

# **AGAINST SPECIESISM AGAINST ANTHROPOCENTRISM**

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But our relationships of subjugation with billions of other species on the earth is one norm that few seem to take issue with; not only are other species unable to communicate their experience to us, but to question means to challenge entrenched habits and world views. If we want to be consistent in our politics, then there's no way we can continue to ignore the impact our anthropocentrism (human-centeredness) is having on the rest of this planet.

Yet, just because most of us are implicated does not mean that we are burdened with some kind of 'original sin'. Quite the contrary: the beauty and power of anarchism is that it pushes us all to live lives that are more just, loving, meaningful, satisfying, and collectively free. So when we talk about speciesism, far from being dismissive, we should embrace the challenge it poses, look further into the issue, and do what we can to change the miserable status quo.



## **8 Reasons for Radical Veganism**

*This anonymous essay originally (and humorously) titled “8 Reasons Why Meat-eating Anarchists Need a Kick Up Their Anthropocentric Ass” appeared online on a number of different sites, and from which was turned into this zine format.*

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## **1. Anarchism impoverished**

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Yet, just because most of us are implicated does not mean that we are burdened with some kind of ‘original sin’. Quite the contrary: the beauty and power of anarchism is that it pushes us all to live lives that are more just, loving, meaningful, satisfying, and collectively free. So when we talk about speciesism, far from being dismissive, we should embrace the challenge it poses, look further into the issue, and do what we can to change the miserable status quo.

## **2. Alienation from the land**

Through civilisation and conquest, insatiable capitalist cultures have alienated most of the world’s population from the ecologies which have been our species’ life support systems throughout its existence. This in turn has desensitised us from the mass enslavement of swathes of non-human lifeforms to the service of humans and capital. Yet, since this alienation is all that many of us city-dwellers have ever

known, we do not really appreciate what is being lost. If this rings true for you, then spend some quality time with other animals; look at what they do, how they interact with one another. Read about the taming of the wilderness for capitalist expansion, and learn about the key role animal agriculture plays in transforming vibrant woodland into the monocultural fields that constitute our countryside today.

## **3. Animals are at the bottom of the dung heap**

The sheer scale, intensity, and normalization of animal exploitation and  
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the poor and of destruction of indigenous peoples’ lands and cultures. Arable land is both scarce and poorly distributed; we need to make major changes in our relationships with it if we are to cope with massive population rises whilst resisting unethical practices such as the expansion of human sterilization programmes or major incursions into what pockets of wilderness remain.

## **8. Carnivorous appetites mean ecocide**

Animal agriculture means habitat loss for wild animals and the precipitation of climate change. The world’s forests, for example, have roughly halved in the past 30 years. Animal agriculture has been a major driver of this, especially in regions like the Amazon, which is both the source of rich biodiversity and approximately 20% of the world’s oxygen output. As anarchists we need to stop supporting the breeding of other living beings and the reproduction of destructive relations with the land – not just as an end in itself, but as one tactic among many in the fight against the immiseration of the earth.

In a world beyond capitalism, neither animal agriculture nor hunting are going to be viable means of survival on a wide scale. The continued breeding and rearing of animals, ethical implications aside, will be unfeasible for many communities due to the intense land and water requirements that it entails. The romantic hunter fantasy of the millenarian primitivists, more ethical on the surface, harks back to an era when the land was carpeted with verdant forests and human was at one with beast. Unfortunately, the post-industrial landscape we are going to be left with is likely to be very different to the forests and steppes we roamed prior to the growth of civilisation. What little wildlife remains will be relegated to the margins and no doubt threatened with extinction by human hunters. Although hunting skills may be useful for individuals in emergencies, it is not a collective solution and will ultimately be suicidal if we see it as such.

### **For further reading:**

*All Out War: A Call For Anarchy Beyond the Left*

*Black and Brown Vegan Power: A Pamphlet of Resistance Against Speciesism and White Supremacy*

*Biting Back! A Radical Response to Non-Vegan Anarchists*

*From Animals to Anarchism*

*Reflexiones Sobre Liberacion Animal*

*What is Green Anarchy?*

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tempted with total resignation. Challenging ourselves and each other to question domination in all its guises builds on that affinity and breaks down isolation. Anarchy cannot be perpetually postponed; to whatever extent possible it must be lived in the present.

