

Veganism: the Future of an Illusion

Eisel Mazard

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Chapter One

For the duration of an oddly-numbered century from 1880 to 1980, we could say that a certain type of person was attracted to Buddhism in the Western world, and that this person had nothing whatsoever in common with the traditional Buddhists of the Eastern world. Even someone who has never read a single page on the subject can immediately imagine that it would have been a certain kind of nonconformist intellectual who was drawn to Buddhism in Europe, North America and Australia (incongruously included in the category of "the west", due to its history of genocide) whereas, at the same time, generation by generation, decade by decade, a totally different sort of person would have been born into one of the continuous Buddhist traditions of Asia and then felt motivated to become a scholar, a preacher, a promulgator or "a bastion" of that tradition.

During this strange century, when just a single generation witnessed the end of overt imperialism, the disappearance of legal slavery, the sense of wonder at the marvels of electricity being replaced with the dull expectation of it as a constant convenience, and the great semicolon in the sentence structure of modern warfare provided by the advent of the atom bomb, many strange people were drawn to Buddhism for many strange reasons. Among the westerners, it would be common enough to meet someone (or to read the reflections they've now left behind) who initially got involved because they wanted to challenge, transform or destroy the traditions of the country they'd been born into; among the easterners, it would be common enough to find, instead, the motivation that they wanted to honor their ancestors, or even keep the accomplishments of a particular uncle or grandparent alive. Among the westerners, it was commonly said that Buddhism was "nihilistic" (and I've even seen this stated in the titles and subtitles of some books on the subject from the era) whereas, among easterners, there was no doubt that Buddhism was a matter of faith –very often blind faith, entailing a great deal of sacrifice (and self-abnegation) for the sake of those supernatural things they blindly believed in.

Veganism in the 21st century is similarly divided, although not between east and west. The golden age of Buddhist scholarship was produced by a spirit of cooperation between the two sides, as they discovered (together) what the history and philosophy of the religion truly was: everyone, on every continent, started out with childlike misconceptions about what the religion was supposed to be, and they proceeded (together) to unearth and analyze the archaeological and textual history of a religious tradition that had been everywhere in evidence, but was nowhere understood. The Abhidhammapitaka was worshipped throughout Southeast Asia, but primarily on the basis of a prophecy that (as Buddhism gradually declined, in the centuries to come) it would be the first part of the corpus of texts to disappear –and the followers of the religion had hoped that, through their hard work, the prophecy could be forestalled. Totally incoherent noises were memorized and recited aloud, because of their magical relationship to this corpus of texts (for example, the first syllables from each of the titles were combined to create an incantation that didn't have any meaning in any language) but there wasn't a single person who could give an intelligent lecture as to what the texts meant, why they had ever been written, or what was supposedly philosophically interesting about them. It was still common enough when I was living in Thailand for these magic words to be written out in chalk, and then for the chalk dust to be collected to be incorporated into amulets, tinctures and even tattoos. I'm sure the magic was enhanced by the illiteracy of everyone taking part in the process, and their total incomprehension of what these words were, or how they had ever come to be regarded as having some profound importance. The process of western scholars working with eastern traditionalists was an intellectually lively one, but in the case of the Abhidhammapitaka, both sides were disappointed to discover that there was nothing interesting about their quarry at all. In other cases, what turned out to be interesting about the ancient texts

wasn't what either party of scholars had been hoping to discover (we get quite a lot of detail about the policing of masturbation in the Vinaya, I'll have you know, but nothing about the meaning of life). For the religion as a whole, ultimately, the nihilists had to admit to themselves that there was nothing nihilistic to be found within it (just a few sentences could be quoted out of context to serve a purpose quite alien to the ancient authors' intentions, but, of course, this is neither more nor less true in the case of the Christian bible, i.e., another ancient book that contains its share of stray thoughts that can be nihilistically reinterpreted in the same way) and the traditionalists had to admit to themselves that their ancient tradition would require a great deal of adaptation and innovation to play a more powerful part in the modern world. Veganism is in the midst of a similar process of "discovery" as to what it really is, and what it should be. The difference is that we have no archaeology, and we have no corpus of text worth reading: our discoveries begin on a blank slate, in the 21st century.

It was in the year 1880 that Helena Blavatsky arrived in Sri Lanka, beginning a "literary" career producing some of the most influential hoaxes in the history of mankind. Her books influenced the whole world, including the formation of Nazi ideology in Germany; they changed the way Europeans thought about religion forever, while also changing the way traditional Buddhists thought about themselves. Her writing was (and is) unrelenting garbage, but my point here is this: she was the kind of person who was attracted to Buddhism in the year 1880, and who made the transition from west to east. She used drugs, and she wrote her books in a half-dreaming state while under the influence of those drugs; she attributed the source of her wisdom to astral projection, and her reading of "the akashic records" that were supposedly "projected" into the sky (many of these assumptions still shape miscellaneous hippie spirituality to this day, without anyone questioning who had devised these notions or why: believers characteristically avoid inquiring into the origins of their own beliefs, whereas unbelievers tend to enjoy pointing them out). Within European culture, Helena Blavatsky was not a normal person, but she was a normal representative of the type of person who got involved with "oriental" spirituality. She ended up innovating a new kind of religion (and a new kind of social movement) while claiming that she was doing something scholarly and traditional, reaching back to the ancient past –all the way back to Atlantis and Lemuria, ostensibly.

In this same sense, what can we say is normal about the very abnormal people who have become vegan in 2022? How can we characterize the innovators in the movement, and the divisions (seen and unseen) that have set them to work in so many different directions, simultaneously?

Before the rise of the internet (and of Youtube, specifically) it would have been easy to say that the bulk of vegans were "pet people" whose logic extended along a very clear dotted line from "I love my cat" to "I love cows and chickens, too, in the same way that I love my cat". This is not veganism, but petism. Not all petists are vegan, and not all vegans are petists (indeed, the majority of donors to foundations like the RSPCA eat meat). This doctrine has been raised up to the highest levels of absurdity by PhD-wielding academics in the form of "the citizenship approach" to animal rights, and it has tainted the phrase "animal rights" with its absurdity: if you feel compassion for these cats and dogs, they suppose, you must also feel compassion for rats and snakes, extending to all of them the rights of citizenship -including legal protection against extermination, and taxpayer funded veterinary care. This doctrine dies with the internet: it is a belief system so stupid that it cannot endure exposure to competition in "the marketplace of ideas". It dies, now, but will it drag the rest of the vegan movement into its grave along with it? In short, the answer is yes: a huge percentage of the money and institutional resources that could be available to build a better future for the vegan movement is unavailable because it has been monopolized by petism. If you include petists in your calculations, they are now the largest slice of the pie chart, and if you exclude the petists, you are instead looking at a dramatically smaller pie, shared out amongst the other vegan camps.

This division, though often enough invisible at the vegan equivalent of a wine and cheese party, has political ramifications that are impossible to ignore, even if it is principally a difference between psychological types rather than an overt conflict between organized factions. In the year 1880, it was easy enough for an Oxford university professor, in his three-piece suit, to sit down and extend respect

(of a kind) to a Buddhist monk in his saffron-colored robes: each was an authority figure in his own way, each had a different kind of language ability, and each had a different kind of talent to contribute toward the research that was (then) rapidly unfolding. There is no such mutual respect or cooperation possible between petists and vegans: the petists may pretend to be open-minded for the brief duration of a wine and cheese "meetup", but their worldview is based on the dogmatic certainty that their own definition of compassion is the only valid one, with everyone else on the planet "therefore" being perceived as an immoral, unfeeling psychopath –most definitely including the vegans who would dare to disagree. From the other side (by which I do not mean the meat- eaters, but instead the vegans who are ethically opposed to pet ownership) the petists believe in a notion of compassion that is self-contradictory, self-serving and immoral: they want this cat to be their plaything, so they either castrate it or perform a kind of hysterectomy removing the whole hormonal system from the females. Is this compassion? They "fix" it, as if a cat's natural behaviors and instincts were "broken", rather than merely being inconvenient for humans who want a wild animal to behave as if it were a living toy. The petists then keep their captive animals on a couch watching television in conditions that would be considered inhumane for creatures in a zoo, and yet they regard this as the pinnacle of "animal rights", arguing that it is our moral obligation (for example, in the case of stray cats, feral dogs, etc.) to provide these "broken" animals with a life of human comforts –"fixing" them and "training" them to be suitable for the entertainment of their human masters along the way.

It is these comforts, it is this "standard of care", that they imagine all animals are entitled to: their whole political movement consists of an attempt to extend these rights to pigs, chickens and other farm animals. For this reason, they endlessly struggle to prove that all other creatures, too, can be "companion animals". If sharks, cockroaches and bedbugs cannot be coddled in practice, the petists will nevertheless argue that we must extend our "circle of compassion" to them in principle, and regard them as our pets, in some abstract sense. They will proudly show photographs of themselves hugging a rat, cuddling a pig or a bear, and never questioning why the value of these animals is established by demonstrating that they can be cuddled with: that they can be used as a human toy.

Veganism, in principle, is the rejection of animal use. In this sense, strictly defined, it does not rely on compassion for animals: someone could just as easily refuse to castrate a cat because they hate cats, rather than because they claim they love them too much to perform the operation. In turning a cat into a living toy, and in getting your strange pleasure out of having them decorate your apartment, you are using the cat: it is not the same use made of an animal in the production of leather, nor in the decision to buy and wear leather shoes, but it is indeed use. Just as certainly as the rider bends the camel's back, you are bending this animal to your will: you are training it to go to the bathroom in one place, not another, you are training it to live and die for your entertainment, and "to be good" by a human standard that has nothing to do with that species' own behaviors and interests. Dogs are prevented from fighting with one another in a park, with each dog owner tugging on the leash and asking their playthings to "be good", but meaning "act as a good person would": wouldn't it "be good" for a dog to fight for the leadership of its pack, rather than being choked on a chain as soon as it exercises its natural instincts?

It would be just as immoral to do these things with a lion as it is immoral to do them with a cat: the petists regard it as immoral for a zoo to train a lion to respond to a verbal command, while they find nothing immoral in themselves doing the same thing with a pet dog.

An octopus is beautiful. To keep it in an aquarium is ugly –even though we neither spay nor neuter nor declaw an octopus kept in captivity. We do not train an octopus to "enjoy" being petted by a human hand, but dogs are trained from birth to pretend that they are happy with their captivity, their celibacy, their castration, their isolation for so many long hours while their owner is at work, their monotonous diet of dry kibbles, and their lifetime spent separate from all of the instincts and activities that they would enjoy in the company of their own species in the wild. A dog is forced to express its excitement in ways a human eye can perceive, rather than using the subtle signals that would exist within a wolf pack, leaping and yelping with rehearsed "excitement" in order to receive a morsel of food as a reward

("good dog!"). The petists insist that these signs of the most abject degradation should be interpreted as "happiness", both in the moment of the dog's elation, and in the longer view of the centuries of sadistic training and eugenic breeding leading up to that moment: the eons during which nature was bent against its own purpose, contorting and constraining the wolf until it become its very opposite: the dog.

Feigned happiness is the animal's most important "trick", and whether they know it or not, performing that trick is the only reason for the existence of their breed. What the owners want is the illusion that subjugation is happiness, not because they resent their own subjugation, not because they need to justify the degree of their own domestication, but instead because they crave a return to the "carefree" existence of childhood, emblemized by the family dog. The owners are not caged apes who wish they could return to the wild, feeling the full range of their own instincts for the first time, nor are they horses that rebel against the saddle and the whip, wishing they could run free; they are humans who resent both the burdens and the freedoms of adulthood, wishing that they could be domesticated (caged and cared for) to an even greater extent than they already are. They do not think of this "eternal return" to dependency as a loss of independence, for all the same reasons that they do not see the dog as having lost anything when it is compared to the wolf: with a mishmash of confused feelings assembled from halfforgotten childhood memories, they imagine "being cared for" as their "natural" state, i.e., as a carefree condition they are entitled to forever, simply as a consequence of their birth or adoption, just like the family dog. This is why the owners fanatically insist that they treat their pets "as if they were their own children", despite the obvious asymmetries. They insist that this infantilization precludes the possibility of exploitation, whereas, in fact, they exploit the dog precisely by forcing it to play the part of an infant, forever. They see their own "second childhood" in the mindless, passive, irresponsible, self-indulgent life of the housepet (and they plan for their vacations and retirement accordingly!). They provide this existence to an animal like a votive offering before the gods, wishing that the whole world would be similarly infantilized, with everyone (and every thing) being cared for as they care for this dog. This is the life they inwardly aspire to themselves, having no ambition higher than being "a human dog".

They can see the misery of an octopus in an aquarium because they are willing to admit to themselves that its captivity is pointless. The pointlessness of the dog's life on the carpet and the couch next to the television is harder for them to see: admitting it would entail that the owners recognize the pointlessness of their own lives as well. In breaking the dog's will and calling it happy they create a symbol for their own captivity, and then try to transform its significance through sympathetic magic: they care for the dog in the same way that they wish some higher authority (paternal, political or supernatural) would care for them in their turn. If that ever were to happen, the owners would discover, once they became the owned, that care from above can never compensate them for what they had lost from below: another person's will, no matter how superior or sympathetic, can never console you for your own lack of spirit, once it has been broken. Your nature can be taken from you, but it can neither be given to you nor given back. Your childhood can be taken from you, but it can neither be given nor given back. The hand that feeds you is the same hand that beats you, that binds you, that breaks you: you and that dog, both, would bite the hand that feeds you, if only you knew, stretching back over so many centuries, that it has always been the same hand.

So it is that the petists collect donations to "rescue" feral dogs from the horrors of the wilderness, imagining that being trapped and trained to live "in a proper home" is the only happiness their species can ever know: bowing, begging and eating from the master's hand. We pretend that it would be difficult to accomplish the same arrangement with monkeys or even members of our own species:

reducing them to a state of mentally and physically crippled dependency, so that the owners among us could practice their misplaced parental instincts in "taking care of" them –rendering them (through castration, eugenics, collars, chains, whips, etc.) incapable of being anything better than "infants" perpetually dependent on their owners' "love". It wouldn't be difficult: it would be evil. With modern technology, how many decades would it take before we had a domesticated variety of monkeys or men

who were as different from their wild ancestors as dogs are from wolves, being "happy" to sit up, beg, and roll over, just to be fed and fawned over, like any other housepet? How much time would it take for human life, also, to be, in this sense, "fixed" and "broken"?

Whether you regard this peculiar kind of "love" as a caring instinct or a domineering one is irrelevant: the ugliest aspects of slavery are with us still, and they are being practiced by the same people who claim that "speciesism" is parallel to racism, and "animal liberation" parallel to the manumission of slaves. These same people have animals surgically modified, collared, chained and trained: the petists neither exploit these animals for work nor food, but put them through the strange drudgery of making human beings feel good about themselves. It is a kind of slavery that exists merely for the sake of the owners' self-esteem.

Petism is the diametric opposite of veganism, but for the past 40 years, the petists have dominated veganism at every level (within the academic discourse, in the leadership of multi-million dollar institutions, etc.) to such an extent that the paper thin commitment to eventually abolishing pet ownership espoused by Ingrid Newkirk and Gary Francione is normally mentioned as a footnote to an appendix, whereas images of them cuddling pets are very much "on the front page" of their fundraising efforts.

Money and influence in the movement have been dominated by petism, and by the simple (and false) logic of extending "the same compassion" from household pets to farm animals, and then even further to wild animals, vermin and parasites (yes, mosquitoes come up in the same discussions along with the question of what to do with rats and snakes discovered living in one's own home). There is absolutely zero compatibility between the two sides: "abolitionism" was an insincere attempt to reconcile them under the pretense that if we could just abolish the category of property (so that neither pets nor wild animals were legally categorized as such) the contradiction within the doctrine of compassion would vanish. A rat infestation is nobody's property, and yet the contradiction remains: vegans do indeed have to deal with the cognitive dissonance of exterminating vermin, whether they live in a house, an apartment, or within the topiary and trimmed hedges of an ostensibly vegan farm. The practical outcome of the abolitionist compromise is that it has been pointless for real vegans to attend vegan events (at any level, from punk rock to black tie) because they're only going to encounter petists and abolitionists who pretend to be petists for fundraising purposes.

The message that you can cuddle up with a cow just as comfortably as you can cuddle up with a cat earns millions of dollars per year (Farm Animal Sanctuary earns over 14 million dollars per annum with this message). The message that neither cats nor cows want to be human playthings will earn you nothing but scorn—even from the vast majority of people who think of themselves as vegans.

With the petists, in 2022, we have a psychological typology that is just as clear as that of Helena Blavatsky in 1880: there is a certain kind of person who forms a childlike "appreciation" for animals as pets, and then holds onto this attitude into adulthood. They cannot comprehend the cold indifference toward animal suffering of the vast majority of adults surrounding them—or, at least, they cultivate a display of this incomprehension as a sign of their own moral purity. "These psychopaths," they think, "simply regard animals as things they use, as a means to an end," whereas the pious petist insists that animals are instead "members of their own family", being raised for some purpose much better than slaughter (although what that purpose really is they're reluctant to admit to themselves). From the vegan perspective, the petists, also, regard animals as things they

use: they're not vegan at all, they're merely people who refuse to eat meat because they can recognize the resemblance between nonspecific farm animals (castrated and kept in captivity) and the particular animals they choose to castrate and keep in captivity as their pets.

The petist philosophy is, in brief, that the whole world should be a petting zoo; the vegan philosophy entails that petting zoos should not exist at all. However, the practical point I'm making in this chapter is merely that these are the people you'll meet within veganism: this is the psychological type. As with the followers of Helena Blavatsky, a certain (abysmally low) level of intelligence is associated with the typology.

No matter how many petists there may be, and no matter how many millions of dollars their donations add up to, their discourse about compassion is as irrelevant to veganism as the Buddhist, Jain and Hindu discourses about karma. If, hypothetically, we lived in a world where 90% of people adopted a vegan diet because of this doctrine of compassion, that overwhelming majority would remain antithetical to the vegan movement: they would be the real enemies of the vegan movement, even if they were habitually customers at the same restaurants as the anti-petist vegans. The same would be true if, hypothetically, 90% of people adopted a vegan diet because of a supernatural belief in reincarnation, or in response to a charismatic Christian cult leader, or a revival of the superstitions of Pythagoras, for that matter.

