

# Against anthropocentrism in radical leftist

## Towards an anti-speciesist anarchism

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## Glossary

### **Anthropocentrism (humancentrism)**

Belief according to which the human species plays a central role in the Universe and that arranges other species and ecosystems in a subordinate position. Anthropocentrism considers ecosystem and who belongs to it as usable to reach goals which satisfy only human desires, regardless of the consequences for the lives of other animals and their environment.

### **Speciesism**

Rooted in anthropocentric thinking, speciesism is based on the belief that humans benefit of greater importance than other animals, basing this judgement on abilities and/or identities standardised by the human species itself to justify their exploitation and transform them into food products, scientific test subjects, objects for entertainment and/or company, and so on. Anti-speciesism takes position against this thinking, considering all animal species as important in the same way.

### **Veganism**

In simple terms, veganism is a practice of abstaining, **as far as is possible and practicable**, from consuming animal products or activities involving their exploitation (food, clothing, circuses, zoos, experimentation, and others). Often reduced as diet, veganism loses its subversive power and it's seen as simple alternative diet. When, in the best scenario, veganism surpasses the idea of diet, it's seen as simple boycott practice, remaining in actual fact stucked in a consumerist logic. However,

**Carol J. A.**, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 1990 (first edition);

**Aph K., Syl K.**, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism*, 2017;

**Rasmus R. S.**, *A Queer Vegan Manifesto*, 2012;

**Anonymous**, *Total Liberation*, 2019 (pdf here: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/total-liberation-anonymous-english>);

veganism is part of a deeper politic analysis and critique of anthropocentrism and, as we are going to see, subverts and questions the oppressive structures of our society, both within and outside the human species.

### **Anarchism**

Anarchism is a path and a method of work and organization that mainly aims to dismantle social hierarchies (man/woman, white/black, able/disable, rich/poor, human/non-human, etc.) in order to destroy actual society and re-build a new one based on horizontal organization, free from hierarchies, statal institutions, centralized power, social oppressions and based on solidarity and mutual aid. It goes without speaking that there can be no anarchism without deep self-criticism, openness to change, communication, solidarity and awareness of our own privileges and the fact that oppressions lay first of all in our minds, and only then in laws, institutions, actions, language and other performative devices.

I am sure that self-criticism and the dismantling of the social hierarchies rooted in our thinking represent the first step towards the anarchy we hope for.

### **Intersectionality**

Term coined by the black feminist **Kimberlé Crenshaw** in the 1989 and that analyses the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination

intersect to create unique dynamics and effects. Forms of inequality stratify and reinforce each other and therefore need to be analysed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one from reinforcing another.

Anti-speciesism extends this concept to other species, affirming that human discriminations and speciesism are not unrelated, but on the contrary they work to consolidate each other.

**Please note:**

**Some quotations in this text may differ from the originals. Unfortunately, I was unable to access several resources in the original (English) language, but I made every effort to report the meaning of these as accurately as possible.**

## **Recommended readings**

**Brian A.D.**, *Animal Liberation and Social Revolution*, 1995;

**Sarat C.**, *Animal Resistance in the Global Capitalist Era*, 2020;

**Steven B.**, *The Politics of Total Liberation: Revolution for the 21st Century*, 2014;

**Uexküll J.**, *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, 1934 (first edition);

**Rifkin J.**, *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*, 1992;

**Mason J.**, *An Unnatural Order: the roots of our destruction of nature*, 1993;

alone is not enough to bring about positive change. Therefore, when we talk about freeganism or boycotts, I personally believe that it is important to clear our judgement from the pure economic concept.

[21] One only has to research rural communities that try to live according to the principles of self-sufficiency and permaculture to see that most of them use non-human animals in their practices.

[22] Anti-speciesist sanctuaries/shelters are places that someone may at first glance mistake for farms, but which function differently, offering refuge to animals who are victims of speciesism (especially by livestock industry), respecting their ethology and individuality, without any kind of exploitation. This means that in a sanctuary we don't see other animals as products or production machines, but let them live respecting their spaces and needs. Anti-speciesist sanctuaries must not be seen as a solution, but as a transition compromise from a speciesist society to a non-speciesist one. You can easily search for anti-speciesist sanctuaries near your home.

[23] Read more about *the herd of 'rebel cows' has been living wildly in the Italian mountains for years*: <https://www.thelocal.it/20170619/a-herd-of-rebel-cows-has-been-living-wildly-in-the-italian-mountains-for-years/>.

[24] *A radical response to non-vegan anarchists*: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/biting-back-a-radical-response-to-non-vegan-anarchists>.

