

Why I Am Not a Vegetarian

By ACSH Staff — April 1, 1997

Vegetarianism has taken on a "political correctness" comparable to the respectability it had in the last century, when many social and scientific progressives advocated it. Today, crusaders extol meatless eating not only as healthful but also as a solution to world hunger and as a safeguard of "Mother Earth." The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) aggressively attacks the use of animal foods and has proposed its own food-groups model, which excludes all animal products.

I disclaimed vegetarianism after many years of observance. Although the arguments in favor of it appear compelling, I have learned to be suspicious, and to search for hidden agendas, when I evaluate claims of the benefits of vegetarianism. Vegetarianism is riddled with delusional thinking from which even scientists and medical professionals are not immune.

Don't get me wrong: I know that meatless diets can be healthful, even desirable, for some people. For example: (a) Men with an iron-loading gene are better off without red meat, because it contains heme iron, which is highly absorbable and can increase their risk of heart disease. (b) Because vegetarian diets are likely to contain less saturated fat than nonvegetarian diets, they may be preferable for persons with familial hypercholesterolemia. (c) Vegetables contain phytochemicals that appear protective against colorectal cancer. (d) Homocysteinemia (elevated plasma homocysteine) approximately doubles the risk of coronary artery disease. Several congenital and nutritional disorders, including deficiencies of vitamins B6 and B12 and folic acid, can cause this condition. Since folic acid occurs mostly in vegetables, low intakes of the vitamin are less likely among vegetarians than among nonvegetarians. (e) Some people find that being a vegetarian helps to control their weight. Vegetarianism tends to facilitate weight control because it is a form of food restriction; and in our overfed society, food restriction is a plus unless it entails a deficit of some essential nutrient.

However, one need not eliminate meat from one's diet for any of the foregoing reasons. Apparently, it is ample consumption of fruits and vegetables, not the exclusion of meat, that makes vegetarianism healthful.

Dog Day Afternoon?

The term "vegetarian" is misleading, for it is not a name for people who favor vegetable consumption, but a code word for those who *dis*favor or protest the consumption of animal foods. The neologism *anticarnivorist* better characterizes the majority of those who call themselves vegetarians. I call myself a "vegetable enthusiast," because I strongly encourage eating lots of vegetables, including legumes, whole grains, and fruits. I believe that these foods are desirable not only because of their high nutrient density and low caloric density, but also because of aesthetic and gustatory factors. Being a vegetable enthusiast doesn't entail rejecting the use of meat or

animal products.

Most people who categorize vegetarians identify at least five different kinds, based on which types of animal food they consume: *Semivegetarians* consume dairy products, eggs, fish, and chicken; *pesco-vegetarians* consume dairy products, eggs, and fish; *lacto-ovo-vegetarians*, dairy products and eggs; *ovo-vegetarians*, eggs; and *vegans*, no animal foods. From a behavioral standpoint, I categorize vegetarians as either pragmatic or ideologic. A *pragmatic vegetarian* is one whose dietary behavior stems from objective health considerations (e.g., hypercholesterolemia or obesity). Pragmatic vegetarians are rational, rather than emotional, in their approach to making lifestyle decisions. In contrast, vegetarianism is a "matter of principle" for *ideologic vegetarians*; its appropriateness is a given.

One can spot ideologic vegetarians by their exaggerations of the benefits of vegetarianism, their lack of skepticism, and their failure to recognize (or their glossing over of) the potential risks even of extreme vegetarian diets. Ideologic vegetarians make a pretense of being scientific, but they approach the subject of vegetarianism more like lawyers than scientists. Promoters of vegetarianism gather data selectively and gear their arguments toward discrediting information that is contrary to their dogma. This approach to defending a position is suitable for a debate, but it cannot engender scientific understanding.

Because of the influence of my Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) environment, I practiced vegetarianism for many years. My wife and I even tried to give up consuming all animal products, but this didn't work. We sometimes muse aloud about the morning we put soymilk on our breakfast cereal. We ended up eating the cereal with a fork because we found the mixture repulsive. We had another unforgettable experience when we ate with a group of vegetarian hippies in the Oregon woods. We were there at their request to advise them on vegetarian eating. They had already prepared the worst-looking vegetarian stew I have ever seen or tasted. It consisted of raw peanuts and a variety of half-cooked vegetables. After eating it, I had heartburn for hours. Digestive distress is legendary among SDAs.

