

THE CRUEL VEGETARIAN*

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In recent years there has been a growing popular interest in psychology and human behavior. Various phases of normal and abnormal psychology are taught in our schools, discussed in our homes, and utilized in a practical way in better adjusting ourselves to our environment. Many business establishments have instituted psychiatric departments to aid them in the hiring of employees as well as in handling emotional problems which may arise. There is an earnest attempt being made to understand why we behave as we do, why we display certain personality defects, and why we are subject to marked changes in mood and temperament. We also try to make clearer the reasons for certain unreasonable prejudices and idiosyncrasies which most of us, at one time or another, harbor.

From the modern viewpoint, it is insufficient merely to give a superficial description of someone's personality traits; one must consider in a more dynamic manner the *reasons* for such traits. A number of years ago, for example, we believed that we had a good understanding of a man when we described him as being domineering, fault-finding, suspicious, vain and selfish. Now we want to know the real and unconscious motivations which contribute to his character-formation. In other words, what are the psychological factors which cause him to have this type of personality?

In previous years it was sufficient to classify as a "bad boy" one who was a problem at school, misbehaved, disobeyed his teachers and parents, and was a bully toward the other children. There was only one way of handling such a problem and that was by administering, what were believed to be the "proper" disciplinary measures. There was no concerted attempt made to understand the basic reasons for the child's incorrigibility. At the present time, when a child is difficult to handle we don't merely blame and chastise him, but we endeavor to find out why he behaves in a cer-

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tain manner. We study the child not only as an individual but in its relationship to its parents, siblings, teachers and playmates. We delve into its play-activities, frustrations, emotional attachments and antagonisms, and try to discover what it has to *gain* by being *bad*. In practically every case, if our detective work has been sufficiently thorough, we eventually find the cause or causes for the misbehavior. It is frequently gratifying to observe the improvement which results when the irritating factors in the child's life are alleviated.

Most of us are so constituted emotionally that we both fear and resent a truthful evaluation of ourselves by others. We hate to be told, for instance, that the reason we wear flashy clothes is that we are exhibitionists, and not, as we have always prided ourselves, that we have a better than average appreciation of color combinations.

It is with considerable trepidation, therefore, that we try to unveil the true psychological motive behind the practice of vegetarianism. Should we, perchance, discover that the unconscious basis for this fad is not very flattering to the vanities of its followers, we can only offer as an emollient the fact that we are all subject to certain beliefs and practices throughout our lives which if put to careful psychoanalytical scrutiny would prove to be not very complimentary to us.

As mere human beings we are generally conceded the prerogative of possessing an occasional pet idiosyncrasy, a privilege with which we are particularly endowed by our philosophy of "rugged individualism." We are all familiar with and generally condone the eccentricities of the followers of the various artistic pursuits, and when any of their activities become bizarre or grotesque, we merely smile indulgently and offer "artistic temperament" as a valid mitigating excuse.

Although it is somewhat more difficult to accept unusual or erratic behavior among the general run of the population, there is still a tendency to absolve it on the basis of "self-expression" and "individualism," unless such behavior becomes so markedly queer as to justify the person's commitment to a mental institution. It has been truly said that we all have a little of the deranged in us

and that the difference between the so-called normal and the psychotic individual is only one of degree.

Vegetarianism, or fruitarianism as some prefer to call it, is a good example of an eccentric fad which, although not definitely in the domain of the abnormal, attracts to its colors a great many cranks, fanatics, and others who may be considered to be on the fringe of mental imbalance.

There have been many articles written about vegetarians, but chiefly of a descriptive character. As far as the present writer knows, no such article has ever attempted to explain the psychology of a person who, of his own free will, becomes a fervent follower of the cult.

For the sake of clarity, let us briefly mention what is meant by vegetarianism. It consists essentially in the exclusion of flesh, fowl, and fish from the dietary. As is true of all fads, the followers may variously interpret the prerequisites for adherence to the cult. Some include on the taboo list not only the flesh of animals but animal products as well; and such foods as milk, eggs, and cheese are rigorously rejected. Others exclude even grain and pulse foods as being possessed with life-like qualities and limit their regimen entirely to fruits, salads and nuts.

The great majority of vegetarians are so by choice as a result of certain psychological drives and are quite sincere and honest about their opinions. This does not apply by any means to all of them. I recently visited a small town in which is situated the sanatorium of a nationally-known vegetarian. I was amused to learn from a local restaurant-keeper that this famous man is not averse to sneaking in frequently and furtively for a nice juicy steak, and immediately afterward, perhaps, writing an article or a tirade against the barbaric practice of meat-eating.