The same problems exist within modern Buddhism: large numbers of people become Buddhists for the wrong reasons, and then become the real enemies of the religion, no matter how ostentatiously they may carry out all of the required rituals, and no matter how lovingly (or condescendingly) they may be treated by "the real Buddhists". If case this sounds too hypothetical for you, let me ask: have you never met a single person who became a Buddhist because of the use of hallucinogenic drugs? For several generations now, the religion has been "inhabited" by large numbers of drug addicts who seem to be unaware that Buddhism preaches (and requires) total abstention from mind altering drugs of any kind. The real Buddhists try to tolerate these people with the hope that they will make the transition from doing the right thing for the wrong reasons to doing the right thing for the right reasons. They never do. You can take a drug addict and wrap him in the religion of sobriety, and he remains a drug addict just the same, even as he bows before a statue and chants sacred words in a foreign language he cannot comprehend.

Whether from an insider's perspective (seeing right and wrong in ideologically defined terms) or from the detached distance of a nihilistic outsider, it is possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons, and it is entirely possible that the vast majority of people doing anything at all ("activists") are following this supposedly-rare pattern. When you recruit people into a political movement for the wrong reasons, you undermine the movement, simply, by working with the wrong people. You create a situation in which the wrong people are doing the right things for the wrong reasons, until, one day, inevitably, even that goes wrong.

Everything that's been said about the leadership of the petists, in this regard, could be repeated for the dietists: the marketing of veganism as a weight loss miracle has, simply, recruited the wrong people into the movement. No matter how lovingly (or condescendingly) they are embraced by the real vegans, they are nevertheless working with the wrong motivations toward the wrong ends; they remain the enemies of the movement from within. We should not be surprised that this phony analogue to the vegan movement is more popular than the real thing, for all the same reasons that, in California, at least, phony Buddhism and phony Hinduism are far more popular than the real thing. The problem is, in brief, idol worship: veganism is a false idol that unites many mutually-hostile tendencies, in the same way that the Buddha statue brings together the traditionalist and anti-traditionalist with one and the same bow –with one and the same "blind faith". Crucially, when worshipped, the statue remains silent; there is a similar kind of silence among the financially successful leaders of the vegan movement (Earthling Ed, etc.) as they know that just a few words could turn a significant number of their followers against them (and against one another) at any time.

What type of person crossed the ocean from Europe to Sri Lanka in 1880? What type of European learned an Asian language, in that era, and then undertook projects in archaeology and philology? Good or evil, we have to say that people of extraordinary intelligence and ambition were the only ones capable of attempting such "missions" in that historical context, even if they failed. We would like to imagine that people of extraordinary intelligence and ambition are now becoming vegan, but the opposite is true: veganism doesn't require intelligence, it doesn't attract intelligent people, and the psychological typology of vegans (as divided into the camps I'm sketching out in this chapter) largely excludes intelligent people. This is due to extrinsic and evanescent factors, easily ignored and fundamentally uninteresting, though of real political importance.

Culturally, playing chess is associated with intelligence, but any idiot can do it. Indeed, people of very low intellectual caliber become chess masters while they're in prison, due to the lack of anything better to do. However, within a particular cultural context, knowing about chess may well be associated with higher intelligence. Likewise, inasmuch as the social sciences demonstrate anything at all, it would be very easy to demonstrate that people who can give well-informed answers to a battery of questions about classical music are far more intelligent than those who answer poorly, although any imbecile can appreciate classical music, and innumerable highly intelligent people despise classical music entirely (even if this is just because they happen to prefer some other genre). My point is merely that within a specific cultural context, in a specific period of time, one psychological type or another will pursue one pastime or another: there will be a clustering effect that ensues, allowing you to meet highly motivated, brilliant people in one place, and being astounded that everyone seems to be a lazy idiot in another. The clustering of talented people at one crossroads, and the dearth of them at another, is a complex side-effect of simple and shallow cultural factors.

Shakespeare wrote for an audience of imbeciles, and most of his plays are just the same kind of meaningless drama that Hollywood churns out for the delectation of semi-literate housewives who watch television in the hours between eating lunch and their children's return from school; nevertheless, you will encounter highly intelligent, hardworking people if (in the 21st century) you go to a conference for those who are seriously interested in the reading of Shakespeare. Inasmuch as intelligence can be measured, any research project would find that the minority of people who have become conversant with Shakespeare's corpus of texts is more intelligent than average, although this kind of knowledge does not require any special intelligence to cultivate –merely a special interest. These cultural clustering effects may be shallow, but the consequences for dissident politics are profound.

In Japan, in Thailand, or in Sri Lanka, in the year 1880, were the most intelligent people becoming scholars of Buddhism? In the year 1980, in all the same places, were the most intelligent people becoming scholars of Buddhism? Good or evil, the type of person who was motivated to become a scholar of Buddhism in Europe (and the type of person who had the self-discipline necessary to overcome the inculcated assumptions of their own cultural upbringing, to learn a foreign language, and to endure the dangers and discomforts of living abroad, etc.) had nothing in common with a traditional Buddhist, who might be motivated to carry on their family's ancestral tradition by the experience of seeing a ghost, and whose path to becoming a religious authority figure required neither daring nor brilliance, but only dull conformism. What kind of person, honestly, becomes a vegan in the year 2022? What kind of person will it be in 2122? We are pretending that they are revolutionaries, but they are not: the vast majority of us are dull conformists, afraid of ghosts.

Chapter Two

There are two types of vegans: those who are forever talking, and those who are forever silent. What makes it a political movement is this, and this alone: the silent ones are not silenced by the speakers, but, instead, pay them to talk.

Among the innumerable (boring) vegan conferences that I've seen archived on youtube, there was one recent example that really sticks out in my memory because the audience entirely consisted of people who knew more than the speakers, and yet they were happy to sit in silence, paying to be lectured about things they already know very well by people who are less knowledgeable than they are themselves. This example was remarkable to me, because the organizers of the conference had selected three attractive young women (who had no accomplishments in terms of career or education, aside from having Instagram profiles) who had deigned to wear revealing attire, sitting with their legs and thighs exposed, in short skirts, and giving the most bland and noncommittal answers imaginable to "softball" questions about vegan activism, often prefacing or concluding their remarks with a blunt statement that they didn't really know the answer themselves, and that the person asking the question should really consult a certain website for the answer instead of asking them.

These events are exclusively attended by diehard vegan activists, often with decades of experience behind them, and yet they pay money to hear insipid generalizations spoken aloud to them by attractive young people on the stage. They are delighted to hear their own stupid convictions being made to sound even stupider, when they are pompously pronounced by aspiring Instagram models who have no expertise in anything aside from the onerous burden entailed by being attractive and young. In this respect, 21st century veganism resembles nothing more than the American Neo-Nazi movements of our time: the audience is desperate to have an attractive young woman on stage telling them the same things they've already told others a hundred times before, just so that they do not feel it is only ornery old men who share these beliefs with them. In this narrow sense, the last 20 years of the vegan movement should be called its fascist period. The economic incentive structure of the movement is this: middle aged and elderly people will pay to have their own biases affirmed through the "performances" of the beautiful and young.

Joey Carbstrong is a perfectly good example, although he doesn't show much skin: he isn't merely "preaching to the choir", he is giving lectures to people who are more intelligent and better informed than he is (about precisely the same issues he speechifies about). They will pay him for his performance (again and again) because it makes them feel young and strident and passionate about their convictions (and perhaps there are some prurient interests rooted in unexamined aspects of human sexuality that need not be iterated in full) in the same way that the Neo-Nazis are desperate for an attractive young person to give a new voice (and a new body) to the same "talking points" they've heard from geriatric cranks a hundred times before. The members of the braying audience want to feel, above all else, that "my ideals will not die with me" –but they will.

The carefully cultivated contempt toward black people that so many Americans have passed on from one generation to the next is dying right now. The pretensions of the animal rights movement are dying, too –and that is why there's so much money to be made in "immortalizing" them.

Any woman with a nice pair of legs who is willing to wear a short skirt while she's on stage could make a fortune doing exactly the same act in the vegan and Neo-Nazi movements. For a male demagogue, the physical requirements are somewhat different, but they're not necessarily more demanding: you need not have a body like Jon Venus to be the next Joey Carbstrong. However, there can be no doubt that

"prurient interests" have been as important to the perceived charisma and actual success of James Aspey (or any other male demagogue) as they were for Freelee (or any other female demagogue).

If veganism were a science, the stage (and "the limelight") would be dominated by ugly people who had discovered something, uncovered something, or accomplished something through research. Open up any of the youtube channels that collect lectures on the applied sciences related to space exploration and scroll through the snapshots of speakers standing at the podium; now compare a youtube channel that collects lectures by vegan activists delivered before a live audience and you will notice a very strange difference between the two. There is a little bit of showbusiness involved in hosting a conference on space exploration; if you choose a number of other examples (from various specific fields in chemistry, physics, etc., or even social sciences like computational linguistics, medical sciences like MRI scanning, etc.) you will find that the sciences less and less involved with showbusiness will have fewer and fewer "presentable" people making the presentations. There are remarkably good-looking people on stage at comic book conventions, you know, but they're rarely the people who write, illustrate or even read comic books. When you extricate the art from the showbusiness, just as when you extricate the science from the showbusiness, you'll be left looking at a field dominated by those who are old or ugly or both. The exceptions are those few fields in which science and showbusiness are inextricable, with "nutritional science" being a painfully salient example (as Freelee unforgettably said, in that line of work, the appearance of her body itself was the only necessary credential).

I do not mean to suggest that ugliness is a virtue, nor that growing older has any kind of cause-and-effect relationship with growing wiser ("there is no fool like an old fool"). What I would suggest to you, instead, is that the desperation of the right wing to embrace Lindsay Shepherd (as a speaker, if not as a leader) has everything to do with her appearance, and has nothing to do with her wisdom (her research, etc.) on any issue; I would say the same for Lauren Southern, the Pettibone sisters, Faith Goldy, and innumerable others. If racism were a legitimate science, nothing would matter less than what these airheads had to say about it. Instead, the racists are desperate to have attractive women tell them that their views are scientifically valid, precisely because they never can be. Vegans are just the same: we want to hear our prejudices presented to us as science by any Instagram model willing to do the job, no matter how clueless, so long as he or she can be called nubile, virile, or some other word with a Latin etymology that allows us to avoid saying "sexy" –the most embarrassing Latin word in the lexicon.

The political function of having such people as "speakers" is that they embody the words that the silent crowd already knows and assents to: this is the ideological equivalent of an Elvis impersonator, performing for an audience that already knows the lyrics to every song. Nobody believes that Elvis is still alive, but they are paying for the illusion that his words (and the value of his art form) lives on; and, on the contrary, it is just now that it can be pronounced dead, as it becomes something memorialized in a museum.

Dead culture is not culture: museums are where cultures go to die. Just like the indigenous people whom we pretend we "remember" by setting up a monument or an exhibition in a museum, it is the racism of the recent past that will disappear, just as it is being memorialized by the racists themselves. When racism was a powerful part of our living culture, nobody had to make an exhibit out of it, and nobody had to put on an exhibition to define and defend it, in the same way that the Hindus didn't make museums about the caste system when it was (simply and truly) their way of life. When Jews were quite literally locked into a ghetto, there could not be any museum of antisemitism, nor would there be any rallies with demagogues defending the science they use to rationalize their prejudices; today, there are quite literally museums and guided tours where those ghettos used to be, and –inevitably– there are Neo-Nazi rallies trying to dispute the version of history taught in those museums. What they are disputing is merely the writing of history: the Neo-Nazis are fighting over the funeral arrangements for their own ideology, although they imagine themselves to be "keeping it alive".

The performances that we pretend make these things endure will, in fact, help them to be forgotten: no matter how much the bureaucrats and academics insist that we do these things "so that future generations will remember", the real function of the museum of slavery is to declare that slavery can be

forgotten. The real function of the museum of indigenous peoples is to excuse the ignorance of everyone outside of the museum, and make them feel morally comfortable in the process of forgetting that is well underway. The real function of both the Neo-Nazi ideologues and the vegans who now stand on stage, in immortalizing their ideals, is ensuring that they will be forgotten. In this respect, for the last 20 years, veganism has been in its "fascist period", and I am sorry to say this fascist period has not yet ended.

Oh, if you imagine that vegans are intellectually superior to the worshippers of Brittany Pettibone (etc.), please allow me to ask: have you forgotten already the meteoric career of Timothy Shieff? Will historians ever compile a list of the "vegfest" events he stood on stage at? With each lecture he delivered, to those select crowds, do you suppose there was a single person in the audience who knew less about vegan ethics (his preferred topic) than he did himself? Without insulting or flattering the intelligence of either side, I must ask: was there a single person in the audience stupider than Tim Shieff, on any of those occasions? And yet the crowd, in their silence, adored him for saying the very things they could have said better themselves, and there is no reason for this whatsoever, other than the fact that he was young and virile –in plain Latin, he was sexy.

Oh, yes, after he ceased to be vegan (and violated all the principles of ethics he had preached before) the same silent crowd allowed themselves to see how stupid he had been all along, but what did his illusory "leadership qualities" consist of before? I don't believe any of the right wingers deceive themselves about the intelligence of Lauren Southern; on the contrary, her admirers don't even consider her well read, and often speculate about who exactly is writing the scripts that she (oafishly) performs; but they remain, nonetheless, her supporters and admirers. Tim Shieff had so much admiration and support that he called himself "the vegan prince", and the majority of the vegan movement joined in with the use of the sobriquet, raising him up to rule over us all! When he said that he believed the earth was flat, excuses were made for him; when he started talking about astral projection, excuses were made for him. Just as the demonstrable idiocy of Lauren Southern does nothing to diminish her status as a demagogue on the right, the idiocy of Tim Shieff barely put a dent in his reputation within veganism.

And I say again, without flattery: I do not believe this is because the crowds that adored him were even stupider than he was. The silent supporters of veganism are in the same position as the silent supporters of Neo-Nazi parties: they're generally older, more cynical and experienced than the performers who are put on stage to "represent" them. This is a kind of puppet show wherein the suspension of disbelief involves forgetting who is the puppet, so that even the puppeteers can regard him (or her) as their leader. Tim Shieff was "the great leader" of veganism only in the same pantomime sense in which Lauren Southern is a leader –and, by the same token, either one could have been scorned and laughed at as a kind of puppet at any stage of their careers.

Do you suppose the future of Canada involves people at higher and higher levels of education and intelligence, participating in higher and higher levels of direct democracy? If Canada is a strange and exotic place to you, dear reader, I must apologize, but it suits my purpose as an example better than any other. Do you suppose the future of veganism involves people at higher and higher levels of education and intelligence, participating in higher and higher levels of direct democracy? I do not. Without glorifying the education system of the past in any way, I will say: in the past, Canadians were stupid, ignorant and poorly educated, but the situation now is getting even worse. In the past we had a sham democracy, but now, likewise, the situation is getting worse.

One of the reasons why it is getting worse is, simply, because it can: individually and systematically, we have the luxury of allowing ourselves to deteriorate. The vast majority of people's handwriting has deteriorated because nobody needs it to be excellent anymore, and the quality of research and writing in the newspapers has deteriorated because nobody needs to read them anymore. These things have become redundant in an era dominated by the computer keyboard and the internet, and nobody cares if their redundancy now erodes the foundations of the deeply flawed democracy we had before, leaving it to fall flat, with nothing better planned to replace it. Our semi-democracy (or pseudo-democracy) had been dependent upon investigative journalism and the profitability of the free press to a ludicrous

extent; nobody planned for how the system would work when those cultural and economic assumptions ceased to be true.

Incredibly few people are "well read" in Canada because incredibly few people feel that they need to dissimulate being well read: if you can compel millions to pursue the illusion, you'll end up inspiring thousands to pursue the thing itself. In the absence of any pressure to be well read, we have become a nation of complacent dunces. Multiculturalism, in the absence of an education system that truly teaches 40 languages, contrasts 40 different political histories, and debunks a dozen different religious traditions, makes this problem even worse: there was a time when you'd be impressed to meet a taxi driver who was well read and well spoken, but now you're impressed to have a taxi driver who can speak comprehensible English at all. In university classrooms, today, the students who are born native speakers of English do not make the slightest effort to seem well spoken or well read, and are drawn into a kind of intellectual lethargy by the unexamined (and implicitly racist) "privilege" of finding everything easier than their classmates who are struggling with English as a second language. The standards for high school education were low before, but having half of the students speaking English as their second language results in even lower expectations for everyone (again, in the absence of a system that can cope with 40 languages, or can provide bilingual teachers for each of them, etc.). The internal divisions created by multiculturalism (and multilingualism) are similar to the divisions within veganism in one respect: they exacerbate the stupidity of each of the "solitudes" created on either side of every tiny divide.

I grew up isolated as an intellectual in Toronto, but how much more isolated would I have been as a Pakistani intellectual in Toronto? And the Pakistanis are isolated from each of the other minority cultures just as much as they are from the majority (English-speaking) culture. Whatever spark of intellectual potential might exist in a city of three million people is reduced exponentially with each division of the whole into a smaller part, with each portion invidiously ignorant of the political, religious and intellectual lives of the others. I have met and spoken to Pakistanis who were quite brilliant, and spoke English well enough to demonstrate this brilliance to me; but they were part of a culture that had its own political discourse about abortion, its own political discourse about inbreeding ("cousin marriage") and its own political discourse about racism (Pakistani racism against Canada's indigenous people, for example, or Pakistani racism against Caribbean blacks). These discourses, within their community, were entirely cut off from mine. They would never challenge my thoughts about abortion, inbreeding or racism, and I would never challenge theirs. In Toronto, we lived in two solitudes, the Pakistanis and I, but there were really dozens of different solitudes. The Pakistanis were estranged from the Koreans, the Russians, and so on, through innumerable combinations. Each could have learned a great deal from the analysis of the other, but, instead, they learned nothing by ignoring the other, avoiding conflict and preferring to preen a sense of their own specialness.

Veganism, thus, has all the disadvantages of an intensely racist movement, and all the disadvantages of Canadian multiculturalism as well. We live in twenty different solitudes, trying to trump up a sense of "togetherness", while each camp despises the others, and regards the most basic "articles of faith" in the rival creeds as evil, immoral and logically flawed. We could learn by challenging one another to reach a higher standard, but we don't: the level of education, the caliber of intellectual discourse, and the quality of participation in our deeply flawed democracy gets lower and lower.

