Pythagoras’ Promotion Of Vegetarianism

People have many different reasons for becoming vegetarians. There are ethical and spiritual issues as well as health concerns that motivate them to alter their eating habits. People have been abstaining from meat since ancient times, dating back to Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato, Plutarch, and Porphyry (“World history of vegetarianism”,2010). Today, the morality and the health risks of an omnivorous diet are being put into question all over the world. Results regarding the health aspect of this debate have been difficult to determine conclusively.

Pythagoras was, and still is, highly respected intellectual figure. His ideas and teachings have impacted our society for many years. Among his many teachings includes the acclamation of vegetarianism. Although the Babylonians and ancient Egyptians practiced vegetarianism due to karmic beliefs much earlier than Pythagoras, his promotion of this ideal had a large impact on even non-religious people. Pythagoras strongly believed that all animals should be treated kindred. This included abstaining from eating meat. Along with avoidance of animal cruelty, he also recognized the health advantages of a meat-free diet.

Although Pythagoras’ promotion of vegetarianism created a huge movement that is still progressing in the present day, Aristotle’s ideals regarding animals seemed to have a greater following. According to Aristotle, the animal kingdom exists for human use. He believed they were to be treated as slaves to the human race. This view was later the accepted view of the Romans and the Christian church, which was the dominant view in the west. Pythagoras’ ideals played such a little role in ancient Rome that they even killed for sport. Gladiators would murder wild animals as a form of entertainment for large crowds. Pythagoreans of this time were so despised that many of them kept their vegetarian diet a secret for fear of being persecuted. Although vegetarianism later began to spread throughout the Roman Empire from the 3rd to 6th centuries as a result of Neo-Platonist philosophy, it took a very long time for this ideal to be respected.

More recently, in the 20th Century, vegetarianism helped in creating a more sustainable diet during the war. Due to food shortages during World War II, were encouraged to grow their own fruits and vegetables. This shift towards a plant-dependent diet showed a great improvement in the health of a nation as well as greater sustainability. In the 1950s and 1960s, the general public became more aware of the truth behind intensive factory farming, which focuses on profit and efficiency at the expense of the welfare of animals. There are now close to two million people who claim to be vegetarians in the UK alone.

More recent philosophical arguments have arisen such as, anti-speciesism, anti-carnism, animal rights, and a feeling of community with the animal world. While these ideals are debated and supported by many, the largest argument for a vegetarian diet involves the environmental and health benefits of a meat-free diet.