

# **Against Speciesism, Against Leviathan!**

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This piece aims to open a dialogue between two key areas of anarchist praxis, those targeting speciesism and civilisation. One easily feels expected to choose between the two in many circles, and that seems a shame. It's hard to imagine what animal liberation should look like outside of the destruction of mass society and everything that holds it together; nor should we be convinced by those anti-civ anarchists who talk about opposing human supremacism whilst uncritically supporting animal exploitation. Here's a case for why and how the two currents might be combined.

# I. An Outline of Leviathan and its Tentacles

Among anarchists, the predominant tendency has been to attack the existing order from *within* human civilisation,<sup>1</sup> thereby setting out from a basis shared in common with authoritarians of every sort. Running counter to this approach, some within the anarchist milieu have made a case for digging deeper, questioning not merely the state and class society, nor even hierarchy altogether, but instead the way of life which framed the development of these phenomena over the last 10,000 years – mass society based around cities and agriculture. Termed “Leviathan” by Fredy Perlman,<sup>2</sup> this target for analysis has typically escaped the attention of leftist<sup>3</sup> critiques; yet the major contribution of anti-civ anarchism has been to expose this as a flaw, one which actively encourages us to defend the basic assumptions from which institutional hierarchy, ecological despoilment, and everyday alienation so frequently originates and intensifies.

Some of the closely related defining features of civilisation include cities, agriculture, mass society, ideology, and technological domination. Each of these will be set out in turn, along with reasons why anti-authoritarians would do well to clash with them, thus providing an introduction to the anarchist rejection of civilisation (to be followed in the next section by a discussion of anarchist anti-speciesism, then by an extended look at the implications of mixing the two).

At its core, civilisation can be characterised by urbanisation, that is, the growth of cities. A city is an artificial habitat designed to concentrate large populations of humans. It is the concrete domain of traffic jams, apartment blocks, and shopping malls – here the lights never go out and the seasons slip by largely unnoticed. Despite most humans today living in these claustrophobic and polluted environments, often taking them to be both natural and inevitable, they are but recent inventions, first arising roughly 400 generations ago. Prior to this (and in some regions to this day), humans avoided permanent settlement altogether; they<sup>4</sup> were instead largely nomadic, moving regularly between parts of a bioregion, foraging for their existence in accordance with local ecological cycles. Yet since then Leviathan has spread urbanisation across the globe, devouring or wiping out almost all undomesticated human cultures, along with so many of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term “human civilisation” is used here to keep an open mind on whether some other animals might also live in civilisations. Ants and termites are notable examples, some of whom arguably practice mass society, urbanisation, animal husbandry, and agriculture. Throughout the rest of this text, talk of “civilisation” should be taken as shorthand merely for civilisation among humans.

<sup>2</sup> Perlman introduced the relevant meaning of the term in *Against His-tory, Against Leviathan!*, the 1983 book which many regard as establishing the primitivist/anti-civ current within contemporary anarchism.

<sup>3</sup> Leftism broadly includes those political movements which can be traced to some variety of socialism, including Marxism, social democracy, social ecology, social anarchism, and identity politics. Despite their diversity, they all share typical leftist emphases on collectivism, social justice, humanism, civilisation, and progress. By contrast, post-Left anarchists reject the Left as an authoritarian, civilising force, presently and historically responsible for redirecting wild revolt into institutional control. Instead of reified social analysis and mass organisation, post-Left anarchy frequently applies non-ideological theory and informal affinity-bonds for the purposes of immediate insurrection.

<sup>4</sup> Talk of a “they” in reference to human foragers should be taken cautiously, given that the (decidedly patchy) anthropological data available hardly depicts a uniform alternative to civilised life, more a series of frequently encouraging fragments from beyond the city’s walls.

more-than-human lifeforms who cocreated their habitats. Put otherwise, you might think of a city as an immense organism which lays waste to its habitat whilst shitting toxic waste. Defined by their high population density, cities are inherently incapable of sustaining themselves on their local landbase, meaning that the untamed surroundings of any urban centre – which become increasingly distant and alien for those living inside – are invariably colonised in order to grow crops, build monuments, and fuel industry. No less, the resulting extra (and unnecessary) work necessitates growing reserves of forced labour: indeed human slavery, having existed since the times of Sumeria, appears to have been constant among all ancient civilisations, whether Chinese, Indian, Mayan, or Carthaginian (and has arguably been indispensable for all modern ones too, through subjugation to wage work and the law).

With cities unable to sustain themselves materially, their existence has always been rooted in agriculture (the cultivation of crops) as well as animal husbandry.<sup>5</sup> Agriculture began when the seeds of wild plants were intentionally spread in more convenient locations, with the offspring with preferable qualities being favoured for further reproduction – a seemingly harmless innovation. Yet this was a fundamentally different means of subsistence, apparently exceedingly rare among animals on this planet, namely, one marked by domestication, a process by which one organism promotes its own wishes by redefining the basic constitution of another. To practice agriculture means reducing a diverse, chaotic habitat – home for countless wild creatures – into a plot of land largely devoid life, except (at least most visibly) for members of a handful of plant species sown by human hands. Moreover, from its outset the process of domestication appears to have been reciprocal; agriculture transformed humans from lawless foragers into farmers who dwelt in houses, toiled under the sun, took orders from bosses, and lived for the future. The shift meant spending more time acquiring food,<sup>6</sup> and offered a diet – focused on staples such as wheat, rice, and maize – which lacked variation and was more vulnerable to ecological instability.<sup>7</sup> The astounding success of agricultural society globally should not, therefore, be attributed to the quality of life it offered; the decisive factor must have been the much higher quantity of resources it generated, enabling far more mouths to be fed. Combined with the ensuing desertification of farmland,<sup>8</sup> the ongoing population boom triggered by agriculture deemed expansion a necessity (hence the close historical connection between civilisation and empire). Given the numerical and technological superiority definitive of agricultural societies, they gradually overwhelmed and destroyed almost all human forager cultures, except for a small number of tribes standing their ground to this day.

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<sup>5</sup> Animal husbandry is discussed in the following section. Agriculture, which is discussed here, is defined in this piece as excluding animal husbandry, because using the word otherwise (from Latin: ager, meaning “field, farm, land, estate,” and cultura, meaning “growing, cultivation”) treats other animals as impersonal features of the land.

<sup>6</sup> Even foragers living in the harshest of habitats – such as the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert – have been described by anthropologists as spending considerably less time at work than most civilised humans, both in less and more industrially developed nations. Note also that, beyond a discussion of hours spent performing labour, agriculture triggered the invention of work altogether, a sphere of activity (seemingly unknown to foragers) in which you perform tasks for someone else in exchange for the necessities of life.

<sup>7</sup> By focusing on particular crops, agricultural peoples make themselves vulnerable to unforeseen stresses such as droughts, floods, or fires. Whereas no organism is immune to disaster, foragers – who can more easily acquire food from different sources than usual, or instead relocate to less affected areas – are at least much more capable of adapting.

<sup>8</sup> Agriculture erodes topsoil by removing the protection offered by trees and other plants, followed by repeatedly plowing the land (usually to grow monocultures), thereby exposing it to the elements whilst preventing the possibility of regeneration.

