

Vegetarianism

Post by “Cassius” of August 8, 2019 at 11:13 AM

This is a placeholder for discussion of vegetarianism, which some assert was practised by Epicureans, but for which there is little if any textual support for that conclusion.

Here is a [post by Hiram on the topic](#). This is the only reference I've seen to vegetarianism being discussed, and it is far from clear that it supports the conclusion that most or even a significant number of Epicureans were vegetarian. I recall nothing in Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes of Oinoanda, or Lucretius which supports vegetarianism.

Post by “Dubitator314” of August 18, 2019 at 11:49 PM

For what it's worth, the only person I've heard that categorically supported the practice was Musonius Rufus, a Stoic.

There are some modern Stoics supporting it too.

Post by “Elayne” of August 21, 2019 at 3:22 PM

I would think the decision would be based on individual assessment of net pleasure.

I have a type of autoimmune arthritis, and before menopause, whenever I would eat meat or chicken, my feet swelled up-- so I didn't eat them. I could eat fish occasionally but not often. This was the case for about 15 years-- I used to check every so often to be sure it was still true, because I love a juicy burger, lol.

Fortunately, that seems to be less of an issue now... but now animal protein seems to worsen insulin resistance for me, if I eat a regular serving. So I eat a little here and there, not much at one time. It doesn't bother me on an empathy basis.

Some people may have unusual sensitivity to thinking about eating animals that causes them disproportionate mental pain, and it makes sense for them not to eat animals as long as no net

pain results from that decision.

Post by “michelepinto” of August 22, 2019 at 5:17 AM

I'm so busy with the first Epicurean festival that will be next week that I do not read this forum often

In the festival we will organize an epicurean lunch. And presenting the epicurean lunch to people just this morning I wrote these few lines:

Epicurus was not a vegetarian

Often we find the name Epicurus in the list of historical vegetarian figures. Indeed there are some testimonies in this sense, which are inevitably misunderstood by those who want to read us what they want to read.

For example San Girolamo tells us: "Epicurus, a supporter of pleasure, did nothing but fill all his books with vegetables and fruit, and said that it is necessary to live on simple foods, because the meats and the refined foods are prepared with great anxiety and effort, and there is greater punishment in proposing them than enjoying them ..."

But we know that Epicurus had made his flag of moderation and excluding a food on principle just does not fit into his strings. Certainly he normally preferred other foods, but on occasion there is no doubt that he even ate meat.

"Being able to live happily with simple and unrequired food is good for your health and (...) makes us appreciate more the little luxuries that sometimes fate gives us ..." (Letter to Meneceo).

Of course after the festival I'll post all the pictures of Epicurus' Lunch... 😊

Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2019 at 6:51 AM

I agree Michelle! Where do people get these ideas? It seems so few are rigorous about providing cites for their propositions!

I tend to be careful about "moderation" too, because when the goal is fixed on pleasure sometimes we are immoderate, when immoderation is called for, to achieve the goal.

The "golden mean" idea seems much more Aristotle / Plato than Epicurus, and yet people presume that he taught that since the others did. But placing any goal as a goal in itself equal to pleasure would be inconsistent.

Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2019 at 6:52 AM

And good luck with the festival and please keep us posted!!!

Post by “michelepinto” of August 22, 2019 at 8:14 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And good luck with the festival and please keep us posted!!!

Thank you!

About Moderation we will talk soon, after the festival.

Post by “Cassius” of August 22, 2019 at 8:15 AM

And I am sure you will attack the Festival with everything you have got, and not moderately!



Post by “michelepinto” of August 25, 2019 at 10:11 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

And I am sure you will attack the Festival with everything you have got, and not moderately! 😊

Sure!

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2025 at 12:01 PM

Just a short quick note to add to this topic because I recently heard someone say "If it can't die, it's not food."

That struck me as helpful in this analysis of the ethics of vegetarianism. Of course I presume that the emphasis at least most of the time in the debate is on "consciousness" as the dividing line between what is "ethical" to eat and what is not.

Nevertheless I can see that it would be useful to think of the problem in terms of the fact that even plants must "die" for us to eat them.

I'm still in the general camp that it makes a lot of sense to minimize conscious suffering whenever possible. Plus, it's hard for me to say that plants fall under any reasonable definition of consciousness.

But when you look at the issue from the more general point of view of "living" vs. non-living," it's also hard for me to argue the conversation ought to be judged in terms of "death" vs. "consciousness." And if you do look at the issue on that level, it seems to be more apparent that it's impossible for any living creature to survive except after the death of other living creatures.

So I guess that leaves me at "minimize the conscious suffering but it's ok to eat meat." And I should add that there are specific steps I would support to make sure conscious suffering is minimized, but agricultural / slaughtering practices are beyond the scope of this post.