## Introduction

Liberation of other animals among the human struggles is the most ignored and even hindered one.

Some responsibility certainly lies with the type of activism conducted by many vegan groups, which have rejected anarchist, transfeminist, anti-capitalist analyses, actually rejecting an intersectional struggle. However, I think that this cannot be an excuse to avoid a self-criticism about our species privilege. I frankly believe that neo-liberal vegan activism is often used as a loophole by the anti-authoritarian leftist to avoid anti-speciesist critique and accountability, for example by attributing the values of neo-liberal veganism to the anti-speciesist struggle or by categorising vegan people.

Although this text is mainly addressed to libertarian circles, I want to consider the text as a critique of all those who every day consciously or unconsciously reproduce speciesism and anthropocentrism (see definitions), in the hope of stimulating considerations and debates.

It should be pointed out that the writer is not free from criticism about this topic and that – similarly to the reproduction of other oppressive behaviours and thoughts caused by privileges – I doubt that any self-called anti-speciesist has managed to completely eradicate speciesism from their own mind.

## Uniting in common paths and practices

Human/non-human and human/environment divisions are often and radically discussed only in function of the human and of an advantage for the latter, which recognises the 'other' a dignity

and a value to be respected only if this produces back something positive for the human being. Without a voluntary downsizing of the human dimension within the ecosystem, a total critique of the hierarchies, power and the role of human as rational user of 'resources' or as custodian/conservator is missing.

Differences between the human species and other species exist and cannot be denied, but they should not become steps on which we rise on. The choice is ours as well as the responsibility to ensure that the social organisation we desire – the anarchist one – is truly free of hierarchies, including species hierarchies, bearing in mind that we cannot pursue the annihilation of the bourgeoisie if we still act as bourgeois or capitalists towards other animals and the Earth.

There is unfortunately the idea that the class struggle between humans is more urgent than the other struggles, and unrelated to them. This die-hard idea is perhaps rooted in the difficulty of integrating all liberation struggles into a single path, probably due to the reciprocal polarisation that each struggle has gone through, putting walls between themselves and other struggles.

It is often said that '*anarchism is already intersectional*'. Then let it really be.

But this can only be done by accepting that the personal is political, and that this path involves political theories as much as we ourselves as individuals, in a mutual exchange and change, in order to accomplish a radical deconstruction of the individual.

*Burger King*

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/91/81/8e/91818e0c41f3337f06fc88e2819a3be1.png>.

[11] Simonsen R.R., *A Queer Vegan Manifesto*, 2012, p. 31-32.

[12] In *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*, Jeremy Rifkin examines how cattle were subjugated to create the foundations of today's west, and in particular to drive the colonisation of America.

[13] See Diamond J., *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The fates of Human societies*, 2005, p. 66-67 and *Kurgan theory* (or *Steppe theory*): [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan\\_hypothesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurgan_hypothesis).

[14] *What Henry Ford learned from a slaughterhouse*: <http://www.mstaires.com/what-henry-ford-learned-from-a-slaughter-house/>.

[15] Rifkin J., *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*, 1992, p. 67-68.

[16] Read more about the *relationship between meat consumption and GDP per capita*: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/news/2021/12/07/new-data-shows-6-countries-have-hit-their-meat-consumption-peak.html>.

[17] Today, the term *animal welfare* is used to refer to welfarism driven by neo-liberal animal rights activists who aim to improve cages, methods of imprisonment and killing by improving cages and practices by reforming the laws, thus falling into the speciesist and legalitarian logic of animal welfare.

[18] The scientific community continues to maintain a fundamental difference between *visisection* and *experimentation*, declaring that 'visisection' is a cruel and obsolete practice that consists in dissecting living individuals, thus trying to create a distance between cruel practices (visisection) and less cruel but useful practices for humanity (experimentation). However, I reject this linguistic difference as pointless and misleading and decide to consciously use the term *visisection*. To put it another way, in the words of Massimo Filippi: '*would we engage in such semantic battles if we were dealing with the suffering and death of humans? Would we spend our time deciding whether it is better to use the term 'torture' or 'particularly violent interrogation'?*'.

[19] Among the many historical events, mention should be made of the experiments on humans carried out by nazi doctors such as **Mengele** and **Wirthis** or the **Balmis expedition** in the 19th century: where 22 orphaned children were used as live carriers of the smallpox vaccine to distribute it in Latin America and the Philippines.

[20] The supply-demand paradigm nowadays is an extremely complex mechanism, so I don't want to say that boycott is a priori useless, but that a change in consumption

the other species and the ecosystem, because either liberation will be total, for all, or it will not be.