Civilisation is often used as another term for mass society, which broadly refers to a cooperative network too large for most of its participants to know each other. As civilised humans, almost everyone we depend upon for everyday life is a stranger; for example, we're unlikely to know the names or faces of those who grow our food, build our dwellings, supply our energy, produce our entertainment, or establish our facts. The mutual estrangement characteristic of Leviathan (especially in its contemporary, highly globalised form) ensures that even the most basic tasks cannot be completed without the mediation of centralised and opaque institutions such as governments, corporations, schools, hospitals, and the media. Social anarchists<sup>9</sup> and other leftists typically strongly favour the maintenance of mass society, arguing that it can be transformed to exclude the bureaucracy and alienation which currently dominates civilised life. An honest analysis, however, should admit that the possibility for nonhierarchical relationships necessarily declines in larger groups, with individual freedom being compromised to the extent coordination occurs beyond the realm of direct experience. At its core, the process of creating a mass means standardising how its participants behave; lacking order and discipline, the coherence of any sizeable collective is inevitably undermined, allowing it to fall apart. By insisting that local autonomy can somehow be combined with mass society, leftists merely disguise hierarchy rather than dismantling it – in many ways a more harmful approach than embracing it openly.<sup>10</sup>

The secret to constructing a mass society is ideology, which involves the subordination of humans to conceptual schemes deployed by various specialists – religious, philosophical, scientific, political – claiming to represent some kind of higher truth or reality.<sup>11</sup> The key force at play here is reification, which involves taking concepts (imaginary entities we create and exchange in order to model and communicate our ineffable preconceptual experiences) to somehow be *more real* than the sensory information from which they derive. Reification prioritises abstractions over that which can be seen and touched; it resembles the confusion involved in taking a map – potentially a very useful tool – to offer something other than a highly simplified representation of a landmass, as if the map itself were the real entity, and the landmass a mere shadow of its blueprint. Examples of reifications include God, the state, the nation, the economy, society, morality, and the law, all of which are variously assigned the highest degree of authority over our lives, despite the fact that such entities are never actually experienced, instead consisting merely of daydreams. For those convinced of the reality of reified obligations, no longer do we have simple likes and dislikes, as does any wild animal; we instead find ourselves tethered to (allegedly) transcendent and universal values dictated en masse by priests, scientists, and politicians, who promote widespread obedience to but a handful of dictums. Ideology lies at the heart of every

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<sup>9</sup> Social anarchism emerged from the Enlightenment as the anti-authoritarian current of socialism; its proponents usually emphasise the importance of building large-scale libertarian social structures as a means of opposing state power.

<sup>10</sup> Leftists commonly claim that mass society can be rescued by the use of some kind of directly democratic system, typically one involving the use of delegates. As the blueprint goes, delegates would be limited to enacting decisions made by local assemblies, unlike in representative democracies, where administrators make executive decisions. Despite the popularity of such proposals, however, it seems wholly naive to suppose that organisations of delegates could ever perform large-scale political administration without making the vast majority of their decisions independently of local assemblies. Requiring such organisations to avoid assuming governmental roles would deem them incapable of functioning, which is why they always assume the role of the state, something confirmed by large-scale libertarian experiments such as anarchist Catalonia (1936–7) and democratic confederalist Rojava (2011–present).

<sup>11</sup> This discussion is largely based on the ideas of individualist anarchist Max Stirner, particularly as found in his book *The Unique and Its Property* (1845), and as developed in more recent years by anti-civ writers Jason McQuinn and Bellamy Fitzpatrick.

civilisation, because large numbers of strangers can only be expected to submit to centralised rule insofar as they believe in common sets of fictions. By contrast, the reign of ideas is of no consequence to those lawless creatures who recognise no higher calling than the wisdom of their senses; they can be engaged, no doubt, but never of their own accord.

Whereas ideology expands civilisation on a psychological level, its material correlate is technology, the transformation of objects into instruments according to rational design.<sup>12</sup> Broadly speaking, animals develop technologies in order to outdo their physiological limitations, a tendency which, in the case of humans, resulted in everything from the first spears (constructed as a substitute for sharp teeth and claws) to super resolution microscopes and spaceships flown to Mars. The urge for technological empowerment is of course multifaceted, as examples such as clothing, walking sticks, writing, and computer hacking suggest;<sup>13</sup> yet it has also increasingly manifested as a runaway obsession with intervening in wild processes of every kind. Technology feeds the logic of supremacism, convincing its devotees that we humans might be architects of the universe, a supernatural or even divine force, for whom no features of our habitat – be they as tiny as atoms or genes, or as vast as the Earth’s atmosphere – are beyond radical manipulation. Moreover, besides reducing the biosphere to mere fuel and parts for the megamachine, another thing to note about technological domination is a certain paradox it involves, namely, that although the point is to increase human capacities, it tends to make us *less* free. Civilised humans have increased their collective efficiency massively, but only through an immense process of specialisation, one which redefines us as workers fashioned to perform highly limited, often unimportant and mind-numbing tasks in exchange for a wage. By contrast, whereas individual foragers would have had access to way fewer technologies, many would have been remarkably independent, acquiring food from a wide variety of sources, using medicinal plants to heal others and themselves, and constructing their own shelter, clothing, and other tools (all without bureaucracy or imported materials). Marxists and social anarchists usually champion technological society, arguing that its liberatory potential could be unleashed if only it were put in the right hands. But this assumption fails to notice that widespread technological dependency – no matter the professed beliefs or intentions of those “in charge” – can only enmesh its users within a vast and uncontrollable apparatus, utterly dependent on machines and their anonymous technicians for being fed, clothed, fixed, transported, and entertained.

In sum, civilisation can most concisely be characterised as the tendency for life to organise itself along centralised lines – to “civilise” is only another word for unification, domination, homogenisation, assimilation. This has been a continual undercurrent of the discussion so far: Cities incorporate surrounding landscapes and peoples into a single set of walls, ruled by one flag, language, and law; agriculture replaces wild ecologies with artificial ones, burying them under increasingly vast and simplified monocultures; mass society demands unity over diversity, treating uncontrollable elements as a threat to the common good; ideology degrades the lived ex-

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<sup>12</sup> This is an attempt at offering a workable definition of a dubious term. Anti-civ writers such as David Watson and John Zerzan have defined technology more narrowly, regarding it as something like a complex of social relations aiming towards the assimilation of all local technics (small-scale usage of tools/machines) into a totalising system. However, besides conflicting with the everyday usage of the term, this definition risks obscuring the potentially disastrous use of local technics.

<sup>13</sup> Rather than opposing technology altogether, this piece rejects technological domination, whereby potentially autonomous organisms (human and otherwise) are reduced to the appendages of artificial infrastructures of production and control.

perience of individual humans, subsuming their unique perspectives into monolithic systems of conceptual rule; technological domination applies this logic to material reality, remoulding myriad lifeforms into the tools of inherently centralised and ecocidal industries. To note, this critique suggests no inherent problem with permanent settlement, tending plants, organising collectively, theorising reality, or developing technics. Instead, the essence of civilisation is the application of these practices towards subsuming that which is local and uncontrolled into a totalitarian whole.



## II. Smash Speciesism – *and* Civilisation

Along with the development of an anti-civ praxis, another key current of anarchist struggle over the last decades has concerned the domination of other animals. This is often phrased with reference to speciesism, that is, an ideology which posits a moral hierarchy between species of animals, where members of one species are somehow considered *better than* another, and therefore worthier of preferential treatment. This hierarchy or chain of being is typically described as placing humanity at the top, usually with reference to some quality – say, rationality – which allegedly makes us extra-special. Nonhuman species are consigned a lesser status, thereby confirming their suitability for exploitation and enslavement<sup>1</sup> by the insatiable economy of Leviathan, whether as pets, labourers, test objects, exhibits, game, clothing, or food.