Post by “Don” of January 7, 2025 at 12:58 PM

Here's an excerpt from Alan Watts' essay "Murder in the Kitchen"

Vegetarianism, for example, is no solution. Years ago the Indian botanist Sir Jagadis Bose measured the pain reactions of plants to cutting and pulling. To say that plants don't really *know* that they are in pain is only to say that they can't put it into words. When I pointed this out to a strictly vegetarian Buddhist, the famous Reginald H. Blyth, who wrote *Zen in English Literature*, he said, "Yes, I know that. But when we kill vegetables they don't scream so loud." In other words, he was just being easy on his *own* feelings. Buddhist and Hindu monks have carried the attitude of *ahimsa*, or harmlessness, to the extreme of keeping their eyes on the ground when walking—not to avoid the temptations of lovely women, but to avoid trampling on beetles, snails, or worms that might lie in the path. Yet this is at root an evasion, a ritual gesture of reverence for life which in no way alters the fact that we live by killing.

Post by "Joshua" of January 7, 2025 at 1:16 PM

I was vegetarian for nearly a year. I stopped when I started driving truck, and since I had to have a physical done to get a CDL, I also had bloodwork and my vision tested. Both of them had actually improved after just under twelve months.

The plural of anecdote is not data, but I was surprised by the changes!

Post by “Don” of January 7, 2025 at 1:37 PM

[Quote from Joshua](#)

The plural of anecdote is not data



I had not heard that before. That's a good one to remember. That'll show up in a future presentation for me at some point!

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2025 at 2:18 PM

The plural of anecdote may not be data, but depending upon the nature of the anecdotal testimony it's still "some" evidence - and that's at least a start and better than the pure speculation on which so much of what passes for "established truth" is based.

Some day more work needs to be done on: [Epicurean Rules of Evidence](#)

I doubt anyone will ever claim that our work "on evidence" meets the standard of "falling from the heavens," but apparently Epicurus' work on the Canon - pretty much the same subject - was impressive!

Joshua is probably a pretty fair evaluator of facts, so it would be interesting to hear about changes in the diet before and after and how that might relate to blood and vision. Since this is a thread on "vegetarianism" that wouldn't be far off topic.

Post by “Godfrey” of January 7, 2025 at 2:56 PM

Some years back I was vegetarian for a year, and my bloodwork took a turn for the worse. I started working with a dietitian and got everything back on track in a couple of months. The most important takeaways, in my case, were to: get more protein; eat good fats/oils and avoid

bad fats/oils; eat whole grains, avoid "white" foods; minimize sugar; avoid highly processed foods.

For what it's worth, I think that these are good general guidelines and can apply whether one eats meat or not. And, for the record, I reintroduced meat into my diet 😊

Post by “Cassius” of January 7, 2025 at 3:38 PM

Yes Godfrey your experience is more what I would expect. Maybe there's more going on with Joshua's experience that played a role beyond vegetarianism. Maybe he had enough time to think "Yay I'm now free, and I'm about to travel around the country in a truck" before he had his test and that improved his results! 😊

Post by “kochiekoch” of January 7, 2025 at 6:10 PM

I was a pescetarian, (vegetarian but with fish), when I was 18 for about a year. (A hippie kind of diet with lots of brown rice).

I did lose a lot of weight, and strangely enough I became much paler, but I can't remember any other changes. I ached a blood test for iron when donating blood though and I still eat brown rice and whole grains when I can. 😊

Post by “Eikadistes” of January 8, 2025 at 9:06 AM

I was a vegetarian between 16 and 24. It suited me OK. To each their own with diet.

Last year, we learned that my wife's EPI medication can only be produced from pig pancreas, so the slaughter of human-like creatures with rational thought is, *sadly* a necessity to people with illnesses.

Post by “Don” of January 8, 2025 at 5:59 PM

One thing that seems to be coming up in my research is that meat-eating was not nearly as prevalent in ancient Greece as we think of it now. That's one reason religious/civic festivals were so popular. Everyone got meat from the sacrificial animals roasting on the altar. The gods got the "choice" bits 😊 (fat, entrails, etc. - [See here for a fascinating article](#)) and the roasted meat was shared among all the celebrants. The ancient Greeks were not a "meat and potatoes" kind of people; more generally-speaking like a "bread and vegetables" people.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 8, 2025 at 6:49 PM

My wife eats little meat, and would likely be completely vegan except that her doctor (following a heart attack) cautioned her against totally excluding any macronutrient from her diet; so she occasionally has a bit of fish or meat.

I basically eat anything. I do have a bit of a gluten issue, and so try to do more to minimize refined grains (bread, pasta)* in favor of intact grains (brown rice). But I am not very disciplined 😞 - and that is the main reason I am a bit overweight.** Following my wife, I try to eat more “beans and greens.”

With age, I find that eggs have become problematic. The old three-egg omelet is out: one egg, whether poached or scrambled, is usually all I can tolerate.

I still eat for pleasure - but try to balance the immediate “kinetic” pleasure with predictable “katastematic” feelings after. In terms of cultural cuisine, I have a motto in Latin: *Sapores mundi gusta ... de domo.* (“Taste the flavors of the world ... from home.”) Tonight we are having some vegan minestrone soup, with added garlic, rice and some finely chopped kale. (I will have a bit of leftover pork tenderloin in mine.)

I do “intermittent fasting” - that is, three or four days a week I fast for 12 to 15 hours, and break my fast with some light “tapas” in mid-afternoon.

* Even “whole grains” refined into flour.

** Based on personal observation.