## Notes

[1] The human being actually originates from the primate family and is defined by the anthropologist **Jared Diamond** as *the third chimpanzee*, after the bonobo and the common chimpanzee.

[2] This can be interesting: *The historical roots of our ecological crisis*: <https://www.cmu.ca/faculty/gmatties/lynnwhiterootsofcrisis.pdf>.

[3] I say literally 'man' because the anthropocentric vision was (and is) often accompanied by a patriarchal vision.

[4] I recommend two articles by **Jon Lieff**: *Animal cultures* (<https://jonlieffmd.com/blog/animal-cultures>) and *Many animals know how to self-medicate* (<https://jonlieffmd.com/category/blog/animals>).

[5] Quote by the philosopher Massimo Filippi.

[6] *The tools animals use*: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/graphics/animal-tools>.

[7] In this case, the human identity referred to coincides with the model of the adult, healthy and able individual.

[8] I strongly recommend the following readings: *Patriarchy and speciesism* (<https://medium.com/@antispeciesistactioncollective/patriarchy-and-speciesism-e19e5ab22291>) and *The impact of masculinity on the Animal Liberation Movement* ([https://www.academia.edu/34034926/The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Masculinity\\_on\\_the\\_Animal\\_Liberation\\_Movement](https://www.academia.edu/34034926/The_Impact_of_Masculinity_on_the_Animal_Liberation_Movement)).

[9] I use *animal bodies* to break the distance we established between *what* we eat and *who* we eat.

[10] The internet is full of examples, but here some of them by *Carl's Jr.* (<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/f8/0a/12/f80a12808fd694950233cb3177a9647.jpg>) and

The willingness to deconstruct and then rebuild together is fundamental, but if the individual is not open to this, there can be no common path.

## Human being is an animal

Human species often forgets to be part of animal kingdom, but in this text I would like to drawing attention to this point, so keep in mind that when I talk about animals I also refer to humans<sup>1</sup>.

Anti-speciesism works for the liberation of every animal, human and non-human, and therefore for the ecosystem. As long as we mark the difference between human and non-human beings, rejecting our animality, no liberation process can be possible, because the hierarchical and domination logic will continue to preserve and reproduce itself.

## Overthrow anthropocentric thinking

Calling itself *homo sapiens* (wise man), the mind of the human individual assimilated for centuries the idea of being intrinsically 'wise' and, therefore, balanced and rational.

In the past centuries, several scientific and cultural revolutions questioned our species identity. These revolutions overthrew anthropocentric ideas, progressively downsizing our idea of the human being. As we are going to see, every time the cultural foundations of human superiority are demolished, the human species misunderstands, manipulates and re-adapt concepts in

order to continue to justify its domination on other animals and on Earth, preserving its species privilege.

### **The influence of catholicism**

Anthropocentrism we internalised and applied is the outcome of a long colonial and cultural process.

Theorised and popularized by philosophers such as Aristotle, it was consolidated by the catholic church through the creation of *human/nature*<sup>2</sup> dualism, later taken up and reinforced by the exploitative views of Bacon and Descartes.

Even if many people – including myself – are not believers and do not support religions, it's important to remind ourselves the huge cultural influence catholicism had in the last two millennia, which is still unconsciously passed on even by those who oppose religious institutions or holy writings.

As **Jim Mason** states in *An Unnatural Order*:

*'[...] Although it cannot be considered the origin in a material sense, Genesis is certainly the origin from a cultural point of view; It is in fact unanimously considered to be the sacred text that stipulates the main right granted by God to humanity, that of absolute dominion over all creation.'*

Genesis 1:26: *«Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground”»;*

The actions of other species in avoiding captivity and pain alone should highlight that all animals have common basic needs and desires and that our perception of other species is just a vision produced by millennia of human propaganda.

### **The indivisible bond between anarchism and anti-speciesism**

At this point we can see that anarchism without anti-speciesism, or anti-speciesism without anarchism, would constitute an incomplete social and political analysis<sup>24</sup>.

Anti-speciesism aims to destroy species hierarchies, aiming at the liberation of all animals. However, it cannot be animal liberation within the capitalist system and without a deconstruction of the hierarchies in our minds. And this is where anarchist praxis comes in.

Anarchism aims to destroy oppressive hierarchies, to analyse and deconstruct the ideology of power in order to destroy the physical and legal devices and organise a new society based on horizontal organisation, solidarity, mutual aid and cooperation.