Reasons for adopting vegetarianism can be very personal. Some years ago I shared a podium for several days with a vegetarian. It became clear from our informal conversations that he was not religious; so I asked him why he had opted for vegetarianism. He told me a touching story about having been a lonely boy whose closest companion was his pet dog. He said that, peering into the dog's eyes one day, he had come to see the animal as a fellow being. Soon he had applied this view to all animals, and since he could not bear the thought of eating his dog, he could no longer eat other animals.

North by Northwest

Darla Erhardt, R.D., M.P.H., listed five vegetarian postulates: (1) All forms of life are sacred, and all creatures have a right to live out their natural lives. (2) It is anatomically clear that God did not design humans to eat meat. (3) Slaughter is repugnant and degrading. (4) Raising animals for meat is inefficient and misuses available land. (5) Animal flesh is unhealthful because it contains toxins, virulent bacteria, uric acid, impure fluids, and the wrong kinds of nutrients. 1 I find all of these axioms flawed:

- 1. The belief that all life is sacred can lead to absurdities such as allowing mosquitoes to spread malaria, or vipers to run loose on one's premises. Inherent in the idea that all life is sacred is the supposition that all forms of life have equal value. The natural world reveals hierarchies in the food chain, the dominance of certain species over others. And most creatures in the wild die (usually the victim of a predator) long before they have reached the genetic limit on their longevity.*
- 2. The multifarious dietary practices of human populations belie the notion that humans are designed to be vegetarians rather than omnivores. For example, Australian aborigines consume insect larvae and reptiles, Eskimos eat raw meat, and traditional Hindus are vegetarians.*

The first SDA physician, John Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943), was a vegetarian zealot. Alonzo Baker, Ph.D., his former private secretary, told me of an incident that occurred circa 1939: Kellogg awakened him in the middle of the night and ordered him to board the morning train for Cleveland. There, Weston Price, D.D.S., who had just returned from the mysterious high north, was to give a report on Eskimo dietary habits. When Baker returned, he informed Kellogg of Price's finding that Eskimos ate raw meat almost exclusively (eskimo literally means "raw meat eater"). Kellogg accused Price of lying.

Perhaps Kellogg disbelieved Price partly because it was widely known that the 1898 Yukon gold rushers had suffered extensively from scurvy. People generally believed that Eskimos derived their vitamin C from berries the snow had preserved. In fact, Eskimos derive vitamin C from the raw meat of animals who synthesize ascorbic acid. If they had cooked their meat, they would have developed scurvy like the gold rushers. (When I visited Northwest Territories, Canada, in 1973, a Franciscan monk who raised beautiful vegetables in a greenhouse in Pelly Bay told me that the Inuits, or North American Eskimos, didn't like their taste and wouldn't eat them.)

- 3. Whether something is repugnant is highly individual. Some Hindus who will not eat animal foods readily drink their own urine for the sake of health. And what is repugnant for example, chores such as changing a baby's diaper or caring for sick*

people is not necessarily wrong. Whether such activities are degrading is a matter of opinion. That most prey are eaten while they are still alive testifies to the heartlessness of nature compared to slaughterhouses, where death is generally quick and painless.

4. The idea that animal-raising is an inefficient way to produce food is half-baked. Animals pull their weight when it comes to land-use and food-production efficiency: They graze on lands unsuitable for crop-growing, eat those portions of plants that are considered inedible (e.g., corn stalks and husks), and provide byproducts and services that ease human burdens. 2 Many nomadic populations survive on lands that lack farming potential by feeding on animals whose nourishment is coarse vegetation humans can't digest.

5. The postulate that toxins render meat unfit as food also lacks merit. Plants also contain naturally occurring toxicants, many of which are far more deadly than those of animal flesh. 3 Vegetarian evangelists who revel in portraying animal foods as unhealthy disregard the fact that those societies that consume the most animal products enjoy record longevity. They also overlook the reality that the animals they brand as diseased are herbivores whose diet consists entirely of raw vegetation. These animals develop many diseases "despite" becoming vegans after weaning.

Ideologic Vegetarianism

Much of my professional life has been spent studying health fraud, quackery, and related misinformation, and their impact on people's lives. I have discerned a recurrent sequence of behaviors: First, the prospective vegetarian eliminates reportedly unhealthy foods from his or her diet, beginning with foods that society considers "bad for you" (e.g., sugar, coffee, and white bread). Next, if concerns about food safety grow to neurotic proportions, the person scrutinizes labels and worries about ingredients indicated by terms he doesn't understand. Then he may patronize health food stores, where clerks and publications can feed his phobias. He may treat modern foods as poisonous. Finally, if he deems vegetarianism not restrictive enough, the "health foodist" may turn to veganism. In my opinion, it is at this point that vegetarianism becomes hazardous, especially for children.

