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Animal Liberation and Social Revolution

a vegan perspective on anarchism or an anarchist
perspective on veganism, with a preface by Joseph
M. Smith

Brian A. Dominick

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1997

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1997

their critique of those who, on the opposite end, believe personal change will actually *be* the revolution when practiced on a large scale, is rather important. We must avoid either extreme. Unfortunately, contemporary anarchists and vegans alike tend toward the lifestylist approach. As I described in the first section of this addendum, there is a vital dialectic involved. And, as I mentioned in the body of *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution*, the simple act of changing one's lifestyle, even when joined by millions of others, cannot change the world, the social structures of which were handcrafted by elites to serve their own interests.

Some radicals go so far as to claim our lifestyles will change "after the revolution." Such a notion is just silly. Those of us who have been raised to be blind consumers, compliant citizens, husbands, wives, and so forth, must radically alter our everyday activities, else we will be incapable of running a future, liberatory society. Indeed, we won't even seek to radically change the world around us until we learn to stop valuing the superficial, spectacular effects and elements of the present. We won't establish a socialist economy which discourages the production of meat due to its high social and environmental costs unless we are willing to give up meat. An inevitable undertaking of a sane economy will be the abolition of animal exploitation industries, and that will be obvious ahead of time to those with the power to construct such an economy (ie, the people). But why would we strive toward a system which would result in our inability to eat meat if we cannot bear to give it up now?

Lastly, it's important to note that lifestyle changes, such as going vegan, really don't constitute any kind of concrete activism. There is much more to being an activist than just taking a stand, especially a quiet one.

—Brian A. Dominick
October, 1997

It is important to note that veganism is not an absolute state of being. First of all, there are many interpretations of what constitutes a sentient being. Some argue that all animals, from mammals to insects, are fully deserved of inclusion in the category. At the extreme, there are those who believe that plants *and* animals are equally deserved of the distinction, and thus choose only to eat fruits and nuts (these people are commonly referred to as “fruitarians”). Still others insist many animals which cannot be demonstrated to have individual will, distinctive character, complex nervous apparatuses or any semblance of emotion, such as insects and crustaceans, are not “sentient” by their definition. I have no space here to delve into the debate, but suffice it to say whatever the specifics of one’s own definitions, it must be understood that we share the same general principles, and are all attempting to live by them as best we know how.

Secondly, veganism is an ideal to which we can only hope to live up. So many products which have become “necessities” of modern life, such as vehicles, photographic film, etc, contain parts derived from animals. Pet food is another controversial issue. It is important to stress that we can only expect to do our best, to take huge personal steps toward our ideal. Even if all we do is quit eating meat this year, while falling short of what vegans consider a fairly simple conversion to compassionate living, we are dramatically reducing our personal contribution to the exploitation of nonhumans. Burnout ensues when we place impossible demands on ourselves, and further alienation is a typical result of extreme demands placed on others.

The Liabilities of Lifestylism

I’m the first to be disgusted by those stodgy radicals, mostly of the “old school,” who proclaim lifestyle changes must, at the very least, take a back seat to the “real” work of social change, which is limited to the restructuring of social institutions. Still,

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others is free them from the restraints which prevent their self-liberation. Second, only those who can comprehend the complexity of their own oppression can combat it through a process of liberation. For countless centuries, the best attempts of humans at freedom have translated into desperate struggles to simply be free from the authoritarian impositions of oppressive society. Like caged animals, there has been little else in our site other than the destruction of the cage itself. Unlike caged animals, however, we have the potential to understand *why* the cage exists in the first place. We know there are always more cages, and until we destroy the *social* machine which produces those cages (for both humans and nonhumans), the closest we can expect to come to liberation is momentary and relative freedom.

Redefining Veganism

I would also like to clarify my definitions of some terms, most importantly “veganism.” My original definition was accurate, I believe, but becomes confused in context of the rest of the essay, not distinct enough from what I call “vegetarianism.” Let me be clear: veganism is the conscious abstinence from actions which contribute, directly or indirectly, to the suffering of sentient beings, be they animals or humans, for ethical reasons. People come to veganism through two primary paths: concern for animal rights/welfare/freedom, and concern for the natural environment (severely harmed by animal husbandry). Abstinence from the consumption of animal-derived foods alone is simply vegetarianism. Abstinence from meat consumption, typically referred to as “vegetarianism,” is appropriately termed “lacto-ovo vegetarianism,” because its practitioners continue to eat dairy and eggs. Most vegetarians are such because their diet is healthier. They thus have no obvious reason to abstain from consuming leather goods, products tested on animals, and so forth.

oppression at the hands of humans. I believe liberation to be a particularly human concept, based on the subjective process of consciousness-raising and self-empowerment. Liberation is personal, and it is much more complicated than merely removing physical chains. When a prisoner is released from the confines of incarceration, he or she is not necessarily “liberated” from the oppressions of an authoritarian society. He or she is simply “free” from the cell. Achieving liberation—itsself perhaps an impossible ideal for any earthly being—is something beyond the capabilities of any animal.