Veganism is the dominion of bimbos: it is the realm of false promises bought and sold between willing parties, each with a wink and a nod, knowing the exchange to be false, but knowing, also, that the transaction has a kind of value created by the audience's participation in being deceived. This cannot quite be compared to the proverbial "Potemkin village" nor to "the Emperor's new clothes". It is more like a clique gathering to cheer on a new punk band, knowing that the music is poor but hoping that if enough people "enthusiastically" attend their first few concerts, the group could end up achieving success disproportionate to their merit. The movement is at its most convivial when the currency of deceit is agreed upon by all, as when (for a few years) activists sincerely believed that a certain number of animal lives would be saved by photocopying and distributing a few hundred pamphlets (and with

deadpan seriousness, they used this equation to "prove" to donors that their money was making a palpable difference in the world). There was a similar kind of math involved when vegans believed that you could eat an infinite number of calories (while still losing weight) so long as you adhered to a low fat, low salt, zero garlic, zero caffeine, vegan diet: the vast majority of participants who promoted the fad knew that the numbers couldn't add up, but they were willing to engage in the deception for the sake of the conviviality that came along with it, and for the remote possibility that the scheme might work (again, like kickstarting the career of a mediocre punk rock band, by mustering up false enthusiasm amidst a false audience).

The movement is at its least convivial (and its most internecine) when the currency of deceit is in flux and the promises offered by our bimbo spokesmodels have become uncertain –and this is because, unlike any mainstream religion, the liars do not actually believe in their lies, but merely participate in the deception (knowingly) for the sake of certain (imaginary or actual) outcomes. It is a movement entirely populated by simps who support and admire their leaders precisely because they do not lead: they merely "perform" (like an Elvis impersonator, and like a puppet show) in reiterating dead and dying ideals that the audience has no need to hear, as they already know the lyrics to every song.

Chapter Three

All evils –imagined and unimaginable– have been justified by this word “compassion”. Vegans dump red paint on the diners at a random restaurant and cannot understand why the public fails to see this as an act of “compassion” for “the victims” in the same way that antiabortion protesters dump red paint on doctors and nurses (“giving voice to the voiceless”, in the same idiom that vegans use when speaking of themselves) with sincere incomprehension as to why the general public does not appreciate them as “compassionate” rather than dangerous.

The genocide of whole nations, cultures and languages has been carried out in the name of this “compassion”, not for people as they truly were, but to benefit them as the missionaries thought they ought to be: not for the evanescent reality of mere women and men, but for the sake of their immortal souls. The pattern is much the same outside of the explicitly religious sphere: we are not helping people achieve their actual desires when we demonstrate our compassion for them, we do not help an alcoholic get drunk, for example, nor do we help an anorexic become thinner, nor a kleptomaniac get away with theft. Instead, we help them achieve whatever we believe an idealized person ought to desire in their circumstances, even if it is the diametric opposite of what they actually want themselves.

If the redemption of the thief requires a jail sentence, we will readily believe that testifying against them to ensure their imprisonment is the compassionate thing to do, because our compassion is not for the kleptomaniac as an actual person, it is instead derived from the fixed notion of redemption we have established in our own minds. In relation to our own family members, employers, colleagues, etc., each of us has a clear idea of the better person everyone else ought to be through “a conversion” of some kind –and this may not mean anything so specifiable and verifiable as conversion to a new religion, a new political party or a new credo (like veganism). It may be as vague as an unspoken wish that, “if only he could share my sense of integrity, we wouldn’t be having these problems around the office” –or “around the family dinner table”, as the case may be. If we have any imagination at all, we are burdened with eight billion fictions of this kind: we live with the definite (although utterly untrue) knowledge of the better person everyone else ought to be, even if we feel powerless to become better people ourselves.

Compassion becomes compulsion: one person’s values are forced upon another’s, even if it is as simple as an alcoholic being forced to become sober, with the compassionate person being quite certain that they are acting in “the best interest” of the person whose will is overruled and snuffed out in the ensuing struggle. The crucial conceit is that we know who someone else ought to be, whereas he or she does not: we know what they ought to desire, and we will desire it for them –calling this strange mismatch of intentions “compassion”. We may be interrupting them in the midst of their pursuit of selfish, shortsighted irrational things when our compassion causes us to “assist” them, contrary to their self-interest, but consistent with our own –and, hypocritically enough, we would not be able to see the relationship as compassionate at all, if our positions were reversed. If an alcoholic forces me to loosen up and have a drink “for my own good” I would be as astonished by his prerogative as he would be at mine, if I were to force him to become sober –although I remain completely committed to the delusion that this would be “for his own good” as well!

In this way, massacres are made invisible to the people who commit them by compassion. Acts of terrorism and cruelty are made to seem kind by means of this same mode of reasoning. Putting a drug addict in prison may be “the compassionate thing to do” according to one person, whereas shutting the prison down and liberating all the drug addicts may seem more compassionate according to another. Imprisonment, exile and execution can all be justified by compassion. It is a dangerous concept clothed

in anodyne distractions, like a sword wrapped up in shelving paper: you're all the more likely to cut yourself because you can neither see its true shape nor which end you're laying your hands upon.

What the referendum is to the average dictatorship, compassion is to the activist: it is a corrupt plebiscite with just one voter. The question of compassion is less mysterious than most people pretend it is, frankly, in the same way that human sexuality is less mysterious than most people want it to be. Denuded of its mystique, what remains but the simplest relationship possible between two mammals? Love is far simpler than the relationship between predator and prey, and perhaps that is why so many cultures (including even the French, in our times) attempt to "glamorize" romance by making it sound like hunting. Compassion is simpler still, and that's why we insist on philosophizing about it in such an abstruse way that it becomes incomprehensible: clothed with extraneous complexity, we're spared the sight of our own bare bodies, and barer intentions, in either sort of relationship. You will be reluctant to hear this, but I will prove it to you without appealing to any fact, theory or concept that you do not already know.

Suppose we were to organize 5,000 athletes into five different training camps, arranged from the most to the least compassionate. Oh, yes, for this hypothetical experiment we must imagine that compassion is something we can test and quantify. Without digressing into the definition of what compassion ("objectively measured") might actually be, I will invite you to imagine that a single drop of blood could be drawn from each athlete's finger to establish their level of compassion as a palpable fact, so that we do not rely on questionnaires or the opinions of psychiatrists. Do you imagine that the 1,000 most compassionate athletes would be the best athletes? Would they be the smartest, the hardest working, the most disciplined, the most ambitious, or the most competitive?

Even at this first, simplest stage, of our hypothetical experiment you must admit to yourself that there is no positive relationship between compassion and any of these other virtues. Culturally, we pretend that compassion is the most important virtue, but, in fact, it neither produces any of the others, nor can it serve as a substitute for any of them in a pinch, hm? If you're extremely intelligent, that may or may not produce the trait of being hardworking, but intelligence could be a substitute for hard work to some extent: a lazy genius may get a particular job done in less time than an imbecile with a good work ethic. Conversely, being hardworking may not produce the trait of being intelligent, but it could serve as a substitute for it, to some extent, on some occasions: a diligent but stupid student who reads the history books thoroughly and repeatedly may be able to outdo a much more brilliant student who isn't motivated to do the reading at all. Looking at intelligence and work ethic, can we fool ourselves into imagining that compassion is a substitute for either one? No, we find it difficult to imagine that any sport would be dominated by the most compassionate athletes, whereas we find it easy to imagine that many of the best athletes will be rather cold, ruthless, and endowed with characteristics that are approximately the opposite of compassion.

Some of my readers might want to imagine that the distribution of compassion amongst the winners and losers might be random, i.e., that the trait would neither correlate to competitive advantages nor disadvantages, resulting in our five groups of a thousand athletes performing at about the same level of talent, competence and intensity. This is a generous assumption. If we were less generous, we'd be willing to say that the more compassionate athletes would disproportionately end up among the losers: compassion isn't associated with any traits that offer an advantage, whereas the opposite characteristics are almost the definition of having a competitive spirit.

None of this is science, all of this is anthropology: what we think of, in our culture, as "playing to win" is incompatible with our notion of compassion. The pursuit of excellence in any field (even the most non-violent, such as architecture) is never thought of as compassionate: it is always seen as hubris, no matter how much the ambitious men and women among us may insist they have humanitarian motivations or altruistic goals. Hubris is our defiance of the low expectations our families and contemporaries force upon us, misperceived as a defiance of the gods.

You know, vegans are not the first social movement to imagine themselves more compassionate than everyone else: among most of the major religions (certainly including the Catholics, Hindus and

Buddhists) it is a very common conceit. If we were to accept the unproven hypothesis that vegans really are extraordinarily compassionate, could we perhaps admit that it has only been a disadvantage for our cause? Could we attach this hollow boasting about our supposed compassion to the blunt admission that we've accomplished practically nothing in the last 20 years, and perhaps this is because the most compassionate athletes are neither the swiftest nor the most cunning?

Conversely, we could discard this conceit altogether, and admit that we only consider ourselves "more compassionate" for the same reasons that the Catholics do: within our own group, we know how to give and receive the cultural signals that are interpreted as compassion. Catholics know how to signal to other Catholics their well wishes: they know (within their own culture and sub-culture) how to communicate concern, caring, appreciation, remorse, guilt and a hundred other signals. These subtle indications of "being a good person" that they practice from birth suddenly become useless when they find themselves in a sufficiently foreign culture. The Cree language and culture is now disappearing from this earth but, until recently, they provided a useful example of just this kind: the facial expressions and manner of speaking that the Cree used to indicate they were being earnest and taking the question seriously would be (consistently) misinterpreted by white Canadians as indicating dishonesty and evasion. One anthropologist complained that their custom of looking down at the floor in silence after a question was asked made it impossible for him to pay them by the hour for the interviews he conducted. However, when he interrupted their silence and cajoled them to answer more promptly, this was offensive to the Cree: their long silences weren't just an opportunity for them to think of the answer, but also indicated that they were taking the question seriously and would answer earnestly. Many white Canadian judges and police officers responded to this same behavior as certain proof of a lie: refusing to make eye contact (by looking down at the floor) had another meaning in the cultural context that had conquered and enveloped the Cree. At the opposite extreme of the cultural spectrum, the Yemenis are known for answering immediately (even before the question has been fully enunciated) to show their earnestness (whereas an answer after a pause would seem evasive, from their perspective). When one Catholic finds another Catholic to be compassionate, all it means is that they know the signals (and social rituals) that will be interpreted by their co-religionists as indicating compassion. Inexorably, the "in group" regards itself as more compassionate than the "out group", just due to these dynamics, and vegans are more deluded about this simply because they don't recognize the extent to which they have (already) created their own ersatz subculture, with its own subtle rituals and coded signals.

What if we weren't studying 5,000 athletes, but, instead, 5,000 students preparing for their final exams in economics, to commence their careers on the stock market? If we followed their careers, do you suppose the most compassionate students of economics would become the most successful analysts and financiers? If you are imagining such a huge number of students, with each one accurately ranked according to their level of compassion, do you think you'd find that the most compassionate students were, also, the smartest, the hardest working, the most disciplined, the most ambitious, or the most competitive?

What if they were medical students, and we then tracked their careers as doctors after they'd taken the test? Have you ever spoken to a doctor who was genuinely compassionate, but, also, made you feel afraid for your own life, because you could see he was an incompetent fool? Conversely, have you ever spoken to a doctor who was cold and unsympathetic toward you, but who nevertheless made you feel certain that your life was in the hands of someone who was brilliant, hard working, highly competent, demanding of the highest standards of excellence in himself and others, and so on?

Should I also propose that we set up a military training camp (with 5,000 new recruits divided into five cohorts, etc.) to test the hypothesis of whether or not the most compassionate trainees become better soldiers? The truth is so obvious that it doesn't require any evidence: we're all embarrassed to admit that neither the navy nor the army nor the air force is interested in finding the most compassionate recruits, and this is because the characteristic doesn't correlate to any other abilities that palpably matter.

Whether you want a good surgeon or a good sniper, there's simply no reason to assume that the most compassionate people will be the most competent. The person who is objectively the most skilled at their task, or the most intelligent in their analysis, may well be the least compassionate, whereas totally incompetent people may be able to elicit this feeling of recognizing compassion from us. If we could establish someone's intelligence by testing a drop of their blood (something absurd to imagine, even as science fiction) we would readily assume that the most intelligent students will perform better in the military, in medicine, in the stock market, and even (to some extent) in competitive sport. We would expect to see the 1000 smartest trainees disproportionately outperform the other 4000 in each of these experiments, and we'd be surprised if the distribution of intelligence (amongst the winners and losers) turned out to be merely random (i.e., if it did not correlate to any advantage at all in praxis). Why exactly do we suppose compassion is a virtue, if we cannot even imagine that it gives us even the slightest advantage in any of these scenarios?

I will tell you why: compassion is neither more nor less real than lust. When we speak of compassion as a trait that objectively exists in others, we are talking about an apparition as absurd as perceiving our own love for someone else objectively existing within their body, as if it were their kidney or their soul: we paint the world with our desires, and then see it everywhere dripping from within. We can perceive how we feel about someone else as if it were their physical attribute, just as nationalism is embodied by a river, or mythology inhabits a mountain, and pride can "arise from" (or "be invested in") practically anything we make or buy, to then be seen and felt "in" these things, as if it had always existed there. This way of thinking appears often enough in bad poetry, but what I love about someone else remains merely my own sentiment; what I appreciate about them (or fail to appreciate) is merely my judgement or opinion. Compassion is a kind of lust: it is not so specific as yearning for a sexual relationship, but it is a mammalian instinct that is neither better nor worse than that simple yearning.

Culturally, we are conditioned to pretend the only instincts we're born with are to fight for survival and to recline seductively for the reproduction of the species, but we have other instincts related to social organization. Trying to sense whether or not we can trust someone, for example, is a first step toward forming some sort of tribe (even if that objective, in turn, serves no loftier purpose than survival and reproduction). When women perceive me as compassionate, it doesn't mean they want to seduce me, nor that they want me to seduce them: it means that we have between us a nonspecific basis for a relationship of some kind. Have you ever had the experience of someone helping you (genuinely helping you, with some kind of material aid, when you were in need) but you did not perceive them as compassionate at all? That is because you didn't feel this strange sort of lust for them. Conversely, if you had lusted after someone who held your hand and did nothing to help you whatsoever (while someone else, perhaps a doctor or a nurse whom you despised, was the one to actually assist you) you would nevertheless regard that person as compassionate just for holding your hand. Swimsuits are not sexy; people are sexy; specific people seem sexy to us when wearing a swimsuit; it is just an error to attribute sex appeal to the swimsuit itself (although, again, "poetically", we often speak this way, even in the best of rap music). There's a similar sort of error in thinking of compassion as "a real entity" that is either within people (like sex appeal) or that clothes them like a swimsuit (or, perhaps, like armor).

I am not stating that compassion is entirely chimerical, and that's why I repeatedly compare it to love, lust and sex appeal: when we say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it doesn't mean that every beholder is capable of finding anyone and everyone beautiful. The point is not that beauty is arbitrary, but merely that I am the arbiter. We are each of us the arbiter of whosoever we perceive to be compassionate, and apart from this perception there is very little objective reality to the phenomenon—but I will admit, there is some. I knew a man with an impairment of the nervous system that caused him to shake and tremble, occasionally interrupting his speech; in the context of a war, it would be easy to imagine that he'd be perceived as a coward, even if he were brave; in the context of some situation requiring the cultural signals that connote compassion, he'd be at a disadvantage compared to someone who could maintain a steady hand and a steady gaze. Someone who had lived with him for years and had become accustomed to his unique set of signals (his manner of speaking, gesturing, etc., despite the

interruptions caused by his medical condition) could perceive him as being compassionate, whereas a stranger (in the same circumstances) would not; but this is neither more nor less meaningful than saying that a woman could fall in love with him, and (in her eyes) his behavior would start to seem normal, and his disability would become invisible, with the passage of time. Perceiving someone as compassionate has nothing to do with how much or how little they have helped you, and it has everything to do with your desire for a relationship with them, although the type of relationship is not the same as carnal lust: you may hate the gym coach or the professor who has helped you the most, whereas you may perceive as compassionate the one who has helped you the least, just because they're the one you'd want (hypothetically) to be friends with (or to be a part of your tribe, on some instinctual level).

So we come back to the central conceit of the vegan movement: we imagine we are so different from the anti-abortion protestors and Christian missionaries, but we are, instead, discredited by the same sort of compassion –and, soon enough, by the same sort of violence.

Never forget that imperialism was justified by compassion: the notion that the conquered peoples should live "a better life" seemed selfevident to the conquerors, who had no interest whatsoever in indigenous concepts of what might be "better" or "worse", instead regarding their own enlightened perspective as a scientific certainty (even if we now regard it as an ersatz religion, in retrospect). My fellow vegans feel their own model of "a better life" is a scientific certainty, and therefore try to compel everyone to live up to it (or live down to it, as the case may be). Just like Christian missionaries, they are utterly mystified as to why they are not regarded as

compassionate when they force others to do something against their will, believing this compulsion is entirely for the benefit of the compelled, never troubling themselves to imagine the opposite perspective.

Killing stray dogs is compassionate according to one person, whereas refusing to kill them (and coddling them until they die) is considered compassionate by another. Each camp regards the other's failure to recognize their own standard of compassion with total incomprehension – and, of course, this division exists within veganism, but also exists on a larger scale in distinguishing the vegans from the omnivores. In this same "double blind" way, during our long millennia of imperialism, the process of conquest and assimilation was never lacking in compassion: the barbarians would be compelled to join the ranks of the truly civilized, "for their own benefit" –and the benefit (like the fixed notion of compassion) was not understood to be a shadow cast by our passions (as lust relates to beauty, etc.) but was perceived as something objectively real. Forcing conquered peoples to learn English, forcing them to read the Bible (in English, inexplicably, though neither God nor Jesus had a high opinion of this foreign tongue), forcing them to pray, and ultimately forcing them to fight in our armies (to conquer other barbarians, thus repeating the process) was all motivated by a compassion just as sincere (and just as chimerical) as the compassion of my fellow vegans who walk the earth today. The conquerors would console themselves with the notion that the conquered people would not moan and suffer "if only they knew!" –which is to say, if only they shared the "enlightened" perspective of the conquerors. This is the stupidest and yet the most common conviction in political science: if only you agreed with my notion of what is in your best interest, you'd hardly notice that its imposition causes you harm –or even entails that you should cease to exist, along with your language, your

culture, your values, your lifestyle, and your nation.

The Mongolians, if they were deprived of meat and alcohol, would cease to be Mongolians; if they ceased to make excuses for eating meat and drinking alcohol, in a sense less drastic than the disappearance of Canada's indigenous peoples, Mongolia would cease to exist. It does not take much imagination to say the same about European cultures, and it does not take much honesty to admit that vegans conspire to bring about just such a civilization-ending change on every continent. It is easy for me to say that Mongolian culture is more than just meat and alcohol, or that German culture is more than meat and alcohol, but that is just as asinine as the

Christian missionaries who sincerely thought that Cree culture would flourish after they converted to Christianity and started speaking only English, refusing to recognize that this conversion entailed the extinction of their culture.

