of a woman's life. She will get left with the child. Almost inevitably. (SB4)

Interviewer: Does that square in your mind totally with, with, uh, being against capital punishment and so on, 'cos some people—obviously

the pro-life people would say well you know this is taking a life.

Respondent: Um, I don't, I don't necessarily see—I mean obviously you can, you can argue about when a foetus becomes a sort of a human life and so on. You can argue that it becomes a life as soon as an egg is fertilized or whatever, but um, I, I personally don't see that. Um, I think—you know—until, um, a foetus is another more recognizable entity which would occur after the, um, 24 weeks, 26 weeks, um, I, I don't see that being contradictory, that, um, I'm against capital punishment but for the right to abort foetuses. (SB6)

Interviewer: Right, now some people might say—might be puzzled and say well, you know, vegetarians on the whole have a great respect for life and they don't like to take life. Is there a situation where you might … you don't, don't see any contradiction?

Respondent: I guess I don't see it as a life as such because it isn't an independent life. It hasn't been born and to bring a child into a situation where it isn't wanted or conditions that aren't right is for me more of a crime. (VM1)

Interviewer: You don't think it's taking life then?

Respondent: No. When does life begin? Is it your first, is it your first, um, breath of air in your lungs, I don't know. That's a difficult one but I would say while you're still classed as a foetus or whatever then um yeah. (VM2)

Two pro-choice respondents believed that abortion did involve taking life but still supported it. One of them considered that since an unwanted pregnancy was accidental it could not be compared with the calculated breeding of animals in order to kill them for food.

The overwhelming impression from the interview extracts, then, is clearly that pro-choice, ethically motivated vegetarians do not see abortion as the taking of life; or, at least, justify their pro-choice stance in such terms. In this they are probably no different from non-vegetarians. Even if ethically motivated vegetarians are more sensitive to the issue of taking life, their ethical stance towards the treatment of animals is in no way incompatible with a pro-choice stance on abortion since this is not seen as taking life.

While the small numbers in the sample make comparisons between vegetarians and non-vegetarians hazardous, and between vegetarians motivated by different concerns—for example, ethical versus health vegetarians—even more so, one possibly meaningful quantitative comparison that might be made is between those whose current motive for following a vegetarian diet is ethical or includes ethical concerns with meat eaters. Current motives for vegetarianism are more relevant than original motives

since the views stated about abortion were current views, not necessarily those held at the time of the adoption of the vegetarian diet. A comparison between ethically motivated vegetarians with meat eaters is more relevant from the point of view of attitudes to violence which one might expect to play a significant part in the world view of ethically motivated vegetarians. A comparison of this kind revealed that ethically motivated vegetarians were indeed more likely to be pro-choice (57 percent) than meat eaters (37 percent). This difference is consistent with the view that vegetarians tend to be more liberal in their outlook than the rest of the population.

Nuclear Weapons, Capital Punishment, Blood Sports and Boxing

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In order to explore vegetarian attitudes to violence further, respondents were asked about all of these issues. Vegetarians in the earlier quantitative study had indicated a considerably greater opposition to nuclear weapons and the death penalty. Ethical vegetarians were rather more opposed to these things than health-oriented vegetarians or those motivated by other reasons, as one might expect. When asked whether they were in favor of or opposed to Britain possessing nuclear weapons 52 percent of ethically motivated vegetarians said they were opposed, while only 28 percent of health-motivated vegetarians and 44 percent of vegetarians motivated by other concerns were opposed, and only 18 percent of non-vegetarians. CND was supported by 82 percent of ethically motivated vegetarians but by only 49 percent of health-motivated vegetarians and 58 percent of those motivated by other concerns. Only 35 percent of non-vegetarians said they supported CND. With regard to capital punishment 84 percent of ethical vegetarians were wholly opposed to it, 76 percent of health-motivated vegetarians, 83 percent of vegetarians motivated by other concerns and 45 percent of non-vegetarians.

In the present study, in addition to nuclear weapons and capital punishment, respondents were asked about foxhunting, shooting animals purely for sport, angling for sport and the sport of boxing. Comparing, as above in the case of abortion, the views of those vegetarians whose current motive included ethical concerns with those of meat eaters, the latter were somewhat more in favor of Britain keeping its nuclear weapons or were multilateralist (42 percent) than ethical vegetarians (32 percent). The proportions favoring unilateralism differed rather little, however (37 percent and 32 percent respectively) with ethical vegetarians being somewhat more uncertain or neutral about the issue (36 percent) as opposed to meat eaters (21 percent).

On the death penalty only one ethical vegetarian supported it while 76 percent were totally opposed; 26 percent of meat eaters supported it while 63 percent were totally opposed.

Respondents were asked their views on boxing and whether they would ban it. Almost the entire sample, both vegetarians and meat eaters, expressed negative views on boxing, either disliking it, disapproving of it or finding it pointless. Few were prepared to say, however, that it should be banned. Ethical vegetarians were actually more inclined to say it should not be banned than meat eaters (63 percent as opposed to 37 percent) on the grounds that it should be left to individual choice, however abhorrent it was to them as an activity or whatever their views about its potential dangers to health.