Most civilised humans agree that how a bird or a beetle lives is not “up to them” – they are not authors of their lives. At no point do they assume a higher purpose, step outside the limits of immediate experience, or consciously create who they are. Indeed, there’s every reason to suggest that, for the immense number of animal lifeforms known to exist, this description is roughly accurate. Key to the speciesist mentality, however, is the refusal to include *Homo sapiens* in such a picture; allegedly humans are uniquely capable of outdoing our animality, of directing fate as we see fit. This idea is deeply rooted in the ideology of Western civilisation, having assumed its most explicit expression in the doctrines of Christianity, which taught that humans – in sole possession of a free will – were created in the image of God to rule over the world. More recently, the period known as the Enlightenment occasioned the demise of Christianity in Europe and many of its colonies; yet its replacement by secular humanism – the ideology claiming (among other things) that humanity can use science and technology to master reality – has served to preserve the central message of traditional Western religion, namely, that humans are fundamentally apart from other animals.<sup>2</sup>

This humanistic attitude is much more pervasive than it often seems. For example, it gets reproduced by a great deal of ecological discourse, the subtly anthropocentric kind which singles out *Homo sapiens* as a uniquely nasty or evil species. Such thinking identifies human behaviour as some kind of radical departure from natural evolution, producing a supreme (albeit malevolent) force over the planet, in the lack of whom everything would be more or less fine. Rather than

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<sup>1</sup> An obvious response would denounce such a characterisation as racist. However, readers should bear in mind that the tendency to feel insulted by comparisons between humans and other animals is largely a Judeo-Christian import. By contrast, the indigenous humans of West Africa frequently considered other animals to be familial relations rather than aliens, worthy of esteem or even spiritual reverence, and comparisons might have been taken as a compliment (the same goes for many precolonial Native Americans, as well as animistic cultures more generally). To reserve the term “slavery” exclusively for human beings suggests that *Homo sapiens* are fundamentally apart from other animals, a view which opponents of European colonialism should arguably reject.

<sup>2</sup> For an illuminating critique of humanism, see John Gray’s *Straw Dogs: Thoughts on Humans and Other Animals* (Granta Books, 2002). It might be summarised as arguing that human life is no more special than that of slime mould, in spite of everything modern Western minds (both religious and secular) hold up as proof of our exceptional status – free will, rationality, morality, technology, progress, and so on.

seeing our activity as manifestations of elemental forces which are always in circulation, this tendency portrays the species – even when subject to scorn – as powerful enough to create something new under the sun. But ecological catastrophes were not invented by human beings; nor was exploitation, domination, or technology.<sup>3</sup> We're not so special: we cannot save the world or destroy it – nobody can. In its rawest, most potent expressions, anti-speciesism means waking up to the inescapable fact of one's own animality, along with the refusal of any kind of human exceptionalism.

An especially relevant misconception has it that humans were the inventors of resistance to domination. This view – just as popular among sympathetic activists – portrays other animals as voiceless, helpless victims, utterly subdued by superior exploitative forces, no less dependant on human courage and goodwill for improvements in their circumstances. Yet this is only an extension of the classic anthropocentric paradigm which regards all nonhumans as passive, mindless objects. On the contrary, many other animals' experiences of the world seem at least as vivid as our own, no less defined by unlimited nuances of pain and pleasure, rich in sensuality, intellect, language, and sociability. And these complex life stories are often significantly shaped by various struggles – for improved conditions, freedom, or just plain revenge – against human domination. When rhesus monkeys escape from the cages of vivisection labs by picking the locks, or elephants attack their trainers instead of performing circus tricks, they demonstrate that anti-speciesist revolt originates from such animals themselves, not from human intervention.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the libertarian-communist Errico Malatesta famously claimed that 'we anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves,' it applies with no less force that animal liberation is only really liberatory when it follows from the self-willed activity of those held captive. The role of human comrades, meanwhile, cannot be to "save" the imprisoned individuals, merely to provide assistance to a fight which is already raging.

Anarchist anti-speciesists have had a major impact on this fight over the last decades. Among other virtues, such comrades have often recognised that animal liberation is ineffective when single-issue or reformist, and is best combined with broader struggles against political structures such as the state, economic structures such as capitalism, and more generally systems of oppression including (but not limited to) white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism, and cissexism. Far from being isolated concerns, each of these structures reinforce one another in profound ways, to the extent that limiting one's focus to one or two of them means strengthening many of the social relations responsible for animal exploitation. The contrasting approach – broadly speaking, the animal rights view – attempts to reconcile anti-speciesism with the current order, along with its laws, courts, prisons, and cops. As such, by seeking to extend rights or even citizenship from humanity to other animals, animal rights activism merely deepens the fundamental mistake made by statist in general, that is, the assumption that being trapped by the body politic might

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<sup>3</sup> Regarding ecological catastrophe, note that as many as six periods of mass extinction have preceded the current one, with previous die-offs having potentially been caused by entities as varied as cyanobacteria, trees, meteors, and volcanoes. On exploitation and domination, whilst some relevant theorists (such as Marx, Bookchin, Zerzan) credit humanity with the invention of such relations, this ignores the high levels of manipulation – inclusive of colonisation, slavery, and genocide – which routinely take place between nonhuman organisms of various sorts. On technology, bear in mind that chimpanzees, ravens, and octopuses are among those individuals known to craft tools with a particular function in mind. Moreover, human evolution itself might be retold as the story of the technological enhancement of manifold microbial communities, without whom we never would have existed.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion owes to the text *Fear of the Animal Planet: The Hidden History of Animal Resistance* (Counter-Punch and AK Press, 2010), written by Jason Hribal.

be a liberatory gesture. Besides supposing that the state (and the notions of justice and morality at its foundation) is fit to rule masses of human beings, animal rights activism goes so much further, insisting that other animals should also be subjected to the horrific political structures that we've inflicted on ourselves.

Despite some vital contributions, however, the major weakness of most anarchist approaches to anti-speciesism is that they take the importance of civilisation for granted.<sup>5</sup> A first resulting problem is the failure to question agriculture, a method of subsistence which developed over the millennia as a kind of war on the wild. It's difficult to imagine anything more speciesist than a monoculture, an area of land stolen from innumerable undomesticated animals, radically simplified to sustain members of but a single species. Besides being deprived of their landbase, animals such as birds, mammals, and insects are continually driven away or exterminated by the use of fences, traps, or pesticides, and are killed en masse as a routine procedure when fields are harvested. Liberals often promote veganism as a "compassionate" or "cruelty free" means of sustaining civilisation, failing to recognise that any kind of agriculture – even when decoupled from the direct exploitation of other animals – succeeds only to the extent it realises human supremacy over the terrain. Other than agriculture, the closely related practice of animal husbandry has been another central driving force in the expansion of speciesism. Whereas wild animals frequently live free and bow to no one, domesticated ones are those who – having been broken by a master – are torn from the capacities to live according to their own values and desires. Animals such as sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, and horses were domesticated only through a long process of confinement and mutilation, forced labour and breeding,<sup>6</sup> resulting in significantly redefined creatures who remain as crucial as ever for the functioning of Leviathan. In short, then, there have been no forces more destructive for other animals than civilisation, which destroys habitat on an immense scale whilst enslaving those dispossessed of it.

Despite usually being ignored, anti-speciesist struggles might also benefit greatly from deepening their opposition to cities, technology, and ideology. Cities, besides burying wild habitats under concrete, have deprived humans of direct sensual contact with other animals, reducing them to spectacles to be consumed in documentaries or social media feeds. It isn't so surprising that masses of human beings living in artificial environments, where only the most heavily domesticated nonhumans are likely to be well known, have convinced themselves that their own species is the only one which matters. By contrast, those indigenous humans living *within* wild ecologies seem to have regarded it as obvious that other animals are conscious, intelligent people. Only to the extent that we lack authentic experiences of the more-than-human, and are thereby dependent on scientific, religious, or philosophical experts to guide us, are we likely to think otherwise.

Secondly, the rise of speciesism over the millennia can only be understood in light of the major influence of technology. The biological means granted to *Homo sapiens* – our blunt teeth and relatively weak bodies – offer little inspiration for supremacist urges; technological development

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<sup>5</sup> This claim is made with reference to visible anti-civ/anti-spe discourse in the northern half of Europe (apparently it applies to North America also). The separation of these issues seems at least a bit less commonplace in the southern half of Europe, as is suggested by anarchist journals such as the Italian-speaking *Fenrir* and the Greek-speaking *Adamasto*.

