Foucault and the Ethics of Eating
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Abstract

In a 1983 interview, Michel Foucault contrasts our contemporary interest in sexual identity with the ancient Greek preoccupation with diet, arguing that sex has replaced food as the privileged medium of self-constitution in the modern West. In the same interview, Foucault argues that modern liberation movements should return to the ancient model of ethics, of which diet was a prime example, as aesthetics or self-transformative practice. In this paper I take up Foucault's argument with respect to the Animal Liberation Movement and the dietetics of ethical vegetarianism. Contra Foucault, I suggest that diet has not been replaced by sexuality in the modern West, and that food choices, along with and intertwined with sexuality, continue to function as practices of self-constitution in both disciplinary and aesthetic fashions. I then consider the implications of this argument for the Animal Liberation Movement, exploring ways in which it might (and to some degree already does) take on aesthetic rather than moral strategies in order to pursue what Foucault once described as “an ethics of acts and their pleasures which would be able to take into account the pleasure of the other.”

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