A great many persons are vegetarians because of religious dictates, among them being the Seventh-Day Adventists, Trappists, and the followers of Vishnu. It should be remembered that practically every religious sect has food proscriptions of one type or another. Thus, Jews shun the pig, Catholics avoid meat on Friday, and Hindus refrain from eating the meat of the sacred cow. These customs undoubtedly represent forms of penance and self-denial, and with such practices we have no quarrel; neither do they

interest us particularly from a psychiatric viewpoint, for man will frequently do things because of religious convictions which he otherwise would not accept or tolerate. Faith is a potent force which is not to be reasoned with logically or derided. Life would be rather dismal were it entirely divorced from an occasional excursion into blind and unquestioned belief.

What interests us more is why a person of apparently normal mental make-up endowed with good intellect and not restrained by any religious dogma, will set up for himself extremely inconvenient and, according to the best medical authority, unhealthful, food barriers. It is even more amazing than if a child persistently refused candy and ice cream. The entire body-economy of the human being is beautifully equipped for an omnivorous existence, as evidenced by the type of teeth, the digestive apparatus, and the ability to eliminate any toxin which may form coincidental with meat-eating. From a medical viewpoint, there is little doubt that, everything else being equal, the meat-eater has the advantage both physically and mentally over the vegetarian in handling the difficult situations of life. Neither is there any evidence to substantiate the belief that meat-eating dulls the mental processes. The Anglo-Saxons are predominantly meat lovers; and there can be little question as to their status in civilization. It is also a matter of note that our greatest moral teachers, Jesus, Moses, Solomon and David, were meat eaters.

Any sincere vegetarian will undoubtedly disagree with this and immediately offer a number of reasons, culled from his cult's literature, proving that meat-abstinence is preferable to meat-eating. First, he will argue, animals are affected by a great many diseases which can be communicated to the human being. Second, the eating of animal flesh produces toxic products in the body, resulting in disease and the shortening of life. Third, from an economic point of view, meat is much more expensive than vegetables having the same food value. The fourth, and perhaps the most important argument he will offer, is that, as civilized individuals, it is morally wrong for us to kill, for our own selfish purposes, beings possessed of the same spark of life inherent in us.

The first three reasons can be argued pro-and-con on an objective level, depending on available statistics and facts. As a psy-

chiatrist, the writer is not particularly interested in their correctness, nor does he have any special desire to prove or disprove them.

The fourth argument, however, is so definitely subjective and on an emotional plane that it immediately attracts our attention. The question promptly arises, "What is there in the psychological make-up of a certain individual to produce in him such a curiously exaggerated compassion for animals?"

The explanation of this idiosyncrasy may, perhaps, become more evident if we momentarily digress from the subject of vegetarianism and consider the psychology of eccentricities generally.

A great many of our odd acts have very little meaning unless they are explained by vagaries of the unconscious. For instance, when a sexually-repressed spinster makes a thorough search of the house before retiring, peering assiduously underneath beds and behind doors, little does she realize that the act in reality signifies an unconscious desire on her part that she may actually find someone there.

Or, consider the case of a patient of mine, who, as if compelled by some unseen force, must resort to washing and scrubbing her hands every few minutes. The natural assumption, of course, is that this woman is excessively clean and detests even the thought of filth. A careful psychiatric study reveals, however, that the opposite is the case. Unconsciously, she is occupied by a great many "unclean" thoughts and desires for which she overcompensates by putting on an outward display of cleanliness. Her apparent aversion for dirt actually represents a liking for it.

I know another woman who is overly concerned over the welfare of one of her children, a boy of 10. She won't allow him to go outdoors unaccompanied, for fear he might "mix with bad company." He is prohibited from playing the usual games indulged in by boys his age, "because he might be hurt." She is constantly having him examined by physicians, restive over the possibility that he may be developing some serious ailment. In general, she is forcing him into an over-protected, cloistered existence which is very apt to lead to his subsequent maladjustment. An unsuspecting person, observing her behavior toward this boy, would attribute it to maternal love and perhaps even extol her self-sacrificing devo-

tion. A study of this case, however, reveals that actually this child was from the very beginning unwanted. Failing in numerous attempts at producing a termination of the pregnancy, the mother unconsciously continued to wish for the child's death for a considerable period following its birth. She now undoubtedly harbors guilt feelings over her attitude and her present oversolicitousness is merely a compensatory reaction for her previous, and perhaps present, homicidal ideas. Shall we term it an attempt at expiation?