<sup>6</sup> Attempts at domesticating other animals haven't always gone to plan. For example, Ancient Egyptian frescoes suggest failed attempts at enslaving hyenas and antelopes – early examples of successful animal resistance.

has thereby been essential for the (partial) ascendancy of human beings over other animals.<sup>7</sup> Animal husbandry, for example, emerged historically only because of various human inventions, among them cages, chains, fences, prods, leads, whips, and brands.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the development of speciesism also deepened the application of other animals *as* technology, machines to be manipulated without limit in pursuit of maximum productivity (as is perhaps most obvious nowadays in factory farms). Finally, besides causing them direct harm, technological domination also causes immense unintentional harm to other animals, merely as a byproduct of the usual business of Leviathan, as with instruments as varied as motorised vehicles, window panes, artificial lights, plastic bags, chemical fertilisers, river dams, and wind turbines.

Thirdly, ideology is as central as anything for the integrity of speciesism. Aside from confining animals within highly stereotyped species categories,<sup>9</sup> the logic of speciesism rests on the basic assumption of reified thinking, namely, that the concepts humans employ grant us access to some kind of higher reality. Given the apparent lack of popularity of our concepts among other animals, to accept ideology inevitably places humans on a pedestal. Yet to abandon it instead, and admit that (for all we know) our concepts cannot convey mind-independent knowledge, truer than what we receive through the senses, the basis for considering humans to be “higher beings” than other animals collapses beneath our feet. It might be the case that *Homo sapiens* have become especially accomplished in the usage of symbolic thought; yet concepts are nothing special, simply another example of the manifold tools various animals apply to help them make it through the day. Just as bats and dolphins developed sonar, whilst spiders taught themselves to spin webs from silk, humans have streamlined communication through the use of complex language. But to become too distracted by these fictions, even to the extent of granting them primacy over lived experience, only leads to seeing things *less* clearly than those animals who spend little or no time conjuring abstractions. In short, then, refusing speciesism can only entail the death of ideology – a final reason why anti-speciesism is useless when it seeks to protect civilisation.

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<sup>7</sup> The very notion of human supremacy is itself a humanistic delusion. No matter how far humans expand their power with science and technology, untold numbers of other creatures – including rats and pigeons, coronavirus and refrigerator mould – continue to live their lives with utter disregard for our designs.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the infrastructure developed for the purposes of animal husbandry is the very same which was subsequently used to enslave humans.

<sup>9</sup> Instead of attempting to establish equal relations between different species, anti-speciesism might be reconceived in the anti-ideological sense of discarding the notion of species altogether, which masks the unique personality of individual animals behind whichever imagined biological type.

### III. Addressing an Old Tension

If anti-speciesism goes so well with anti-civilisation, why does a rift between the two currents persist? The answer is probably straightforward: anti-speciesists usually have a strong distaste for hunting other animals, whereas anti-civ anarchists frequently favour a revival of hunter-gathering as a means of subsistence. One camp sees other animals as friends or comrades, whilst the other – despite sometimes treating them as friends and comrades too – is also eager to exploit them as resources. The incompatibility has often seemed fundamental. Yet it might rest on a mistaken assumption, namely, that anti-civ anarchy and anarcho-primitivism are one and the same.

Anarcho-primitivism emerged from North America towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century; it was initially forwarded by the Detroit-based journal *Fifth Estate* and is nowadays associated mainly with the writers John Zerzan and Kevin Tucker. Broadly speaking, anarcho-primitivism champions the subsistence practices of indigenous humans, relying on anthropological accounts of their lives (both historical and more contemporary) to argue for a return to a foraging lifestyle. A key element of this approach has been to present often highly idealised depictions of the social and ecological relations of hunter-gatherers, claiming that they did without human-on-human hierarchy – no patriarchy, xenophobia, or economic inequality – as well as ecological despoilment.<sup>1</sup> Despite these rosy descriptions, anarcho-primitivists often put a heavy emphasis on the importance of hunting other animals as a means of sustaining oneself outside of civilisation,<sup>2</sup> thereby placing a barrier between themselves and most anti-speciesists. However, whilst anarcho-primitivism has been at the forefront of popularising anti-civ ideas over the last decades, a growing number of voices from within the anti-civ milieu have since chosen to distance themselves from the label and many of its surrounding ideas.<sup>3</sup> This has opened up the possibility of an anti-civ critique which, in rejecting primitivism, refuses an ideology which clings to an image of traditional hunter-gathering as the ultimate model for contemporary anarchist praxis. Of course, this piece has made use of some of the information available on foraging humans, and for good reason: their stories demonstrate that urbanisation, agriculture, and mass society are but relatively recent additions to human relations, inventions which place severe restrictions on our capacities to live unsubmitively. Yet we can appreciate these insights without hopelessly seeking to emulate hunter-gatherers, who

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<sup>1</sup> These misconceptions have been debunked by a number of writers. For a classic example, see *The Truth About Primitive Life: A Critique of Anarcho-Primitivism* (2008), written by Ted Kaczynski.

<sup>2</sup> There are also definite exceptions to this claim. Leyla AbelRahim and Ria Montana both strongly oppose hunting in favour of veganism, yet nonetheless retain the term “anarcho-primitivist” to describe their anti-civ views.

<sup>3</sup> On this topic, Bellamy Fitzpatrick’s *Corrosive Consciousness* (Enemy Combatant Publications, 2017) is highly recommended. Other notable examples of anti-civ texts which are also anti-primitivist include David Watson’s “Swamp Fever, Primitivism & the ‘Ideological Vortex’: Farewell to All That” (*Fifth Estate*, 350, 1997), Jason McQuinn’s *Why I am not a Primitivist*, and Wolfi Landstreicher’s *A Critique, Not a Program: For a Non-Primitivist Anti-Civilization Critique* (Intellectual Vagabond Editions).

thrived in an era in which immensely fewer humans lived on a planet consisting more or less entirely of unspoilt wilderness.<sup>4</sup>

More specifically, the rest of this section asks whether – in attempting to combine the refusal of speciesism and Leviathan – we might separate anti-civ praxis from the usual appraisal of hunting. Such an approach is pretty unorthodox; in rejecting primitivism, however, it becomes easier to notice that most celebrations of indigenous hunting practices by Western critics of civilisation are works of fantasy. For example, in *The Practice of the Wild* (1990), poet and deep ecologist Gary Snyder notes that ‘each creature is a spirit with an intelligence as brilliant as our own’, only to tell us in the next paragraph that ‘Other beings (the instructors from the old ways tell us) do not mind being killed and eaten as food, but they expect us to say please, and thank you, and they hate to see themselves wasted.’ In another brilliant book, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997), similar confusion is offered by eco-phenomenologist David Abram, who claims that, during a successful hunt, many indigenous humans ‘will speak directly to the dying animal, praising it, promising respect, and thanking it for offering itself to them.’ Similarly, in *The Vegetarian Myth* (2009), meat-fanatic Lierre Keith quotes an anthropologist approvingly: “If [indigenous] people suffered food shortages they were apt not to say, ‘I cannot kill deer any more,’ but rather, ‘Deer don’t want to die for me.’” Going even further, fellow anti-civ writer Derrick Jensen claims in *Endgame* (2006) that, whilst glowing in the light of his open fridge, a piece of dead salmon once told him: “If you help take out the dams that will help us survive. Then you can kill and eat all the salmon you’d like. We will even jump out of the water right to where you are waiting.” In *Meditations on Hunting* (1972), lastly, philosopher and hunt-enthusiast José Ortega y Gasset seems certain that ‘the greatest and most moral homage we can pay to certain animals on certain occasions is to kill them with certain means and rituals.’

These are generic examples of the outright ridiculous lengths some anti-civ types will go to when attempting to justify hunting. In short, the basic idea showing up time and again is that hunting other animals is somehow based on mutual respect. As potential prey, they consent to being hunted, do not mind it, or even enjoy themselves; conversely, as potential predators, human beings kill and eat other animals as an expression of our love and appreciation for them. Anti-civ anarchists do well to point out that it’s highly preferable to hunt rather than domesticate animals, given that doing so avoids enslaving such individuals in the process of utilising them. Yet it has also been a common mistake to suggest that hunting other animals could ever be free from exploitation. Such a practice can only mean using, coercing, hurting, and objectifying someone, relating to them exclusively in terms of what they can do for you. Nor should we deny the inherent domination involved in a process – fundamentally about power and control – in which a predator subdues its prey and makes it theirs, destroying their autonomy in the process. There is no respect to be shown here, certainly not for the hunted individual. Such colourful imaginings merely serve to calm the conscience of the predator; they are plainly of no use to the dying prey. An honest account can only acknowledge that hunting somebody is one of the worst things we can do to them.

