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Should We Eat Anything With A Face? Vegetarianism Vs. Carnivorism

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Vegetarianism has been a part of human culture since the dawn of civilization, when Greek philosophers debated the morality of killing animals for their flesh. It was Pythagoras, the father of mathematics, who said, "As long as man continues to be the ruthless destroyer of lower-living beings, he will never know health or peace. For as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other." (For what it's worth, that is not [necessarily true](#).)

More than 2,000 years later, we're still having that debate. Last week, Intelligence Squared hosted a panel on the rights and wrongs of meat-eating, entitled "[Don't Eat Anything With a Face](#)." In support of this ethos was Dr. Neal Barnard, a physician who works primarily in nutrition, and Gene Baur, president and cofounder of Farm Sanctuary, a New York-based farm-animal shelter. On the pro-carnivore side was Chris Masterjohn, a nutritional sciences researcher, and Joel Salatin, an author and "alternative" farmer.

Over the course of about 90 minutes, the panel discussed the usual territory: the effects of meat-eating on human health and the environment as well as animal welfare. The pro-vegetarian camp trotted out some recent findings that humans have only recently, evolutionarily speaking, increased the amount of meat in their diets. (This is [not entirely accurate](#).) Meanwhile, the pro-meat people fared no better with the well-worn "we're predators at the top of the food chain, so there" argument.

You can watch the whole thing here: http://fora.tv/2013/12/04/Dont_Eat_Anything_With_A_Face

Still, it's a compelling series of arguments that shouldn't be discounted. But, perhaps the debate could've used an ethicist on the panel. We know that meat can cause health problems, and we know that the Western world's industrial agriculture practices are deleterious for the environment. Neither of those effects of killing animals for food are necessarily tied to the act of killing itself. (We could all just eat reasonable amounts of pastured birds and be perfectly healthy and green.) The question of whether it's *right* to kill for food is the most important part of the vegetarian question.

As to who won, 45% of the audience voted for (not eating anything with a face) and 43% against, with 12% undecided. Interestingly, however, a pre-debate poll had 51% of the audience siding with the pro-meat argument and 25% undecided. While there was no clear winner, the pro-no-face side of the panel did a lot to sway swing voters.