It can be argued that animals who are abused and violated (and quite obviously suffer psychological damage) must, like oppressed humans, undergo a process of psychological or subjective recovery. But even personal recovery, theoretically within the capacities of many nonhuman animal species, is not truly liberation. Since liberation, as I define it, requires the raising of social consciousness, for which nonhumans (and some humans) simply do not possess the capacity, its texture is more complex than that of recovery.

This may all seem a matter of semantics. However, I insist it is much more. For too long human liberation has been perceived to be solely a social/structural process. When we change the conditions of society, we become liberated. I believe a much more dialectical approach is in order. We must become liberated, as collectives of individuals, before we can restructure society in such a manner that it is conducive to liberation. At the same time, before we can become personally liberated (ie, empowered, enlightened, etc), we must restructure society and its institutions. This seems like a catch-22 of sorts, making of us tail-chasing cats. But when we look at this dialectically, as a gradual, bilateral, process of ebb and flow, the complexity of liberation theory begins to give way.

Self-proclaimed “animal liberationists,” typically dedicated and sincere activists to be sure, tend to miss two points. First, one can only liberate oneself. The most we can hope to do for

Preface: Sharpening the Tools of Revolution

To embrace veganism and forgo the consumption and utilization of animal products is not an end, but a beginning; a new start affording the practitioner an opportunity to see everyday realities in a different light.

However, to speak of the suffering of non-human animals and the benefits of a vegan lifestyle is often a disheartening situation to the vegan, for typically the first reaction of her audience is to disagree. Opponents of veganism say that the way vegans view human-animal relationships (i.e. radically) is wrong, and that, looming on the horizon, is a severe cost for such blatant societal insubordination. Ultimately, they prophesize, the error of veganism will become obvious and, eventually, the idea thrown away.

In a strange way, however, veganisms’s critics are correct.

Not until one realizes what makes veganism “unreasonable,” will the individual realize the true reasoning behind what it means to be vegan. Not until one questions what it is that depicts veganism as “wrong,” in the eyes of non-vegans will one gain the ability to adequately address the wrongs driving their refusal to accept humanity’s violent and unwarranted treatment of non-human animals. Not until the principles of veganism are applied to the rubric of injustice as a whole will one understand the need for veganism at all.

They are correct because veganism in isolation defeats the purpose for which it is intended.

And so it goes, for the alienation experienced as an effect of breaking social conventions is often enough to make one “question” her commitment to veganism.

As a philosophy, veganism stands in defiance to ideologies touching the core of Western thought. Opposed to the irrational belief systems which establishment institutions socialize

people to “accept,” the principles of veganism challenge individuals to confront the dogma they are issued and to construct new ethics and values based on the premises of compassion and justice.

Confronting the existing belief systems, however, is a frightening concept to a society that has voluntarily conscripted itself to the dominant social paradigms of the state. However, as Brian Dominick so skillfully illustrates in the following essay, it is precisely this confrontation that we must agree to make if we are honest in seeking a true assessment of what social liberation has to offer. In the totality of this process, *veganism is but one element in the compound structure of social revolution*. It is in this light that Brian’s essay shines its brightest. *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution* is a compact framework designed to assist us as we embark on the endeavor of recognizing what roles compassion, critical thinking, and rationality (ought to) play in our simultaneous deconstruction and transformation of society. Relentless in his quest to set the proverbial wheels of this transformation in motion, Brian presses us to confront the oppressive ideologies we harbor within ourselves and to uncover their linkages to the injustice that pervades every sphere of our existence.

It is Brian’s belief that each of us has been given the tools to draw these necessary conclusions. It makes no difference if you are an anarchist approaching veganism, a vegan approaching anarchism, or neither of the two. All that is required is the willingness to roll up your sleeves, sharpen those tools and start drawing, in a concerted effort, to challenge humanity’s myopic vision of what constitutes a just society.

—Joseph M. Smith
November, 1995

* * *

anti-choice (abortion) tendencies within the animal liberation movement (except the quote on page 3). These tendencies are strong and growing, and they are a threat not only to the reproductive freedom of women but also to the rational basis for veganism. Veganism, in short, does not equal pro-life.

Also, the tactics of the animal lib movement are in dire need of critique. From pointless protests to violent attacks, the movement has become increasingly angry and decreasingly grounded.

Finally, I wish I’d discussed the concept of “animal liberation” more fully. Can we truly liberate animals? Isn’t liberation a subjective process, with us able only to liberate ourselves?