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<sup>4</sup> We should be honest in something that anarcho-primitivists have been reluctant to accept, namely, that reverting to a foraging lifestyle wholly independent of domesticated food-sources is totally unrealistic for almost all humans alive today. On this note, the North American anti-civ journal *Backwoods* has had the good sense to focus on permaculture and forest gardening – ecologically manipulative, yet also potentially highly regenerative means of subsistence – as genuinely practicable means of deserting Leviathan.

How has this simple point proven impossible for many to grasp? Presumably an enduring tension is at play: On the one hand, those sympathetic to hunter-gathering are usually eager to regard other animals as friends or familiar relations, intelligent individuals worthy of respect or even spiritual reverence; on the other hand, it is taken as vitally important to hunt and kill such animals, to overpower and exploit them, treating them as violently as we would our worst enemies. It should come as little surprise, then, that humans throughout the ages have invented feel-good narratives to soften the contradiction. Insofar as the commitment to hunting is final, it can only make sense (for those willing to partake in a serious delusion) to suppose that those we butcher are grateful for this ‘most moral homage’.

For those who, despite being at odds with Leviathan, won’t pretend that hunting is something other than it is, we might have a basis to prefer avoiding it.<sup>5</sup> Yet there’s a very important response to consider here. To take seriously an aversion to hunting arguably means drawing bold and fanciful lines through reality, splitting animals – as if they were the only individuals worthy of concern – from everything else, which is reduced to irrelevant and dead matter. Whereas the norm in Western civilisation has been to distinguish humans from all other beings along metaphysical<sup>6</sup> lines, thereby making humanity and the moral community one and the same, anti-speciesism risks repositioning the same kind of reified divide elsewhere. Animals are regarded as conscious individuals deserving of kindness and protection; yet everything else – perhaps all beings lacking a central nervous system, including plants, microbes, and minerals, as well as larger entities such as forests, mountains, and planets – are taken as passive, insensate, idiotic stuff, fundamentally lesser compared to us clever animals. Here we have another feel-good narrative, this time pretending that we can use non-animals as resources whilst doing them no harm, because animals are the only beings to whom harm can be done at all. Liberal and radical vegans alike are usually happy to assume such a position (perhaps modern science, at its current limits, could be used in justification). But it must be said that this view is eminently civilised, standing in stark contrast to the innumerable ways of seeing and feeling maintained by many indigenous humans since time immemorial. These perspectives are often grouped under the umbrella term “animism”, which refers to any kind of worldview that refuses to draw sharp boundaries between animate and inanimate matter, instead regarding all objects – a snake traversing the desert, a rock silently sprouting lichens – as both physically and mentally active individuals, co-creators of our common reality.<sup>7</sup> Instead of simply rearranging the chain of being, as does civilised anti-speciesism, animistic sensibilities destroy all such attempts to categorise re-

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<sup>5</sup> No moral prescriptions are being made here. Rather than attempting to determine how we ought to behave, this piece merely highlights some overlooked considerations presumably of interest to those serious about resisting exploitation, both of others and themselves. Let our own lived experience determine what must be done to make it through the day.

<sup>6</sup> Metaphysics (from Latin: *meta*, meaning “behind” or “beyond,” and *physics*, meaning “natural things”) is often defined as the branch of philosophy dealing with themes that supposedly lie beyond the realm of mundane knowledge. However, given the impossibility of ever experiencing something beyond our perceptions of the here and now, and thereby figuring out how the world *really* works, all metaphysical commitments can only be revealed as articles of faith.

<sup>7</sup> For a definitive account of animism in contrast to rationalism, see David Abram’s *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Vintage Books, 1997), an evocative and special book. It was Abram’s genius to apply phenomenology, a skeptical philosophical movement associated with Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, towards providing an intelligible account of animism for a modern Western audience. To describe any kind of object as “animate”, argues Abram, is simply the most straightforward way of understanding our spontaneous experience of it, prior to the application of definitions and other conceptions.

ality hierarchically, revealing these grand metaphysical schemes to be fairytales. For the current discussion, such a turn is wholly inconvenient, because it denies any hope of an easy answer separating “fair game” from the individuals we owe respect. Seemingly there are no non-exploitative options: in order to make it through the day, we need to consume *something* in order to survive. Why prioritise animals over everything else, given that intelligence and the will to live extend so much further?

At this point the discussion often breaks down, splitting the civilised anti-speciesists from the wild hunter-gatherers. However, in taking a position against both speciesism *and* Leviathan, we might notice that regarding everything as alive hardly implies taking it all to be the same. Animals strive with no greater passion to make it through the day; nor are their lives intrinsically more meaningful; nor should they somehow be considered better or higher beings. Nonetheless, despite recognising a boar, a sage bush, and a geode as fundamentally alike, each as brilliant as the other, there are definite peculiarities to how we might like to interact with each of them.

Are animals the only organisms with whom humans can potentially make friends? Conversely, are their cultures the only ones to whom we might potentially be known as enemies? At the least, it seems that humans are distinctly liable to being psychologically disturbed by the experience of inflicting suffering on animals. Perhaps this explains why indigenous humans have often attributed a uniquely grave significance to the act of killing them, making other animals the objects of the most decorated rituals. Indeed, this solemn anxiety surrounding the hunt – as well as its close correspondence with myth-making – seems to have been present in the mind of at least one Westerner determined to escape civilisation, Ted Kaczynski.<sup>8</sup> Recounting his rewilding experiences in an interview with *Blackfoot Valley Dispatch*, he once mentioned that, every time he shot and killed a snowshoe rabbit, ‘I [would] say aloud “Thank you, Grandfather Rabbit” – Grandfather Rabbit is a kind of demigod I’ve invented who is the tutelary spirit of all the snowshoe rabbits.’ It will strike many readers as unsurprising that he seems to have had no impulse to invent a demigod for the spinach or potatoes he grew for food in his garden, nor even for the trees he used as firewood. These points speak of the subtle peculiarities that human minds, both civilised and wild, often attribute to other animals, our closest and most familiar nonhuman kin.

Nonetheless, some would respond that these points are anthropocentric. Compared with plants and fungi, other animals are more similar to us humans, hence we can empathise and communicate with them better, more easily appreciate their intelligence, feel their joy and their pain as our own. Doesn’t such an approach amount to little more than prioritising those beings who most resemble humans? In a definite sense it does. Yet we should bear in mind that all of our decisions must come with at least a hint of anthropocentrism, given that one’s mental states are never disembodied or objective, and can only ever be contained by the limited and biased perspective of a particular organism – in our case that of a human being. Bear in mind, however, that this isn’t at all anthropocentrism as we usually understand it, in the fundamentally Christian sense which regards humans as uniquely rational or spiritual beings, and thereby elevates *Homo sapiens* above all other creatures. We’ve departed the terrain of moralism here, of reifying

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<sup>8</sup> In his late twenties, Kaczynski abandoned a promising academic career for a reclusive life in the woods of Montana. Besides familiarising himself with hunting and gathering techniques, in 1978 he embarked on a fierce letter-bombing campaign, being dubbed “the Unabomber” by the media for targeting universities and commercial airlines. Under the recommendation of the FBI, who had little hope of solving their longest and most expensive case, both the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* published the Unabomber’s anti-tech manifesto, *Industrial Society and its Future*, in 1995. Kaczynski was arrested the following year, and currently resides in ADX Florence, Colorado.



personal preferences to the level of universals; it's merely a matter of noticing that – when forced to choose – organisms very frequently consume those beings to whom they relate less easily.

