

Review: Deep Vegetarianism

By Michael Allen Fox

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Fox, Michael Allen. *Deep Vegetarianism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. 234 pp. US \$19.95 paper ISBN: 1-56639-705-7. US\$59.50 cloth ISBN: 1-56639-704-9. Alkaline paper.

Deep Vegetarianism is all about a choice of lifestyle - but takes a much broader view. Michael Allen Fox challenges you to re-examine not just your eating habits, but also your views on animal rights, world hunger, spirituality, even reaching out to issues of racism and feminism! Get ready for a long, long read....

A Professor of Philosophy at Queen's University, and once an advocate for animal experimentation who no longer holds those views, Fox presents a comprehensive study of the history and evolution of ideas concerning vegetarianism, and compelling arguments in favor of a vegetarian lifestyle. The book opens with a "historical-philosophical" overview, which is followed by an exploration of the cultural symbolism of meat and vegetarian food, in lifestyles varying from the heavily urbanized to tribal. Fox also addresses the interesting phenomenon of "compartmentalization" of ideologies within individuals (a classic example being Hitler, a committed vegetarian!).

With that background (meant to develop a comparative understanding of the cultural, ethical and philosophical roles that the consumption of meat plays, and has played, in our lives), Fox moves on to what he believes are compelling arguments for vegetarianism. In a series of three chapters, he links seemingly disparate ethical issues such as ecology, animal rights, world hunger, spirituality, racism and feminism under the basic premise that vegetarianism is not a single, disconnected moral issue but part of a harmonious lifestyle, in which all sentient beings are accorded equal rights. In a particularly fascinating section, the link between the commercialized objectification of an animal as a set of meat portions and of a woman as a collection of sexual parts is explored, drawing on an extensive body of ecofeminist literature.

The arguments commonly advanced against vegetarianism are also presented, along with counter-arguments. A final chapter expresses the

hope that the reader, whatever his/her final viewpoint, will have been convinced that vegetarianism is a way of life, with an accompanying "integrated set of beliefs and practices" (pg 181). It also examines the practicality of adopting a vegetarian lifestyle under modern, urban conditions, and explores its extension to veganism.

Deep Vegetarianism is a compelling read -- I read it through at one sitting the first time, and find myself continually dipping into its pages since then. It is not a "neutral" descriptive account of vegetarianism; this is a book with a strong message to send. It is, however, an effort to evaluate all aspects of the debate rationally. For those interested in the development of vegetarianism as a holistic, alternate lifestyle with connections to ecofeminism, animal rights and the environmental movement, this book is invaluable. It also provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical development of vegetarianism, and its philosophical underpinnings, with a fairly extensive reference list. It is a book that will leave readers, vegetarian or otherwise, convinced/converted or not, with a greater, more nuanced understanding of the various aspects of vegetarianism.

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