These and other questions must be dealt with sooner or later. I suppose they will have to await another pamphlet.

—Brian A. Dominick
August, 1996

Afterword to the Third Printing of *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution*

When the second edition of this pamphlet went to press about a year ago, I appended a brief “Afterwords” proclaiming my concern with some of the notions expressed in the original text. Rather than make serious editorial changes to the content of the essay, which I believe still stands as a solid tract, I have opted to discuss some of my more recent conclusions on the topic.

On Liberation

Among the problems I now have with the original piece is my own and others’ use of the term “liberation” to describe what is actually the *freeing* of animals from exploitation and

gies into one, holistic theory, vision, strategy and practice—is a truism we can no longer afford to ignore. Only a perspective and lifestyle based on true compassion can destroy the oppressive constructs of present society and begin anew in creating desirable relationships and realities. This, to me, is the essence of anarchy. No one who fails to embrace all struggles against oppression as her or his own fits my definition of an anarchist. That may seem like a lot to ask, but I will never stop asking it of every human being.

* * *

The anti-human garbage of a rotting system ... must be destroyed and will be destroyed. ... It won't come soon enough for us. Breakdown begins at home. The society that abolishes all adventure makes the abolition of that society the only real adventure.

—Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous
“Adventures in Subversion”

Theory will either be a practical theory—a theory of revolutionary practice—or it will be nothing...nothing but an aquarium of ideas, a contemplative interpretation of the world. The realm of ideas is the eternal waiting room of unrealized desire.

—The Spectacle

Afterwords

Well over a year after having written the first version of *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution*, I find myself wishing it had been more inclusive. Indeed, there is no critique of the

Everyone has a limited amount of time and energy, and time taken in active work for once cause reduces the time available for another cause; but there is nothing to stop those who devote their time and energy to human problems from joining the boycott of the produce of agribusiness cruelty. It takes no more time to be a vegetarian than to eat animal flesh... When non-vegetarians say ‘human problems come first’ I cannot help wondering what exactly it is that they are doing for humans that compels them to continue to support the wasteful ruthless, exploitation of farm animals.

—Peter Singer
Animal Liberation

Introduction: The Veganarchists

For some time now, animal liberation and the activists who struggle in its name have been embroiled in heated discourse and action. Although animal lib theory and activism have rarely been welcomed or taken seriously by the mainstream Left, many anarchists are beginning to recognize their legitimacy, not only as a valid cause, but as an integral and indispensable aspect of radical theory and revolutionary practice. While most people who call themselves anarchists have not embraced animal liberation and its corresponding lifestyle—veganism—growing numbers of young anarchists are adopting ecology- and animal-inclusive mindsets as part of their overall praxis¹.

Likewise, many vegans and animal liberationists are being influenced by anarchist thought and its rich tradition. This is evidenced by growing hostility among some animal lib

¹ **Praxis:** The fusion of theory and practice; a lifestyle consciously rooted in social theory.

activists towards the statist, capitalist, sexist, racist and ageist Establishment which has been escalating the intensity of its war not only on non-human animals, but also on their human advocates. The relatively new community of animal liberationists is rapidly becoming aware of the totality of force which fuels the speciesist machine that is modern society. As such awareness increases, so should the affinity between animal liberationists and their more socially-oriented counterparts, the anarchists.

The more we recognize the commonality and interdependence of our struggles, which we once considered quite distinguished from one another, the more we understand what liberation and revolution really mean.

Besides our far-reaching vision, anarchists and animal liberationists share strategical methodology. Without pretending to be able to speak for all, I will say that those I consider true anarchists and animal liberationists seek to realize our visions via any means effective. We understand, contrary to mainstream perceptions of us, that wanton destruction and violence will not bring about the end we desire. But unlike liberals and progressives, whose objectives are limited to reforms, we are willing to admit that real change will only be brought about if we add destructive force to our creative transformation of oppressive society. We can build all we want, and we should be pro-active where possible. But we also understand that we can make room for free creation only by obliterating that which exists to prevent our liberation.

I am vegan because I have compassion for animals; I see them as beings possessed of value not unlike humans. I am an anarchist because I have that same compassion for humans, and because I refuse to settle for compromised perspectives, half-assed strategies and sold-out objectives. As a radical, my approach to animal and human liberation is without compromise: total freedom for all, or else.

ery word we speak, every action we make must be rooted in radical praxis. We must liberate our desires through constant critique of what we have been taught to think, and a persistent quest for what we truly want. Once our desires are known, we must act in their interest.

After identifying how our society works, and deciding what we essentially want, we must commence to dismantle the present and assemble the future—and we must go about these tasks simultaneously. As we tear down the vestiges of oppression, we must also create, with both focus and spontaneity, new forms of social and environmental relationships, facilitated by fresh, new institutions.