Of course this response is pretty arbitrary. Another approach – one focused more on the needs of others than our own gut feelings – might draw attention to the fact that, rather than simply being creatures we prefer, animals usually have physiologies which mean that they cannot be consumed without being killed. You can only eat a piece of a buffalo, for example, by ending the life of that creature altogether – a wholly exploitative gesture. By contrast, the constitution of many plants is such that they can be consumed without harming them. When consuming fruit from a tree, humans might even benefit the parent-organism (also the broader habitat) by spreading its seeds elsewhere, thereby playing an intimate role in its reproduction. Nuts and legumes can also often be eaten without killing or damaging the parent, a relationship which – whilst lacking the mutualistic element of consumption from fruit-trees – at least potentially avoids harm. Grains, herbs, and mushrooms can usually be consumed only by damaging the organism, although many such creatures are resilient to being partially eaten, insofar as their roots/mycelium are not removed. Lastly, the consumption of plants which are consumed whole or targeted for their roots – garden vegetables, for example – might indeed involve a degree of exploitation comparable to that involved in hunting an animal (even if most vegetables do not live beyond a season). Overall, however, there remains a definite sense in which the consumption of plants and fungi enables one to ask how to enter symbiosis with the organism at hand, or at least to minimise harm. No such question can be posed with hunting, a practice which – as far as the individuals involved are concerned – is very much all or nothing.<sup>9</sup>

Plenty have interpreted nihilism<sup>10</sup> as a kind of free for all, one in which the liberation from moral fetters invites us to kill and maim whoever we wish without the slightest concern for empathy or remorse. Indeed there's nothing objectively wrong with such an approach. Yet for those of us interested in living anarchy – those myriad situations in which we know ourselves neither as master nor slave – it can't be enough. The above considerations therefore concern themselves with asking how we might sustain ourselves whilst minimising the exploitation caused in the process. Not because it's the "right thing" to do, because you're a shitty person if you don't; simply because (for some of us) it opens up those moments in which we feel most alive.

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<sup>9</sup> Whereas these thoughts refer to the consumption of wild organisms, something similar applies to the consumption of domesticated food-sources also (which is at least as important to consider, given the distinct lack of foraging opportunities available for most humans alive today). Animal husbandry – even when it assumes a relatively benign form – arguably always amounts to slavery; yet it seems less clear that such a characterisation applies to the tending of plants and fungi. For example, note that organisms without a central nervous system, despite moving a great deal, usually do not change places of their own accord. A cabbage plant presumably cares little for being enclosed in a fence (indeed a fence would not be necessary), but that could hardly be said of a rabbit. Without suggesting an answer here, we should be willing to ask: where is the coercion involved in sowing a seed and watering it?

<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, nihilism (from Latin: *nihil*, meaning "nothing") might be described as a thoroughgoing rejection of monotheism and its consequences; not merely of God, but also the various ideals – frequently maintained by vocal atheists – which were largely built upon the foundations laid by traditional religion, including morality, justice, progress, utopia, objective truth, and intrinsic value. More specifically, the kind of nihilism mentioned above is moral nihilism, the rejection of right and wrong, of supposedly universal values determining how we're obliged to behave.

## IV. Hunting and the Spawning of Civilisation

Whereas it was previously argued that speciesism is thoroughly enmeshed within the dynamics of civilisation, this last section asks if the opposite is also true, if the origins of Leviathan are significantly grounded in prehistoric hunting practices. To pose such a question inevitably conflicts with anti-civ orthodoxy, which takes domestication as *the* historical shift responsible not merely for the rise of civilisation, but for the rise of oppressive relations altogether. As is definitive of anarcho-primitivism, Zerzan and Tucker argue that domination and alienation first arose about 10,000 years ago, and only among those indigenous humans who first adopted agriculture or animal husbandry. With the emergence of this new subsistence strategy, a sudden and fundamental break with prehistory allegedly came about, spoiling an era in which humans across the globe experienced a complete lack (or at least very little) of conflict, territorialism, ownership, division of labour, starvation, and disease, in addition to living in harmony with other-than-humans.<sup>1</sup> Without doubt, this approach gets at something important: as has been fundamental for this essay, there's no chance of significantly understanding or disrupting the current order whilst ignoring the role that domestication – of flora, other animals, and humans – plays in sustaining it. However, in placing such a heavy emphasis on one element among potentially many, an-prims have failed to ask whether domestication was only an intensification of a war on the wild which had already long since existed, until then mainly assuming the form of hunting.<sup>2</sup>

If hunting is defined more broadly (for example, as including the killing of lizards, insects, or small mammals, as well as the theft of eggs), nobody could guess when prehistoric humans<sup>3</sup> or their ancestors first took it up – perhaps it has always been around. At some point in human evolution, however, hunting apparently assumed a more refined, warlike form, involving the targeting of larger mammals with the use of coordinated strategies and relatively sophisticated technologies. When exactly such a practice – call it “planned hunting” – first arose can never

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<sup>1</sup> In his essay “Future Primitive”, Zerzan claims that ‘life before domestication/agriculture was in fact largely one of leisure, intimacy with nature, sensual wisdom, sexual equality, and health’, and also that humans altogether ‘did not know alienation or domination’ (from *Future Primitive: And Other Essays*, Autonomedia, 1994). Similarly, Tucker claims in *Against Cultivation and in Defense of Wildness* that ‘anarcho-primitivists focus on the dawn of domestication as the origins of our current dilemma, because above all else, this is the definite event in which the social ills we are all faced with now begin.’

<sup>2</sup> To be clear, none of the historical speculation offered in this piece attempts to reveal “the truth” of the matter. Civilised minds have often referred to the past with a sense of certainty, supposing that our inherently limited and biased perspectives (besides being capable of knowing what *really* happened just five minutes ago) are powerful enough to objectively discover how things were millennia before. Yet history is not a portal into the past; it is merely the construction of more or less durable fictions in the present. No amount of data or analysis can overcome the inability of animals – humans included – to experience something beyond the here and now. And in that sense the past will always remain an unknown chaos.

<sup>3</sup> Use of the term “human” should no longer be taken as referring exclusively to *Homo sapiens*, but to all members of the genus *Homo*, including *Homo ergaster* (who lived in eastern and southern Africa a million and a half years ago), *Homo erectus* (who thrived in the east of Asia for close to two million years), and *Homo neanderthalensis* (who roamed western Eurasia throughout the Last Ice Age).

be known for sure, nor the extent to which it became generalised among foraging humans.<sup>4</sup> Yet even a cautious approach to the available archaeological data suggests that, many millennia before human hands routinely sowed seeds or made livestock of wild animals, planned hunting had a devastating impact.

The Late Pleistocene was the geological period spanning about 120,000 years between the end of the Last Ice Age and the emergence of human civilisation. One of its defining features was the expansion of *Homo sapiens* across the globe, another was the extinction of a remarkably large portion of the planet's megafauna, especially mammals. Roughly 70,000 years ago, when *Homo sapiens* successfully established themselves beyond Africa, there were around 200 genera (groupings of species) of large terrestrial mammals (those weighing over fifty kilograms). Yet the archaeological record suggests that, by the time of the Agricultural Revolution, that number had been cut in half – only about 100 of these genera remained. Unlike in Africa and Eurasia, this wave of extinctions seems to have been most pronounced on those continents where *Homo sapiens* arrived suddenly. In Australia, for example, the arrival of our ancestors – presumably by boat around 45,000 years ago – corresponds with the sudden loss of over 90% of the island's large animals. Included among those eradicated were marsupial lions and flightless birds twice the size of ostriches, the largest terrestrial lizards known to have existed, as well as giant kangaroos, -koalas, and -wombats. Something similar then seemed to play out in the Americas, where humans probably first arrived by foot around 16,000 years ago, crossing from Siberia to Alaska via the Bering Strait. They were met with mammoths, mastodons, camels, horses, sabre-toothed cats, and giant ground sloths, all of whom thrived in the Americas at the time; yet none of them survived the next two thousand years. During this relatively short period, 70% of the genera of large mammals of North America went extinct, along with 80% of those of South America.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps such a stark outcome is unsurprising. We can hardly overstate the extent to which human colonisers would have been empowered by advanced technologies, potentially including spears, axes, and arrows tipped with flaked rock, as well as the controlled use of fire for clearing dense forest into grasslands. Having no prior experience of *Homo sapiens*, the indigenous creatures of Australia and the Americas would have lacked the knowledge necessary to weather their advance; conversely, the newly arrived must have seen the locals as aliens, requiring generations of cohabitation to treat them less severely.<sup>6</sup> As ever, the details cannot be known, and