The natural conclusion to be drawn from these examples of odd behavior is that any unusual activity on the part of an individual may represent an emotion directly opposite to the one which is superficially apparent. Thus, an excessive display of morality, as in reformers, may actually be due to an unconscious desire to be immoral. Unusual cleanliness may result from the possession of "unclean" thoughts or desires. An extreme display of love may really cloak a hidden hatred, as is evidenced by the fact that false friends often are the most vociferous mourners at a funeral.

When two opposite emotions, such as love and hate, toward the same object coexist in an individual, they are referred to by the psychoanalyst as *ambivalent* feelings. Psychological experience has convinced us of the prevalence of these apparently antagonistic emotions in our so-called normal social intercourse. A careful observer would promptly suspect, for instance, that an excessive and unnatural display of love actually represents an underlying animosity; that an over-exuberant joviality may be merely a cloak for an unconscious morbid sadness; and, that an imperious and tyrannical personality may be only the superficial indication of a hidden feeling of inferiority and weakness.

We can now, therefore, view the vegetarian in a different light. Rather than the sympathetic and compassionate animal-lover, we may perhaps frequently expect to find an individual with underlying tendencies for cruelty and sadism. That such is often the case is borne out by everyday observations as well as by the more thorough studies of the psychiatrist.

Anti-vivisectionists have been known to appear in courts to protest the use of animals in scientific experimentation, wearing fur coats made of animals slain for that purpose.

The author knows of a confirmed vegetarian and zoöophile who is far from being a tender creature toward his family and others, yet feels faint at the sight of blood in the stockyards because of, what he terms, so much unnecessary cruelty. I lost my respect for his sentiments, however, when observation revealed him to be an egocentric domineering bully toward his subordinates, and mercilessly cruel to his wife and children. He is unfair in his business dealings and thinks nothing of taking advantage of a man's unfortunate position or poverty. But let anyone as much as kill a fly in his presence and he immediately becomes loud in his protestations. The coexistence of the ambivalent emotions of tenderness and cruelty is beautifully illustrated in this case, the vegetarianism and love of animals serving merely as a screen for his innate sadism.

Miss S., a single, middle-aged woman, with strong vegetarian leanings, came to me for the treatment of a rather severe neurotic condition. She was possessed by a great many fears of impending danger, she couldn't sleep nights and imagined that practically every organ in her body was in some way affected. She had always been selfish and self-centered and never displayed any concern over the welfare of others. For years her chief preoccupation had been with her bodily processes, and nothing else seemed worth while. The frequency of her bowel movements was a subject of the utmost concern to her, and one which she rarely failed to discuss with others. Peculiarly enough, despite all of her vague bodily complaints, she egotistically expressed the belief that, as a result of her vegetarianism, she would live to be 100 years old. I was tempted to ask her what difference it would make.

Adolf Hitler presents an interesting study in ambivalent emotions. There can be little doubt that a great deal of his terrific drive and energy was dominated by his excessive and psychopathic animosities. His emphasis on "might over right" and his total disregard for the human being as an individual might perhaps be condoned as necessary policies in the unification of the state. His most fervent apologists, however, could find little justification for the unnecessarily brutal methods he employed. The purge of June, 1934, when he killed, or had killed, in cold blood some of his supposedly best and closest friends, men with whom he had been on

intimate terms for a great many years, and without whose aid he would never have reached his position, as Germany's dictator, can be rationally explained only by the man's innate sadism. Nor can any logical excuse be offered for his insanely cruel attitude toward the Jews, Poles, Dutch, Greeks, and others, his mistreatment of the German Catholics, the infliction of the death penalty on many individuals of questionable guilt for relatively minor offenses, and the herding of thousands of human beings into concentration camps on mere suspicion. It must appear highly paradoxical to the average intelligent observer that during the period that these and other sadistic and inhuman acts, displaying a marked disregard for the laws of Man, were perpetrated, stringent laws were being enacted to protect animal life throughout the Reich more adequately, including the marked curtailment of the use of animals in medical experimentation.

The paradox becomes more explicable when we learn that at the time of Hitler's assumption of power, the central organ of the German vegetarian league came out with the flaming headline: "First Great Victory of German Vegetarians—Hitler Becomes Chancellor."

But whether or no some of Hitler's activities appear paradoxical to the average observer, to the psychoanalyst, they follow quite definite psychological laws. One could almost predict a tendency toward vegetarianism in a person of Hitler's temperament without any fore-knowledge of the existence of the condition. Whether Hitler's vegetarian sympathies were partial or complete has not been definitely known. According to a recent biography by Konrad Heiden, Hitler was not an absolute vegetarian but only a partial abstainer. Whether this was true is of little consequence; the psychological implications are nevertheless present. It is thus that his vegetarianism not only reveals a new facet of Hitler's personality but helps to explain a great many of his apparently unexplainable activities.