Foxhunting presented a very different picture, as one might expect. Only two ethical vegetarians were prepared to allow it and 86 percent wanted it banned outright, while 32 percent of meat eaters said it should be allowed to continue and 47 percent supported a total ban. Shooting of animals purely for sport, rather than to be eaten, was an issue that elicited somewhat less certain and clear-cut views but 62 percent of ethical vegetarians and 42 percent of meat eaters wanted this banned. Not that meat eaters were all that much more in favor of allowing it than ethical vegetarians (16 percent versus 19 percent respectively); they were simply more inclined to be uncertain about it. Finally angling purely for sport, rather than to catch fish to be eaten, was an issue about which meat eaters, for some reason, were very uncertain (84 percent) with 11 percent willing to allow it and 5 percent in favor of a ban. The figures for ethical vegetarians were 35 percent in favour of allowing it, 25 percent in favour of banning it and 40 percent uncertain.

Conclusion

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Overall the figures above show some support, if limited, for the idea that ethically motivated vegetarians are more sensitive to and concerned about actions involving violence than the population in general. The foxhunting issue is one where this is most clear but this is very much to be expected. Other "blood sports" are less clear cut but the general picture seems to support the hypothesis. The picture with regard to nuclear weapons gives weak support while that of capital punishment does so somewhat more clearly.

The rather liberal tendencies of vegetarians that the abortion issue perhaps reveals can be seen to some degree in the figures for boxing where there is considerable reluctance to ban it on the grounds that this infringes choice and freedom. Vegetarians were less uncertain and hesitant than meat eaters that it should not be banned. In contrast, where it is not a question of choice, as in the case of foxes hunted to death with hounds, vegetarians do not hesitate at all to support a ban and to limit freedom. Fewer ethical vegetarians are as certain about this in the case of shooting although a very

clear majority were. Angling raises all sorts of doubts. Its sheer popularity among ordinary people makes vegetarians reluctant to support a ban. Hunting and shooting are perceived as the preserve of the elite whereas angling is seen as a sport of the common man. In any case, many vegetarians said, the fish are not always, or very often, killed, but put back. Much anxiety was expressed about harm to and suffering of the fish but much doubt was expressed, also, about the degree of sentience of fish as opposed to birds, and certainly mammals. Those opposed to angling, whether they would ban it or not, were often as worried about the damage done to swans and other aquatic birds by fishing lines and hooks than to the fish.

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Appendix

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DETAILS OF RESPONDENTS

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Each respondent has a letter and number identifier followed by type of diet (except in the case of non-vegetarians), length of time this diet has been followed, sex, an age code, an education code and an occupational description.

KEY TO AGE AND EDUCATION CODES

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Age

i Under 21
ii 21–30
iii 31–40
iv 41–50
v 51–60
vi Over 60

Education

i GCSE
ii A Level
iii Teaching or equivalent qualification

iv University degree or equivalent and higher
v No qualifications
vi Other

Vegetarians

FC1, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 10 years, female, age ii, education iv, supported housing officer.

FC2, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 4 + 1 years, female, age iii, education ii, textiles artist.

LC1, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 19 years, female, age iii, education iv, administrator/manager.

LC2, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 19 years, male, age iv, teacher, education iv, teacher.

LC3, Fish, female, 25 years, age iv, education v, secretary.

LC4, Lacto-ovo vegetarian then vegan (at home), 20 + 6 years, male, age iv, education iv, university lecturer.

LC5, Lacto-ovo vegetarian then fish, 18 years then 8 years, male, age iv, education iv, lawyer.

SB1, Lacto-ovo vegetarian becoming vegan, 25 years, female, married, age iv, education iv, housewife.

SB2, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 12 years, male, married, age 30, education iv, university lecturer.

SB3, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 9 years, female, married, age iv, education iv, librarian.

SB4, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 15 years, female, single, age v, education ii, semi-retired systems analyst.

SB5, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 10 years, male, married, age ii, education i, bank clerk.

SB6, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 12 years, male, single, age iii, education iv, librarian.

SB8 Semi-vegetarian—fish, 2.5 years, lapsed, female, married, age iii, education i, housewife.

SB9, Some fish, 25 years, male, married, age iv, education iv, librarian.

SB10, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 16 years, female, married, age ii, education iv, teacher/housewife.

SB11, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 56 years, male, single, age v, education ii, ex-civil servant/writer.

SB12, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 10 years, female, married, age iv, education iv, project manager.

SB13, Some fish, 23 years, female, married, age iv, education iv, civil servant.

SB14, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 10 years, female, single, age ii, education ii, student.

SB15, Fish, 5 years, male, single, age ii, education iv, librarian.