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<sup>4</sup> Current estimates on when planned hunting began vary extremely widely. Suffice it to say that it predated domestication by some thousands of years, and was a focal activity for those human cultures which later developed civilisation. It should also be mentioned that, whereas we might use archaeological evidence to speculate as to when *some* humans took up planned hunting, this is quite apart from the hopeless question of asking when humanity altogether took it up. It could easily be that divergent attitudes on hunting are not new at all. Might some Stone Age humans have hunted other animals' cultures into oblivion, whilst other humans – either entire cultures or individuals living within them – took no interest or actively opposed such practices?

<sup>5</sup> Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of The Third Chimpanzee* (Vintage Books, 2004); Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens* (Harper, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> We might ask whether a similar dynamic led to the demise of *Homo neanderthalensis*, a human species who went extinct around 30,000 years ago, just around the time *Homo sapiens* were spreading throughout their homelands in Eurasia. Whilst anthropologists disagree on whether or not genocide at the hands of our ancestors contributed to the loss of the Neanderthals, it remains a leading theory. Relevantly, to the extent such an explanation is favoured, the planned hunting of nonhumans must have been an essential precursor. In much the same way as human slavery applies the routine treatment of nonhuman livestock to members of our own species, prehistoric genocides would have drawn on the weaponry, mentalities, and social forms long since used for hunting other animals, merely applying them to the slaughter of human beings.

what appears clearer remains informed guesswork. Nonetheless, it seems impossible to ask how so many species were lost during the Late Pleistocene without implicating planned hunting as a decisive factor.<sup>7</sup>

Anarcho-primitivism is one of numerous ideologies which seeks to undermine oppression by contrasting the horrors of the present with a prelapsarian past, an era of prehistory in which humans lived wholly in balance both with nature and each other. Such notions are comforting, because they allow us to believe that the current situation – defined as it is by death and catastrophe – is some kind of abnormality, a mere passing nightmare to be followed by a return to bliss. Yet the extinctions mentioned above are but one major reason to doubt such a highly simplistic chronology.<sup>8</sup> Many leftists point to capitalism as the source of ecological catastrophe; anti-civ orthodoxy points instead to domestication; whereas the current discussion questions whether ecocide induced by *Homo sapiens* can be discussed in terms of “origins” at all.

Moving on, besides wreaking havoc prior to the Agricultural Revolution, planned hunting might also have played a decisive role in the birth of Leviathan itself. The first thing to note here is that the domestication of animals merely involved the deepening of a longstanding exploitative relationship, not its invention out of nothing. Hunting must have routinised violence and coercion against nonhuman prey, presumably to the extent that such interactions became mundane, thereby providing a crucial stepping stone for the rise of animal husbandry. This must have corresponded with the incubation a speciesist mindset, one which justified the predation of other animals on the basis of their lesser status,<sup>9</sup> leading the way – very gradually and over the millenia – towards their eventual enslavement. Lacking countless generations of practice in hunting, animal husbandry could only have been impossible (along with cities and agriculture also, both of which are consistently described as emerging thousands of years later, and were largely built off the backs of abducted animals and their descendants).

Planned hunting might also have played a crucial role in the development of centralisation, patriarchy, ideology, and the culture/nature divide – all of them core features of civilisation. Beginning with centralisation, anti-civ anarchists do well to emphasise that farming – with its stored surplus, division of labour, and gradual massification of human relations – could hardly have thrived without inducing extensive bureaucracy and specialisation (a process which later culminated in the rise of cities, settlements of such a size that they cannot possibly function without governments). However, it would be a mistake to leave planned hunting out of this account,

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<sup>7</sup> The chief rival explanation of these mass extinctions is climate change. Yet such an approach cannot explain why extensive megafaunal loss during the Late Pleistocene appears to have been absent in the oceans, and also on those landmasses where humans arrived much later. Moreover, there are other cases where the sudden human colonisation of once isolated landmasses – such as on Wrangel Island in the Arctic Ocean (4,000 years ago), New Zealand (800 years ago), and the Galapagos Islands (200 years ago) – corresponds with the loss of many indigenous species of animals; only these cases, being more recent and hence more easily documentable, leave little or no room for shifting the blame away from planned hunting.

<sup>8</sup> Whereas this discussion has focused on the domination of other animals by *Homo sapiens* prior to domestication, we might also refer to the not insignificant evidence both of oppressive tendencies within groups of hunter-gatherers, as well as of conflict or even outright warfare between different tribes. We can say that Leviathan massively amplified these tendencies – already sufficient grounds for opposing it – without suggesting that it invented them.

<sup>9</sup> Some anti-civ anarchists would contest this point, given that hunter-gatherers are usually regarded as seeing themselves as equally valuable compared with other animals. Yet such a characterisation should be rejected, given that most human foragers apparently refused to treat members of their own species as fair game: this suggests that they had already adopted speciesism on some level, taking *Homo sapiens* to possess some kind of unique dignity which made them unfit for predation.

given that it must have been one of the oldest human practices which necessitated hierarchy. Unlike foraging for plants and fungi, which fosters the autonomy of individuals and small groups, it's difficult to imagine how humans could have regularly used Stone Age technology to prey on large mammals – woolly mammoths and rhinoceroses, among others – without developing strong leadership and discipline. Whereas Zerzan associates chieftainship with civilisation,<sup>10</sup> it seems baseless to suppose that such a social form didn't predate domestication, especially given its more recent documentation among hunter-gatherers.<sup>11</sup> And to the extent that it did, we should seriously consider whether planned hunting – a distinctly masculine expression of strength and courage in the face of alien danger – was the main activity from which such authority was derived.

On that note, any attempt to explain the origins of gender and patriarchy without reference to planned hunting seems especially limited. Zerzan attributes great significance to gender, which he describes as the artificially imposed sexual division of labour, arguing that – having arisen thousands of years prior to domestication – it lay certain foundations (specialisation, separation, hierarchy) which were later vastly expanded upon by agriculture and animal husbandry.<sup>12</sup> But he offers no explanation for how 'the gender revolution' successfully established itself tens of thousands of years prior to domestication, around the beginning of the Late Stone Age; perhaps because such an explanation cannot fail to emphasize hunting? Gathering wild plants and fungi (as well as non-planned hunting and scavenging) is often compatible with pregnancy and child-care, and was therefore unlikely to have provoked the rise of gender among humans. By contrast, planned hunting – with its prolonged, militaristic campaigns – usually excludes those committed to reproductive roles. Within the sphere of likely activities regularly engaged in by pre-civ foragers, it's difficult to imagine a more significant basis upon which humans might have began dividing themselves along gendered lines, attributing their reproductive organs major social significance.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, besides separating men from women, planned hunting probably contributed to the *hierarchical* arrangement of these categories, to the formation of patriarchy. Among those foragers who relied most heavily on planned hunting (as a source of identity and authority, as well as for food and other essential materials in harsh, previously uncolonised habitats), men must have acquired an increasingly superior status, along with the skills and mentalities most useful for exerting social control. Zerzan makes no mistake in describing domestication as a fundamentally masculine expression, 'as male energy subduing female nature, one frontier after another.' Yet this dynamic – the combined domination of women and the more-than-human – is displayed at least as clearly in the much older practice of planned hunting, upon which Leviathan must have been an elaboration.