For instance, economically speaking, where there is private ownership today there must be social ownership tomorrow. Where production, consumption and resource allocation are now dictated by irrational market forces, in the future there must be a rational system for the acquisition and distribution of material goods and services, with a focus on equity, diversity, solidarity, autonomy, and/or whatever we deem to be the values which guide our visions.

As visionary, the vegan sees a world free of animal exploitation. Further, she sees a truly peaceful and sane relationship between human society and its natural environment. The deep ecology movement has shown us that non-animal nature has value which cannot be quantified in economic terms, just as vegans have demonstrated the worth of non-human animals, a worth that cannot be calculated by economists, only measured by human compassion. That compassion, demonstrated for the proletariat by socialists, for women and queers by feminists, for people of color and marginalized ethnicities by intercommunalists, for the young and aged by youthists, and for those at the end of the state's gun barrel by libertarians, is the same compassion as that felt by vegans and radical environmentalists toward the non-human world. That each of us needs to become all of these "types" of radicals—and to incorporate their ideolo-

etc—capitalism can now control the very conditions of existence. The world we see is not the real world, it is a view of the world we are conditioned to see... Life itself has become a show contemplated by an audience... Reality is now something we look at and think about, not something we experience.

—Larry Law

The Spectacle: A Skeleton Key

The Revolutionary Endeavor

Understanding ourselves and our relationship to the world around us is but the first step towards revolution. We must then apply our understandings to a practical program of action. When I speak of action, I am not merely referring to weekly or monthly events when we, in collaboration with an organized group, state our beliefs at a demonstration, or when we execute a planned raid on a facility of oppression.

Action is not so limited. It can be found in our daily lives, our routine and not-so-routine activities. When we assert our beliefs by speaking out in conversation, on the job, at the dinner table, we are *acting*. In fact, whether we realizing it or not, everything we do is an action or series of actions. Recognizing this allows us to transform our everyday lives from repressed and alienated to liberatory and revolutionary.

The role of the revolutionist is simple: make your life into a miniature model of the alternative, revolutionary society you envision. You are a microcosm of the world around you, and even the most basic among your actions affect the social context of which you are a part. Make those effects positive and radical in their nature.

The revolution must become part of our lifestyle, guided by vision and fueled by compassion. Every thought we think, ev-

In this essay I wish to demonstrate that any approach to social change must be comprised of an understanding not only of social relationships, but also of the relationships between humans and nature, including non-human animals. I also hope to show herein why no approach to animal liberation is feasible without a thorough understanding of and immersion in the *social* revolutionary endeavour. We must all become, if you will, “veganarchists.”

* * *

Some animal advocates think that recognition of animal rights means opposition to abortion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Abortion represents a unique moral problem that is replicated nowhere else in society. Even if the fetus is regarded as a rights-bearing “person,” the reality is that *this subservient right-holder lives inside the body of the primary right-holder—the mother*. We can either leave the decision to terminate pregnancy to the mother, or we can leave the decision to some white male legislator or judge who cannot get pregnant. In our patriarchal society, those are the only choices that we have. In our view, opposition to oppression commits us to support freedom of choice.

—Anna E. Charlton, Sue Coe & Gary Francione

“The American Left Should Support Animal Rights: A Manifesto”

What is Social Revolution?

“Revolution” is one of those words whose meaning varies greatly from one person’s usage to another’s. In fact, it’s probably safe to say that no two people share the same idea of what

“revolution” really is. This, in my mind, is what makes revolution truly beautiful.

When I speak of revolution, I am referring to a dramatic social transformation. But my revolution is not defined by objective changes in the world around me, such as the overthrow of the state or capitalism. Those, to me, are merely symptoms. The revolution itself cannot be found outside of us. It is wholly internal, wholly personal.

Every individual has a perspective. We each see the world in a different way. Most people, however, have their perspectives molded for them by the society in which they live. The overwhelming majority of us see the world and ourselves in ways conditioned into us by the institutions that run our lives, ie, government, family, marriage, church, corporations, school, etc. Each of these institutions, in turn, is generally a part of what I call the Establishment—an entity which exists solely for the perpetuation of the power of a relative minority. Fueled by that elite’s passion for more and more power, the Establishment necessarily draws power from the rest of the world by way of oppression.

The Establishment employs many forms of oppression; most of them commonly acknowledged but rarely understood, much less opposed. First, there is classism, which is economic oppression; statism, or the subjugation of people by political authority; sexism and homosexuality, oppression based on heterosexual (male) supremacy or patriarchy; and racism, a general term for oppressions founded in ethnocentrism. Beyond these more commonly acknowledged oppressions, there is ageism, the dominance of adults over children and young people; and, finally, the oppressions which result from anthropocentrism, namely speciesism and environmental destruction².