If respecting non-human life is negligible “lifestylism” as some suggest, then we should see treating our partners with respect (e.g. not abusing them) in the same light. I’m under no illusions about the capacity for veganism to create revolutionary change, but that is as true as for any ‘lifestyle choices’: we can’t just content ourselves with changing the way we live & treat each other – we always need to combine this with attack on the structures of power.

## 7. Veganism is not ‘cultural imperialism’

The basic principles underlying veganism are by no means ‘Western’ (in the sense of a product of ‘Enlightenment’ thought originating in Western Europe); if anything, as capitalist land expropriation first wreaked havoc in that part of the world, quite the opposite is true. Through a close relationship with plants and animals, often amplified by animist beliefs, many indigenous peoples maintain healthier relations with the animals around them – to the point of exaggeration and romanticized cliché. The fact that some prominent English-speaking liberals began to spout loudly about animal welfare in the 19th century does not give the ‘West’ a monopoly on respecting animal life. In fact, some of the discourses in which these were embedded (particularly, seeking a scientific rationale for animal welfare), were more problematic than the practices of indigenous peoples who engaged in hunting for their food, but never sought to enslave the animals in the first place.

There have nevertheless been some overtly racist campaigns from the charity PETA, or imperialist – and frankly ridiculous – concepts such as ‘World Week for the Abolition of Meat’. But just as the existence of liberal feminist charities makes few of us dismiss feminism altogether, this is hardly basis for claims that veganism is inherently ‘Western’ or imperialist. Such an attitude is also patronizing and dismissive of the many people and cultures that avoid meat and dairy for spiritual and ethical reasons, either for most of the year or altogether.

Lastly, animal farming goes hand in hand with the continued dispossession of people from the land. It requires huge quantities of land for production of animal food; this true for both the ‘free range’ animals grazing on pastures and for those eating feed in dark animal factories. By contrast, significantly more people can be sustained on a given piece of land on a plant-based diet than on livestock, which is also far more water intensive. Land grabs from cattle ranching in South America have been a major driver of landlessness of

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suffering is greater than that of any of our species. If you don’t agree, (so it sort of goes), you just aren’t paying attention. Hundreds if not thousands of entire species have been enslaved to capitalism, being imprisoned, manipulated, selectively bred, experimented on, used as reproductive machines & killed for our satisfaction, profit, and entertainment.

Each year, around 9 billion animals are farmed and killed in the US for ‘food’; about 600 million cows and billions of chickens. In life, the vast majority of chickens are crammed into sheds with complete disregard for their needs or desires as living creatures, before being killed at 6-7 weeks (naturally, they live for around 7 years). Selective breeding of meaty birds means they’re unable to support their own weight and spend 76%-86% of their time lying down; death from thirst or hunger comes to many. Soiled litter solidifies around their legs producing painful ulcers. In the case of egg-laying hens, the majority kept in cages, the intense stress of their short, miserable lives can lead to self-harm and cannibalism, so many have their beaks cut – without anesthetic – to reduce this risk. Whereas their wild ancestors laid 12-20 eggs per year, human enslavement has produced a modern reproductive machine that lays up to 300 eggs for our pleasure and profit annually. This is to say nothing of the dairy, pork, beef or fish-farming industries. Those animals are not going to be able to tweet about their misery (there is as yet no evidence that pigs are daft enough to while away their time on social media): go read up on it yourself.

Meanwhile, each year nearly 20 million animals in the US alone are subjected to ‘research’ in the name of science; experiments to test new products like medicines and chemicals (cleaners, plastics, pesticides, food additives etc.), and military trials. The most prestigious US universities continue to cage and experiment on the same non-human primates, dogs, cats and other animals for many years on end. These include depraved invasive experiments that physically and psychologically manipulate primates (eg. implanting electrodes into their skulls, removing parts of their brains, studying the effects of deliberately inflicted stress and pain, and so on).

On top of their uses for ‘food’ and ‘science’, there’s the breeding of pets for human pleasure (including 4-5 million healthy dogs and cats killed annually in the US after being taken or from or abandoned by mostly incompetent ‘owners’), and the use of animals to make money in a host of other industries (racing, zoos, circuses etc.).

## 4. Defensiveness maintains domination

**All systems of oppression are supported by defensive attitudes, justifications, trivialization and denial. Sometimes these claims might be**

**fair enough, but people more often than not simply react to feeling attacked and respond from a selfish position of self-preservation.** An anarchist ethic should stem from a desire for individual and collective liberation, so that when a comrade challenges another's behavior, they should be able to put their wounded pride aside for a moment and at least give the point the consideration it deserves.