Benito Mussolini was frequently described by pro-Fascist writers as a kindly man of simple tastes, possessing few personal enemies and dominated solely by the altruistic and unquenchable desire to help his country assume her deserved rôle in European affairs. Even the section in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* devoted

to Mussolini, written quite perceptibly by a Mussolini admirer, fails to mention some of the acts which made the name of Mussolini anathema to a great many Italians as well as other intelligent and righteous people throughout the world. There are still many who have not as yet forgotten those cruel "castor oil days," during which human torture of the Mussolini type closely approached in severity the methods of the Inquisition. Is it any wonder that so many risked their own lives in the numerous attempts to assassinate him? Since it is our purpose to point out the relationship between psychopathic cruelty and dietary practices, we are not particularly interested in Mussolini's political theories or his methods of carrying them out, except where they tend to demonstrate such a relationship. Whether Mussolini would have characterized himself as a vegetarian or not we do not know, but we do know that his leanings were certainly in that direction. In his autobiography, he wrote: "As for the love of the table, I do not appreciate it. I do not feel it. Especially in these last years my meals are as frugal as those of a pauper. In every hour of my life it is the spiritual element that leads me on." Then again in Megaro's "Mussolini in the Making," we find the following: "His stay in Trent enriched his experience. He contented himself in living in a room in the poorest section of the town, with a daily fare of beans and polenta."

The vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists and zöophiles may perhaps constitute a very small minority of the population, but, like many minorities, they are extremely vociferous in their protestations. They attempt to influence our home life, our legal apparatus, our educational methods, and to inject their thoughts into every phase of human endeavor. Hardly a day goes by but some new bill is introduced to prevent cruelty to animals. Medical schools are assiduously spied upon by "sob-sister" groups for any violations in animal experimentation. Their influence has been so marked that when a cat becomes stranded on a telephone pole and the "humane" society comes to its rescue it is an occasion for large newspaper headlines and photographs.

Recently a meek, harmless young man was almost lynched in New York City because he checked his little dog in a baggage locker for a short period while attending a movie. No amount of

pleading by the man that he meant no harm, that he liked his dog, and would like to have him returned, was of any avail. The general reaction was that he was an ogre of the worst type. The metropolitan newspapers devoted a great deal of space to the incident. Such a reaction is certainly pathological when we consider what few protests are raised against the crime-breeding slums, against the miserable conditions under which children are forced to be raised in various parts of the country, against the atrocious, inexcusable straits of the sharecroppers, and against other intolerable social conditions and abuses.

We can find little fault or argument with a man's personal preference for vegetarianism. His choice of diet is as much his individual prerogative as his choice of reading material. It is only when one attempts to force his idiosyncracies on the rest of us and to influence our normal emotional attitudes and evaluations that we ought to resist such interference strenuously. Many of these individuals fight ceaselessly against the use of animals in medical experiments and are extremely sensitive to even the slightest evidence of cruelty to animals while at the same time they display little regard for the suffering of their fellow human beings. Their exaggerated concern over the welfare of animals betrays the utter contempt and hatred which they hold for the human race generally.

I want to reemphasize the fact that the preceding remarks do not apply to all vegetarians. There are undoubtedly some who are convinced, whether falsely or not, of the health benefits of meat-free diets. Generally speaking, however, most of the followers of this cult, particularly those who exploit the humanitarian angle, are basically cruel and unnecessarily malicious. If, for some reason, they do not give, or cannot give, physical expression to their sadism, they may often do this in a modified manner through unwarranted attacks on their fellow-men by means of ridicule, insults, and caustic witticisms—anything to hurt the other fellow. Some have actually become famous, either as authors or public speakers through their uncanny ability to utilize the power of satire and invective; and one can almost picture them gloating over the discomfiture of their targets.

In conclusion, I can truthfully say that in my experience with vegetarians, I have rarely encountered one who could be consid-

ered an entirely normal, well-adjusted individual. The average vegetarian is eccentric, not only as regards his food, but in many other spheres as well. Careful observation of his views on such phases of human relationships as politics, religion, economics, love, and other fields will frequently reveal somewhat twisted and rather peculiar attitudes and prejudices. In short, the average vegetarian is not definitely "a lunatic," but he certainly fringes on it.

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