But as long as we see other species and the ecosystem through the eyes of those who want to subjugate and dominate them, it will not be possible to deconstruct the ideology of domination that we have internalised. So the road towards anarchy must necessarily involve both anarchist praxis and anti-speciesist analysis. When it is said '*we are not free until everyone is free*' we should consider in this 'everyone' also the involvement of



Mention should also be made of the way in which public opinion reacts to when non-human animals escape from those places: expressions such as 'crazy bull' or 'dangerous wild boar' minimise their intent and are efficient to ridicule their fugitive status, scare the population and justify their killing or capture, in order to segregate these individuals again and re-establish normality and 'safety'.

Some non-human animals that were enslaved now live in shelters (commonly called anti-speciesist or vegan sanctuaries)<sup>22</sup>. Even if sanctuaries' projects sound exciting, it has to be said that we are talking about animals that have (probably indelible) traumas due to their past conditions.

Knowing the background of each animal and witnessing their personal evolution day after day is an experience that can teach us a lot about animality and shed a light on our paternalistic and selfish way of relating to other species.

As already mentioned, non-human animals cannot escape, because once they escape they find themselves in an environment constructed, known and managed by the same species that legitimises their oppression. But sometimes it happens that some individuals, or groups of individuals, manage to escape and find their own independence.

This is the case of the Rebel Cows<sup>23</sup> living in Liguria, Italy. This herd of cows has suffered over the years a *cowhunt* by several hunting squadrons whose aim was to shoot them because they were considered *dangerous*: objective failed, the herd has always managed to escape.

Genesis 1:28: «God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fishes in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”»;

Events such as the Copernican revolution and the Darwin's theory of evolution radically changed our knowledge, questioning anthropocentric beliefs spreaded by catholicism and challenging the church at a time in history where it had a very powerful influence.

### **Copernican Revolution**

According to catholic tales prior to this event, it was said that god created our world at the centre of the Universe, and that at the centre of the Universe dominated man<sup>3</sup>, *the rational being*. This vision of the Universe, thanks to various discoveries, was destroyed forever, but it has left a cultural trail.

As we already know, up to six hundreds years ago, humans thought Earth was at the centre of the Universe and Sun, Moon and close planets orbited around it. This vision – called *geocentric theory* – was mainly thought up by Aristotle and Ptolemy and became the reference model for millennial, being accepted by catholic doctrine. In 1543, the astronomer **Nicolaus Copernicus** published a text (*De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium*) where he elaborated the *heliocentric theory*, in which he argued that the Earth was just one of the several planets orbiting the Sun, and that the Sun was at the centre of

the Universe, concept that would be taken up again the following century by **Galileo Galilei**. Obviously, the Copernican model came as a bolt out of the blue and did not immediately find consensus in the scientific community and in the catholic church, which condemned Galilei for heresy and abjuration and placed Copernicus' work on the church's index of prohibited books, as it questioned the narrative of holy bible, which placed the human being at the centre of everything.

This discovery, which today seems to us to be obvious, revolutionised the understanding that human species had of the the Universe and itself, and challenged the idea that humankind was created to dominate everything from a central position in the Universe.

### **Darwin's theory of evolution**

Historically, it can be observed that each discovery about our animality led us to seek new ways of restoring our centrality and superiority, always in different ways.

Realising that we are just one species among many others and that the planet and the Universe do not need us seems to be obvious, but as a species we still struggle to accept it.

After the *social trauma* following the studies of Copernicus and Galilei, there was – in the following centuries – another discovery that gave another shock to human society.

In the year 1859, **Charles Darwin** published a manuscript he called *The Origin of Species*, which he worked on for two decades.

believing that will disappear with the fall of the economic system, rather than with ideological deconstruction of speciesism, reveals an argument completely off track<sup>21</sup>.

### **Animal resistance**

The places where non-human animals are imprisoned and enslaved have many similarities with how the human prison system works: imprisonment, deprivation of freedom, control and alienation are all acts used to completely annihilate someone's individuality.

As it happens with human prisons, this is the case with breeding farms, circuses, vivisection laboratories, zoos and so on. It is easy to find material on non-human resistance, even if the material that can be found is to be considered only a small part of what is happening with non-human resistance, as many rebellions are silenced and not showed.

By showing and watching these testimonies it is possible to listen directly to those who are protagonists of this struggle through a universal language: *resistance*.

Enslaved non-human animals are constantly trying to rebel and resist their oppressors, but most of the times they fail and if they succeed in escaping they are took back to those places. This happens because the environment they face after escaping is made on human model and needs. Wherever they escape, in any case, they will be under human control, and the state apparatus will organize itself to drive them out and 'reintegrate' them in the places they escaped from.