If I say that I am preserving what is best in Mongolian culture while destroying what is worst in it (and so on for German culture, Swedish culture or Argentinian culture) I've merely adopted the missionary mentality of an alien ideology: from the indigenous perspective (i.e., with the Germans being indigenous to Germany, etc.) it is precisely meat and alcohol that makes life worth living. It is these

("meaningless") indulgences that their whole culture revolves around. Instead of being surprised that they do not see our attempts to destroy them as compassionate, we should be surprised that they are not trying to destroy us, as well: I may perceive their pleasures as meaningless in the same way that the pious Christians perceived the pleasures of the pagans as paltry and sordid compared to the pleasures of the soul, but from the heathen perspective (of my meateating, alcohol-drinking adversaries) those are the only pleasure they can ever know. That is all the meaning their lives can ever have.

For so many centuries, Buddhists and Christians alike would happily interrogate you, torture you, imprison you, and eventually kill you for the sake of your own "karma": the compassionate thing to do is to punish you for your crimes now so that you won't endure much worse consequences in the afterlife! Do you think we will be any less deluded in the next century, when it isn't the impalpable

consequences of the afterlife we're trying to avert, but the much more tangible consequences of global warming and the suffering of farm animals in their billions? If an unsubstantiated story in a picture book can form the basis for the fanaticism of the dark ages on so many different continents, do you think we're going to be any less fanatical in our new religion, now that we have videotape evidence of the horrors within slaughterhouses instead of sfumato paintings of an intangible hell, and scientific measurements of carbon levels in the atmosphere, instead of a numerological interpretation of a prophet's dream to foretell the end of the world?

The notion of "objectively real" compassion is always a kind of myth linking a cause to an effect: if we really believe that killing you will reduce the number of years you spend in hell after you die, from that tiny seed of faith will sprout an elaborate ethical system making unspeakable atrocities seem perfectly compassionate. If we believe that human sacrifice will change the weather (and end a drought, bringing rain, etc.) then it seems perfectly compassionate to kill any number of people in order to help the others. These are not hypothetical examples: they motivated and defined human behavior for centuries over vast continents. The irrational is perceived as rational because our subjective desires are perceived as immutable facts. Veganism marks the beginning of a new and more terrible tyranny than the dark ages ever knew, precisely because the mythology of cause and effect (of sin and punishment) can be shown to be physically true, here and now. Think about how little evidence the Jehovah's Witnesses could ever muster to prove that the world was about to end, and now look at the scale of the stupidity their squalid little cult has inspired! In the next hundred years, veganism will be worse than the last century of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons combined: there is no other cult with such conviction that their notion of hell is real. For that same reason, vegans are utterly deluded in thinking their notion of compassion is real. For that same reason, they will kill for it, perceiving themselves as compassionate all the while.

There are two closely linked misconceptions about European philosophy that prefigure and enframe this problem. The first is that philosophy itself will make you shrewd and dangerous, whereas, in fact, it will teach you to be a fatuous imbecile, but to feel satisfied with your own fatuousness (and, thus, departments of philosophy have neither been the laboratories of revolution, nor even the dodgeball tournaments of revolution). The second is that the best way to make progress in the world (or bring about some kind of radical change, be it progressive or not) is to start with a blank chalkboard and fill it up with some grandiose philosophy. The assumption is that we must begin with great ideas and then set these ideas into motion in a series of steps that are subsidiary to the philosophy first set down on the chalkboard. The reality is very much the opposite. The American Revolution succeeded because it had no philosophy, and, conversely, inasmuch as it had a philosophy, that was its greatest weakness. A philosophy is a limit: men of action have none. Compassion is a limit: men of action have none. The philosophy of compassion is a limit: it is one of many reasons why vegans have accomplished so little in the last twenty years.

Look at the pathetic incels with their pathetic political movement forever defined by the outrageous atrocities committed by a few of their least coherent adherents. Look at the neo-primitivists whose whole social significance is forever defined by the terrorist attacks carried out by just one man: the Unabomber. Now, by contrast, compare how liberally we disregard the atrocities committed by George Washington. Think of all the skulduggery we can attribute to Napoleon, who is nevertheless remembered as an angel by the French to an even greater extent than Washington is glorified by the Americans. Into which sort of history do you suppose the vegans of our century will be written? It is only a matter of time until someone, somewhere acts on the advice of Gary Yourofsky and takes up a gun in the name of veganism: perhaps this person will be as incoherent as the incel killers in their manifestos, perhaps as prolix as the

Unabomber in his prison cell, where he is still publishing new tomes. What then? What next? What will remain of our movement after it is indissolubly associated with some lunatic like Elliot Rodger or Alek Minassian?

How much different would the world be today if there hadn't been an overt conspiracy to erase every trace of Nasime Sabz from the internet (to deter "copycat" killers, seeking fame) after she attempted a massacre at youtube headquarters? She could have been remembered as "the vegan killer" of our generation, but her whole catalogue of youtube videos disappeared (along with her websites, etc.) before they could become the subject of widespread ridicule. Today, her name is forgotten, and her attempted massacre is not even a footnote in history, unlike the enduring infamy of Elliot Rodger. Of course, his infamy is fueled by fear: it is reasonable for people to be afraid of "the next Elliot Rodger", but it is even more reasonable to fear "the next Nasime Sabz". It will happen again and again, until the violence ceases to be seen as the exception to the rule and instead becomes the stereotype that discredits the entire movement (in the same way that Alek Minassian discredits the incels, in the same way that the Unabomber discredits the neo-primitivists, etc.).

I know what you're thinking: you're wondering if I don't have some hope that we could end up in the other category, along with George Washington and Napoleon Bonaparte. Could we, also, be counted amongst the heroes of history whose sins are washed away with retrospective sympathy? This is impossible for vegans in the same way that it would be impossible for the anti-abortion protesters: it is our notion of compassion that makes us despicable. It is the sanctimonious conceit that we are harming others for their own benefit that makes us intolerable, even if the harm we do is so minor as ruining a fur coat with red paint, or ruining the quiet of an evening meal at a restaurant with placards and chanting. People can respect the rapacious egomania of leaders like Napoleon because they did terrible things for their own benefit; what makes compassionate people intolerable (no matter which religion they preach) is that they act with the conviction that they will help the very same people they will destroy.

Chapter Four

I am not saying to you, "this is the world, take it or leave it." I am saying, "If you want to change the world, first accept it as it truly is: stop reproaching it for failing to equate to some ideal of what it ought to be." When I say "first" I do not mean "last": radical, revolutionary change can begin with an acceptance that the status quo is rational, even if evil. We can appreciate that the social conventions of our own time were created for good reasons and that they are now being perpetuated for good reasons, instead of judging them to be evil from the moral high ground of our imagined futurity: it is their very goodness that makes them difficult to overcome. If they were entirely evil, they could be discarded without anyone devising a better idea to replace them; in recognizing that they're a mix of good and evil, we begin to feel that there is an onus upon us to innovate and offer better solutions, rather than merely complaining that the currently working solutions aren't good enough to suit the moral standards of our utopias.

America's subsidies to the oil industry exist for a good reason, you know: the beneficiaries who justify the program are the urban poor in Chicago, some of whom would not be able to afford the heating in their homes and apartments without it. Do I say that the policy is "good"? No, but it is rational: every left winger who begins by complaining that fuel subsidies are the result of an evil conspiracy (to delay our supposedly miraculous transition to solar power) ends up in a state of stunned silence once they get a few google searches into uncovering why the policy exists and what the consequences would be if the subsidies were suddenly canceled. Beginning with a recognition of the rationality of the status quo is mature; beginning with an insistence that your own utopia is rational, whereas our modern world is some self-contradictory kludge (a creaking contraption, kept working only by an evil conspiracy, soon to

collapse in on itself, etc.) is the most reliable indication of immaturity in politics (left, right and center). As vegans, our "imagined futurity" is built upon the assumption that our perspective alone represents the future, whereas everyone who disagrees with us is "stuck in the past" ("regressive", "reactionary", etc.), even if the reality is that our opponents control and dominate the present, whereas we represent an infinitesimal minority with very little chance of influencing anything in the next ten years. Our powerlessness in the present is rationalized with reference to a future no more substantive than science fiction that we believe will vindicate the rightness of our cause; this delusion has been widespread amongst religious fanatics throughout history, including Catholics persecuted by Protestants just as much as Protestants persecuted by Catholics. All of them imagined that some future regime would look back upon them as martyrs who were before their time.

Would you rather lose by being "before your time", or win by being "of your time" and "for your time"? Martyrdom is a philosophy for losers: in the end, they are forgotten and the moral distinctions they were willing to die for (such as the distinction between two rival sects of Christianity) are regarded as risible in retrospect –and vegans, too, in the span of centuries, will suffer the same fate. It will become the stuff of cocktail party banter, as we now laugh at the details of faith healing rituals and reliquaries devoted to the severed body parts of saints that were, centuries ago, taken far too seriously to be sneered at: "Did you know that in the 21st century there was a philosophy that claimed even rats should have human rights? They denounced anyone who disagreed with them as 'speciesists'! They went so far as to propose a law that you should go to jail for killing a rat or a snake in your own basement, but if the snake were to eat the rat, nobody would be punished!" We insist on seeing strength as weakness and weakness as strength, so that we can believe we are "on the right side of history", no matter how blatantly and constantly we may be losing.

I can barely stand to hear the voice of Carol Adams: she maintains the petulance and insouciance of a fifteen year old, with her hair grown grey. The vast majority of people who hear her lectures would agree that she sounds childish, but why it is exactly that she sounds so immature (while preaching veganism in the most inscrutable of academic jargon, with all the gestures and intonations of elderly sagacity she can muster) most would not attempt to say. She addresses the world from the distinctively childlike perspective of someone who "knows better" than anyone else what human nature ought to be, and she then addresses her political beliefs to the world (as it truly is) as a kind of complaint: it is offensive and immoral that we should all fall short of her standards. You can hear in her voice that she is aghast and astonished with each example she presents of evils that are so commonplace as to be unremarkable, even in the eyes of a true believing vegan: she has not discovered the fountain of youth, but, perhaps, she has discovered the fountain of naivete. Yes, the majority of the world's population is racist, the majority is sexist, and so on, but there's neither any analytical value nor any leverage (any method to change the world) in complaining about it. With a lever long enough and a fulcrum set down beside it, Archimedes said he could move the world; it is the degree of detachment entailed by having your fulcrum set down somewhere "outside of" the world that the childish perspective lacks.

You will never once hear Carol Adams say, in a detached way, that she can understand the perspective of racists and sexists as rational, even if deplorable, in the same sense that I can reflect on the racism of the Cambodians against the Vietnamese, or the racism of the Chinese against the Tibetans, openly saying that I understand it, that I see how it has resulted from historical conditions in a "rational" way, and so on. The whole vegan discourse remains arrested at this childlike stage of development: they stomp their feet and complain, "The world wasn't supposed to be this way!", as if that sentiment were more powerful than having some leverage that could move the world just one inch out of its complacency. Inasmuch as veganism ever had a philosophy, prior to the publication of this book, it was just a bunch of competing claims as to what the world was supposed to be: myriad models of the garden of Eden, providing a basis for myriad appeal-tonature fallacies, with no purpose other than deepening this petulant pattern of complaint, "I know better than everyone else what human nature is, and what the world ought to be, therefore, when I complain about the 'fallen state' we're now stuck in, you should all listen to me!"

Preaching morality is an art; complaining about immorality is a passtime. Vegans have struggled to elevate the latter passtime into an olympic sport, while utterly neglecting the former art. And why? Because they are united by this sense of shared identity: "We are the ones who know what the world was supposed to be" –and, likewise, "We are the ones who know how mankind is supposed to live". Notice how easily vegans will switch from making a narrow claim about the optimal diet for the species and the true system of morality that ought to govern our society: from an outsider's perspective, one provides no valid basis for an inference about the other, but from an insider's perspective they're two folds in the same cloth. Vegans see these suppositions as a strength, rather than a weakness, never once looking at parallel examples of other movements (or cults, frankly) that were founded on similar principles: we are not so different from the believers in the "alien origin" hypothesis (the cult of RaÅ«lism, etc.) claiming that some other species (from another world) meddled in human evolution and then left without a trace. If this hypothesis were true, you might ask, what difference would it make? Wouldn't it be the most trivial footnote imaginable if aliens had (against all probability, and in the absence of any evidence to support the hypothesis) tinkered with human genetics, and then abandoned us in this state that is (empirically) indistinguishable from what evolution could have produced anyway? From the perspective of a detached outsider, such a claim about evolution provides no basis for any inference about morality, politics, etc., but from an insider's perspective they're two folds in the same cloth.

The "alien origin" worldview brings with it all the same suppositions that haunt veganism: that we alone are the ones who know the truth about human nature, "therefore" only our ideas about the progress of civilization could possibly be right, and "therefore" our model for the future of society must inevitably triumph over all others, and so on. Even if science cannot yet verify their theories, the believers in aliens go to their graves quite certain that "one day" they will be vindicated, imagining themselves

to be martyrs for a great cause, no matter how little they actually accomplish, simply because of the gap between what they believe and what they are willing to suppose will "one day" prove to be true. There is even more pseudoscience, not less, amongst the believers in the colonization of Mars, who hold conferences very much like the vegans do, where they share their sense of being under-appreciated and misunderstood by a cruel world that they imagine will "one day" recognize that they were "ahead of their time". The ethos of vegan slacktivism relies on an insincere but strident certainty about our supposed future significance in much the same way: the whole world may deplore us for being in the wrong now, but we can dream that eventually it will be proven that we were right all along.

With this cultic sense of certainty in their own specialness, Vegans ignore entirely the embarrassing question of, "If we are going to change the world, who among us knows how?" It is enough for them to assert that the world ought to change, because "it wasn't supposed to be this way", like children accustomed to complaining about their food who have never once attempted to cook for themselves, and have no idea what kind of labors they're imposing upon their parents with their demands. Childishness, in politics, reflects a deep-seated assumption that if only we complain enough, if only we weep enough, "someone" will fix the problem for us –with the even deeper assumption that someone, somewhere, already knows how!

If you want to change Cambodia, first you must say, "I accept the Cambodians as they are, with all their petty racism, and all their sexist attitudes." You can neither take up the political work of trying to change them nor the humanitarian work of trying to educate them on the basis of hatred, contempt and a smug sense of certainty in your own moral superiority (nor with the assumption that your own values represent the future, whereas theirs represent the easily outmoded past). It would be even worse to believe in the superiority of your imaginary "better world", whether that be the alternate reality of a vegan world, the alternate reality of a Christian utopia, a Communist utopia, or any other. The childish perspective is, "If you cannot reject racism, you cannot change it", but I say, instead, "If you cannot accept racists, you cannot change them."

Note the difference between "it" and "them": if you actually want to overcome racism or sexism, you are trying to change people, not ideologies that exist as static entities. Gender roles and sexist attitudes in Cambodia did change, and not because of any of the pompous "volunteers" who got rich preaching from the progressive feminist playbook. The Cambodians had a common turn of phrase, decades ago, that "you can't move a stack of plates on the back of a bicycle without some clattering around", and this was interpreted to mean, "a man must inevitably beat his wife every few days just to keep his house in order", but as everyone started to have a cellphone in their pocket, attitudes toward domestic violence were utterly transformed. It is one thing to hear someone complaining that their husband is a violent drunk, and another thing to see a video recording of it; indeed, it is even harder for people to take the violence of a woman against a man seriously if they do not see it for themselves, but the cellphone made this possible, too, as never before. The brutality of Cambodia's gender roles could not endure "the light of day", and daylight would shine through ten thousand keyholes created by several million mobile phones.

Video cameras forced people to reflect on their own conduct with detachment as never before: technology has changed "selfconsciousness" in the broadest sense of the term, and it has changed the notion of "accountability" for one's actions in the narrowest sense of the term as well. If I had been equipped with a 21st century mobile phone as a child, I could have had my parents put in prison, and I could have had half of my schoolteachers fired. Surveillance has brought to the world, as a political fact, what the monotheistic god offered only as a religious fantasy. And this, also, has been the great hope of vegans in the 21st century: that seeing the reality of the slaughterhouses, seeing the environmental consequences of eating meat, and so on, will motivate people to change their own lives and, in some sense, change the world. The problem is that the vegan response to this opportunity has been as childish as Carol Adams.

If I may lampoon Auguste Comte for a moment, consider "a Positivist view" of computer technology and veganism in parallel. The first phase of computer programming was the era of the hobbyist, and

there is some level of public interest in the historical transition from hobbyist to professional. We are told to admire the visionaries who bought the very first Sinclair home computer (the ZX80) and saw the potential in it, although it was utterly useless for even the simplest of tasks (it was far worse than a traditional typewriter for what we'd now call "word processing", for example). The hobbyists who invested thousands of hours into learning to program (hunched over that terrible keyboard, and enduring the awful buzzing sounds, etc.) were in a strategic position to make millions of dollars when the professionalization of the industry ensued, even if they just created amateur video games for successive models of Sinclair computers. History, told in this way, has an uplifting effect on the listener, and the moral of the story seems to be that we should all be on the lookout for the next "ugly duckling" opportunity: something just as useless as the Sinclair ZX80 could make us fabulously wealthy and change the world for the better, if we're willing to put our time and money into it, as the first generation of bedroom programmers did before. There have been movies made and books written about that transitional era; although I can't quite say it is the subject of widespread fascination, there is certainly more celebration of it than the dry history of government policy, military-funded research projects and university department quarrels that shaped the development of computer programming in the same period. You can imagine what a different perspective we'd have if we were to begin the story with the corporate mainframe computers of the 1950s (e.g., the IBM 700) or if we'd written the early history of pinball games and coin-operated jukeboxes as "chapter one", tracing a different trajectory toward the hobby video game developer. Yet another version of the story could commence with the mechanical reckoning machines of the 18th century, examining the relationships of aristocratic patronage that made possible the first steps toward the pocket calculator and (eventually) the mobile phone. None of these versions of history would have the same uplifting effect on the audience: we will not feel encouraged to learn that making a difference in this world requires the mathematical brilliance, hard work and hereditary wealth of Blaise Pascal, along with aristocratic supporters currying the government's favor on our behalf. Of course, it would also be discouraging to think that we might be driven insane by the meticulous detail of our labors, as Pascal most certainly was.