The case of Sonja and Khachadour Atikian illustrates what can happen to those seduced by ideologic vegetarianism. The Atikians were AmigrÃs from Lebanon who because of unrelenting media barrages focusing on environmental pollution, diet, and health became overly concerned about the safety and healthfulness of modern foods. Sonja Atikian began shopping at health food stores instead of supermarkets. Gerhardt Hanswille, a self-styled herbalist from Germany, taught classes in the rear of a health food store she patronized. Although Hanswille was not licensed to practice medicine, he saw 40 to 45 "patients" day. He treated Ms. Atikian for a sore knee, and she took some of his courses. Hanswille taught that: (a) people should not kill animals, nor consume

animal products; (b) God intended cow's milk to be food for calves, not human babies; (c) eating eggs deprives hens of fulfilling their divinely intended role as mothers; (d) people should not poison themselves or the earth with the unnatural products of modern living; (e) using herbs both as food and as medicine is God's way; and (f) the medicines of doctors are poisons. "Choose whom you will believe," said Hanswille, "me or the doctors. You can't have it both ways."

Ms. Atikian chose poorly. Except for eating fish occasionally, she followed the herbalist's advice during pregnancy. She delivered a healthy 8.2-lb girl named Loreie. Hanswille convinced the Atikians that the newborn would become a superbaby if they gave her a vegetarian diet of raw, organic foods. He dissuaded them from having the infant immunized and from continuing to see a pediatrician. And he induced them to rely on him for healthcare advice.

Four and a half months after her birth, Loreie's weight was still at the 75th percentile, but when she was 11 months old, breast-feeding her sole source of animal food discontinued. Fed only fruits, vegetables, and rice, she eventually stopped growing, slept more and more, and had more and more infections. As the baby's health spiraled downward, Hanswille assured the parents that her decline was merely "the poisons coming out of her body" and that she would eventually become the superbaby they desired. In 1987, 17-month-old Loreie died of bronchial pneumonia complicated by severe malnutrition. She weighed 11 1/4 lbs. The Atikians were charged with failing to provide their daughter with the "necessaries of life." Their defense was that they had truly believed they had been providing the "necessaries of life" when they followed Hanswille's advice. The judge acquitted them after the discovery that the prosecution had failed to provide important information supporting the couple's story.

Let's run through some other examples of ideologic vegetarian extremism:

** It caused mental and growth retardation in two boys underfed from birth to ages 3 and 5. Their mother had become a vegetarian, later eliminated sugar and dairy products from her diet, and eventually adopted a macrobiotic diet (see "Peculiar Vegetarianism"). 4*

** Ten cases of nutritional rickets were reported among infants (most of whom were breast-fed) of strict-vegetarian mothers who had not sought medical counsel during pregnancy but had obtained advice from health food stores. 5*

** Scurvy and rickets occurred in two boys, 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 years old, whose parents were adherents of the Zen Macrobiotic diet (see Peculiar Vegetarianism below). 6*

** A 36-year-old former college professor attempted to become a "breatharian" one who supposedly feeds on air alone and died of malnutrition. First he became a vegetarian, then a fruitarian, then a "liquidarian" (consuming juices only), and finally, a would-be breatharian. 7*

** A 2-month-old boy died because his mother, following the invalid*

recommendation for colic in Adelle Davis's Let's Have Healthy Children, overdosed him with potassium. 8 In a television interview, the mother said that, as she became increasingly estranged toward conventional medicine, she had adopted vegetarianism and then veganism.

** A 24-year-old woman who was head of San Jose State University's student art program died after taking an extract of pennyroyal to induce an abortion. She was described as "a strict vegetarian who was involved in holistic medicine." 9*

For the ideologist, vegetarianism is a hygienic religion. It enables believers to practice self-denial. As a religion, vegetarianism attracts the guilt-ridden. It attracts masochists because it gives guilt a boost. And it seduces the unskeptical by causing guilt and/or by instilling false guilt. Guilt leads to self-denial, even asceticism. The belief that salvation is attainable by eschewing worldly pleasures marked the asceticism of early Christian zealots. Similarly, health neurotics with medical problems seem to believe that the more they restrict their alimentary pleasures, the more their health will improve. Fasting, austere diets, enemas, and the ingestion of bitter herbs are consistent with the psychological needs of health neurotics, many of whom shun those voices of conventional medicine and public health that might disenchant them.