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<sup>10</sup> "Agriculture" (from *Elements of Refusal*, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Whilst most hunter-gatherers seem to have had immensely less hierarchy than civilised humans, chieftainship doesn't seem to have been completely absent either (as is suggested, for example, by some anthropological accounts of the Aborigines of Australia and the Sirionó of the Amazon).

<sup>12</sup> Zerzan, *Patriarchy, Civilization, and the Origins of Gender*.

<sup>13</sup> Along with any historical speculation offered in this text, this description shouldn't be taken as offering a universal story, as if gender was adopted according to a singular sequence by humanity as a whole. The heterogeneity of gender is confirmed by its expression in much queerer, nonbinary forms by plenty of indigenous humans (the Aashtime of Maale culture and the Māhū of precolonial Hawaii and Tahiti are but two examples), whilst apparently being ignored completely by others (such as the Yoruba of the Niger Delta, who prior to colonisation lacked terms for "man" and "woman", instead favouring age as a basis of social differentiation).

Onto ideology, lacking reference to planned hunting, any account of how the reign of ideas established itself over human minds must be incomplete. Prior to the invention of fictions such as God, the state, morality, or society, reification would have been used to justify hunting, which (as has already been discussed) involved killing creatures that indigenous humans frequently saw as kin. In order to convince oneself that preying on someone could be an expression of love or respect for them, it becomes necessary to take some kind of abstraction – either the idea of their invisible spirit, or else of their species – to somehow be *more real* than the living, breathing organism at hand. Hunt rituals might thereby be described as concerning the subordination of senuous life to abstractions, with imaginary entities being served over the needs of actually existing individuals. Such practices have no doubt become highly common in the modern era; yet plenty of *Homo sapiens* may have experimented with them first in an attempt to ease the difficult emotions which often arise from hunting.

Lastly, perhaps the most fundamental feature of a civilised mind is the tendency to divide culture from nature, to regard human affairs as somehow distinct from the realm of wild, uncontrollable, other-than-human forces. Anti-civ discourse has pointed out that this illusory separation is largely grounded in agriculture, an approach to subsistence which relies on subordinating ecological processes to human control, as well as urbanisation, which distinguishes itself from nomadism by the creation of artificially designed habitats. Without doubt, such shifts must have been decisive for convincing humans of their supposedly exceptional status; but we should hesitate before assuming that civilisation invented the nature-culture divide altogether. In *A View to a Death in the Morning* (1993), a historical exposition of the cultural significance of hunting for Western civilisation, anthropologist Matt Carthill argues that one of the distinctive features of hunting is that it targets a wild animal, namely, someone who lives outside the human domain, and is ready to protect that freedom by fleeing or fighting back. As such, he aptly describes planned hunting as ‘an armed confrontation between humanness and wildness, between culture and nature.’ In other words, one can only conceive of hunting in light of a conceptual separation between culture and nature, between one’s own world and an external Other against which one wages war – otherwise there are no “wild animals” to speak of. We should thereby expect this mindset to have predated domestication,<sup>14</sup> only in a more rudimentary form which was later massively expanded upon by various civilised ideologies, culminating in the hyper-alienated modes of thought known all too well in the West today.

To clarify, it would be easy to read these thoughts as attempting to supplant the anarcho-primitivist emphasis on domestication with a novel emphasis on planned hunting, as if the latter were the real lynchpin of oppressive relations, the hinge upon which history turns. But not so. To claim anything of the sort would only offer the latest version of the typical leftist understanding of the past, which singles out whichever axis of domination as the hidden solution to what Karl Marx called “the riddle of history”. Indeed, such accounts find their archetype in Marxism, according to which the entirety of the past can be explained with reference to a single theme, class conflict. Allegedly it was only with the invention of private property that humans began to organise themselves into classes, an event of unrivalled significance which replaced a world free of exploitation with various systems of toil and submission, capitalism being the most recent example. This basic approach has been rehashed time and again, not merely by anarcho-primitivists.

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<sup>14</sup> We needn’t take this claim to refer exclusively to human beings. Might lions also consider antelope to be wild animals, against whom their cultures wage war?

For example, in *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982) Murray Bookchin<sup>15</sup> proudly rejected the “original sin” identified by Marxists (private property), as well as by orthodox anarchists (the invention of the state), only to come up with an original sin of his own – the invention of hierarchy. At some point in the past, all humans everywhere supposedly lived without domination, both social and ecological, following which elders and shamans created the very first hierarchies, thereby eventually spawning class, the state, and ecological abuse. Another post-Marxist, in *Liberating Life* (2013) Abdullah Öcalan<sup>16</sup> retold a story similar to Bookchin’s, only with a particular focus on patriarchy, allegedly the first form of slavery, which transformed a world of freedom and equality into one dominated by capitalist nation-states. Lastly, even anti-speciesist writers reproduce the kind of anthropocentrism mentioned above, singling out human activity as responsible for the creation (and dissolution) of hierarchy – except they retell the story with a special emphasis on animal exploitation.<sup>17</sup>

The core problem here is deeper than deciding which of these (or other) reductionist accounts has somehow managed to get it right. Rather, it concerns any attempt to crunch the past – as vast, complex, and mysterious as it can only be – into a single narrative, that is, a unified explanation of the origins of oppression. Be it with reference to class, gender, hunting, or whatever, any such account identifies a pivotal historical moment when everything went wrong (by consequence, they hold up the global implementation of whichever corresponding political cause – communism, feminism, veganism, etc. – as the secret to achieving universal emancipation). Yet the discussion of planned hunting isn’t interesting because it offers a rival description of how an Edenic world was spoiled by the original sin of predation: its use lies in revealing that no such idyll ever existed. War, predation, colonisation, extinction – to say that these have been around for as long as there have been humans would be an understatement; as far as we can tell, they seem to have been widespread among nonhuman organisms throughout the course of natural evolution. Whilst we potentially gain much from telling good stories about how our enemies amassed their power, we might recognise that both speciesism and Leviathan have only ever accelerated forces that are always in motion. It would be another humanistic delusion to suggest that *Homo sapiens* are powerful enough to transform the world, be that for the worse – through the invention of oppression – or for the better, in the form of a revolutionary transition to a future utopia. Such linear accounts of time are extremely popular in Western civilisation;<sup>18</sup> yet

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<sup>15</sup> One of the most influential theorists of contemporary anarchism, Bookchin broke with his social anarchist forbears Bakunin and Kropotkin by strongly promoting ecology, as well as replacing Marxian class analysis with a broader core emphasis on hierarchy. Nonetheless, and despite numerous political shifts (including away from anarchism in his later life), Bookchin’s proposals remained quite orthodox in their dogged loyalty to civilisation, rationalism, humanism, and speciesism.

<sup>16</sup> The intellectual leader of the Kurdish Freedom Movement, Öcalan was largely responsible for its eventual adoption of democratic confederalism, a strain of libertarian socialism which emphasises feminism and ecology, along with all of the key leftist assumptions held by Bookchin and Marx.

<sup>17</sup> See Steven Best, *The Politics of Total Liberation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.17–18.

<sup>18</sup> Linear accounts of time essentially hold that radical global change is possible (usually also that human agency is the driving force in affecting such change). The linear conception of time was largely popularised by monotheistic religions such as Christianity, which taught that present matters are quite unlike the past (before the Fall) and will be quite unlike the future (following the Redemption). This rough outlook was later secularised by the humanist ideology of progress, which holds that humanity is forever advancing towards a better world than anything that came before. Such superstition was distinctly lacking in Ancient Greece, China, and India, as well as in animistic and otherwise non-monotheistic human cultures; they seem to have broadly agreed that time is rhythmic or cyclical, incorporating vast waves of gain and of loss, yet without creating a future fundamentally different to the past.

they attribute humans a degree of agency we will never possess. We cannot change the world, nobody can! Really there is no past, and also no future: there is only the here and now, containing all there is or ever could be, including every opportunity for anarchy as well as for fascism.



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