

Research report

A meaty matter. Pet diet and the vegetarian's dilemma

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Highlights

- This paper examined a dilemma experienced by meat-abstainers who have pets.
- The dilemma involves whether to feed their pet a vegetarian diet.
- Feeding pets an animal-based diet may promote their well-being but at the expense of other animals.
- Vegans and ethical meat abstainers were more likely to feed their pet a vegetarian diet.
- These individuals also expressed the most negativity when they fed their pets an animal-based diet.

Abstract

The present research examined pet ownership, current pet diet, and guilt associated with pet diet among a fairly large sample of non-meat-eaters ($n = 515$). It specifically focused on the conflict that pits feeding one's pet an animal-based diet that may be perceived as best promoting their well-being with concerns over animal welfare and environmental degradation threatened by such diets, here labeled the *vegetarian's dilemma*. Questionnaire responses indicated that ethically motivated meat abstainers were more likely to own pets and owned more of them than those motivated by health concerns or a combination of ethical and health concerns. Vegans and those resisting meat on ethical grounds were more likely to feed their pet a vegetarian diet and expressed the greatest concerns over feeding their pet an animal-based diet. For vegans and ethical meat abstainers, it is suggested that questions concerning what to feed their pet approaches a tragic tradeoff contrasting two sacred values: protecting the well-being of their pets and protecting the well-being of other animals and the environment. For meat abstainers motivated by health concerns, this constitutes a relatively easy moral problem because the primary concern for such individuals is the health of their pet with less or no regard for other ramifications of the decision, i.e., harming other animals or the environment.

Keywords

Vegetarians; Vegans; Pet diet; Diet motives; Animal welfare; Vegetarian's dilemma