Of course, I don't blame ideologic vegetarianism per se *entirely* for tragedies such as those outlined above. Mental or emotional disorders apparently figure in many instances. In such cases, extremism is more to blame. This doesn't take ideologic vegetarianism off the hook, however, for it can fuel or ignite psychological problems.

Eating by the Book?

SDA vegetarianism is rooted in the Bible, according to which for food God gave humans "all plants that bear seed everywhere on earth, and every tree bearing fruit that yields seed" (Genesis 1:29). Meat is said to have become a part of the human diet after the Flood, when all plant life had been destroyed: "Every creature that lives and moves shall be food for you" (Genesis 9:3). Adventists are taught that the introduction of meat into the human diet at that time decreased the human life span from the more than 900 years of the first humans to today's "three-score and ten."

However, the Bible warns against confusing dietary practices with moral behavior:

*For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace.
(Romans 14:17)*

Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink. (Colossians 2:16)

One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables, let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats. (Romans 14:2-4)

It also seems to condemn vegetarianism:

The Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some in the church will turn away from Christ and become eager followers of teachers with devil inspired ideas. These teachers will tell lies with straight faces and do it so often that their consciences won't even bother them. They will say that it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat meat, even though God gave these things to well-taught Christians to enjoy and be thankful for. For everything God made is good, and we may eat it gladly if we are thankful for it. (1 Timothy 4:1-4, Living Bible)

SDA Church pioneer Ellen G. White (1827-1915) was a proponent of vegetarianism even though she did not practice it herself. Like the Grahamites of her time, she taught that gradually the earth would become more corrupted, diseases and calamities worse, and the food particularly animal foods unsafe. In 1902 she wrote that the time might come when the use of milk should be discontinued. Although White was an advocate of science and chiefly responsible for making SDA healthcare a science-based enterprise, clearly she did not anticipate twentieth-century advances in public health and medical science. Despite the record longevity now enjoyed by people in the developed nations, vegetarian zealots within the church caught up in the doomsday hysteria of the 1990s have decided that the time has come to give up all animal foods and are fervidly preaching veganism.

East of Eden

It is possible to provide all essential nutrients except vitamin B12 without using animal foods. On the other hand, it is possible to provide all essential nutrients with a diet composed only of meat. Personal dietary appropriateness including the value of a diet as a source of essential nutrients and its value as a preventative for oneself and one's significant others is the foremost dietary consideration of pragmatic vegetarians. In contrast, the overriding dietary consideration of ideologic vegetarians varies with the particular ideology. Typically, their motivation is a blend of physical, psychosocial, societal, and moral, often religious, concerns.

A continual problem for SDAs who espouse the "back to Eden" ideology is the absence of a non-animal food source of vitamin B12. A vegetarian Registered Dietitian who wrote a column for a

church periodical asked me if I thought vegans could derive vitamin B12 from organic vegetables that were unwashed before ingestion. I opined that it would be better to eat animal foods than fecal residues. She agreed.

A perennial assumption among vegetarians is that vegetarianism increases longevity. In the last century, Grahamites devotees of the Christian "hygienic" philosophy of Sylvester Graham (1794-1851) taught that adherence to the Garden of Eden lifestyle would eventuate in humankind's reclamation of the potential for superlongevity, such as that attributed to Adam (930 years) or Methuselah (969 years). I discussed this matter 25 years ago with an SDA physician who was dean of the Loma Linda University (LLU) School of Health. Although he admitted that lifelong SDA vegetarians had not exhibited spectacular longevity, he professed that longevity of the antediluvian sort might become possible over several generations of vegetarianism. SDA periodicals publicize centenarians and often attribute their longevity to the SDA lifestyle. However, of 1200 people who reached the century mark between 1932 and 1952, only four were vegetarians. 10 I continue to ask: Where on Earth is there an exceptionally longevous population of vegetarians? Hindus have practiced vegetarianism for many generations but have not set longevity records. At best, the whole of scientific data from nutrition-related research supports vegetarianism only tentatively. The incidence of colorectal cancer among nonvegetarian Mormons is lower than that of SDAs. 11 A review of populations at low risk for cancer showed that World War I veterans who never smoked had the lowest risk of all. 12 As data accumulate, optimism that diet is a significant factor in cancer appears to be diminishing. An analysis of 13 case-control studies of colorectal cancer and dietary fiber showed that, for the studies with the best research methods, risk estimates for dietary fiber and colorectal cancer were closer to zero. 13 A pooled analysis of studies of fat intake and the risk of breast cancer that included SDA data showed no association. 14

A meatless diet can facilitate weight control because it is a form of food restriction. But one need not eliminate meat to maintain a healthy weight, and there are many overweight vegetarians. Surely prudence and selectivity overshadow mere abstention from consuming animal products.