² There are other oppressions (eg. ableism) but the injustices I have mentioned are those which most clearly and directly reinforce the Establishment.

When I, as a male, converse with a woman, or with someone younger than me, am I dominant and overbearing as I’ve been conditioned to be by a patriarchal society? Do I, as a “white” person, see myself (even subconsciously) as “above” “blacks”? Indeed, do I look at people of color as being somehow inherently different from me? These are the questions we are not encouraged to ask ourselves. But we must. In order to overcome alienation, we must be vigilantly critical not only of the world around us, but of our own ideas, perspectives and actions. If we want to extinguish the oppressors in our heads, we must constantly question our beliefs and assumptions. What, we must ask ourselves as individuals, are the effects of my actions, not only on those around me, but on my natural environment?

As a key component to the perpetuation of oppression, all alienation must be destroyed. As long as we can ignore the suffering in the slaughter house and vivisection’s laboratory, we can ignore the conditions in the Third World countryside, the urban ghetto, the abusive household, the authoritarian classroom, and so on. The ability to ignore *any* oppressions is the ability to ignore any other oppression/s.

* * *

More than just a refusal to take part in violence against non human animals for food, clothing, etc, veganism is a refusal to take part in the violence that affects society as a whole. Veganism works to expose and end the subtle indoctrination of industry in capitalist society that wishes to desensitize humanity to the violence against the many for the gain of the few.

—Joseph M. Smith
“The Threat of Veganism”

With its modern technology—mass media, rapid transport systems, computers, economic plans,

pression, humans would not be able to go about their lives as they presently do.

Humans must even be kept alienated from the simple rationale behind veganism. In order to maintain an us-them dichotomy between human and “animal” (as though we are not animals ourselves!), we cannot be allowed to hear basic arguments in favor of transcending this false sense of duality.

We are told that humans can employ complex linguistics and intricate styles of reasoning. Non-humans cannot. Humans are people, all others are beasts at best. Animals are made less than human not by nature but by active dehumanization, a process whereby people consciously strip animals of their worth. After all, the inability to speak or reason in an “enlightened” capacity does not subject infants or people with severe mental retardation to the violence non-humans suffer by the millions every day.

Let’s face it, the dichotomy between human and animal is more arbitrary than scientific. It is no different than the one posed between “whites” and “blacks” or “reds” or “yellows”; between adult and child; between man and woman; between heterosexual and homosexual; local and foreigner. Lines are drawn without care but with devious intent, and we are engineered by the institutions which raise us to believe that we are on one side of the line, and that the line is rational to begin with.

In everyday life, we are alienated from the results of our most basic actions. When we purchase a food product at the grocery store, we can read the ingredients list and usually tell whether animals were murdered and/or tortured in the production process. But what do we learn of the people who made that product? Were the women paid less than the men? Were blacks subjugated by whites on the factory floor? Was a union or collectivization effort among employees crushed? Were a hundred slaughtered on a picket line for demanding a living wage?

Throughout history, the Establishment has been dependent upon these oppressive dynamics³, and has increased and concentrated its power as a result of them. Consequently, each form of oppression has become interdependent upon the others. The infusion of these different oppressive dynamics has served to enhance and complement each other in versatility as well as strength.

So the force behind the institutions which have socially engineered us is the same force behind racism and speciesism, sexism and classism, and so on. It would be reasonable to assume, then, that most of us, as products of Establishment institutions, have been socially engineered to foster oppression inside and among ourselves.

Revolution is the *process*—it’s not an event—of challenging the false wisdom and values we’ve been indoctrinated with and of challenging the actions we’ve learned to make and not make. It is we who are the enemy; overthrowing the oppressors in our heads will be the revolution—watching their constructs fall in the streets will merely be a (joyous!) sign that we are revolting together in a unified, unrestricted manner. The social revolution is a collection of internal processes. Radical social change of the objective conditions in whose context we live can only come about as a result of such revolution.

Radical Veganism

Two more words, the meanings of which are more often than not misconstrued, are “radicalism” and “veganism.” The cooptation of these terms by short-sighted and self-centered liberals has removed the potency originally bestowed upon them. Again without claiming a monopoly on “true” definitions, I will offer my personal meanings for these terms.

³ Though not every society has manifested them as the West does today.

Radicalism and extremism are not at all synonymous, contrary to popular belief. The word “radical” is derived from the Latin root, “rad,” which actually means “root.” Radicalism is not a measurement of degree of ideological fanaticism, to the right or the left; rather, it describes a style of approach to social problems. The radical, literally speaking, is someone who seeks out the root of a problem so that she may strike at it for a solution.