I want to focus on the latter, in particular on food recovery. My thoughts are not directed at people who do not have the privilege of choosing what to discard from the bins, but to all those individuals and groups who can afford it but who, for one reason or another, refuse to do so.

In political places, from city squats to occupied forests, the recovery of animal's bodies and secretions is often subject of debates.

Basically there are people who identify themselves as supporters of anti-speciesist and anti-anthropocentric struggle, but who continue to consume animal products recovered from bins, claiming that if the recovered products are not taken by money, then they are not contributing economically to their production. This logic leads us into two misunderstandings:

1) the consumerist one, because it believes that a (non-targeted) boycott of a product leads to a decrease in its production, forgetting that the surplus itself is specifically created by the food industry to continuously stimulate the circulation of supply and demand<sup>20</sup>. Moreover the abstention from the consumption of certain products is seen as a simple boycott practice and not as a radical social critique;

2) the speciesist one, because it considers other animals as consumable. Recovering bodies or secretions from the dumpster means to reject anti-speciesist critique, thus reinforcing speciesism and the idea that non-human animals can be consumed, which would never happen with human bodies or secretions, because something outer our western culture. Speciesism has certainly been supported by capitalism, but

Before scientific revolutions by Copernicus and Darwin, the human species based its concept of nature on a hierarchical reference model called *scala naturae* – or *The great chain of being* – and which positioned, on levels of rationality and perfection and from the top downwards: god, angels, humanity, animals, plants and minerals.

Darwin destroyed this model, claiming that the human was only one species among millions of species and that our evolution – as well as that of other living organisms – was shaped by what he called *natural selection*.

Natural selection, despite what some might think, is not 'the law of the strongest', but rather the capacity to adaptation. Darwin's natural selection wasn't linked by competition thinking. He never used 'survival of the strongest', but instead he highlighted our being animals, pointing out that species are differentiated by *degree* – or rather **different capacities learned according to needs** – and not by *kind* – or rather **capacities or characteristics that are present or absent** –. This means that animal species always adapted to their needs and their environments, changing and evolving accordingly. Human species may have developed different abilities from other animals as a result of different experiences and different adaptation paths; this does not make automatically species superior to others, but simply different.

### **Social darwinism**

In order to take advantage of Darwin's theories to support industrial capitalism (which was in its initial stages) and the

dominant classes, Darwin's theory was revised from a social perspective: the term *social darwinism* was created and it changed the original value of *natural selection* in the collective imagination, which began to take on the value of the 'law of the strongest'. The competition plays a fundamental role in capitalism, and social Darwinism raised the idea that force created the right to domination. By deliberately misinterpreting Darwin's theories, promoters of social darwinism adopted an incorrect meaning of natural selection, declaring that the marginalisation of the poor classes was inevitable as an evolutionary process of natural selection, or by advocating the race ideology which was embraced, for example, by nazi eugenics. However, even though today the social darwinist model lost the influence it previously had, it continues to have a cultural influence on us and in justifying discrimination of class, ethnicity, gender, species and so on.

### **Nietzsche, Freud and rationality**

We humans often like to claim that we are rational, and for this reason superior to other species, which are not rational.

**Nietzsche** and **Freud** dismantled the idea of the rational human being, stating that we are instead governed only partly by rational impulses.

*Psychoanalysis* theorised by Freud helps us to understand how all of us do not consciously control our actions, which are instead influenced by unconscious impulses, sometimes very difficult to understand.

This last point is more provocative than anything else, because I have no intention of debating the usefulness or uselessness of scientific experimentation on other species, because I do not believe that the usefulness of an action can justify the *systematic* oppression of the bodies and minds of others.

According to the logic of utilitarianism, as long as a sacrifice – again, on others, and not on ourselves – is useful, or at least there is a possibility that it may be, then it is ethically justified. Clearly, experimentation on humans would be more successful, but it would make anyone shudder, at least until it is proved to be the only or most appropriate way to guarantee the 'common good'<sup>19</sup>.

In vivisection, the only requirements that must be met in order to exercise control over bodies are the utility and beneficial effects of such sacrifices for the community.

Anti-speciesism rejects non-consensual experimentation, exploitation and use of any-body, regardless of whether these practices are beneficial or not.

### **Freeganism illusion**

I can simply describe freeganism saying that it is a 'passive anti-capitalist lifestyle' adopted to try to live with as little money as possible. Some examples: taking public transport without a ticket, shoplifting, occupying abandoned places (or squatting), retrieving objects or food from dumpsters (or dumpster-diving)...