The ethical significance of any given history is changed by the choice of where the storyteller begins and ends the tale. Many vegans do (currently) think of the movement in these same "enterprising" terms as the bedroom programmer period of computer software, precisely because they like the implied "moral to the story". They want to believe that veganism will make a parallel transition from its despised status as the eccentric interest of a few hobbyists to being as ubiquitous as computers are today, through a period of

"professionalization" that will richly reward the "early adopters", who were once despised as nerds. This fantasy brings with it the possibility of becoming fabulously wealthy by investing in the first stages of the transition: some small company promises to process tofu into the most convincing simulation of meat imaginable and thousands of vegans (rich and poor) leap at the chance to participate in what they presume will be the dietary equivalent to the Sinclair ZX80, dreaming that they will get rich as the whole movement makes the leap from "hobbyist" to "professional".

Notice how profoundly different this notion of progress is from the usual left wing tropes: the abolition of slavery, the black American civil rights movement of the 1960s, the protests against the Vietnam War, and the relatively sudden success of the gay rights movement. Vegans really talk about these things as if they're different facets of the same stone, but the "Positivist" conceit in each is profoundly different from the others: what they have in common is that they set out a series of stages and call them the inevitable progress of history, but nobody was getting rich from the "mainstreaming" of gay rights, civil rights, or the anti-war movement.

The meaning of "mainstreaming" itself is slippery: in the year 2022, demands for police reform have become mainstream, but actual reforms have not. Demands for a sudden end to the military occupation of Afghanistan were mainstream, right up until the moment Joe Biden delivered what the left wing had been asking for; then the left and right alike beheld what a horror it was to have Afghanistan return to the dominion of the Taliban; soon enough, complaining about that became mainstream instead. Vegans

could be divided into several different camps on the basis of what it is they implicitly assume "the mainstreaming of the movement" would mean, but there can be no doubt that the free enterprise model is now predominant, with the fantasy being that obscure vegan food substitutes will not merely become popular, but will render meat and dairy obsolete in the same way that laptop computers have destroyed free market demand for typewriters without any government coercion (without any law) forcing the transition to occur.

The imagination of many an activist is fueled by the possibility that they might make a vast fortune along the way, something that was possible with slave trading, but not in fighting for the abolition of slavery –and it is slavery that is the activists' preferred parallel, in drumming up support for both their protests and their for-profit enterprises. This is a painfully obvious paradox that nobody in the vegan movement is willing to think about, while promoting their projects in the loaded jargon of "abolitionism", "animal liberation", "anti-speciesism", etc., as if the marketing of vegan cheese substitutes were an act of rebellion closely comparable to the underground railroad.

Although vegan pastries, bread, etc., have not been waiting on any kind of laboratory to make a breakthrough in the way that tofu has supposedly been awaiting the discovery of simulated blood (so that it can be more effectively marketed to carnivores), the same pattern of false futurity can be seen in the anticipation that vegan baking will now transition from an obscure hobby into a mainstream profession, with a (presumed) mass market worth billions of dollars, even in the absence of any technological innovation. The "Positivist" structure of vegan history is this: that the era of the hobbyist will give way to the era of the professional, with the "ubiquity" of the "new technology" ensuing soon thereafter. The professionalization of veganism is regarded as an inevitable process that is already under way, without any of the "activists" questioning why this transition would be so different from the abolition of slavery, from Gandhi's campaign for the independence of India, or any of the other (cherry-picked and cynically misrepresented) political struggles that vegans regularly choose to compare their own slacktivism to. Those examples, inexplicably, do not follow this pattern of "professionalization" at all, and do not present any "easy" opportunity for investors to "get in on the ground floor" and be made rich by the inevitability of "social progress".

The meaning of "obsolescence" is also slippery, and also salient here: from the perspective of a true believer, the Protestant Reformation made the Catholic Church obsolete, but centuries of unspeakable violence and coercion failed to make this seem self-evident to the Catholics (who never did come to regard themselves as obsolete, and never will). Exactly the same self-deception is involved in the vegan assumption that we've "outmoded" our adversaries, who nevertheless continue to rule both the pulpit and the parliament in Rome. It never occurs to vegans that we'll be regarded as old fashioned ourselves, one day: the veganism of 2006 (when "the Skinny Bitch" was the most influential book in the movement) is already remembered as "just another diet fad" that was outmoded by a seemingly endless succession of best selling books promoted on an equally endless succession of talk shows. Almost nobody alive can remember the veganism of Dick Gregory that came and went before –and most of the people we now consider famous within the movement have never been (and will never be) as famous as Dick Gregory once was. There was a time when the Hare Krishna movement seemed new, and there was a time when it became faintly ridiculous to even mention it, as something associated with half-forgotten newspaper stories and stand up comedy routines of the 1970s. There would have been a time when Christian Science seemed new, and there would have been a time when the Quakers seemed new before that, and so on: each one of these movements imagined they'd outmoded their contemporaries, but they became outmoded in their turn. The people who fought and died for the Protestant Reformation may well have imagined that they would establish some kind of profound, permanent change in ethics, but they were, instead, just another fad in fashion. Oliver Cromwell imagined he had changed the moral and religious systems of the English-speaking world forever, but whatever difference he made would disappear soon after he died; and we, the vegans of the 21st century, imagine the ethical system we're advancing has so much more permanence to it, when we neither have an army nor a revolution behind us, as Cromwell did before.

Despite all the pounding of drums and ringing of alarm bells, the fundamental vegan weltanschauung is even more passive than it is childlike: the role of the activist is merely to pout and complain while waiting for the magic of the free market to transform the evil world of animal exploitation into a utopia of animal liberation –as if (unlike the abolition of slavery, unlike the struggle to get women the right to vote, etc.) this could all be done at a profit, and without “the activists” actually engaging in any acts of daring or self-sacrifice. Nobody has to live in a cave, nobody has to build a fortress in the jungle, and nobody has to lead a revolution: in the same way that the electric lightbulb extinguished all the candles in the western world, without one moral argument snuffing out another, without any political struggle whatsoever, the belief in the “technological” superiority of veganism entails a totally passive role for the believers. From this entrepreneurial perspective, even the vegans who engage in terrorism (lighting furriers on fire, for example) are doing little more than “guerilla marketing” for a cause that “sells itself”, with or without their attempts at “promotion”. This passivity runs so deep, and the perspective is so prevalent, that even those who support terrorism talk about it as a kind of sideshow, while the true progress of the movement “unfolds” without anyone doing anything at all. The model neither relies on heroism nor activism, nor does it revile the terrorists as villains, I might add.

There is no concern that bad leaders will discredit us, nor that bad followers will make us all seem like mass murderers; there is no concern that our philosophies make us seem like madmen, and no concern that our health advice is grossly unscientific and dishonest (relying on exaggeration, concealment and sleight of hand). We imagine our cause could not possibly become the subject of derision and distrust for these (eminently reasonable) reasons, simply because we pretend that veganism represents “the next step” in an historical process that does not exist anywhere outside of our own heads (it is just as unreal as science fiction, and just as laughable as religious prophecy from the perspective of an unbeliever). The technological conceit is crucial to this idiocy, even amongst those who have never articulated the futurity of veganism in these terms:

just as the superiority of the lightbulb over the candle could not possibly be diminished by the idiocy of its enthusiastic early adopters, we regard our own cause as impossible to defile, our own credibility as impossible to lose, no matter how many times our leaders drag the name of veganism through the mud.

Although the free market has never been able to eliminate cigarettes, alcohol or heroin, we are now supposed to believe that meat and cheese will disappear from the earth, simply because “a better alternative” is being offered for sale, a few shelves down the aisle. Mere competition, without coercion, will bring about the change, they dream, as if there had not been “better alternatives” to cigarettes, alcohol and heroin all along –but only “better” from the perspective of someone who isn’t addicted to them! As if circumcision could be abolished, simply because “a better alternative” is being offered by conversion to some other religion! As if monogamy could be abolished because “a better alternative” is offered by Islam, albeit with the minor inconvenience of requiring circumcision! In every case, we avoid recognizing that “better” is a subjective judgement, with each and every judgement entailing a tragedy: the Muslims will fight to defend their right to circumcise themselves as if it were the only happiness they’d ever known, whereas it brings them only misery, in the same way that the fentanyl addict will defend his little flake of “medicine” as if it could save his life, whereas it drags him down into a living death.

This whole fantasy relies on an irrelevant notion of progress: a vegan croissant is not “technologically superior” to a croissant made with butter. One will not make the other obsolete, as the lightbulb did the candle. The difference is, instead, like a wedding planner suggesting a Protestant venue rather than a Catholic one: the distinction is morally important to an insider, but invisible to an outsider, and utterly unreal to an unbeliever. A Japanese tourist might scoff at the difference between a Catholic and a Protestant chapel, noticing only trivial differences in the church architecture and wondering aloud what all the infighting is about, whereas the grandparents of the bride might be passionately opposed to the wedding being held at one venue or the other. Even if the moral distinction represents something “real” enough that some of the insiders would be willing to kill and die for it, the thing remains utterly

unreal in the eyes of a detached outsider. For me, the difference between vegan yogurt and cow yogurt is very real, but I cannot make it real for anyone other than myself, and I have endured the company of a few scoffing Japanese tourists, who cannot understand what all the infighting is about.

Newspapers are biased by novelty, and the writing of history is biased by newspapers, training us to think in terms of the dramatic "rise and fall", of one movement after another. It is much more difficult to measure out the political changes that really endure after the novelty of any given movement has worn off. The real significance of Napoleon cannot be found in the newspaper articles that charted his "rise and fall" as it happened, nor in a history book composed by collecting those articles together into one narrative. The real significance of Black Lives Matter, in our times, is nowhere to be found in the newspaper articles that cheered the movement's rise, nor in those that have cheered its fall, nor in a narrative that offers a synthesis of the two (which is presumably how the history books will now be written). Likewise, for both the history of computers and the history of veganism, there is another stage and another era that follows after the first two, that is more politically significant but also more easily ignored: there comes a time when the excitement and innovation of the earlier transition lies dead, and new computers are regarded with as much indifference as a fridge or a stove. That is the stage of the vegan movement I have been trying to prepare you for in this book, and with a thousand nihilistic youtube videos before.

The future of computer technology requires our contempt for computer technology: just as the art of photography ceased to be taken seriously when we all became easily able to understand and participate in it, the triumph of microchip entails its total banality. Whatever may be "new" and "different" about the next generation of computers will matter as little as the minor innovations coming out in next year's refrigerators and stoves. So long as a photograph was something that had to be hung from a clothesline to dry, after a difficult process involving dangerous chemicals in a dark room, then

(and only then) we could respect it as one of "the fine arts", comparable to carving a statue out of stone.

Similarly, as veganism loses the mystique of being something dangerous and difficult, it will be regarded with more and more contempt. In this sense, I represent the future of the vegan movement in a way that no other leader ever has, because I alone (among "the early adopters") am willing to despise its past for what it is, seeing it as the explanation for why we've accomplished so little thus far, rather than glorifying it as the winning formula for what we're going to accomplish next. In this contempt, I am embodying both the indifference and the struggle against indifference that will define the next phase of the vegan movement: everyone else is marketing veganism as a novelty, with no thought whatsoever for the world that will endure after the novelty itself is dead and gone.

The health benefits of the vegan diet, the ecological advantages of abolishing the meat industry and the horrors of slaughterhouse footage have all become as easily ignored as background noise, losing their power to shock and awe. Their novelty is gone, and will never return again: the version of the movement built on marketing that novelty is antiquated. It is doomed to become politically and culturally inert, just as the Quakers and the followers of Christian Science were before –even if they still have well-funded institutions, paid for by the donations they amassed in the irretrievable and inimitable years of their novelty. There was a sense of urgency when people first learned that cigarettes cause cancer, that alcohol causes brain damage, or that the mass of ice at the north pole is shrinking, but these revelations, too, have become "background noise" amidst the rhythm of our civilization. In this same pattern, all our precious ideals will be ground under the millstone of the social media cycle, and they will be more easily ignored (not less) as they become more familiar to the general public. This is the future you must be prepared for, and every other vegan leader is collecting donations for the sake of an illusion so that, instead, you will enter into that next phase of history utterly unprepared.

My rival leaders, in their presumption that the hobbyist's enthusiasm will be perpetual, ensure their own irrelevance as the professionalization and mainstreaming of the movement makes its former radicalism seem laughable: both Gary Yourofsky and Gary Francione now seem as absurd as Malcom X, with his demands for a separate black homeland within America. Never forget that X supported

and worked with white segregationists, including overt Neo-Nazis, because he saw his own goals as compatible with theirs: both parties wanted the removal of blacks from white society, whether that would be accomplished by exiling them back to Africa, or by giving them a separate plot of land within the United States. In clinging to this model of "radical" black nationalism (black separatism, etc.) Malcom X made his political movement irrelevant to the century of integration and acceptance that would ensue, and is still ensuing now. That is what we, as vegans, are also facing, in our way: everything that formerly seemed radical about our movement will be dissolved by acceptance ultimately leading to indifference -and in the warm embrace of that indifference, our dreams of a better world will die.

There is another way: there is a new way of life opening up a new course of action that isn't reliant upon the enthusiasm and selfsacrifice of "the early adopters" of "the new technology". Individually and organizationally, enthusiasm allows us to ignore our lack of discipline: in moving beyond the hobbyist's stage of development it is self-discipline that's lacking -or, more precisely, it is at this stage that we notice the extent to which it had been lacking all along. I need not describe the ways in which conventional activism will ruin your life, even when it does not directly require your imprisonment or immolation: enthusiasm flows toward reckless, self- destructive, short-term thinking, it can very rarely be funneled into the self- discipline that allows an individual, a small organization, or a mass movement to challenge the complacency of the culture that surrounds them. There is another way and a new way forward that these two books I've written attempt to announce and explain, but the vast majority of activists already in the movement will be incapable of taking the new path, not because of their lack of enthusiasm, but because enthusiasm is all they ever had -nothing more.

Enthusiasm began as a religious concept, and it is as a religious concept that it should end, dispelled: the true believers will insist that you can only appreciate the bible when you look upon it with "the eyes of faith", which is to say, if you read it with the assumption that its message must be good and profound and true and inerrant, with your own belief in it being presupposed, rather than earned by the book as it proves its worth to you - but, of course, the very opposite is true. The bible only becomes meaningful when we read it without faith, without believing in it any more than we believe in Marduk or Mazda: when we can look upon it with the utter detachment of a foreign religion, only then does it start to become "our own" as literature, or even as the raw materials for the elocution of our own political aspirations and philosophies. The contempt for the whole history of the vegan movement that I'm speaking of here (in so much depth, despite its shallowness) is not an end in itself: in the same way that disbelieving the bible leads to the true understanding of the bible (beginning and ending with an understanding of its worthlessness, its nothingness, its untruthfulness) we must utterly disbelieve the history of claims made to propound veganism in order to "work with it" as a kind of literature. The battles that existed within veganism just a few years ago (Peter Singer vs. Gary Francione, etc.) are already as ancient as the competition of Marduk against Mazda, but I can, at the same time, truly understand them inasmuch as I'm willing to admit to myself their meaninglessness. The specific claims made, in the past, about weight loss, fitness and even the number of animals' lives saved by refusing to buy meat and milk: the vast majority of vegans regarded these things with a kind of neurotic "biblicity", thinking "it must be" good, profound, true and inerrant, because it is "the bible" - because it assures us our eventual salvation, because it assures us of the inevitable victory of the vegan movement. Understanding the Bible as a bunch of stories made up for the entertainment of children (sometimes by authors who were quite deranged) is not the final conclusion of Bible study, but the necessary first step (the point of departure) in appreciating the literature for what it is -rather than what it isn't. Likewise, we must have contempt for the sanctimonious marketing ploys that have -thus far- comprised "the literature" of veganism, not as an end in itself, but as "a point of departure" for what comes next.

My contemporaries, my rivals, are just dreaming: most of them are getting rich by peddling a bunch of dreams they can no longer believe in themselves. I alone am saying that the dreamers can neither lead nor follow in the next phase of the movement to come. Ask Earthling Ed what he seriously expects his movement to have accomplished after the next five years, and then ask why he hasn't accomplished it already in the last five years, given the vast fortune that has been handed to him (with no strings

attached) by the cheering crowd. He is stuck with selling a dream that he no longer believes in himself; he'll have a fortune in real estate five years from now, but the movement he's leading will accomplish nothing more than making him wealthy. He wraps the scarf of a revolutionary leader around the neck of a bureaucrat. He keeps on collecting donations that disappear into his bottomless bureaucracy, while lending his voice to the ideals of a revolution he never expects to materialize.

How would you have lived your life in Ukraine, these last five years, if you'd had certain knowledge that war with Russia was ahead in 2022? How would Earthling Ed or any of the other enthusiasts be living their lives if they thought they were within five years of accomplishing the revolution they say is imminent, again and again? They live like bureaucrats because that's what they are: body and soul.

They expect nothing to change, even as they become rich by perpetually preaching that everything is about to change. The ferocity of Gary Yourofsky was utterly phony: he complained that he couldn't quit his job (as a part-time supply teacher) to work as a full time vegan activist, but when he was handed an unlimited budget (with one millionaire donor in particular being more generous than all the rest) he soon crumbled and cracked and quit. Like Erin Janus and so many others, he was given the opportunity to live his "dream life", as he had described it himself, but then could not endure the contradiction between the revolutionary dream and his own bureaucratic reality. None of these leaders are, in fact, leading the revolution they've described: they live as if the status quo can be perpetuated forever, with an endless stream of edutainment podcasts profiting by repeating the same few factoids, with an endless stream of hit books (like Dr. Greger's "How Not to Die", etc.) with nothing new to say being promoted on an endless series of TV talk shows (i.e., imagining that the cultural impact of Oprah Winfrey's promotion of the vegan diet could be infinitely repeated, instead of facing up to the sad fact that the novelty of the thing was exhausted with the first try).

They preach that the movement is about to become mainstream, but they profit by remaining on the margins: they are marketing the novelty of their diet, ethics, scientific factoids and street activism, as if the public will never become bored by insincere rabble-rousing on behalf of a revolution that has yet to materialize –and never will. Freelee and Durianrider were covered in the newspapers because their extreme diet and their extreme ethical statements provided an attention-getting freak show (most infamously, Freelee claimed that meat eaters did not deserve to live, and this was indeed reported as "news" in England's Daily Mail). The younger generation celebrates the mainstreaming of the movement, failing to realize: when veganism ceases to be a freak show, it ceases to be a show at all.