Radicals do not limit their goals to reforms. It is not their business to make concessions with victimizers to bring about an alleviation of oppression’s resulting misery. Those are tasks usually left to liberals and progressives. While acknowledging that there are often gains to be found in reforms, for the radical, nothing short of victory is a satisfying end—an end defined as a revolutionary change in the roots of oppression.

By my definition, pure vegetarianism is not veganism. Refusing to consume the products of non-human animals, while a wonderful life choice, is not in itself veganism. The vegan bases her choices on a radical understanding of what animal oppression really is, and her lifestyle choice is highly informed and politicized.

For instance, it is not uncommon for self-proclaimed vegans to justify their care free consumption of corporate products by claiming that animals are helpless while humans are not⁴). Many vegetarians fail to see the validity of human liberation causes, or see them as subordinate in importance to those of animals who cannot stand up for themselves. Such thinking

⁴ In many countries, people are prevented from demanding humane work conditions by the militaries. In this ages, such things happen because so-called “Third World” countries—or at least the elites that run them—want to entice investment from the West. This is best accomplished by demonstrating the impotence of the popular work force as a political weapon. In such countries, the treatment of human labour “resources” is scarcely better than that of non-human animal “resources” here at home. Purchasing a product on the North Amerikan market which was made under these types of conditions is indirectly sponsoring the perpetuation of those conditions, and is thus not truly vegan.

nature, must alienate us from the effects of our actions. It is difficult to convince one human to cause suffering to another. It is even difficult to convince a human to harm a non-human animal for no reason, or to directly contribute to the destruction of her own natural environment.

When one society goes to war with another, it is imperative that the leaders of each society convince “the masses” that the adversary population is vile and sub-human. Further, the leaders must hide from the people the real results of war: mass violence, destruction and bloodshed. War is something that happens elsewhere, we are told, and those “foreigners” who die are deserving.

Oppressive dynamics in social relationships are always based on an us-them dichotomy, with the oppressors seen in clear distinction from the oppressed. For the oppressors, the “us” is supreme and privileged. The wealthy “understand” their riches are acquired by “fair” and “just” methods. For instance, both oppressor and oppressed are led to believe it is the poor’s inability and incompetence which holds them down. There is no recognition of the fact that economic privilege automatically precipitates inequality. There simply isn’t enough to go around when some are allowed to take more than their even share. But the wealthy are alienated from this truism. They have to be, else they would not be able to justify the inequity to which they contribute.

It is the same for every oppressive dynamic. It has to be.

The vegan understands that human exploitation and consumption of animals is facilitated by alienation. People would not be able to live the way they do—ie, at the expense and suffering of animals—were they to understand the *real* effects of such consumption. This is precisely why late capitalism has entirely removed the consumer from the process of production. The torture goes on elsewhere, behind (tightly) closed doors. Allowed to empathize with the victims of species op-

correlates to social violence. Humans who are mistreated themselves tend to mistreat others, and animals are among the easiest, most defenseless victims. This exposes yet another reason social oppression must be struggled against by those concerned for the welfare of animals.

What's more, this cause-effect dynamic works both ways. It has been shown that those who are violent towards animals—again, directly or indirectly—are also more likely to be violent towards other humans. People fed a vegetarian diet, for instance, are typically less violent than those who eat meat. People who abuse their pets are unlikely to stop there—their children and partners are often next.

It is absurd to think that a society which oppresses non-human animals will be able to become a society which does not oppress humans. Recognizing animal oppression thus becomes a prerequisite to radical social change.

* * *

Early this century, Thomas Edison devised a way of demonstrating, in one blow, the power of electricity and the impact of the motion picture camera. He filmed the public execution of an elephant

—Larry Law

Spectacular Times: Animals

Alienation in Everyday Life

At the root of oppression, contends the radical, is alienation. Human beings are social creatures. We are capable of feeling compassion. We are capable of understanding that there is a social welfare, a common good. Because we can feel empathy towards others, those who would pit us against each other as societies, communities and individuals, or as humans against

exposes the liberal vegetarian's ignorance not only of human oppression, but of the deep-seated connectedness between the capitalist system at large and the industries of animal oppression⁵.

Many people who call themselves vegans and animal rights activists, in my experience, have little or no knowledge of social science; and, often, what they do “know” about the connections between society and non-human nature is laden with misnomers. For example, it is not uncommon to hear vegans argue that it is the consumption of livestock which causes world hunger. After all, more than 80% of the US's grain harvest is fed to cattle, and that would be more than enough to feed the hungry of the world. It seems logical to conclude, then, that the end of human consumption of animals in the United States would bring about the feeding of hungry people elsewhere. Vegan guru John Robbins seems to hold this belief.