Daniel's Diet

According to the first chapter of the Book of Daniel, Israel's captive whiz kids "well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in all knowledge, and understanding science" (verse 4) after subsisting on just vegetables and water for ten days, impressed the Babylonian king as far superior to all the magicians and astrologers "in all matters of wisdom and understanding" (verse 20). Many ideological vegetarians credit vegetables for group's physical and mental improvement (see "A 'Biblical' Alternativist Method"). A more credible proposition is that abstention from drinking wine caused the improvement, which the story ascribes to God.

In an interview on the school's Christian radio station in the mid-1970s, an LLU nutrition graduate student (who was not an SDA) claimed that vegetarianism produced superior intellects. To make her case, she stated:

Linus Pauling says that vitamin C improves intelligence. Vegetarians get more

vitamin C in their diets than meat-eaters. The probable reason why George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy were brilliant was because they were vegetarians.

The interviewer agreed, extolling the health and intellect of vegetarians. That Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian went unmentioned during the interview. Also unmentioned was that Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and other eminent moralists were not vegetarians.

Animal behavioral scientists have noted that, to survive, meat-eating predators must outsmart their vegetarian prey. However, I believe that all such theories break down because of the difficulty of defining intelligence.

SDAs note that meat-eating predators such as wolves and lions have tremendous speed but lack endurance. However, Arctic sled dogs that run the 1200-mile Iditarod cover more than a hundred miles per day a feat no horse, mule or ox can accomplish.

The idea that vegetarians have superior physical endurance was reinforced in 1974 when a group of male vegetarian runners called "the vegetarian seven" set a 24-hour distance record. This inspired an undergraduate dietetics major to seek me out as a coach for a group of seven female vegetarian long-distance runners. I asked her what their motivations were something every coach needs to know. She said they wanted to demonstrate the superiority of a vegetarian diet. I asked who would be representing the meat-eaters. She said that, because the event would not be a standard competition, no one would represent the meat-eaters. I revealed to her that three of the male runners had not been vegetarians until training for the record-setting event but merely had pledged to become so. I also told her: that genetic factors, principally the capacity for oxygen uptake, determine distance-running ability; that whether a diet is vegetarian is inconsequential to distance-running ability; and that a 24-hour run is a perilous way to try proving vegetarian superiority. "What will you do," I inquired, "if seven meat-eating, beer-drinking atheists who are world-class runners decide to beat your record?" She got the point. And although she became an accomplished amateur runner, she didn't use her success to propagandize for vegetarianism.

John Harvey Kellogg sought to prove that vegetarians were physically superior by fielding a Battle Creek College football team, which he personally coached. According to a former player, "Brother" Wright, whenever Kellogg's players lost, he railed at them for cheating on their diets and held them captive until one would say he had broken training rules and eaten meat. Wright stated that sometimes a player would eventually lie that he had eaten meat just to get the team released. He described Kellogg's efforts as "a crusade to prove the superiority of vegetarianism." Ellen G. White's condemnation of this approach to proving SDA superiority led to a policy restricting interscholastic sports by Adventist schools.

Odorless Doo-doo?

The John Harvey Kellogg character in the 1995 film *Road to Wellville* stated that his feces had no more odor than that of "freshly baked biscuits." One evening I offered a ride home from the university to an elderly colleague, an avid vegetarian. Upon entering my car, he declared: "When I drink carrot juice, my bowel movements have no odor."

Before I could respond, he said: "Rabbits eat lots of carrots, and their feces have no odor." The thought of someone running around sniffing little piles of rabbit doo-doo almost made me laugh, but I didn't want to be disrespectful. His idea that rabbits eat many carrots intrigued me. I had raised them in my boyhood and discovered that, despite the passion for carrots shown by Bugs Bunny, real bunnies are not particularly fond of carrots. Furthermore, wild rabbits seldom would have an opportunity to eat carrots. Luckily the ride was short.

