

Biting Back

A Radical Response to Non-Vegan Anarchists

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While there are certainly a number of radicals who recognize the oppression of non-human animals and are fighting against it, we continue to see non-human animals offered as food items at many radical potlucks, bookfairs, and other anarchist gatherings. We believe this is a hierarchical form of oppression worthy of a much needed anarchist critique.

This short essay will attempt to address some of the most common anarchist objections to veganism. We aim to inspire a praxis of insurrectionary anarchy and eco-defense by asserting a position against speciesism and the objectification of non-human animals.

Definitions

Insurrectionary anarchy: Insurrectionary anarchy is a way of conceptualizing anarchism within our present moment. Rather than waiting around for a revolutionary moment in the future, the insurrectionary anarchist recognizes that the revolutionary fight is happening here and now. There will be no grandiose revolution to wait around for. Insurrectionary anarchism is focused on action. We want to create a better world in our present moment while attacking what holds us back from realizing that world. We aim to put an end to the state, capitalism, and all internal and external power structures which maintain this society.

Anthropocentrism: The moralist belief that human beings are the most significant entity on earth.

Speciesism: Speciesism, like many other isms, is based on a line of thinking which views certain unchosen traits as inherently superior over others. Racists think they are superior because of their race, sexists think they are superior because of their sex, speciesists think they are superior because of their species. Speciesism arises out of an anthropocentric view of the world in which an individual holds the belief that the human is the most important animal and therefore has the right to subjugate other animals based on species.

Veganism: The avoidance, as much as possible, of cruelty to and consumption of non-human animals and products derived from them for food, clothing, and entertainment. Vegans view all animals (human and non-human alike) as beings with their own desires and potential for freedom.

Radical veganism is a logical extension of anarchist thought which recognizes the situations faced by all beings under attack by oppression, not only the human. Veganism in this respect proposes the constant reflection and deconstruction of personal positions, behaviors, and actions in the forever changing relationships between individuals, the world around us, and the dominating systems imposed onto us.

Here are 4 common objections to veganism presented by anarchists.

1. *Imposing veganism is a colonial practice because killing and eating meat is an essential aspect of many indigenous communities. i.e. "Killing and eating animals is*

not the problem, a colonized relationship to killing and eating animals is the problem.

This is a common position we have seen many anarchists take. Interestingly enough, we find it is most often evoked as a response by white anarchists assuming a position as an “ally” to indigenous people. Many anarchists believe they are somehow speaking on behalf of indigenous people or seeking to further the traditions of indigenous people. This simplistic use of identity politics is nothing new. One need not look far to realize that there are a great number of indigenous people who are vegan today as well as a number of indigenous people whose customs never centered on consuming animals. There is no monolithic indigenous culture to evoke and therefore the gesture is meaningless. There are only multitudes of indigenous people with their own beliefs and customs. Attempting to justify hunting and/or non-human animal consumption by romanticizing Indigenous people only plays a role in homogenizing the experiences of all indigenous peoples.

2. ***I oppose factory farming but there is nothing wrong with killing animals outside of capitalism. i.e. “Killing and eating animals is not the problem, killing and eating animals under capitalism is the problem.”***

This objection to veganism assumes that under capitalism factory farming is the only harmful experience attributed to non-human animals. While yes, slaughterhouses look better up in flames, at the core of speciesism is a hierarchical relationship between human and non-human animals (which is reflected in their everyday use for entertainment, pharmaceutical testing, and fashion trends involving their skin and fur) which justifies their oppression beyond just capitalism. Since the social relationship to non-human animals has been heavily shaped by capitalism, they are viewed as manufactured commodities rather than living beings capable of experiencing pain and suffering. While the elimination of capitalism and factory farming will end the institutionalized manifestations of speciesism, only an elimination of human supremacy on a personal level will create new relationships with non-human animals-relationships based on respect for their right to bodily autonomy and freedom from human domination.

3. ***Veganism is only a consumer activity and not inherently anti-capitalist. Boycotts don’t change anything. i.e. “There is no ethical consumption under capitalism.”***

All too often this objection comes from a perspective that mistakenly assumes liberal veganism represents veganism as a whole. On an organized level, radical vegan groups and cells like the ALF, Animal Liberation Brigade, Animal Rights Militia etc. have destroyed hundreds of thousands of dollars in property and terrorized the state into creating the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. On an individual level, veganism is an attack on the day to day speciesist power structure, a power structure invisibilized by social normalcy.

Anyone who has attended enough anarchist gatherings that excluded vegan food knows how quickly discussions/arguments over speciesism and non-human animal oppression disrupts the atmospheric peace surrounding the consumption of animal flesh and secretions. While it seems tempting to dismiss veganism as merely a consumer activity, veganism challenges the oppressive hierarchy (speciesism) in radical spaces by acting as a wrench in the gears of speciesist conformity. By existing as such, dialog is created which

brings the issue of non-human animal oppression to the surface and calls for an extended examination of internalized oppressive tendencies and behavior.

Speciesism is normalized through individual participation in a broader social program that objectifies non-human animals and places them below humans as commodities to consume. Taking part in this process of objectification normalizes the existence of oppressive thinking and ideology in anarchist spaces. It is an incomplete observation to say veganism is only concerned with food; it opens new avenues of thinking in terms of our relationship to non-human animals, while challenging a socially constructed hierarchy of human supremacy that normalizes our consumption of them.

4. ***"I'm not contributing to animal oppression because I only steal or dumpster animal products."***

While this might satisfy some liberal vegans, it still does not get at what the core of the issue with consuming animals is. While only stealing or dumpstering animal products might mean you are not contributing monetarily to animal oppression, it still validates the notion of human supremacy by normalizing the social activity of consuming non-human animals. By stating "its ok if it's not bought and otherwise would be wasted" people who dumpster animal products reduce veganism to a boycott strategy rather than an anti-speciesist/anarchist analysis of the ways that humans relate to their surroundings. Simply put, dumpstering animal products undermines the necessity for developing personal non-hierarchical relationships with non-human animals which destroy their assigned commodity status.

Conclusion

Veganism is not merely a dietary choice, but a challenge to the dominant anthropocentric narrative. It is not about purchasing different products but cultivating new relationships with non-human animals which are not based on hierarchies and oppression. While there are still anarchists who feel waiting for the collapse of capitalism and supporting the ALF is a sufficient enough approach to anti-speciesism, many of us recognize the social and dietary framework which enables speciesism and the need for its total destruction.

Anarchists are quick to recognize that racism, sexism, and homophobia will not simply go away upon the collapse of capitalism and they must be fought here and now. These same anarchists, however, are often unwilling to apply this logic to speciesism. If we want total freedom, we must cultivate new relationships in our everyday lives. This means fighting oppression on every line, including the line of species. Refusing to do so is not coherent with anarchist and autonomist practices.

We are not asking for bigger cages but the destruction of all cages along with the ways of thinking that create them. Towards anarchy through individual and collective negation of this society and all its internalized roles, in solidarity with the wild against the prison world of human supremacy: vegan anarchy means attack everywhere!

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