



**TWO LEGS
GOOD,
FOUR LEGS
EQUAL**

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ColdType



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WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD

<http://coldtype.net>

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“The moral duty of man consists of imitating the moral goodness and beneficence of God manifested in the creation towards all his creatures. Everything of persecution and revenge between man and man, and everything of cruelty to animals is a violation of moral duty.” – Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason



DESPIITE the trappings of a civilized culture and the persistent myth of moral exceptionalism, we are mean-spirited, depraved barbarians, each sharing responsibility for the infliction of immeasurable degrees of unnecessary pain and suffering upon the rest of the Earth’s sentient beings.

Deeply integrated into a cultural and economic system in which compassion is considered a weakness and greed, exploitation, profits, property, winning, bellicosity and selfishness are sacrosanct, we cannot escape the reality that each of us participates in the American version of Hannah Arendt’s “banality of evil”. Unless we isolate ourselves in a mountain cabin, US citizens are each damned to be one of 300 million “Little Eichmanns” who enable our cynical plutocratic masters to dominate the world both economically and militarily.

Struggling to make itself heard above the cacophonous din of sound bites, advertising jingles, clichés, and other manifestations of the false consciousness that afflicts us, the voice of conscience occasionally grabs our attention and violently reminds us how badly we are screwing the rest of the world. And when it does, the question we each need to ask ourselves is, “How much like “Eich” do I want to be?”

While there are myriad ways we can each minimize our culpability in the crimes of savage capitalism and consumerism, the struggle to end speciesism should be at the vanguard of our much-needed moral evolution. Yet is often minimized and ridiculed by sociopolitical thinkers of all stripes.

Seeking to provoke a re-examination of our practices toward animals, Patrice Greanville, a force in the animal liberation movement for many years, has defined speciesism as akin to German fascism. While the comparison is inflammatory, it is well grounded, since both speciesism and Nazism share a core ideology of entitlement to total dominion over anyone

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or anything outside the “master race” :

“[as] the oldest, crudest and most pervasive form of fascism or tyranny around...speciesism must be understood...as an unrecognized fascism...not so much as the organization of a mass party of thugs to beat back labor, or an outright rightwing military dictatorship, but as a form of institutionalized supremacism whereby a particular nationality, group, class, race (or species), unilaterally proclaims its ‘superiority’ over others, and proceeds to confer upon itself the right to exploit, murder, and tyrannize at will with absolute impunity.”

Infectious and insidious as racism or sexism, speciesism permeates nearly every facet of our existence – and it’s class blind: both poor and rich practice it with alacrity. Raising 4-5 billion non-human animals each year in concentration camp-like conditions of factory farms, we torture and slaughter fellow sentient beings merely to satiate our carnivorous desires⁽¹⁾ or to justify any project, no matter how inane. As Peter Singer documented so well in his seminal work, *Animal Liberation*, we annually perform an array of horrendously brutal experiments on millions of non-human animals, including inflicting acids and solvents on restrained rabbits’ eyes (given their great sensitivity). Singer’s book clearly demonstrates that much of the “research” conducted by torturing animals involves redundant university studies that yield conclusions one could have intuited, frivolous government or military projects, and unnecessary consumer product tests designed to validate “new” brand claims.

Gandhi was correct when he noted that “*the greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be measured by the way its animals are treated.*” If the United States has a prayer of attaining even a fraction of the “greatness” and “moral progress” it already attributes to itself, we must engage in a fearless moral inventory and prepare ourselves to make sweeping and dramatic social, economic, and political changes.

Treating non-human animals as objects for our convenience – in the process subjecting them to horrendous suffering and abuse – is certainly one of our most shameful misdeeds. It is also one for which each of us can readily begin making amends. One simple step is to refuse to consume meat or products from the fast food industry, a hideous manifestation of capitalism that catalyzed and necessitates factory farming.

Rising to the moral challenge

Every human being has a moral stake in the struggle against speciesism, whether they define themselves as Left, Right, centrist, liberal, or Libertarian. Drawing perilously close to the spiritual black hole spawned by the excesses of the declining American Empire, our capacity to evoke change as individuals in the face of an opulent ruling class steeped in historically unprecedented wealth and power is limited, but we are not impotent in the battle for

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our souls. Consider the position of Matthew Scully, who authored *Dominion: the Power of Man, the Suffering of Animals, and the Call to Mercy* and who was a speechwriter for George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Dan Quayle, and Bob Dole (not exactly the credentials of a “bleeding heart liberal”):

“Conservatives like to think of animal protection as a trendy leftist cause, which makes it easier to brush off. And I hope that more of us will open our hearts to animals. I also believe that in factory farming and other cruelties conservatives will find some familiar problems – moral relativism, self-centered materialism, license passing itself off as freedom, and the culture of death.”

