

For over 30 years Peter Singer, a professor of bioethics at Princeton University, has not “eaten an animal” because of his ethical concerns for the environment and the animals themselves.

Singer spoke on Friday to an overcrowded audience at an event he called “The Ethics of What We Eat.” Many attendees were forced sit on the floor due to the large amount of interest in the event.

Singer is the author of several books, including his most well known published work “Animal Liberation.” He has been called the most influential living philosopher by The New Yorker, according to Vegetarian Club President Rusty Zufall, a senior majoring in computer science.

“He is a big part of the reason I became vegetarian,” said Zufall.

Despite being hosted by the Penn State Vegetarian Club, Singer made a point of discussing the ethics of everything we eat, not just meat. He is passionate about environmental issues, and stressed how important he feels it is to think about what we are putting into our mouths.

“We tend not to think what we eat is an ethical issue,” said Singer, “But nothing we do two or three times daily has as big of an ethical impact as our food choices do.”

Singer showed pictures of animals in factory farms, which he feels is the worst possible area of the ethics debate. Not only do the animals suffer in these factories, but they also have a devastating impact on the environment according to Singer.

“Please eat less meat, it is very carbon intensive,” pleaded Singer. “We don’t have 100 years to reduce methane gas. It must be reduced in the next 20 years.”

Singer discussed options that he feels are the best bet for a more ethically sound lifestyle. He said organic foods and fair trade is a good idea, but did not want to be negative to those that eat meat. “No one can tell someone else that they cannot get what they need to nourish themselves or their family,” Singer said.

He even mentioned that he prefers a hunter fully using deer meat over someone that supports factory farms. He calls those who seek out free-range meat “conscientious omnivores.”

Singer did recognize that a vegetarian lifestyle is not possible for everyone. “It’s different in poorer countries to eat animal products in order to get proper nourishment,” he said. He pointed out that it is much easier in our society where supermarkets are readily available stocked with plenty of meat-less nourishment.

The environmental impacts of factory farming are water pollution due to heavy manure runoff into rivers and greenhouse

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gas emissions due to the methane in meat production. "What do we get out of it?" questioned Singer, "Relatively cheaper food."

He also gave an overview of the current view of animal ethics. "The mainstream view today is be kind to animals and avoid cruelty, but animal interests are not as important as human interests," he said. People become very upset when a dog is abused, but house pets in general are treated much better than factory farm animals.

Singer described his first exposure to vegetarian lifestyle many years ago. He ate lunch with a vegetarian and picked the individuals brain about the reasoning behind their decision. From that point on, his interest and passion for animal ethics continued to grow.

The Penn State Vegetarian Club's mission is provide vegetarian and vegan students the opportunity to socialize and find support from others that share their lifestyle. The club also aims to provide outreach programs that offer information about health and ethical concerns pertaining to vegetarians.

The Vegetarian Club urged audience members interested in becoming involved to attend the meetings. They discussed monthly vegan pot-luck socials, including their most recent Thanksgiving meal.

The club worked hard to promote the event, and passed out

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flyers all over campus, including at the HUB.

“One of the members of the club gave me a flyer and I thought it would be interesting to see what [Peter Singer] had to say,” said Michael Frasso, a senior majoring in kinesiology. Frasso said has a lot of interest in nutrition and appreciate the perspective Singer presented. “I am not a vegetarian, though,” he said, “it just made me think more about what I eat.”

Singer has had teaching positions all over the world, including the University of Oxford in England and at New York University. He grew up in Australia and received his a Master of Arts degree from the University of Melbourne.

He ended the event by taking questions and reinforcing his stance on environmental and animal ethics. “It has a bigger environmental impact to become a vegan than switching your car to a hybrid,” he said. “But why not do both?”