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How should cultural traditions influence the way we evaluate food ethics?

Introduction

Culture forms a large part of the choices made by people in their daily lives. It also dictates the types of food that a person consumes. In this paper, I will evaluate the impact of culture on food ethics. This topic is interesting because it allows me to understand the interaction of ethics and culture on a decision that is made every day by millions of people all over the world. I will argue that cultural traditions do not act as a guide for making moral food choices. First I will explain how cultural impacts food choices made by the people and then explain how a person should separate cultural traditions and ethical food decision making. I will, then, explain the concern that cultural tradition can cause unethical food choices. I will also explain an argument cultural tradition bring against ethical food consumption and present a counter argument.

Exposition and Arguments

Ethical eating is a very important subject that has only just started gaining attention. The basic definition of eating ethically is to have an understanding of the industrial, environmental and

economic conditions surrounding the food choices a person make (Singer, 229). The wages paid to the farmers, the pesticides and technology being used to grow food, the sourcing of the meat and vegetables, the carbon footprint and health concerns that come with the food are some of the issues that must be kept in mind while choosing to consume different types of foods. Many people believe that vegans are ethical eaters because they do not cause harm to animals. However, it is essential that ethical eating has to do with a lot of subjects and require that you support ethical practices in the food industry instead of cutting yourself off from a certain part of the industry. It is about demand generation, if the people demand ethical produced food then the unethical part of the industry will become redundant. Hence, for ethical eating is it important to have an understanding of the process that goes behind the production of food and how do these processes have an impact on the world at a large scale. Consequentialists agree that morality should be based upon how their actions will affect other people. This information can help a consumer in making morally sound food decision. It is also essential to understand the processes behind many food products can be difficult to understand and have a wide array of impact on economic, environment and humans, hence a consumer does not need to go into too much detail because the process of understanding the various component involved in product can be difficult and time consuming instead an approach of learning and sound decision making can be a big step towards changing the practices in the food industry. However, with time as a person starts understanding more about food processes and how they impact the moral code of a person, they can then go in-depth whole making ethical food choices.

Culture tends to have a lot of influence of food choices being made by people. In Indian culture, people do not consume beef because of religious reasons but they consume other animal byproducts such as butter and milk. In Asian regions, people tend to be lactose intolerant and

prefer avoiding any food products that might contain lactose (Singer,310). Most people in USA prefer having food that is high in sugar and fat because of the fast paced life and I tendency to eat out at fast food chains. Contrarily, Europeans tend to have a high in protein diet. This difference is very similar to how British prefer tea over coffee but Americans do not like tea. Such examples can be found all over the world as each region has a distinct culture which dictates their food choices. It is essential to understand that food choices are driven by culture but they are not rigid, they can be changed depending on the change in environment and an exposure to new food categories.

Cultural influences should not be used as a guide for evaluating the morality of food. It only plays a role in defining the different types of food preferences people have. There a difference between descriptive and normative concepts. Culture gives us a descriptive claim which means that we eat a high quantity of meat because of the availability of farm animals in a region. Normative claim helps us in understanding that we should not eat meat just because it is available, instead we should look at how animal breeding is conducted from providing us food. Culture does not work as a moral compass for the types of food that should be including in a person's consumption. For example, people in India do not have to forgo pluses completely to make moral food choices instead they need to develop a demand for pulses that have been grown ethical. This means that the farmers have been given their due wages, the pulses are sold at a price that does not cause farmers to suffer, the pesticides being used in the fields are not dangerous to human or animal health, etc. are being met in the production and supply chain (Singer,240). Hence, it is essential to perceive culture as the tendency to favor certain foods without having consideration of the impact on the processes that they have been obtained from. Culture and ethical eating should be combined in order to develop a consumption plan. This view

is in follows the principle of equal consideration where all impacts related to a decision are calculated in order to decide the morality of the decision. Food choices will have an understanding of the impact that they can have on all the people included in the production, supply and consumption of the product.

Some of the challenges to moral food choices are cultural pressure, lack of knowledge, lack of power to influence producers and lack of suppliers. Cultural pressure can make a consumer his/her choices are deviating from the cultural practices (Singer,235). Lack of knowledge about the process behind a finish good or produce can become a hurdle in ethical eating. A single consumer might not be able to create an impact on the producers of food products. There can be a lack of ethical suppliers in the industry because of the concept is new and this can reduce the choices of ethical eating that a person has.

Objections and Replies

Culture can sometime became a hurdle to ethical eating. In some cultures eating large portions of food is very common. People do not consider waste as they are used to cooking and eating large portions. Many people tend to believe that these large portions are essential for having the required amount of energy. They also believe that famine are a part of the past and hence there is no need to focus on saving food and eating only the scientific dedicated amount of calories. These people tend to look down on others who try to consciously reduce the amount of that they are consuming. This cultural aspect can be found in many developing as well as developed nations throughout the world. Since these countries do not have a large starving population means that their consumption is not hurting anyone and can be categorized as moral eating.

The practice of eating large portions and more than the amount of food required by the body can be linked to the issues that the people had to face during periods of famine (Singer,244). It is essential to understand that human body does not need more food than that dictated by caloric intake. Moral food choices should include a moral compass for the people, animal and other resources that are being used to produce food. The resources being used to produce can be saved and used for other purposes if people reduce excessive consumption. Hence, eating large portions is not ethical and changes should be made by using principle of equal distribution and looking at the world on a large scale.

Many people believe that certain eating habits bring them closer to their cultural roots and enable them to follow in the footsteps of their ancestor. It is essential to understand that change is a part of life. There are many practices of the past that we have let go even though they were part of culture. Slavery is an example of cultural practices that are no longer followed because people have understood how they impact people. In a similar fashion, food choices and eating habits should also be changed and based on moral aspects instead of cultural practices.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that ethics and cultural traditions should be viewed as two separate phenomenon and they must not influence each other. It is essential that a person acts ethically while being in the confines of the culture. Moreover, culture can change depending on the environment; however ethics should stay the same. This topic can be further researched by including specific research on regions where the cultural practices go against ethical principles and how people can act ethically in these environments.

References

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