Yet time and again issues raised around speciesism are mocked, trivialized and dismissed, which is both a massive disrespect to other animals and to those comrades. Ok, so this isn't helped by the puritanical vegans out there who guilt-trip those who eat the occasional skipped cheese sandwich, but only the laziest and least committed comrade can attribute their crap, anthropocentric attitudes to encounters with the Vegan Police.

## 5. Animal abuse is inseparable from patriarchy

**Animal abuse is on the same spectrum as misogyny, homophobia, racism, and the abuse of children, the elderly or disabled. Claims that these analogies are racist/sexist/ableist only underscores the inherent speciesism of such a position, for how can we make exceptions for other sentient beings? The basic principles are there: violence perpetrated for pleasure or gain by 'strong' against the 'weak'.**

In one suburban family home, a woman is threatened by a male fist; somewhere in another, a pet hamster gets flushed down the loo: both are worthless rubbish in the eyes of those who wield relationships of possession over them. In the toilets of a hipster bar, a Siamese Fighting Fish lies lifeless and numb on the gravelly bottom of its barren tank; in Croydon, an Afghan refugee friend waits for years on end for word from miserly Home Office bureaucrats: both reduced to mere numbers and objects by those with money in mind.

How can anyone fail see these issues as essentially one and the same, or reject one and justify another?

In 1901, anarchist Elisée Reclus described how as a young man he struggled against almost overwhelming pressure for conformity against his vegetarian ways, "parents, official and informal educators, and doctors, not to mention that all-powerful person referred to as "everybody", all work together to harden the character of the child in relation to this "meat on feet"..."[1]. Over a century later, the culture of meat & dairy consumption is still maintained by ridicule and social pressure. It is especially bound up in machismo (e.g. you're a bourgeois wuss if you can't handle a bit of liver), and marketing that exploits masculine insecurities, even though 99% of such macho posturing revolves around meat pathetically acquired from the likes of Tesco's, rather than from creatures that have been hunted (see Carol J.

Adams' *The Sexual Politics of Meat* for an in-depth discussion on this). If you want to prove yourself an adept hunter, I can think of much better targets than wild boar.

## 6. Veganism isn't a middle class 'consumer choice'

It might sound trite, but for many 'ethical vegans', veganism really is a philosophy rather than just a dietary choice. Challenging how we think of animals as products and producers for our pleasure, questioning the 'necessity' or inevitability of animal consumption, and varying our diet beyond animal sources is just one part of that, but there are many ways to subvert our relationships with other animals – from fighting the culture of pet breeding, to carrying out acts of liberation & sabotage. In fact, a definition of veganism coined by Vegan Society co-founder Donald Watson, was the notion that animals should simply be free from exploitation and cruelty. This removes some of the emphasis on consumer choices, as favored by green capitalists & liberals. Too often, critics hone in on hipster vegan cupcake shops or fancy fake cheeses, glibly equating all veganism with shallow ethical consumerism or a bourgeois fad. But where there appears to be a market, we can always expect some corporation to cash in on it (H&M's recent rip-off of the Kurdish YPJ's uniform springs to mind as an example). It's also disingenuous to claim it's a 'class privilege' to eat a plant-based diet – if anything it's cheaper if you're not going in for fake meat and dairy substitutes. The irony about these claims is that the animal rights/liberation movement in the UK is significantly more working class and less dominated by academics than my experience of other major 'single issue' movements in the UK at present. Class-based critiques of veganism from feminists with PhDs says more about themselves and where they spend their time than anything else.

There are obviously some people who can't avoid consuming animals because conditions make it unviable (eg. destitution, certain illnesses, migrants in transit, desert-dwelling peoples...you get the picture); the point is to do what we can because we at least reject speciesism as we should any other system of domination. Unfortunately, many of us are not even there yet.

Attempts to carve out an ethical way of life under capitalism and the state inevitability tend to feel hollow. So what's the point of changing our individual practices now? Well, apart from the obvious problem that mass insurrection still seems a distant prospect, consistency in our ideas and our actions gives us lives worth fighting for. The existence of relationships based on love, solidarity and respect spare us from unrelenting misery of life under capitalism and compel us to attack the systems which threaten them. Without the inspiring examples of my comrades around the world, I would be