Thinking only of "the mainstream" as some great accomplishment, vegans have ignored the extent to which mainstreaming entails the loss of interest in things that had formerly been fascinating (when they were seen as fearsome, forbidden, taboo and so on). When black Americans accomplish complete equality, the cultural fascination with them will end: their music, their stand-up comedy, etc., will cease to be appreciated as distinctive in any significant way. Decreasing racism brings with it a decline in race fetishism, and the trend will conclude with the trivialization of racial distinctions that formerly seemed important, whereby they become utterly boring.

The Cornish are no longer seen as distinctive within Britain, but were formerly regarded as a separate "race of man", with a separate language, culture and artistic tradition. As the difference between black and white becomes politically meaningless, there will be less fear and hatred directed toward the blacks, but there will also be less fascination with them, or in whatever putatively makes them special or distinctive. Likewise, the novelty of female corporate executives will soon enough become banal, as women have more and more (de facto) equality in the workplace (i.e., the fascination with them that existed before was reciprocal with a certain degree of fear and hatred, just as race fetishism is reciprocal with racism). It should be self-evident that the increasing victory of the movement for racial equality makes the movement itself meaningless, with something equivalent being true for the feminists in pursuit of workplace gender equality; but for the people inside these movements, it is not obvious at all –and they will try to retain the fanaticism of the earlier phase of their movement's heroic struggle, long after the opposition and oppression (that created their reputation as radicals) had ceased to exist. They will fight to retain the enthusiasm of the first phase of their own movement, as if this could exist without

reference to specific (attainable) objectives, and as if it could not cease to exist when those objectives have been accomplished. Why? For them, as individual activists, enthusiasm was all they ever had: they are radicals with nothing to offer but their own radicalness, trying to make money by marketing their own marginality. Nobody will donate to support a bureaucrat: so it is that he wraps his neck in the revolution's scarf.

Within my lifetime, both the fascination and the fear directed toward homosexuals has diminished in the western world, and it will eventually end entirely with total indifference. There was a time when people thought that the availability of gay pornography would really entail the collapse of our civilization. Similarly, we have already forgotten the apocalyptic significance that so many white Americans ascribed to the rise of "black power", and to the "takeover" of their cities by the black minority. The final stage of the process is not victory for one side or the other; instead, it concludes with increasing public indifference toward the distinction that separates the two. The third stage of this "Positivistic" process is contempt for the very thing that was regarded as a radical challenge before.

In the 1980s there were about 200 lesbian bars in New York City, and today there are about 24. Did you assume that the progress of gay rights would entail increasing enthusiasm for all things homosexual? You would be wrong: the victory of gay rights means, instead, that two women can go on a date together in almost any bar or restaurant in the city, and that they can hold hands or kiss practically anywhere without fear of persecution. The politically produced panic that had formerly motivated them to meet only at an exclusively lesbian establishment has waned away, and it will continue to diminish further. Do you suppose the vegan movement will be immune to this kind of "sea change"? The declining number of gay establishments doesn't correlate to increasing repression, but to increasing acceptance: both the fascination and the hatred that homosexuals once attracted will come to an end. This will not produce a new wave of enthusiasm for their cause, but, instead, indifference toward it (even amongst homosexuals themselves!). At some point, the difference between gay and straight, black and white, Cornishman and Englishman, just becomes too trivial to be revolutionary.

If you were a lesbian opening a restaurant in New York City today, would you be motivated to make it an exclusively lesbian enclave? For the vast majority of lesbian restaurateurs, I'm sure their answer to this question would be, "Why bother?" The mere existence of such a restaurant has ceased to be radical, ceased to be revolutionary; it has instead become something quotidian and easily ignored. In the cities that already have many vegan restaurants, they're not regarded with any more respect than Chinese restaurants, Indian restaurants, or gluten free restaurants. In the department stores that have a vegan aisle or section, it isn't regarded with any more respect than the area set aside for Halal food, allergy-sensitive food, and so on. The future of our movement entails more contempt, not less, even if that contempt is the result of a kind of pluralistic acceptance, accommodation and indifference toward us (as "just another minority").

The leaders of the vegan movement want to believe that the next step forward will be a step backward: that the progress to ensue after our professionalization will return us to the enthusiasm of the hobbyist's era. It won't. The radicalism of the movement will be lost, and what will replace it will be a kind of indifference you cannot (now) imagine, in the same way that our 21st century indifference toward open displays of homosexuality (although preferable to homophobia) could not have been imagined as recently as the 1960s. This kind of indifference seems impossible to achieve until one day you realize it is impossible to escape. The old radicals are left mourning the lost avant garde of their youth, when a better world seemed possible. And indeed it was, but never will be again.

Computers did once represent a radical change to our way of life, but they have long since lost their air of radicalism: the difference between the Playstation 4 and the Playstation 5 cannot cause the excitement of the transition from the Atari 2600 to the Nintendo Entertainment System. The difference between a 1080 pixel monitor and a 2160 pixel monitor is hardly worth squinting to see, but there was a huge wave of enthusiasm when, for the first time, facial features could be recognized in what had been, before, the mess of blocks used to represent video game characters. It was a great thrill when it first became possible to edit a photograph on a computer, using a hand held scanner, and it inspired artists

to work in new directions, but a single generation's paradigm change is followed up by a thousand years of incremental developments that will never again present the same kind of opportunity. The gay rights movement will never again be radical in the United States of America, and if they have any further victories, they will be regarded with increasing indifference, in the same way that successive waves of computer technology will be: at some point we can say that their potential to instigate social change has been exhausted. Likewise, black power movements will never again be radical, and sincere attempts to reradicalize them now seem unintentionally satirical. It is as laughable for their leaders to presume that the next step forward entails a return to the status quo of the 1960s as it would be for vegans or for any other movement. Look at how seriously the Nation of Islam was taken when Cassius Clay endorsed it, changing his name to

Muhammad Ali. Do you suppose that black nationalism, generally, or the Islamic form of it, specifically, could be taken so seriously once again, in the year 2022 or 2032? Anyone who would attempt this backward transformation of black American politics will end up producing propaganda that's indistinguishable from parody –and this is a problem they have in common with my fellow vegans.

Technological advancement provides no allegory for moral advancement: it would be absurd to say that the Afghans became "more advanced" when they converted to Islam and started burning their Buddhist temples down, or that the Greeks became "more advanced" when they abandoned polytheism for Christianity and forced the oracles to stop predicting the future, and yet it is precisely this absurdity that distorts and defines the vegan movement as a whole. Vegans convince themselves that one croissant is "an advancement" over the other, but the "advance" is merely a difference in moral perspective, and one perspective can never render another obsolete; instead, tragically, one can only dominate another through political power, created and sustained by violence.

The religion of Marduk has disappeared from the vast empire of Babylon, with its last traces preserved only in museums. Who can estimate how many people fought and died in the process of its "disappearance"? Conversely, try to imagine the military budget that would be required to give the followers of Marduk and Mazda a chance of re-establishing their dominion in Iraq and Iran, now, through "conversion by the sword". Would you prefer to imagine that history only flows in one direction, because the winning side (in any given war) is "more advanced" than the side that happened to have lost? The winners may be more technologically advanced, although even this is not always true, as the Mongolians were able to conquer the Chinese, and the Taliban were able to defeat the Americans, and so on, but in any case, technological progress can never indicate a "direction" for moral progress, distinguishing which side is (ethically) more advanced than the other: Islam forbid tattoos, and so the muslims regard tattooing as "barbaric" and "uncivilized", while they find nothing barbaric or uncivilized in continuing to cut off part of the penis in order to express their magical pact with a nameless god. Each culture is blind to its own evils, while heaping scorn on even the most trivial evils of contrasting ("enemy") cultures; and each of us is born into a struggle for our own emancipation from the stupidity of our parents, who taught us to think in this way. Neither secular politics nor the history of religion can be seen as a competition between ethical systems, with the winner being "the more advanced" side: in the ashes of one civilization, ethical systems are invented to justify the evils of the next. Excuses for evil are, definitionally, regarded as good: the Australian colonists make the colonization of Australia the very definition of virtue, and thus they are indifferent to the sordid reality of the genocide they're in the midst of committing. The same "logic" works well enough when nations commit cultural genocide against themselves: the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Iranians and even the Pakistanis live without any regrets about the immolation of their own ancient, indigenous, pre-Islamic cultures, simply by clinging to this conviction that the new ethical system they've embraced is "more advanced" than the old! Likewise, the Chinese Communists feel reassured that they did nothing wrong in burning all their old books, persecuting Buddhist monks and burning down the old temple architecture, just by telling themselves that the new system of ethics was technologically superior to the old! This allegory between technological progress and ethics is consistently false: it is neither more nor less evil than pretending that the Nazis were "more advanced" than the Jews, simply because one party managed to massacre

the other –and it would be just as absurd to pretend that the morality of the Stalinists was “more advanced” than everyone they managed to massacre, in their turn. In each scenario, secular or religious, the winning party will make evil the very standard of what is supposed to be good, creating a crisis for the intellectual minority of the next generation, when they figure out that everything their parents taught them was a lie; and this is not accidental, but a definitional aspect of civilization as such.

No matter how many Protestants carry out massacres of Catholics, or vice versa, the imaginary moral differences between the two will never be made “more real” from the detached perspective of a disinterested outsider; in this same way, we cannot make our own moral distinctions “more real” for the great majority of people who refuse to believe in them, with or without violence. Consider the difference between Sunni and Shiite, for example; they are killing each other “for nothing”, we may say, but to them, it is everything; a thousand years can elapse without any of the participants in the massacres seeing the irony. The assertion that meat eaters will eventually “wake up” and see what is “in their own best interest” is just as absurd as pretending that circumcision will be abolished in the same way, i.e., without the use of force –without violence on a scale comparable to the wars of Protestant against Catholic, Sunni against Shiite, and so on. The perception of “good” is so utterly subjective that Muslims can see nothing wrong with cutting off a part of their own penis in the name of their invisible god; the scale of coercion that would be required to compel them to stop (and the violence they would offer in resisting that coercion) can hardly be compared to anything else imaginable –aside from the future of the vegan movement.

There is not, today, any philosophy represented by the computer, nor any political faction supported by it, nor any moral code propounded by it: computerization has become banal, along with the gay and interracial pornography that had been so intensely feared just a generation before, now made instantly available everywhere thanks to that same (“ideologically inert”) computer technology. Nobody thanks the microchip for challenging our homophobia and racism, just as nobody thanks the lightbulbs, plumbing and running water for all the things we’ve learned in schools that would have been impossible without them.

We have no innate respect for the things we need, we merely fear the loss of them, just as little children do not instinctually respect their parents, but instead take all their efforts for granted. Oh, yes, we could add many pages to this book trying to establish some kind of “objectively real” philosophical, political and moral significance for each of these examples (computers, lightbulbs, plumbing, etc.) but my point is that whether or not they could have such significance ascribed to them on an academic chalkboard, we (in our millions) are utterly indifferent to the possibility: the masses will not be moved by the thought that they’re beholden to the philosophy of plumbing, nor that they must live up to its moral implications, just because they flush the toilet. That kind of indifference is the moral, political and philosophical challenge that veganism must overcome in the next century. The struggle begins with overcoming it within ourselves.

The future of the computer involves utter contempt for the computer: it will never be the basis for a political movement, nor will people see in it some moral significance that might (for example) lead them to give up the practice of circumcision or lose their faith in god. There was a brief window of opportunity when this was true, in the same sense that the atom bomb briefly challenged our moral and political preconceptions but soon enough became part of the background noise of our civilization, neither forcing us to reconsider our old cultural conventions nor inspiring the innovation of new ones. There was a brief window of opportunity when people first saw slaughterhouse footage, and first saw the correlation between cholesterol and various diseases, when this shock (ultimately made possible by computer technology) could have had some moral significance for a few thousand people, and those people could have formed themselves into a political movement, but now, already, that window is closed.

The enthusiasm for computers was a product of the hobbyist stage; it carried on with some inertia through the professionalization of the industry, but then ended with the computer becoming an easily ignored part of daily life, like the kitchen stove (or, in a sense, like the atom bomb). Although people use greater and greater numbers of computers, it would be fundamentally wrong to imagine that this

entails greater enthusiasm for computer science, or even a greater appreciation for the programmer's art. On the contrary, like photography (or nuclear weaponry) it has become invisible:

everywhere ignored while its influence is everywhere in evidence.

Yes, at one time, in the past, to become a vegan chef was seen as radical, innovative, and a challenge to the establishment, but it has already become as banal as Chinese food, gluten-free food, or the decision to specialize in any other kind of cuisine. Greater acceptance entails greater indifference: as soon as "vegan" became an option that could be selected on a form when applying to enter culinary school it ceased to be a radical challenge to that establishment. Likewise, punk rock ceased to be a threat to the establishment as soon as it was taught in music schools, and Marxism died its final death by becoming the ideology of university professors (as such, it could no longer be the radical philosophy it once was, when it was challenging the institution from the outside). Even within the nutritional sciences, veganism is becoming as banal as any other "alternative medicine". It is now very much marketed in the same fashion as massage therapy and infrared saunas; within this "entrepreneurial" paradigm, it has just as little potential to change the world.

There is another way. There is another way to understand this history, and another way to draw out the next steps to be taken. I said before that technological change provides no allegory for moral change, but if we think of language as the most fundamental technology, then I must offer an equally fundamental exception to my own rule.

The changes in our language provide an allegory for the changes in our morality, and I mean "allegory" in the strictest sense, here: in comparing the two, one reveals something hidden about the other. You cannot imagine how the language of homophobia dominated the schoolyard of my youth, with every child asserting a hundred times a day that the worst thing anyone could possibly be was gay. Likewise, I

cannot imagine how the language of racism dominated the schoolyard of my father's youth, implicitly affirming the existence of a racial hierarchy a hundred times a day, in the constant, casual exchange of insults between children.

I spent a year in Scotland as a child, and I felt as if I'd stepped into a time machine: I found myself in an earlier era when Gypsy and Jew were still used as self-evident insults, along with many ethnic categories and terms that had been entirely unfamiliar to me in Canada. The way the Scottish children employed these terms reflected the assumption that having an ethnic identity of any kind was a terrible stain on your character: the only way to be morally pure was to have no ethnic categorization at all. I was expected to resist being categorized as a Jew, and to argue back that I wasn't a Jew, and they were wrong to (thus) "call me names"; and other children actually did this, in front of me, when they were called Jews, in the schoolyard. Nobody was prepared for the possibility that I'd laughingly agree: a Jew was precisely what I was. I wondered aloud why I should be insulted by having this fact pointed out to me.

You cannot achieve political change by forcing the mere use of words to change, but the changes in how people think and feel will inevitably be proven through changes in language. Forcing people to say "genital mutilation" instead of "circumcision" will not result in the abolition of the custom, but if we lived in a society that had actually achieved this abolition, we would end up discussing it in very different terms. After the abolition, we would use a vocabulary that we cannot imagine today, just as the language of antisemitism had to disappear from the schoolyard when people became uncertain as to whether or not it really was a valid insult to call someone a Jew.

Look at the tremendous vocabulary we have for alcohol, in our culture: if we really accepted that the stuff causes brain damage, what then? How we talk about it would change, because how we feel about it would change. Can we accomplish the abolition of alcohol through the (de jure) reassignment of words? No, certainly not. However, if there ever were a real change in the moral significance of alcohol (with or without some basis in a scientific awareness of what its effects on the body and the mind happen to be) we should expect a change in our language to accompany it.

In the last century, nothing has transformed our language more than computer technology, and this, too, has happened in a series of stages that lends itself to a kind of satirical Positivism. In the first stage, the computer transcribes already existing language, and already existing music, without transforming it. The technology of the typewriter becomes the keyboard, with the paper being replaced by a digital file, and the technology of the microphone is adapted from a reel-to-reel recording studio to instead function in the digitization of sound, with the "tape" replaced by a hard drive. In the next stage of development, the computer transforms the way we compose music: the computer itself becomes the primary musical instrument, and then changes the way we listen to music, the way we feel about music, the way we think about music, and the way we talk about music.

Whether we look at language teaching or a particular, productive use of language, such as journalism, we can describe a similar series of "positivistic" stages of development: first the language textbooks are simply "scanned in" to be used on a computer in the same way that they were used on paper before, but, subsequently, the computer transforms the way our languages are taught, learned and used (with teachers being paid to provide lessons via videophone, and software automating both the studying and testing process). Yes, at one stage, journalism was merely shared via Twitter, but then Twitter itself became the primary source of information used by journalists: what had been merely the final stage of publishing (or "re-publishing") instead became profoundly imbedded within the process of research, composition and production (in the same sense that pirating old albums from the 1960s over the internet was merely "re-publishing" a finished product, but this led to the subsequent stages of the computerization of music composition, and so on). The computer doesn't merely change the things we listen to, nor merely the things we sing about, it changes music itself; and in the same sense, it changes not merely what we use language for, but eventually changes language itself.

The process is political, but it is also creative. Vegans are a despised minority trying to transform the world's cultures on a massive scale, but are we more despised, now, than the Rastafarians were before the fame of Bob Marley? That was a movement that had a pitifully small number of followers, that was hated and scorned by the Christian majority even within Jamaica, and their publications (like the Holy Piby) had earned zero intellectual respect; nevertheless, they managed to influence at least a century of the world's history, and they changed the English language along with it, even if (in my own opinion) these changes were for the worse, not the better. From their position of powerlessness, the Rastafarians changed the way we think about marijuana, and even changed the words we use for marijuana, paving the way towards its normalization and legalization, during the same few decades in which medical evidence for the brain damage caused by the habit would accumulate –and would tragically be ignored. The idiocy of their religion was no obstacle to their success, and the lack of any scientific basis for their health claims didn't slow them down at all, because they achieved their influence through the creative arts. Credit where it is due: they never had an army, and they never spread their faith through "conversion by the sword". We cannot say they expanded their religion because they had any greater philosophical profundity than their rivals, nor because their ethical system was "more advanced": it was by the sheer brutality of the creative arts that they won their war.

Veganism is now a struggle to change the way the masses think, feel, and talk, but we must begin by changing the way that we think, feel and talk ourselves (putting an end to the epoch of Carol Adams, and inaugurating a new kind of language). We are a despised minority (far more despised than computer programmers, journalists or language teachers) struggling to transform the way our culture sees itself. Not how it sees us: how it sees itself. That is why we must begin with a change in how we see ourselves, even if we continue to be despised and ignored forever. I am not proposing a new vocabulary for the discussion of meat (nor of animals, nor of violence, etc.) in the sense that some feminists want to change the use of gender-specific nouns and pronouns; the elimination of the distinction between "actor" and "actress", for example, does nothing to liberate women, nor will it even change their roles; instead, what I'm describing is a change in how we think and talk about who we are.