But it is entirely false! *If North Americans stopped eating meat next year, it is unlikely that a single hungry person would be fed newly-freed grains grown on US soil.* This is because the problem of world hunger, like that of “overpopulation,” is not at all what it seems. These problems have their root not in the availability of resources, but in the allocation of resources. Elites require scarcity—a tightly restricted supply of resources—for two major reasons. First of all, the market value of goods drops decisively as supply increases. If grains now fed to livestock were to become suddenly available, the change would drop the price of grains through the floor, undermining the profit margin. Elites

⁵ Many self-proclaimed vegans think this way, and it is truly sad. I call them “liberal vegetarians” here simply because, though they do not consume animal products, they have by no means made a holistic attempt to free themselves from being oppressors through their lifestyles. At this moment, there is no escape from the massive markets of late capitalism. However, there is a compromise point at which we can achieve an understanding of the effects of our actions as well as adjust and refocus our lifestyles accordingly. In other words, there are more ways to limit violent consumption besides vegetarianism. You are what you *consume*.

with investments in the grain agricultural market, then, have interests directly corresponding to those of elites who own part of the animal agriculture market. Vegetarians tend to think that vegetable and grain farmers are benign while those involved in animal husbandry are vile. The fact is, however, that vegetables are a commodity, and those with financial interests in the vegetable industry do not want to make their product available if it means growing more to make even less profit.

Second, it is the case that the national and global distribution of food is a political tool. Governments and international economic organizations carefully manipulate food and water supplies to control entire populations. At times, food can be withheld from hungry people as a means of keeping them weak and docile. At other times, its provision is part of a strategy intended to appease restless populations on the verge of revolt.

Knowing all this, it becomes reasonable to assume that the US government, so tightly controlled by private interests, would subsidize the *non*-production of grains, in order to “save the industry from collapse.” Farmers would likely be paid *not* to grow grains, or even to destroy their crops.

It is not enough to boycott the meat industry and hope that resources will be re-allocated to feed the hungry. We must establish a system which actually intends to meet human needs, which implies social revolution.

This is only one of many connections between animal and human exploitation, but it illustrates well the need for *total* revolution. A revolution in the relationship between humans and animals is narrowly focused and is, in fact, preempted by the very nature of modern society. One reason animals are exploited in the first place is because their abuse is profitable. Vegetarians tend to understand this much. But the meat industry (including dairy, vivisection, etc) is not an isolated entity. The meat industry will not be destroyed until market capitalism is destroyed, for it is the latter which provides impetus and ini-

Comparing the suffering to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist; one who has embraced the false notions of what animals are like. Those who are offended by comparison to a fellow sufferer have fallen for the propaganda spewed forth by the oppressors. To deny our similarities to animals is to deny and undermine our own power.

—Marjorie Spiegel
The Dreaded Comparison

Violence in Everyday Life

Our society, few would disagree, is one based largely on violence. Everywhere we turn, it seems, there is violence, a perception enhanced exponentially by corporate-controlled media images.

This violence, as part of our culture and our very existence, undoubtedly has a profound affect on us the extent of which we can hardly hope to ever truly understand. Those who are on the receiving end of violence naturally suffer a severe amount of disempowerment. Because power is a social concept, we as people do not necessarily comprehend what it means to us. When we perceive a loss of power, one of our typical reactions is to assert what little power we have left. Once we have internalized the effects of oppression, we carry them with us, often only to become victimizers ourselves. It is an unfortunate truth that victims often become perpetrators specifically because they themselves are victimized. When the victimization takes the form of physical violence, it often translates itself into still more violence.

That in mind, we can see clearly why abuse of animals—whether directly, as is the case regarding the mistreatment of pets, or indirectly, as through the process of meat eating—

as it did, imagine what social strife meat prohibition would create! Just as the Drug War will never make a dent in the problems brought about by chemical dependency and its corresponding “underworld,” no legal War on Meat would have a prayer of curbing animal exploitation; it would only cause still more problems. The roots of these types of problems are in socially-created and -reinforced desire to produce and consume that which we do not really need. Everything about our present society tells us that we “need” drugs and meat. What we really need is to destroy that society!

The vegan must go beyond a monist understanding of non-human oppression and understand its roots in human social relations. What’s more, she must also extend her lifestyle of resistance to a resistance of human oppression.

* * *

Here in the zoo, in this place of hypnotic fascination, human beings come to see their own instincts caged and sterilized. Everything that is intrinsic to human kind, but smothered by capitalist society, reappears *safely* in the zoo. Aggression, sexuality, motion, desire, play, the very impulses to freedom are trapped and displayed for the alienated enjoyment and manipulation of men, women and children. Here is the harmless spectacle in which everything desired by human beings exists only to the degree that it is separated from the reality of human existence... The condition of slavery automatically poses the question: What are the prospects for liberation? It hardly needs to be stressed that the notion of revolutionary transformation between humans and beasts [sic] is all but unthinkable today.