The late Pulitzer Prize-winning anthropologist Ernest Becker argued that defecation is most closely associated with humankind's animality and mortality. 15 During a Bible class at an SDA school, I was taught that people did not defecate in the Garden of Eden but utilized the food they ingested in its entirety. Apparently, foul odors did not beset Paradise. (Perhaps the persistence of the miasmatic theory of disease the theory that diseases are due to foul-smelling emanations from the earth well into the nineteenth century, when SDA beliefs were developed, reinforced the idea of a poopless Paradise.) I was also taught that roughage became part of the human diet after the Fall. Allegedly, this broadening of the diet to include "the herb of the field" (Genesis 3:18, King James version) occurred because humans were now under the "death sentence" caused by original sin. Whether this reportedly was a voluntary dietary change or part of the curse of being ousted from Paradise is debatable. Some versions of the Bible imply that "the herb of the field" merely meant "wild foods" (New English Version), not a new source of food.

Heavy "PETAing"

In the last century, the pacifist movement was vegetarian because of the belief that meat-eating animals were fierce and vegetarian animals were docile. The British poet Percy Bysshe Shelley claimed that the French revolution had been bloody and the English revolution bloodless because the French ate more meat than the English. 16 Such invalid notions have been discredited, but not abandoned. Some boxers still eat raw meat or drink blood before a fight to increase their aggressiveness.

People who fancy themselves morally superior often have a mission to convert humanity to their worldview. The most violent ideologic vegetarians are the animal-rights activists, who have destroyed animal research facilities and threatened researchers' lives. Animal-rights groups such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) consider animals on par with humans. On April 24, 1996, PETA's Ingrid Newkirk appeared on the television newsmagazine *Day & Date* opposing sport fishing. She began her argument by seeking commiseration for suffocating fish. Then she said that fish were unhealthy food because they contained mercury and other environmental contaminants. The solution, according to Newkirk, was vegetarianism. Her opponent, a TV talk-show host, pressed her into acknowledging the PETA creed. The talk-show host described an on-air encounter she had had with another PETA representative. A scenario had been presented in which the representative's daughter needed a vital organ from a beloved household pet in order to survive. The ethical question had been whether the child's life was worth

more than the pet's. The PETA representative had held that the child had no more value than the pet. Newkirk did not contest the assertion that PETA considers the life of a child no more valuable than that of a pet.

When an LLU medical team transplanted a baboon's heart into an infant whose pseudonym was "Baby Fae," animal-rights activists picketed the medical center. They seemed disillusioned with SDAs, who have no qualms about prioritizing humans over animals. In October 1992, after a pig's liver had been transplanted into a 30-year-old woman to enable her to survive until a human liver was secured, a representative of PCRM engaged in a televised debate with one of the physicians who had performed the transplant. The representative lamented that the pig's consent had not been obtained.

PCRM appears to be largely a personal forum for its leader, Neal Barnard, M.D., and is said to be substantially funded by PETA. (In fiscal year 1994, donations and grants to PCRM reportedly totaled more than a million dollars. 17) Barnard extols the longevity value of vegetarianism. He has claimed: "It's not genetics or fate that gives people long, healthy lives and cuts other people short; for those who want to take care of themselves, it all comes down to diet." The surgeon argued that pigs were killed daily for meat, including their livers. The PCRM doctor retorted that the consumption of animal fat (which is highly saturated) was responsible for most deaths in modern society. He cited a study conducted by Colin Campbell in China. Campbell had focused on the relative morbidity for certain diseases without pointing out that life expectancy in China (66 years) is lower than that in the United States (75 years). 18

Because they consider themselves morally superior, many vegetarians exhibit no reservations against using mind-control techniques or terrorism to actualize their agenda. Mind control includes using information selectively to "educate" people about the alleged superiority of vegetarianism. It may also include traumatizing people emotionally to condition them against the use of animal foods. Early in my teaching experience, I attended a meeting of SDA secondary school health teachers where many said that they converted students to vegetarianism by taking them on field trips to slaughterhouses to witness the bloodshed. This strategy offended me even though I was a practicing vegetarian at the time. Having studied for years how people have been manipulated by cults and quacks, it is now clear to me that the slaughterhouse tactic is a form of mind control that it is as unethical as discouraging little girls from having sex by inducing them to watch a difficult childbirth.