Inexorably, we must have some definite notion of who we are, even if it is never articulated, in the same sense that the musician must have some definite notion of what it means to be an artist, and the

journalist must have some definite notion of what it means to be a writer, no matter how studiously they avoid the use of academic terms. The computer has utterly changed what it means to be a creative artist in every field (music, writing, painting, filmmaking, etc.). Without any philosophical pretensions, we must articulate who we are and what we do as a part of the process of doing it; a change in language of this kind reflects a change in how we think and feel - -and it will prefigure a change in how we act, as well.

The same kind of transformation is coming (and is not yet here) for what it means to be a political leader, for what it means to be an intellectual dissident, for what it means to be an activist, and for what it means to be a vegan within any of these categories. The future of the vegan movement is nihilism: it is the creative nihilism that results from living with the awareness that whatever we do next cannot be derivative of what was already done in the past. This is art. Veganism rapidly became a tradition that suffocates itself, like so many cults and cul-de-sac political movements that came and went before. Its immediate future entails a perpetual process of breaking away from that tradition. This would be equally true for musicians, writers and creative artists of any kind, who must be forever negating the assumptions and expectations established by their forebears: as soon as a genre is established, it must be challenged, must be changed, must eventually fall. And this state of rebellion does not exist "as an end in itself", but simply so that we may live: the life of the artist requires the destruction of whatever fixed paradigm now defines the state of the art. If, instead, you move in the opposite direction, the art becomes a religion (with the same few statues and paintings worshipped forever, in the suffocating absence of innovation) and the artist must either become a mute ritualist, sustaining the same tradition, or die. The life of the politician exists in a similar opposition to the establishment that defines the status quo in any given moment, even if particular political leaders do not think of themselves as dissident intellectuals, and even if they do not think of their own work as creative in any way. The politician's own life requires that same opposition I've described in the arts, and the vegan political leader's life is a mixture of the two (political art and political science). That is the future of veganism: a new conception of the life of the artist, of the career of an intellectual dissident, and of a political leader. It is a new model for the meaning of life that can only be vindicated by actually living it. And now, in conclusion, I may say:

this is the world, take it or leave it.

Chapter Five

Veganism cannot win on the basis of a popularity contest: wisdom and self-discipline will never be more popular than self-indulgent stupidity. A society of pious people is only possible inasmuch as piety becomes indistinguishable from stupidity: when being good is the stupidest thing to do, the dominant majority will be "morally good" by that (ineluctably stupid) standard. The Taliban, for example, makes a certain kind of stupidity easy to sustain from the cradle to the grave: a certain kind of piety prevails inasmuch as it requires neither intelligence nor self-discipline under their dominion, whereas rebellion would require a great deal of both. In America, by contrast, rebellion is associated with laziness, with a sort of childish refusal to succumb to adult conventions, whereas piety requires intelligence, self-discipline, and at least as much eccentricity as the rebels have on their side. Vegans practice a form of piety that is both defiant and despotic, both rebellious and repressive: it is absurd to imagine that it will ever be popular, unless we're discussing forms of veganism so utterly debased that they've become indistinguishable from stupidity. Inasmuch as veganism becomes indistinguishable from any other ten step program for achieving a bikini body, then it may be popular within that remit, but only for the same reasons as any other fad diet, and with the same (utterly non-revolutionary) outcomes. If veganism becomes indistinguishable from any other donation-driven petting zoo, then it may be popular within that remit, but only for the same reasons as any other rent-seeking charity, and with the same (utterly non-revolutionary) outcomes. If veganism becomes indistinguishable from a dogmatic religion (like Hinduism or Islam) then it may be popular for reasons that are neither more nor less valid than any other dogmatic religion –and it will be neither more nor less revolutionary.

These popularized forms of the movement will never move. They will be as inert as the imbeciles who pay for them, and as venal as the leaders who profit from them. We sabotaged our own movement by making it into a popularity contest: we debased the moral and political significance of veganism in an alloy with the vanities of commercial fitness culture, the cupidity of the charity sector, and the self-indulgence of 21st century spirituality.

The most basic premise of popularizing veganism is an error: it is both morally and strategically wrong. It is as self-contradictory as the popularization of aristocracy.

In the long centuries of the dark ages, the power of the aristocrats was not increased by making as many people as possible into a Duke or a Duchess: it would be a ludicrous delusion to imagine that the objective of the aristocrats had been to "convert" one person after another to aristocracy until there were no commoners remaining, so that we could all share in the same titles and privileges. What if, in some parallel universe, the aristocrats could have earned money by promoting a "conversion" of exactly this kind? What if their leaders could have risen to fame and fortune by claiming that anyone willing to take up the diet, exercise and charitable donations that define the life of an aristocrat could become an aristocrat themselves?

Doesn't it seem magnanimous to take the very thing that makes you extraordinary and then pretend that it isn't extraordinary at all? A professional basketball player does not make money by "converting" members of his audience to athleticism, nor does he dream that one day everyone will be an athlete, without anyone remaining a passive member of the audience to cheer him on from the sidelines. Nevertheless, there will be money and fame to be had in promoting the delusion that anyone can become an athlete (and that everyone should try) by eating the same food the successful athletes eat, by doing the same exercises they do, and by wearing the same shoes.

They do not present themselves as the "aristocrats" of the sport (as an exclusive club, born to a special rank and privilege) but merely as "the first among equals", in a thoroughly democratic position that anyone could nominate themselves for –if only they would be sufficiently motivated to do so.

Doesn't it seem humble and helpful to pretend that such rare privileges are freely available for anyone who wants to take up a simple "change of lifestyle"? I've seen athletes, bikini models and chess champions saying words to this same effect, insisting that anyone could accomplish the same things as themselves, if only they'd eat the same diet and have a positive attitude (etc.). In every instance the sentiment is false.

University was once the privilege of a few and we now pretend, instead, that it is something anyone can do without any special talent, without any particular motivation, without even an interest in becoming an intellectual (instead, those who openly scorn the life of the mind seem to be especially welcome). In our century, anyone can be admitted to a university, but not just anyone can learn from the experience: the vast majority learn nothing, and then take their university diplomas as proof that they need learn nothing more. In effect, learning remains the privilege of a few, whereas university courses have become "accessible to all" –even if they cannot afford it – especially if they cannot afford it.

You can create an education system that does not teach anyone anything and call it a meritocracy: in this way, "merit" becomes "equal", but actual learning, refinement, sophistication, etc., remains the privilege of a select few. The question is: who selects them? They select themselves. The people who choose to learn what is not being taught, and to overturn what is being taught: within the system, they select themselves –and the best of them will ceaselessly conspire to destroy the very institutions they owe their existence to. In this respect, the example of the dissident intellectual comes closest to the social role of the vegan in the 21st century (i.e., the parallelism here is much closer than the example of the athlete or the aristocrat, mentioned before) because this is an elite that "elects" itself (i.e., they owe little or nothing to privileges of birth, physical size, etc., whereas the athletes and aristocrats owe a great deal to this category of circumstance). We have an education system that, in the name of universal equality, exacerbates inequality: like the Taliban, it makes a certain kind of stupidity easy to sustain from the cradle to the grave, and inadvertently creates a tiny minority of remarkable people who rebel against that stupidity –they become what they are despite (and not because of) their education. That is the status of a true intellectual within the university system, and it is the status of a real vegan within our society as a whole, and within the microcosm of the vegan movement as well. In the name of admitting all, regardless of talent or motivation, modern education worked against its own purpose, creating classrooms that pandered to the lowest common denominator (to people who simply didn't want to learn) for the greatest possible amount of money; and in the name of admitting all, regardless of talent or motivation, the vegan movement worked against its own purpose – and inadvertently created the self-selected elite that would destroy and supplant it, in the century to come.

The argument in favor of free education is that everyone should be able to learn. There is an implicit error here (that vitiates all political discourse in the 21st century) in posing the question in terms of "ability" and "disability". Someone may be able to learn, and yet have no desire to do so: they can buy a \$250,000 education, but cannot buy the requisite desire – and reducing the price of tuition does nothing to reduce the scarcity of that desire.

There is no question of our ability to be sober, but there is a very difficult question of our desire to be sober: although there is a common cultural tendency (in this decade) to discuss drug addiction as if it were an innate disability, nevertheless, we are all able to abstain from drugs and alcohol, with the desire to be sober belonging only to a small minority. We do not diminish the enormity of this problem by pretending that the crucial variable is "access to institutions" that would supposedly "empower" people to exercise their sobriety. If, in the future, everyone were to have free access to the same \$250,000 drug rehabilitation programs enjoyed by the wealthiest celebrities in Hollywood (who nevertheless have an alarmingly high relapse rate) then we will see that the constraint was not "lack of access" to these institutions: what had been scarce all along was the requisite desire –and, if lacking, there is no substitute for it that can be purchased at any price.

Even if vegans are only distinguished by their desires, we must deal with how extraordinary those desires are –we must admit it to ourselves, for a start, and admitting it entails that we realize we are not merely a minority now, but will be forever. If the intellectuals who rebel against the constraints of modern education are not, in fact, any more intelligent than the conformists, but they merely happen to have the desire to learn more (despite the stupidity the system would inculcate into them) we must likewise deal with how extraordinary those desire are. The fact that anyone could do it doesn't mean that everyone will –nor even that ten percent will ever try. Oh, yes, it is much easier to visualize what I'm talking about if the example is a university campus in Iran or North Korea, but this is only because you don't want to admit to yourself the extent to which the problem in France or Canada is much the same. There is a war between the real intellectuals and the merchants of education everywhere on this earth –and the intellectuals never win –just as the vegans never do. Saying that "anyone could be vegan" is as absurd as saying "anyone can read Appian and Sallust, Aristotle and

Thucydides"; if it fills you with optimism to think that anyone could, it should fill you with pessimism to recognize that fewer than one in a thousand ever will. A marvelous smokescreen is created by compulsion: compulsory education masks the extent of human indolence and ignorance, and compulsory veganism (on any scale) would have the same effect (creating an illusion of ethical concern and intellectual sophistication amongst the compelled that does not, in fact, exist). Go ahead, devise some dictatorship in which people are compelled to read Appian, and you will have accomplished nothing more than creating a smokescreen to mask the minority who can actually appreciate Appian, and who read his work with the right motivations. Under coercion, anyone can be sober; under coercion, anyone can be vegan, too; but the number of people who will do the right thing for the right reasons, simply because it is the right thing to do, remains extraordinarily few. We are embarrassed to admit how extraordinary we are, in part because this reveals (by the same token) that our political cause is utterly doomed – inasmuch as we conceive of it as a popular, majoritarian cause, and not as an elitist, aristocratic conspiracy.

Literacy was once the privilege of a few. We now believe that everyone can learn to read if they're forced to, and therefore everyone should be forced to: with this coercion, on a massive scale, we conceal from ourselves the baleful reality that the vast majority of people do not read anything at all except when they are compelled to do so (for work, for school, etc.) no matter how many diplomas and degrees they've amassed. In ending the era of illiteracy we failed to bring about an enlightenment: instead, the era of aliteracy began, with its own distinctive mode of self-deception and reciprocal flattery.

Before compulsory education was established for all, we could pretend that the masses had the desire and potential to be intellectuals, but they were merely "held back" and "constrained" by their lack of access to these "enabling" institutions. What we have achieved, now, is the universality of compulsion, not of education; what we have revealed is that the vast majority of people who can read will not read; what we have concealed is the difference between learning and being compelled to learn.

In depicting the starkly unequal society in which he had grown up himself, Tolstoy always made the effort to show us that his aristocratic characters understood math and geometry, whereas the peasants did not; the great lesson of modernity was that everyone could be compelled to learn math and geometry, so that we could all be aristocrats together. This was based on the false premise that compulsion and ability are one and the same. That we can be compelled to learn math is very different from being able to do it. All social movements, all political movements, all religious movements, are influenced by the invisible violence and conspicuous egalitarianism of modern education. We are corrupted by the contrast between the two: the violence is real, whereas the egalitarianism is phony –one gets results, the other doesn't. We are corrupted, by degrees, in seeing how this works, learning the implicit lesson that political progress is achieved by violence compelling bad people to do the right things for the wrong reasons (and so it is no wonder that the whole political spectrum, left and right, unthinkingly reflects this model: the government as the lion tamer of the ignorant masses). Organized education works against its own purpose, and organized veganism works against its purpose in precisely the same way. If you actually wanted to create a dozen talented painters, or a dozen talented mathematicians, the first step would be

finding a few people who genuinely wanted to learn: applying compulsion to thousands (or millions) who do not want to learn (but will endure the lessons if they have to) would only make it harder to find the few who could really benefit from the education you have to offer (in painting, in math, etc.) and who would sincerely pursue a career or a hobby making use of the discipline –and with sincere motivations, for the right reasons. Compulsion fails to create talent, and the smokescreen effect (that I’ve described already) makes it harder for the tiny minority of people actually interested in art, math, veganism, etc., to find one another (as equals, or as master and pupil, etc.). Indeed, the whole system makes it harder for anyone who is sincerely motivated to learn to actually get an education or have a career: being in a classroom with 30 people who did not want to learn Cree did not help me to learn the language, but, in fact, made it impossible for me, etc., and being a part of a political movement crowded with people who are there for the wrong reasons made it impossible for me to accomplish anything within it, in much the same way (as I said before: the institutions pander to the lowest common denominator, i.e., to people who simply do not want to learn, for the greatest possible amount of money). Compulsion is the opposite of ability: what we can do, when compelled, is precisely what we cannot do – and this is hard for us to accept because it means that we, as vegans, or as intellectuals, or as both, will forever be a tiny minority.

Allow me to describe this on the smallest scale, the most intimate scale, and the most embarrassing scale, because it is so much easier to visualize than the effects of compulsory education on a society of millions. Have you ever known a woman who dragged her husband into some hobby or another that he had no sincere interest in? As the moon shines with the light of the sun, reflected indirectly, have you seen how his interest in her hobby was, in fact, an indirect reflection of his desire for her, rather than his desire for it? Suppose the hobby were not designer shoes, yoga lessons, or kayaking, but vegan activism. If you’ve never known a married couple like this, it should be easy enough for you to imagine: there is a subtle sort of compulsion that leads the husband into mimicking his wife’s desires –although, again, his real desire is for her. He has no interest in the object of her desires, but, because she is the object of his, this is precisely what he learns to feign; and if she makes it easy for him to comply, and dangerous for him to rebel, there will be an illusion that he’s just as much committed to the cause as she is, herself.

Compulsory education makes us familiar with indirect desires, and unfamiliar with our own, direct ones: after a certain age, it is not easy to distinguish our own interest in mathematics, music, French, etc., from the interest we had in studying the subject in order to avoid disappointing someone else in our family, to avoid disappointing our teachers, or to achieve some other objective that required us to complete the course. Why did I study theater? It would be embarrassing for me to extricate my own, direct desires from those of my father and mother, in reference to the boy I was in my first year of high school; but it would be much less difficult for me to reflect upon the motivations of the man I’d become by my first year of university. There may be a few husbands who maintain a canny, detached awareness of where their own interests begin and where their wives’ interests end, but for the vast majority of men, one type of desire becomes muddled up with the other. He may not know the extent to which his own interest in veganism is insincere for all the same reasons that he doesn’t know the extent to which his interest in those yoga classes is insincere – unless or until the marriage comes to an end. In divorce we rediscover, in this shallow sense, who we truly are.

Marriage has its own sort of egalitarianism, too, and its own sort of participatory democracy, and the two parties who enter into this intensely political arrangement may be unaware of how phony (or how sincere) these aspects of the relationship are. Do they, truly, make decisions together, as equals? Did they both decide to become vegan, together? Did they both decide to enroll in those yoga classes? Yes, in some cases, the husband will have a detached awareness of which decisions were his own, which were hers, and which were a synergy, but it is very easy to be deceived about these things –whether for the sake of love or laziness. In brief, it becomes difficult to distinguish the light of the moon from the light of the sun. Were these decisions mine? Was this desire mine? Were these talents mine? Were they

mine alone, were they just an indirect reflection of hers, or were they a sort of synergy? If none of these observations apply to your marriage, you should immediately file for divorce.

If education were as simple as imprisonment we could very quickly come to a conclusion, and if democracy were as simple as military conscription, this book could be just a few paragraphs long. The reality is that we can do things with education that we cannot do without it, as the married man accomplishes things he would not have been able to do alone, no matter how much he may resent his wife or his education.

There is an enabling dynamic just as real as the oppressive one, and we lose track of our own desires not because we are denigrated to the point of forgetting who we truly are, but because we find our understanding and appreciation of life extended by our synergy with others. Have you ever met anyone who would have had a sincere interest in the sciences if there hadn't been institutions (and movies, cartoons, etc.) that made the sciences seem entertaining for them? This seems shallow, but it isn't: millions of dollars are spent on museums that make the most boring facts of chemistry and physics seem interesting, for a few fleeting moments, with the hope that a portion of the next generation's children will turn their hearts in that direction, instead of every single one of them trying to become a rapper, an athlete, or a movie star. How many children think they're interested in a career in chemistry or physics, only to discover (after some number of years) that their interest was only in science fiction, or in the animated, simplified form of the sciences that had been presented to them in museums? The anarchists depict compulsory education as a kind of prison, but it entices us and rewards us with methods just as subtle as any marriage—good or bad. Education expands the scope of our interests in the same way that our wives "make us" interested in yoga despite ourselves, although I admit this entails a subtle sort of crisis in later disentangling what our own desires and interests truly were all along. I have heard couples passionately insist that they became vegan together, jointly, after a sort of congressional inquiry led to a unanimous vote on the matter, and I have heard couples insist that they quit veganism (and returned to eating meat, etc.) with just as much democracy. Perhaps, for some couples, there is a certain kind of "strategic ambiguity" in pretending not to know which interests belong to which party, but for others the ambiguity is real—and, as a result, their interest in veganism is not.

Would it discredit a man's interest in Chinese, as a researcher, if we could establish (as a matter of fact) that he only learned the language because he happened to fall in love with a Chinese woman?

Conversely, would it discredit the marriage if we could establish (as a matter of fact) that he only selected and married her because he wanted someone to help him learn Chinese? In both voluntary marriage and compulsory education, our motivations become muddled: we do not know to what extent we're naturally talented in a certain subject, or to what extent we ever had a desire to develop a talent in it, as opposed to the extent to which we were encouraged by a kindly authority figure, or rebuked by a terrifying one (and I say "authority figure" here to include parents, teachers and all others in one category). In marriage and education alike, people insist that they had a foreordained destiny, rather than admitting the strange synergy that resulted in this particular man learning one thing or another, irrevocably changing his identity.

