

# Plant Roots: 101 Reasons Why the Human Diet is Rooted Exclusively in Plants

By Rex Bowlby

Reviewed by Dan Balogh

To be honest, when I first starting flipping through this book I was skeptical. I wondered why we needed yet another book on the merits of veganism. I wondered whether the cheesy clip art at the beginning of each section would try my patience and inhibit my ability to get through all 500 pages. A web search on Rex Bowlby found one previous book by him - dealing with how to keep kids entertained without spending loads of money. What does this guy know about veganism, I thought?

Gosh was I wrong! Now, after having read the book,



Author Rex Bowlby

and finding it quite easy to do so, I believe it is one of the most important contributions to vegan literature in some time. Yes, there are plenty of good books on veganism out there, as well as journal and magazine articles - but the value that Bowlby adds with "Plant Roots" is very important. After climbing that mountain of existing information, and absorbing it all, he does an amazing job of isolating the most compelling facts and distilling them into bite-sized portions for us. One can think of "Plant Roots" as the Cliff Notes version of the vegan literature - only this Cliff Notes is 500 pages long!

"Plant Roots" covers every possible angle from health to the environment, from animal rights to religion. The breadth of material covered is astonishing. The 101 "reasons" of the book's subtitle actually refers to its 101 chapters, each of which offers dozens of reasons why veganism is our natural diet. To prove that he's climbed the

mountain, Bowlby lists loads of footnotes and rigorously traces them back to one or more of the 1,001 sources listed in the bibliography. When was the last time you saw a bibliography with 1,001 sources?

A 500-page Cliff Notes? That can't be entertaining, can it? Think again. Bowlby jumps hoops to make the information as accessible and entertaining as possible, concocting fictional radio interviews, movie plots, games and other devices to keep the reader entertained. In most cases it works, at other times it distracts from the main points. Bowlby is at his best, however, when he's being dead serious, formulating his unique insights into some very memorable analogies.

For example, Bowlby's observation regarding the American obsession with eating chicken eggs (which is to chickens as the human placenta is to humans) is stark - "Most likely after witnessing a human birth, and seeing the placenta expelled, our thoughts did not include the desire to cook up an omelet." Later on, when describing the deplorable conditions that broiler chickens are forced to endure during their mercifully short lives Bowlby notes, "Broilers will live their lives crammed four to five in a 16-by-18 inch cage. Imagine living our total life in an elevator with 20 other people." He continues "To reduce the damage, chickens' beaks are partially removed. Imagine having our fingernails tom off."

At other times the book is very funny. In describing how we eat animals to get vitamins, instead of just directly eating the plants that the animals eat, Bowlby says, "This might be compared to chewing someone else's already-chewed gum." Taking vitamin supplements to combat our lousy eating habits is like "putting out a three-alarm fire with a water pistol."

In the chapter on manipulation, Bowlby takes on the food pyramid. Defenders of the food pyramid, which is far from satisfactory, claim that it's a good compromise between what is realistic and what is optimal - after all, folks are going to eat eggs and bacon anyway, so they should be told to merely limit their intake. Bowlby ponders how this reasoning would work when it comes to parenting - "We know our kids are going to run into traffic anyway, so we should advise them not to do so more than two or three times a week."

At other times Bowlby's observations are simply brilliant. In the section on pork, after describing the many similarities between pigs and humans, and explaining how pig hearts are now being used as human transplants, he observes, "If the absurdity of replacing our heart, with the heart of the animal we consumed that ruined our heart isn't evident, then we should fear for the future of our

species."

As if his amazing distillation of the mountain of information into the first 400 pages wasn't enough, Bowlby closes the book with a 32-page summary of what came before, listing nearly 300 facts and observations. In essence, he first reduces the mountain into chewable bites and then chews those bites for us in the last 32 pages. This alone is worth the price of the book.

So if you're interested in learning more about veganism, you have a couple of choices. You can begin climbing the mountain yourself (reading all the existing books and articles), or you can read Rex Bowlby's amazing trip report. Ironically, in this case it seems preferable to chew someone else's already-chewed bubble gum!