Terrorism involves trying to coerce people to behave in ways the perpetrators desire. In December 1994, to keep people from having turkey for Christmas dinner, self-described animal-rights terrorists claimed they had injected rat poison into supermarket turkeys in Vancouver, British Columbia. The scare caused the destruction of more than \$1 million in turkeys. Apparently, the activists had not foreseen the ensuing slaughter of turkeys as replacements.

Disclosure

Research into vegetarianism by vegetarians always involves at least unconscious bias. All humans have entrenched beliefs whose rootedness makes doing related scientific research unwise. Kenneth J. Rothman, Dr.P.H., referred to SDAs in a recent discussion of conflicts of interest in

research:

We might expect conflict of interest concerns to be raised, for example, about Seventh Day Adventists who are studying the health effects of the comparatively abstemious lifestyle of their fellow Adventists. Whereas policies at [the Journal of the American Medical Association] and The New England Journal of Medicine emphasize financial conflicts, Science asks authors to divulge "any relationships that they believe could be construed as causing a conflict of interest, whether or not the individual believes that is actually so." In other words, to comply with disclosure policies at Science, authors might need to disclose to editors their religion and sexual orientation along with their financial portfolio. 19

Although Rothman argues for letting work stand on its own merit rather than judging cynically any possible connection to a funding source, his example makes the point that motivations more powerful than money can distort data. Science fraud can be extremely difficult to detect, because the perpetrators control the information. As Mark Twain observed, "Figures don't lie, but liars figure!"

I don't believe that *all* research done by vegetarians is untrustworthy. My experience with the ongoing Seventh-day Adventist Health Study (SDAHS), a series of studies conducted from LLU School of Public Health, has been largely positive. Its chief researcher, the late Roland Phillips, M.D., Dr.P.H., was an outstanding scientist in whose objectivity I had the utmost confidence. He recognized the problem of the influence of social expectations on SDAs responding to questions about their lifestyle. Adventist groupthink makes it likely that SDAs will underreport activities disfavored by the church community (e.g., meat-eating, coffee drinking, and imbibing) and over-report those that are approved (e.g., dining meatlessly and exercising). Phillips seemed to feel that the benefits of vegetarianism per se were limited, and that one must take account of heredity, socioeconomic status, and the total SDA lifestyle. Abstention from smoking, access to state-of-the-art healthcare, and strong social support probably are responsible for most of the health benefits SDAs enjoy. The main problem with SDA vegetarian science is how the scientific information is used. To paraphrase an old Pennsylvania Dutch saying: Among SDAs, when the news about vegetarianism and health is good, "we hear it ever" ; when the news is not good, "we hear it never."

I have received numerous reports from SDA health professionals, and have personal knowledge of other cases, in which church members' overconfidence in vegetarianism prevented them from obtaining effective medical care. Some reports have involved true believers in vegetarianism who were members of physicians' families. Some denied symptoms, and their denial kept them from seeking effective intervention in time. Others rejected medical care for "natural remedies" that emphasized diet. The attitudes evidenced are consistent with those identified in cancer patients who had turned to quackery because they believed they had brought the disease upon themselves and could cure it by "natural" practices. 20 The SDA Church has bent over backward to document the benefits of the SDA lifestyle and to persuade members to adopt vegetarian diets. I would like to see the church seek earnestly to expose the harm that its vegetarian teachings have caused its

members. Alas, there's the rub with ideologic vegetarianism: Objectivity always takes a back seat to proselytism.

The data suggest that most SDAs are reasonable in their approach to vegetarianism. In the 1970s, the SDAHs revealed that only one percent were vegans. 21 This may change as vegetarianism becomes more popular in the general population. SDAs tend to be overachievers. If we regard something as "good," we strive to adopt it completely. If we consider something "bad," we avoid it completely. SDA vegetarian evangelists have become more aggressive in recent years because of the widespread belief in the SDA community that doomsday is nigh.

I recall an SDA church leader's fitting reply to the question of whether he ate meat: "I eat just enough to keep me from becoming a fanatic!"

One Less "Ism"

I gave up vegetarianism because I found that commitment thereto meant surrendering the objectivity that is essential to the personal and professional integrity of a scientist. As a health educator, I feel I have an obligation to endeavor to stick to whatever unvarnished facts scientific research uncovers. I can support pragmatic vegetarianism, but I believe that crusading vegetarian ideologues are dangerous to themselves and to society.

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