

OMNIVORE'S DILEMMA

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Like Jenny, I was aware of some of the issues raised in *Omnivore's Dilemma* before I read it, not because I had sought out information about our industrial food system, but because it has been gaining more prominence over the last few years. I've had a few limited conversations with people about some of the issues, but most of my information has come from a *New York Times* blog called Bitten, written by Mark Bittman. (Bittman is the author of *How to Cook Everything* and *Food Matters*). I found *Omnivore's Dilemma* to be very informative, and when I finished it, I promptly went through the bibliography, looking for more about the websites and other resources that Pollan had mentioned.

Thanks to the Teaching Center's Summer Reading Group that I was participating in, I learned about *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, by Barbara Kingsolver. While I had checked out many books from the resource list of *Omnivore's Dilemma*, I wound up reading *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* instead of those. Kingsolver approaches the same topics covered by Pollan in a much more hands-on manner. *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is the story of the Kingsolver family's year of giving up the "industrial-food pipeline." Some of the information offered in *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* is the same as in *Omnivore's Dilemma*, but it's a much more personal book. While living off our own acres of land is not feasible for most of us, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* offers a wealth of information on gardening, canning, what foods are in season when, and the challenges of giving up the traditional ways of obtaining food. This information is helpful in figuring out what small steps you can take to help break out of the Western diet. This book was much more eye-opening for me than *Omnivore's Dilemma* because I realized that I had approached my own garden all wrong. Next year (starting this fall, actually), I will be paying much more attention to my garden and how and when I plant the vegetables I want to grow.

After finishing *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*, I was still looking for more information on what I could do about the issues raised in *Omnivore's Dilemma*. My garden certainly isn't big enough to support me for a full year (and I don't think I'm quite ready for that level of commitment yet, either). I returned to Michael Pollan's writing, picking up *In Defense of Food*. Written after *Omnivore's Dilemma*, *In Defense of Food* talks more about the science (nutritionism) behind the food industry and what the Western diet does to the human body. He also discusses how to escape the Western diet and gives more of a how-to on the topic than he does in *Omnivore's Dilemma*. The third section of *In Defense of Food* focuses on three phrases – "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." Pollan deconstructs each phrase and offers many tips on how to actually act on these phrases.

Animal, Vegetable, Miracle and *In Defense of Food* gave me more of the tools and information that I needed to start acting on the disturbing information presented in *Omnivore's Dilemma*. I still feel the confusion and frustration that Jenny mentioned, and I'm still eating fast food and shopping at Kroger. But I'm hoping that my garden will do better next year and that I can start cooking more and being much more careful about what I do eat. These changes are hard, though, since it feels like I have no time to put into cooking SOLE (seasonal/sustainable, organic, local, ethical) meals on a regular basis. I gave up (or thought I had) super-processed foods a while ago, but *Omnivore's Dilemma* made me realize that maybe I hadn't given up as much as I thought. I have friends who've given up things like sugar and HFCS (high fructose corn syrup) for health reasons, and I'm amazed by their strength. I'm hoping that the changes I intend to make in my eating habits will carry over to my soon-to-be husband as well. Since he is a fairly recently diagnosed diabetic, much of what I've read about the effects of the Western diet makes me think that maybe we can reverse some of the effects he's already feeling. I'm not sure he believes that I'll actually make him eat his vegetables, though!

There are many other books and resources available to help with these changes (large and small), but I'm glad I started with *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* and *In Defense of Food*. I do intend to continue reading and learning about this topic and will probably continue reading Michael Pollan's books on the subject. Another author I've seen recommended is Wendell Berry, whose books will certainly be added to my reading list as well.

You can find a list of the websites that are mentioned in these books, as well as others I've found at http://delicious.com/library_chic/omnivoresdilemma. ■