SB16, Fish, 10 years, female, single, age i, education iii, gym instructor.
SB18, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 20 years, female, married, age iv, education iv, university lecturer.
SB19, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 7.5 years, male, single, age iii, education iv, software engineer.
SB20, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 15 years, female, single, age i, school pupil.
SB21, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 17 years, female, single, age i, education i, school pupil.
SB23, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 30 years, female, single, age v, education iv, creative writing tutor.
SB24, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 28 years, female, single, age iii, education iv, contract research officer.
SB25, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 5 years, female, age i, education i, secretary.
SB26, Fish, 2 years, male, age v, education iv, university lecturer.
SB27, Fish, 2 years, female, age ii, education iv, research assistant.
SB28, Fish, 6 months, male, age iii, education iv, university administrator.
SB29, Largely lacto-ovo, 20–25 years, female, age iv, education iv.
SB30, Lacto-ovo, 1 year, female, age v, education iv, university administrator.
SB31, Fish and ovo, 4 years, female, age v, education iv, secretary and formerly occupational therapist.
SB32, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 5 years, vegan, 2 months, female, age ii, education iv, research assistant.
SB34, Lapsed lacto-ovo vegetarian, 10 years, then no red meat, 4 years, female, age vi, education iii, retired lecturer.
SB35, some fish, 2 years, male, age iii, education iv, graphic designer.
SB36, Fish, 15 years, female, age vi, education iv, retired.
VM1, Lacto-ovo vegetarian (some fish outside home), 9 years, female, age iv, education iii, copy shop assistant.
VM2, Lacto vegetarian but free-range eggs as ingredient, no milk, 41 years, female, age iv, education, ii, manager.
VM3, Lacto-ovo vegetarian, 7.5 years, male, age iii, education iv, software engineer.
VM4, Vegan (85–90 percent), 10 years (vegetarian for previous 18), female, age vi, supermarket assistant (retired).

Non-vegetarians

ME1, male, married, age v, education iv, university lecturer.
ME2, male, married, age iv, education ii, chef.
ME3, male, single, age iv, education iv, university lecturer.
ME4, female, married, age v, education i, secretary.
ME5, male, single, age ii, education iv, university lecturer.
ME6, male, age vi, education i, caretaker (retired).
ME7, male, age iv, education i, construction site manager.

ME17 (lapsed vegetarian, 7 years), female, age ii, education iv, communications consultant.
ME18, male, single, age ii, education iv, student.
ME19, female, married, age ii, education iv, university lecturer.
ME20, male, single, age iii, education, iv, student.
ME21, male, married, age vi, education iv, university lecturer.
ME22, male, married, age iii, education iv, manager.
ME23, male, married, age v, education iv, university lecturer.
ME24, male, cohabiting, age iii, education ii, computer technician.
ME25, female, married, age iv, education iv, accounting technician.
ME26, male, married, age iii, education iv, research fellow.
ME27, female, married, age iv, education iv, business development officer.
ME28, male, single, age ii, education iv, assistant secretary.
ME29, male, married, age iv, education iv, university lecturer.
ME30, female, married, age iv, education iv, university lecturer.
ME31, male, married, age v, education iv, laboratory technician.

Notes

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1 The survey was carried out in the Reading area during 1992/93 and used a structured questionnaire. About 200 vegetarians participated in the first stage of the survey which did not include questions about motivation. A follow-up telephone survey of 125 of those who participated in the first stage was carried out in 1995 and this included questions about original and current motives for adoption of a vegetarian diet.

2 Gallup polls show 2.1 percent of the UK population reporting themselves to be vegetarian in 1984 and 5.0 percent in 1999. In a Gallup poll carried out for Realeat in 2001, 4.0 said they were vegetarian. Vegetarian Society website: http://www.vegsoc.org/info/realeat.html (Accessed 23/05/05).

3 Walter (1991) has argued that the perception that death is a taboo subject in our culture is something of a myth. While acknowledging that it is to a large degree tabooed in public contexts he claims that in private discourse it is not so and a subject which people are willing readily to talk about. The fact that there appears to be a reluctance to acknowledge publicly the reality of death, however, certainly points to death being problematic in our culture. The fact that one can always find people willing to talk about it in private hardly invalidates this point

4 The telephone survey carried out in 1995 found that a clear majority (approximately 70 percent) of those who abstained from eating meat but ate fish identified themselves as vegetarian.

5 Those brought up vegetarian are all counted as having added one or more motives to their original "motive". In all but one case of a respondent who disliked meat they had come to adopt an ethical stance on meat eating.

6 The two lapsed vegetarians are, of course, not included here.

7 Letters and numbers after quotations from the interviews are used to identify individual respondents. A list of respondents with essential details is given in the Appendix.

8 Hamilton, M. B. Vile Bodies: Expressions of Disgust with Meat Among Vegetarians. Paper presented at the Joint Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Food and Society and the Agriculture, Food and Human Values Society, New York University, June 2000.

9 For details see Hamilton *et al.* (1995).

10 This was very much the response to the findings reported in Hamilton *et al.* (1995). Although surprising to this author, since in my own view a pro-life stance on abortion does not seem to be at all incompatible with the ethical stance of vegetarians on the treatment of animals, many responses to this finding expressed considerable puzzlement and a sense of inconsistency in it. It was because of this that the present study sought to explore the issue in greater depth.

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