Not only that, but consumers also use this topic to deceive themselves, so that they can continue to consume animal products undisturbed, making a kind of compromise with their conscience and hiding behind hypocritical loopholes. These individuals convince themselves to choose a more ethical and *greener* path, and they consider the violence of animal exploitation only for the modalities of exploitation and death. In their eyes, it seems more respectful than intensive farming, and at the same time they are not interested in the biological and social needs of other animals, whose only purpose is to be bred and raised to satisfy human desires and purposes.

### Utilitarianism and 'necessary' sacrifices

The western person is horrified by the reports of sacrifices of non-humans by some non-civilised societies, defined 'barbaric' and 'retrograde' societies, forgetting that the West does the same exact thing, only in a manner that is 'appropriate' and supported by a large part of the scientific and non-scientific community. From the breeding of animals for supermarkets to vivisection<sup>18</sup>, the sacrifice of other species is useful for human purposes.

Speaking of vivisection, many people agree with experimenting on other animals for three simple reasons:

- 1) the experiments **are executed on others**, not on them;
- 2) the subjects are animals considered inferior and less deserving of life than the human species;
- 3) animal experimentation is *useful*.

Nietzsche's studies indicate that rationality is only one part of our personality, which is complemented by a series of impulses that are part of our *unconscious* where thoughts, instincts and emotions control our actions, often without awareness. Rationality is only one piece of our strength, not the main one. However, in the last year of his life, Nietzsche's sister altered his works into a kind of ideological nazi bible: selecting, manipulating and publishing fragments of Nietzsche and collecting them in an archive called the *Nietzsche-Archive*, which portrayed Nietzsche as a seeker of power and unconditional success.

Some researchers do not want to relieve Nietzsche of his responsibility for preparing theoretical bases of nazism, but the topic is more complex, and describing Nietzsche as an anti-Semite or as father of nazism is a rash judgement. After his death, thanks to his fame, the idea of the *Übermensch* (*the overman*) he theorised was exploited by his sister and nazi Germany to promulgate racial and anti-Semitic ideas, including it into national-socialist propaganda.

### What is nature?

The term 'nature' is often abused to claim that eating other animals is 'natural', using a mystification meaning of natural selection similar to what is written above. When human species wants to give value to its discriminating ideas, whether they are speciesist, racist, homophobic, transphobic and so on, it always resorts to this fateful 'nature': *it is natural to eat animals; it is*

*natural a man and a woman couple and make children; homosexuality is unnatural; changing sex is unnatural and so on.*

What *is* or *is not* natural is almost always used to maintain strict social binarisms and safeguard privileges. Moreover, this also contributes the anthropocentric view of the environment around us, since nature – as we see it – is indefinable unless it is definable by human and western visions only. Nature is known and experienced in different ways by other cultures in different historical periods and also by non-human cultures<sup>4</sup>.

*«The endless ontological purpose of defining what nature is, is replaced by the political purpose of reporting to whom and for what the continuous recourse to naturality is needed.»*

### **The human being is the most intelligent animal**

As we already mentioned, human being is constantly stubbornly trying to reassert itself as central, constantly seeking a definitive difference between the human species and other species. The need to find new arguments to reconfirm and defend human identity follows everytime the latter is challenged. We saw this with the censorship of the heliocentric theory and the deliberate misrepresentations of Darwinism and Nietzsche's thought. But these are just examples of how human beings always try to limit the effects of cultural revolutions. For example, we thought human being was the only one capable to use tools. We then found out animals such as birds, invertebrates and

industry, and the *disassembly* chain he saw in a slaughterhouse he visited in Chicago, which he took inspiration from<sup>14</sup>.

During the industrialisation process of Europe, among the english privileged classes in England, the consumption of animal bodies became a tool to manifest a certain social rank and privilege:

*«The political influence of a man depended to a not insignificant extent on his ability to attract influential people to his table. At the lords' table, meat was a political and social tool which suggested the rank and status of the diners. The most important diners were always served first, then the others were served according to rank, and so on. The best cuts of meat were reserved for the first ones to be served; the less cuts were distributed according to strictly hierarchical criteria.*

*[...] While the rich gorged themselves on meat, the poor, practically excluded from the meat diet until 19th century, were content with what the english called 'white meat': cheese, milk, butter and other dairy products. Between rich and poor, there was an increasingly working class and an increasingly wealthy and powerful bourgeoisie who aspired to the carnivorous customs of the nobility.»<sup>15</sup>*

Even today, meat has acquired the status symbol of economic prosperity: Countries with continuous economic growth are characterised of increased consumption of animal bodies<sup>16</sup>.