—The Surrealist Group

tiative to the former. And to capitalists, the prospect of easy profits from animal exploitation is irresistible.

The profit motive is not the only social factor which encourages animal exploitation. Indeed, economics is only one form of social relationship. We also have political, cultural and interpersonal relationships, each of which can be demonstrated to influence the perception that animals exist for use by humans.

The Christian Bible, and Western religions in general, are full of references to the alleged “divine right” of humans to use our non-human counterparts for our own needs. At this moment in history, it is absurd for anyone to even think that humans *need* to exploit animals. There is little we can gain from the suffering of non-human animals. But God supposedly said we could use them, so we continue to do so, despite the fact that we have out-evolved any real need we might have once had for them.

Vivisectors claim we can learn from non-human animals, and they use this assertion to justify the torture and murder of sentient beings. Radicals need to realize, as vegans do, that the only thing we can learn from animals is how to live in a sane and sound relationship with our environment. We *need* to observe animals in their natural environment, and mimic their environmental relationships, where applicable, in our own. Such an understanding of harmony between humans and nature will someday save and add value to more lives than finding a cure for cancer through the “science” of animal torture ever will. After all, the *root* of most cancer is in human mistreatment of nature. No radical would expect a solution to such a problem to be found in further destruction of nature by way of animal experimentation.

The correlations between speciesism and racism—between the treatment of animals and people of color—has also been explicitly (and graphically) demonstrated. In her book, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, Marjorie Spiegel astutely draws astounding comparisons between the

treatment of animals by humans and the treatment of “inferior races” by whites, claiming “they are built around the same basic relationship—that between oppressor and oppressed.” As Spiegel illustrates, treatment of non-whites by whites has historically been startlingly similar to that of non-humans by humans. To decide one oppression is valid and the other not is to consciously limit one’s understanding of the world; it is to engage oneself in voluntary ignorance, more often than not for personal convenience. “One cause at a time,” says the monist⁶ thinker, as though these interrelated dynamics can be sterilized and extracted from relation to one another.

Male dominance in the form of patriarchy and speciesism brought about by anthropocentrism has been exposed with poetic clarity by Carol Adams in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Feminism and veganism have much in common, and each has plenty to teach to and learn from the other. After drawing concrete comparisons between the patriarchal perspective and treatment of animals, Adams describes and calls for recognition of the deep connection between vegan and feminist lifestyles.

One comparison between interpersonal relations and human-animal relations which has not been thoroughly examined, to my knowledge, includes the adult treatment of children and young people, as well as the adult treatment of the elderly. In each case, the oppressed is seen as someone not in possession of full agency for her or his actions. For instance, children and old folks alike are seen as feeble and incompetent (regardless of their actual potential for responsibility). Ageism is rooted in something I call *adultocracy*, which refers to the notion that adulthood is possessed of a certain quality of responsibility not found in the aged or young. Like animals,

⁶ **Monist:** Any social theory which emphasizes one oppression as being more important than another; a single issue-focused approach to revolution.

those oppressed by ageism are treated as objects devoid of individual character and value. They are exploited whenever possible, spoiled when deemed “cute,” but almost never given the respect offered adult humans. That children, the elderly and animals are living, thinking, sentient beings is somehow lost in the adult quest for dominance and power. Not unlike patriarchy, *adultocracy* doesn’t require formal hierarchy: it asserts its dominance by convincing its victims they are indeed less valid than their adult oppressors. Non-humans, too, can be easily invalidated. Simply depriving them of any freedom to develop individual character is a major step in that direction.

There is no question that the state is on the side of those who exploit animals. With a few exceptions, the law is decidedly anti-animal. This is demonstrated as much by government subsidization of the meat and dairy industries, of vivisection⁷ and military use of non-humans, as by its opposition to those who resist the animal exploitation industry. The politician will never understand why the state should protect animals. After all, every sphere of social life condones and encourages their abuse. Acting in the present “interests” of (human) constituencies will always translate, however absurdly, into acting against the interests of the animal kingdom, a vast constituency which has yet to receive the right to vote.

But, the anarchist asks, if every animal were to be granted suffrage and then asserted their need for protection by voting, would we have a better society? That is, Do we really want the state to stand between humans and animals, or would we rather eliminate the need for such a barrier? Most would agree that having humans decide against animal consumption without being coerced to do so is the optimal choice. After all, if alcohol Prohibition caused as much crime and violence

⁷ **Vivisection:** The practice of experimenting on animals through operations and other forms of coercive torture.