Vegetarianism, one potential cure for the disease of speciesism, has a long and rich history. A number of individuals noted for their impressive moral, intellectual, social, literary, or political accomplishments, including Edison, Einstein, Gandhi, Kafka, Pythagoras, da Vinci, Tesla, Plato, Tolstoy, Thoreau, Jane Goodall, Cesar Chavez, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and George Bernard Shaw, were vegetarians.

Almost undoubtedly these conscientious individuals who respected non-human animals enough to stop eating them confronted the same specious, often snide, arguments against vegetarianism that defenders of speciesism still use today.

Consider a brief deconstruction of a few of them:

1. “A vegetarian diet is protein-deficient and vegetarians become weak, frail, and sickly.”

There is abundant medical and anecdotal evidence to demonstrate that a plant-based diet provides ample proteins for a human being to sustain health to the same extent as those eating meat. There are also some indications that we were almost exclusively vegetarian at one point in the evolutionary process ⁽²⁾.

2. “Animals do not have the same capabilities as humans, so they are not entitled to the same rights.”

That is true. The first part, that is. It would be absurd to argue that a pig has the right to bear arms. The point is that few serious-minded people pursuing animal liberation think in terms of animal rights, per se. However, the moral equality sought by animal defenders for animals is not based on a ludicrous equality of “intelligence” between non-human and human species, since if intelligence (or lack thereof) were the criterion to confer protection from abuse, torture and death, then we would be logically justified to kill, eat and use mentally handicapped or brain-dead people in such manner, and we clearly are not about to do so. As has been repeated for a couple of decades now, the basic point is not whether ani-

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mals can reason like us, but whether they can feel pain as we do, and they clearly, obviously, and loudly do, as anyone can readily attest by spending a few minutes in a slaughterhouse.

In *Animal Liberation*, Singer defined the above principles in this manner:

“The argument for extending the principle of equality beyond our own species is simple, so simple that it amounts to no more than a clear understanding of the nature of the principle of equal consideration of interests. We have seen that this principle implies that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like, or what abilities they possess (although precisely what this concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do). It is on this basis that we are able to say that the fact that some people are not members of our race does not entitle us to exploit them, and similarly the fact that some people are less intelligent than others does not mean that their interests may be disregarded. But the principle also implies that the fact that beings are not members of our species does not entitle us to exploit them, and similarly the fact that other animals are less intelligent than we are does not mean that their interests may be disregarded.”

3. “To live is to destroy and kill.”

There is also an element of truth in this statement. For instance, we inadvertently kill insects and microbes with great frequency. However, as self-conscious, relatively intelligent beings, we bear the responsibility and have the power to minimize the destruction, suffering, and death we cause. One certain way to achieve this end is to end one’s support of the industrialized murder committed by the meat industry.

4. “Vegetarians have no regard for the “suffering” of plants.”

One of the principal reasons most animal liberationists oppose meat consumption is the suffering it imposes upon non-human animals. Arguing that vegetarians are hypocritical because they eat plants is fallacious for two reasons (which are probably obvious even to those who disingenuously make this ridiculous assertion).

Lacking a central nervous system and even a rudimentary consciousness necessary to experience pain, it would be impossible for plants to “suffer” in the sense that human and non-human animals do.

Admittedly, we do violate the sanctity of life in an absolute sense when we consume a plant, which is why there is some validity to the assertion that “to live is to destroy and kill.”

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Yet again, as self-aware beings capable of making moral decisions, it is incumbent upon us to minimize the suffering and death which we cause simply by being. Choosing to eat plants rather than animals is one of the most viable means we have of doing so.

Abstention from eating flesh aside, ardent speciesists argue that the entire notion of animal liberation is puerile and trivial because the world is filled with problems that are “more important” than relieving the misery of non-human animals. But remember that many of these same individuals thrive in a system of savage capitalism which provides them with an “inalienable right” to prosper through exploitation. Terrified of losing their profits, they work vigorously to prevent society from adopting a more enlightened moral position with respect to animals.

Certainly the United States is not alone in committing shocking atrocities against non-human animals as a matter of routine, but we are the epicenter of the most advanced and malignant stages of predatory capitalism. Yet regardless of the considerable number of constraints the ruling elites have upon us, we are still the stewards of our own souls and possess the means to rise above the abject moral poverty of our nation. What better place to start than in the defense of the most vulnerable amongst us?

Here’s to the liberation of animals and of our spirits.....

SOURCES

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