### **'Ethical' exploitation**

Ethical livestock or *happy meat* is an underhanded and deceptive mechanism by the industry to persuade those individuals who care about 'animal welfare'<sup>17</sup>.

imprisoned in farms, in zoos or in other places are perceived and treated.

Even though I said that speciesism, like racism is based on biological topics, I would like to focus on this aspect for a moment, because I do not consider it to be completely correct.

Racism, just like speciesism, is not only based on alleged biological differences, but also and above all on economic and political topics. Just as the ruling classes needed the enslavement and subordination of non-white people to expand and maintain their power, so current capitalism needs the speciesism and subordination of non-human animals – and humans in plundered countries – to maintain its *status quo*.

### **Classism and capitalism**

The development of capitalism, or rather the economic conception and exploitation of bodies, probably started around the years of the agricultural revolution, a period in which the human species began to control plants and other animals.

The term *capitalism* is derived from *caput* (head of cattle), indicating the fact that non-human animals were one of the first goods of exchange in the economy after the agricultural revolution.

Domestication of cows<sup>12</sup> for farming and horses<sup>13</sup> for travel and fighting were fundamental for colonial expansion; just as the slaughtering processes of the early 1900s helped the development of industrial capitalism: **Henry Ford** spoke of the link between his assembly chain, the first of its kind in

other primates also use tools<sup>6</sup>. Discoveries of this kind challenge the human species' sense of superiority, so the need to restore it led to assert that human being is the only animal capable of using tools to produce other tools.

This example is part of the debate that the human animal is more intelligent, but this statement is senseless since human beings define the concept of intelligence on human skills, cultures, and knowledge. Our idea of *intelligence* is corrupted and based on human standard applied on human contexts.

It is not surprising that we consider many animals more intelligent than others by basing our judgment on behaviors similar to those typical of the human species, as it happens for example with some parrots who are able to reproduce the sounds emitted by us – managing also to interact – or in general to domesticated animals who respond to each of our inputs **in the way we expect**.

The ability to make themselves invisible to predators, to find the right way in a huge forest, to orient themselves through sound waves or to perceive magnetic poles are all demonstrations of intelligence that some animal species have acquired thanks to an evolutionary process different from ours.

Intelligence is commonly described as 'the ability to solve a problem,' but instead it is a more complex encounter between different abilities that go beyond logical-mathematical concept: creativity, abstraction, self-awareness, emotionality, planning, problem solving; these change from individual to individual and such differences should be seen – as Darwin would say – differences by *degree* and not *kind*. In short, calling someone

smarter than someone else is misleading, since in this way we ignore individuals' personal experiences and other important factors that shape their abilities. Judging an individual (human and non-human) on the basis of a supposed 'intelligence' should become – in my opinion – something obsolete.

### **Human and non-human environments**

We frequently, as a species, define other animals' intelligence by observing situations in which they behave differently from our expectations, or from what we would do in their position.

One of the pioneers of ethology, **Jakob von Uexküll**, manages to describe this concept in his masterpiece *A Foray Into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*. In fact, Uexküll points out that each species perceives every object or environment in a unique way through what he calls *perceptive marks*.

If we – humans – walked in a dungeon, with the right light intensity we would be able to see spider webs above our heads and avoid them with our eyesight, which is not the case with flies, whose perceptive marks make do not allow their eyes to identify the web; in the same way, a sea urchin responds to the darkening of the horizon with a movement of their spines: they will defend themselves against any stimulus, be it a ship, a cloud or a fish.

Each species uses different perceptive marks to 'read' the environment in which they find themselves, and although it may seem 'incredible' to the human eye to watch the behaviours

*«...every meal I would have consumed with my family would have challenged anthropocentric eating habits. Rejecting not so much animal food as much as, worse still, the very mode of being together around the family table. I would have become a party pooper. Not only that, but since my mother would no longer be able to carry out the same 'female service work' for me and for the other members of the family, my choice also called into question the hetero-centred order of domestic space.»<sup>11</sup>*

### **Racism and colonialism**

Colonialism and its propaganda followed a very specific procedure in the past: to treat some human beings exactly like non-human animals. Africans and natives were denigrated and called 'pigs', 'worms', 'monkeys', 'rats'. Once the white colonialist succeeded in assigning to them image of wild animals, a few steps down the anthropocentric hierarchical scale, legitimised consequently the same treatment of other species.

