

BOOK REVIEW

ON EATING MEAT

Matthew Evans

This is an important read, and available reviews have missed the main points, to my way of thinking.

Mostly what has been emphasised is the point Evans makes about the creatures that are killed in cultivating any crops, fruit, grain or vegetable. He is pointing out that human sustenance inevitably impacts other life forms on the planet. The reason for making this point, though, is that he wants the readers to look closely at the provenance of their food rather than emphasising only the particular dietary choice - omnivore, vegetarian, vegan. And that in being conscious of our impact, we exercise due diligence out of concern for all creatures great and small as well as environmental impact.

Universal veganism, he explains, is not necessarily going to have the beneficial impact on the environment that is claimed for it, if provenance is not considered. The reason is that the statistics quoted about the harms of animal production relate to Industrial Agriculture. Every form of battery or lot-feeding of confined animals is massively polluting. This contrasts with the mixed farm including free range animals, which maximises land use, both by utilising land unsuitable for crops or horticulture, and by the soil building value of animal dung. On this topic he points out that industrial agriculture is basically strip-mining topsoil, which is a finite and steadily reducing resource. (Not to mention the massive land clearing required to facilitate broad-acre monocultures, whether vegetable or animal).

Indigenous diets have traditionally included meat, and this was pointed out very sharply to me by Uncle David Carline (of loving memory), at YM in Hobart in 2016. Vegans and vegetarians are deeply concerned about the cruelty to sentient creatures that is perpetrated to provide meat. Matthew Evans is equally concerned about this matter, paying particular attention to the mode by which animals are killed for meat, as well as humane animal husbandry allowing the expression of natural behaviours. Indigenous cultures hunt and kill their animal prey with respectfulness and gratitude, for the laying down of life which provides them with nourishment. We would do well to think this way too, if we wish - or are obliged - to include meat in our diet. We now know that trees and plants

are sentient in ways we did not understand until recent scientific studies, though indigenous people have lived with this insight for millenia. So it behooves us to eat mindfully and with gratitude, whatever our diet. Let's reinstate saying Grace before meals! And in the light of these nuances, let us do away with condemning and shaming meat-eating friends.