Just like sexism and racism, speciesism is created on a dualism between a dominant group and a dominated group, proper to justify the domination of one over the other and then claiming that it is the natural order of things, following a logic based on a presumed biological and/or anatomical differences; racism is the result of a *white* supremacist theory, just as speciesism is the result of a *human* supremacist theory. White europeans thought black people did not wish for freedom or other needs/desires which were prerogatives of white europeans. We can say the same thing about the way non-human animals



In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, **Carol J. Adams** analyses the different ways of eating and how they serve to maintain a strict gender binarism. For example, roasting animal bodies is the preferred method of males, as it does not change their appearance and maintains a bloody outlook, which suggests ideas of strength, gory scenarios and war; whereas boiling is considered banal, bland and feminine.

Red flesh is associated with masculinity, virility, strength, while dairy products are more associated with femininity.

The connection between speciesism and sexism is obvious to anyone when one comes across certain disgusting advertisements: Burger King, FAT shack, Carl's Jr. are some companies who used female bodies and dismembered non-humans altogether for their advertisements, promoting the objectification of bodies, the definition of a beauty standard and the judgement of what is or is not 'sexy'<sup>10</sup>.

A man's refusal to consume animal products automatically indicates that he is effeminate or homosexual, because it lacks the fundamental part of animal consumption: the part that should support his supposed virility. Veganism, seen from this point of view, is anti-normative and a refusal to conform to heteronormative social rules. Vegan people who define themselves as men therefore become a problem, as they undermine the masculinity and virility of the heterosexual model.

Speciesism and gender roles are also reproduced at the table, in the family. Writer **Sara Ahmed** reports on her personal experience when she started to be interested in veganism:

of other animals, this constitutes a normality and an operability projected in their environments.

Moreover, not only the humanisation of other species is a senseless and anthropocentric approach, but it forces each human being into a pre-set intelligence model, ignoring the physical and mental capacities of each individual. Just to give an example, several people claim that we are 'smarter' because we can create movies, songs, sculptures and build cars, towers, buildings, cranes and so on, giving for granted that every human being is capable of these activities, but this is not true, since these are subjective skills and cannot necessarily be learned by every individual. Some people will never be able to produce movies, write songs, create sculptures, construct buildings, and this for several reasons due to different experiences and conditions for each individual.

It must also be said that these skills are the result of hundreds of thousands of years of evolutionary process relating to the human species – which evolved in such a way to develop certain knowledges –, and cannot be applied to species that had a different process.

The 'engineering' complexities, if we can say so, are measured by the subjective view of each species and comparing them with each other is the same as decontextualising them.

For example, looking at it from a human perspective, if we compare the complexity of ants' anthills with a bed of straw, they could be described as superior to pigs, but that would clearly make no sense.

Our way of judging our own and other species indicates that what makes us superior in our eyes is not to be seen in the human skill set, but in human identity itself<sup>7</sup>.

The alleged superiority is based solely on identity, economic and political grounds, similar to the logic behind race and gender discrimination.

Anthropomorphising (or humanising) other animals by calling them ‘less intelligent’ is once again a functional judgement for the assertion of our superiority as adult and able humans, since we would use measurement scales that have as their standard of intelligence that of the adult and able human.

## **Connections between speciesism and human discriminations**

Starting from the concept of intersectionality we can reiterate how different discriminations reinforce each other, bringing out the need to analyse and deal with them without prioritising one to the detriment of another. Intersectionality is still a difficult topic to discuss in some circles, such as in the neo-liberal vegan one. However, even in other circles – such as the anarchist one – deconstruction of speciesism is minimised, arguing that there are more important things to think about.

It is not taken into account – only when talking about speciesism and veganism – that there is no obligation to actively devote oneself to all struggles. I actually doubt that there is anyone who has the time and energy to devote themselves to every single social struggle. However, this does

not mean, that we have to justify, or worse, contribute to that kind of discrimination just because we consider our struggle more deserving of attention, perhaps even driven by personalism.

I may not actively participate in the anti-racist struggle, for example, but this will not undermine my personal process of deconstructing racist thinking – which has been indoctrinated by society – and will not justify my racist behaviours. Similarly, not taking an active part in the anti-speciesist struggle should not justify my active and conscious speciesism.

I would like to make it clear that it is not my intention to reinforce my criticism of speciesism by exploiting the link with human struggles, because it is shocking, disgusting and violent in itself, but only to describe how historically and culturally speciesism has influenced and reinforced other oppressions. I want to emphasise how all struggles are interconnected and important in the same way and that only by demolishing every possible hierarchy, and the very concept of *hierarchy*, we will be able to destroy the ideology of domination.

## **Animals’ bodies consumption and genders roles**

The link between speciesism and gender roles is so wide-ranging that we could discuss it for days and days without pause<sup>8</sup>.

Historically, the consumption of animal bodies<sup>9</sup> has always been linked to the concept of masculinity and virility.