Not everyone can teach themselves to read Pali, not everyone can teach themselves to speak Laotian, not everyone can do both of these things simultaneously while sleeping under a mosquito net and chopping firewood in the mornings, as part of a humanitarian program to hand out sacks of rice to starving people. Oh, yes, it would certainly be socially acceptable for me to pretend that I think of this as nothing special, and to insist that I imagine all these things could have been just as easily done by any of my former highschool classmates, by any of my own brothers, or by any of my fans and followers on social media. We show our humility by pretending that there is nothing extraordinary in our accomplishments aside from the requisite desire to get them done: it is that same form of false humility, too familiar to be remarkable, when a musician pretends that an instrument may be easily mastered, presuming that you have the desire necessary to practice for four hours per day. The desire is everything, and the instrument is nothing: the desire is the one thing you cannot buy, unlike an expensive violin, unlike an aristocrat's title, unlike a formal education, and unlike a husband or a wife.

Although less common now than in centuries past, people still pay for relationships, and they pay for a kind of credential that makes it seem like a marriage, rather than prostitution, but the one thing they cannot buy is the desire: you cannot pay someone to want you, nor can they ever pay you enough for you to truly want them. You can pay for the opportunity to learn, and you can pay for the credential that makes the process seem so much better than prostitution, but all that money can never elicit the necessary desire from yourself or others -no matter if you practice with a solid gold paintbrush on a solid gold easel, or write on a solid gold desk with a solid gold pen.

Should I repeat all the same generalities with sobriety as the point of comparison? A solid gold psychiatrist's couch? Solid gold manacles, pinning you to the wall of an artfully decorated detoxification cell, where you can vomit into a solid gold basin? The desire is everything, the instrument is nothing: this becomes even more apparent when the instrument is not a pen or paintbrush that we learn with, but, instead, a book that we learn from.

Someone else could read all the same books I've read without learning one tenth of what I've learned. Someone could visit the same places I've visited, sleep under the same mosquito net, and chop the same firewood, while remaining an intellectual nonentity, never budging even a fraction of an inch from the comfortable ignorance they'd already inhabited before their vacation had begun. There is something I brought to the books, and that I brought with me on the journey, that matters more than any of the particular things I've read or done. Likewise, an athlete brings a kind of talent to the gym that matters more than the equipment he's used -although you can certainly take your turn with those same weights once he puts them back on the rack, as you can take your turn with all the same books I've read, once I've put them back on the shelf. The basketball player is expected to tell the audience that if they just wake up early with a positive attitude, day after day, they can become a champion in the same way that he has himself, but the reality is that the majority of the spectators struggle with getting out of bed in the morning because they can't even have that positive attitude, let alone the ten thousand other requirements for success in this (or any other) field. What is effortless for one person is an insurmountable obstacle for another; the desire that one person has in abundance can never be shared with another; and the inequalities of the mind are far more horrifying (and invidious) than the inequalities of the body that athletes learn to politely pretend they are unaware of.

There is a fortune to be made from beautiful women saying, "you can have an ass just like mine!", but the egalitarianism of the ass is just as absurd as the egalitarianism of the mind: even if it were wholly a matter of spirit and self-discipline (without inequalities of birth entailing a certain degree of predestination for the shape and size of every lump of flesh on your bones) we would have to face up to the horrifying inequality of spirit and self-discipline that dooms one person to never be able to accomplish what seemed effortless for another. In brief, we must confess that the selfishness, laziness, short-term thinking and stupidity of the vast majority are permanent features of our "climate" even if (briefly) they may sometimes disappear, like the perpetually shining sun.

Extraordinary people can do extraordinary things for extraordinary reasons; it is pointless to pretend that everyone is capable of the same accomplishments just because the prerequisite steps leading up to them are voluntary. Inasmuch as sobriety is voluntary, for the vast majority it is unattainable; inasmuch as reading nonfiction is voluntary, for the vast majority it is unattainable.

We live with the delusion that people are inwardly and secretly good, just because they seem to accomplish these things so effortlessly when they are under compulsion to do so. Studying the behavior of a dog in a cage tells us nothing about the behavior of a wolf in the wild. The sobriety and studiousness of human beings in solitary confinement (or when under the duress of army discipline) tells us nothing about how they'll behave when they have regained the power to make decisions for themselves. And, as I explained at length before, many of the forms of compulsion we live with are much more subtle and synergistic than our relationships with prison guards and drill sergeants: the behavior of a married man may tell us nothing about how he'll behave after his divorce, nor even how he'll behave if he happens to have a few months without his wife's constant supervision. A man may be sober when married, and yet he finds he is incapable of sobriety when single; another man may be entirely capable of maintaining

sobriety when single (both before he met his wife and after the divorce) and yet he found himself constantly drunk and incapable of quitting so long as the marriage lasted. You know, I have even heard that there are some women who were only capable of earning their PhDs because they happened to be married to very brilliant and supportive men, but, in our culture, this sort of thing is a closely guarded secret: women are much less willing to speak of it than men in the same position, who are eager to heap praise upon their wives for all the help they've received from them.

We pretend that a voluntary barrier is not a barrier at all, but it is the most ineluctable limit on human nature. Yes, if people were compelled to overcome that barrier "they could", but this mere possibility does nothing to diminish the fact that (in the absence of compulsion) they can't and they won't.

Hypothetically, aristocrats could recruit new peasants to join their social class until it ceased to be an elite and started to comprise the vast majority. No matter how absurd that may seem, it is a hypothetical possibility. For vegans to do the same is not. For intellectuals to do the same is not. For the tiny minority of vegans who are, also, dissident intellectuals, it is not: the dream that we will eventually comprise "the moral majority" ends with this book, for the few of you who read it. What distinguishes us from the majority cannot be bought, cannot be sold, cannot be multiplied and commercialized: more people can be compelled to do the right thing, but they will never have the desire to do the right thing for the right reason, as we do.

The human species is disabled by its desires. The notion that a barrier can be overcome –personally or politically– because it is "simply" a matter of desire (rather than disability) is false. The tragedy of our century is that the vast majority of our disabilities are now voluntary, and the vast majority of us are –at any given time– voluntarily intellectually disabled. We choose to be drug addicts, we choose to be video game addicts, and we choose to live like idiots, even if it is not a choice made at just one point in time, but at ten thousand points in time, with none of them being singly memorable as "a fork in the road".

If self-discipline is a luxury available to all, it is nevertheless a luxury only enjoyed by a few –and this will not change in the next decade, nor in the next century. It is utterly paradoxical to pretend that the majority is capable of enjoying self-discipline just because they're capable of enduring discipline when it is forced upon them. Keep in mind that this "force" may not always resemble the command structure of a prison or a platoon: it would be equally absurd to say that everyone could be an intellectual, that everyone could be vegan, etc., if only they fell in love with someone sufficiently attractive and wealthy who would influence them to do all these things (just because we have before our eyes, at any given time, examples of men and women who take up yoga, kayaking, etc., for the sake of love – or out of fear of being alone). Perhaps the average man could cease to be average if he were to fall in love with an extraordinary woman who demanded that he become extraordinary himself, but this is no better than supposing that we could all become brilliant, sober intellectuals if the whole world were a prison that compelled these virtues from us. It certainly seems more probable that the average man could become a drug addict, if he fell in love with a woman who was already addicted to drugs (i.e., it must be much more rare for love to force mediocre people "up", to some higher level of self-discipline, rather than "down", to something worse than mediocrity). The moon shines with the reflected light of the sun: another man's desires, or another woman's desires, will never be our own. Discipline will never be self-discipline.

In relation to veganism, narrowly, and ecology, broadly, the difference between the optimists and the pessimists is the extent to which they allow themselves to admit the importance of discipline. Self-discipline overcomes instinct, allowing us to be much more (or much less) than what we were evolved to be, in the proverbial "state of nature". Optimists want to believe that we are already equipped with the instincts necessary "to save the planet", without even the milder sort of discipline a democratic society will tend to enforce upon us, for example, in urging us to quit smoking. Optimists believe that the vast majority will do the right thing spontaneously, out of the goodness of their hearts, without compulsion, on the same simple principle whereby the average man could be relied upon to pull his hand away from

a flame, after it burns him, or, perhaps, to escape from a burning house, after he has seen the flames directly enough to realize he has no other option but to flee. The reality is that dogs do not even have an instinct to avoid eating antifreeze, and human beings do not have an instinct to avoid huffing glue.

Playing the piano may feel instinctual, from moment to moment, after many years of developing the discipline, and something similar can be said for the moment-to-moment decisions entailed by veganism and ecology, but the barriers that are effortless for us to overcome are insurmountable for others. Everything that we casually claim "feels natural" (as the piano player may say, in reference to a thousand complex and carefully timed motions of the hand) is profoundly unnatural to the vast majority of people –and it will remain so forever. You would have to believe that stupidity is a shortterm fad to think that it could be overcome by a fad: self-centered, short term thinking is never going to go out of fashion, like a perpetual age of darkness, no matter how many "enlightenments" and "renaissances" come and go along the way. Any political movement premised on the expectation that ordinary people will do extraordinary things is doomed to failure: we need a movement based on the premise that extraordinary people will do extraordinary things –even if this is a movement as small as an artist's studio. Such a studio, with enough talent in it, and enough synergy, still has a better chance of changing the world than a million morons mouthing slogans they don't even understand, lifting up their hands and screeching, like monkeys at the zoo, advocating for their own freedom by showing their teeth in a gesture their captors can only misinterpret as a smile.

Artists do not change the world through their ordinariness, but through their extraordinariness. Intellectuals do not change the world by inviting others to become the same as themselves, but by demonstrating things the masses can never do –and can never understand. I say again: wisdom and self-discipline will never be more popular than self-indulgent stupidity. Inequality is not the enemy of progress, nor is egalitarianism its prerequisite. Inequality is an engine of progress, inasmuch as the elite genuinely wants to help the mass of humanity (who, doubtless, will sooner kill them than accept their assistance). Of what use is a conspiracy of equals? Of what use is an artist indistinguishable from his patrons? Of what use is an athlete indistinguishable from his audience? Of what use is an aristocrat indistinguishable from his peasants? In courting "mainstream acceptance", vegans have sought to become indistinguishable from the people whose politics they would transform: this was both morally and strategically wrong.

We neither have an instinct to avoid eating foods that directly poison us, nor to refuse to eat foods (as a matter of moral principle) that indirectly entail cruelty, suffering and the devastation of the world's ecology. We have an instinct to refuse to be circumcised, and an instinct to refuse to torture someone, to refuse to burn them at the stake, and so on, but these instincts are easily overcome by ideology: it is enough to tell someone a story just a few sentences long that will justify all the evils of religion, Communism, Fascism and myriad forms of tribal brutality that have no convenient name.

Many of us would like to imagine that humanity has a generalized instinct to act in the interests of "the greater good", leading us to accept (without evidence) that our species "therefore" has a more specific instinct to avert global warming, to have fewer children once we're aware of overpopulation, and so on. This formula can be abstracted into a sort of "minimalist instinct" to buy fewer cars, etc., in the name of this "greater good" that everyone is supposedly aware of, and that we are expected to respond to with an instinct as immediate and innate as the fear of snakes. I would call this theory "biological minimalism": the delusion that humanity has an evolved instinct to "save the world" through their consumer choices - -with veganism, of course, being the most significant choice of all. The situation we are in now is the diametric opposite: through selfdiscipline, people can overcome their fear of snakes, and veganism -likewise- is something accomplished through self-discipline, but perpetually opposed to our evolved instincts. If it is effortless, for you, that is as politically irrelevant as a master pianist saying that it is effortless for him to play the piano. If philosophy is the queen of the sciences, then laziness is the queen of the instincts. There never will be a natural instinct to play the piano (not even with another million years of evolution!) any more than there will ever be a natural instinct to favor veganism or ecology. The most fundamental problem of politics is accomplishing the tasks that nobody

wants to do for the benefit of all: when we desire a distant outcome but cannot voluntarily endure the intermediate stages of misery that separate us from it, we contrive some sort of government to force us through the process, step by step. We have no instinct for building bridges: we have governments that force us to pay taxes, and they use the taxes to pay for the blueprints, planning and construction –with or without some degree of democracy to ascertain “the will” of “the people” before the bridge is built. If we had the instincts of bees we could build a hive of houses and roads (and sewage pipelines and electrical wiring to connect them all, etc.) without any government to legislate and regulate our “natural” industry. Instead, we are a breed of bees that expects the hive to be built for us, while we do nothing but pay taxes. Government is required at every step and stage of the process, whereas our own intelligence, morality, initiative and industry is not: people want to live in houses, but do not want to think about where the electricity comes from, nor where the sewage goes when they flush the toilet. They do not even want to know the name of the department where these decisions are made on their behalf, nor to be democratically involved in its deliberations (and the exceptions are people like myself, who are not merely regarded as eccentrics, but as eleutheromaniacs, for trying to “politicize” what the vast majority regards as “apolitical”). They are happier having someone else decide where the bridges should be built, how much they should cost, and so on, without the slightest curiosity about the details –unless or until a huge number of people should die, when it turns out that the wrong decisions were made, and one of the bridges has collapsed. So too, most people have no interest whatsoever in the morality or ecology of their diet, because they assume that if the bridge needs to be built, someone in government will do it for them –even if we’re talking about a bridge from one epoch of human history to the next, correcting the ecological errors of the past thousand years, and ending forever the threat of global warming.

We live in an era when the most fundamental problems of political science have been solved, and –even worse– they have been regarded as settled for several centuries in a row. As a result, there is tremendous public passivity (and even disbelief) that there could be any social problem requiring the direct application of our own intelligence, morality, initiative and industry. Heroism is dead: if you tell people there’s a dragon that has abducted a princess, they’ll tell you that their tax dollars have paid for someone in a suit and tie to take care of it on our behalf. A huge percentage of the public will dismiss the most basic premise of veganism with an insistence that, “If that were true, or if it mattered all, the government would take care of it.” What they believe is not that vegans are incapable of drawing attention to a problem as dire and dangerous as a dragon, but they cannot imagine that it is our problem, entailing some kind of self-discipline, or even heroism, on our part: they have an underlying faith that every significant social problem, sooner or later, will be solved by the government –or else it will be exposed as baseless hysteria and be forgotten about. If meat and dairy were really as bad as asbestos, the argument goes, the government will take care of it, eventually –as they did with asbestos, eventually. Their belief is that bureaucracy (left to its own devices) will sooner or later build a bridge over every river and pave over every pothole, without any political movement forcing it to happen –and, to be fair, this is their experience in life. The vast majority of people do not want anything that the government does not already provide, and if there are a few potholes still to be fixed, this isn’t enough to make them into revolutionaries, merely enough to make them into a bunch of whiners. I would say that they’ve lost the capacity for heroism, but, of course, they never had it.

A society without cigarettes, or a society without tooth decay, is far more desirable than the construction of a new bridge, but the intermediate series of stages that would create such a society might be far more unpopular (and far more costly) than Joe Biden’s announcement of twenty-seven billion dollars to be spent on new bridge construction. People do not naturally build roads for others to benefit from, nor do they provide education to the children of the poor without being able to profit from the process themselves, and so on. This is the category of tasks that nobody wants to do but that someone will need to undertake for the benefit of all. People will say that a life without cigarettes is virtuous, that a life without tooth decay is preferable to paying the dentist’s bills, but this doesn’t mean they have an instinct even to take responsibility for their own sobriety and dental hygiene, let alone to help

out millions of others, without profiting from the process themselves. A society without excess carbon emissions (and, thus, without global warming) is indeed "desirable", and millions of people will say that they desire it, but they have no conception of the heroism involved: they only know how to whine and complain until the government does "something" on their behalf. Look at them, now, with their cardboard signs: every single slogan could be summarized as, "somebody should do it for me". It does not occur to them that their own intelligence, morality, initiative and industry will be called upon, in slaying the dragon: it does not occur to them that they are the heroes in this fable. Personal initiative has become disassociated from political progress: the so-called leaders of ecology and environmentalism are merely the leaders of the chorus carrying cardboard signs. They are the first among beggars, as they beg the government and the bureaucracy to solve these problems on their behalf. Nobody is concerned that a Caesar or a Napoleon will rise up among them; nobody is concerned that the next guillotine will be set up by these "revolutionaries" –and, indeed, there is no reason for concern, as it is an utterly phony revolution.

In working against stupidity there is no progress at all: people are no more intelligent now than they were a thousand years ago, and they will not become any more intelligent a thousand years hence. Working with stupidity, yes, some sort of progress is possible, but it is the bittersweet success that a musician must face when his art (for so long ignored) is suddenly appreciated as genius when it becomes background music in a blockbuster action film. Whatever you thought was brilliant about your own work can only be appreciated when it has become indistinguishable from the stupidity of the crowds that adulate and appreciate it: when it becomes "background noise" for the kind of nonsense that makes idiots feel good about themselves. And this is the definition of entertainment: that it makes stupid people feel wise. Even in comedy, when a joke is made at their expense, the crowd feels as if they're wise enough to have a laugh at their own foolishness, and so are flattered even by mockery.

This is not an evanescent problem that will be forgotten at the dawn of a new day for humanity. Stupidity is not some dark cloud that will soon pass away, it is the sun: it is now and forever the dominant force in our solar system. When the earth beneath your feet rolls around to interpose itself between your seated perspective and the sun, you perceive this obstruction as "night", just as surely as you perceive a dark cloud overhead as "shade" during the day; but the sun shines on continuously, at all times, whether or not your subjective view of it happens to be obscured.

In Buddhist culture, the hunter was regarded as the most despicable of people, and was even pitied for having been born into the circumstances that led him to that profession, whereas Christian and Muslim cultures regard hunters as the most admirable of men. The masses of humanity remain equally stupid either way, but the progress of culture provides them with fables that gradually make one kind of wisdom or another seem compatible with their own stupidity (compatible with their own "self-interest", as the right wingers like to say). In one culture, these fables train the masses to regard the hunter as a pitiable sort of villain whereas, in another culture, we're all led to regard him as an enviable sort of hero. The blood and the filth of hunting is just as despicable in every cultural context: our instinctual reaction to the stench of a wild boar's corpse is just the same, for example, and cannot be changed by any number of fables. The pretext that a man needs to be brave, daring or even intelligent to shoot an animal is as easily debunked in either context: no matter how much mythology we've been burdened with, to watch a man kill a bear with a bow and arrow is just as saddening a spectacle as watching him kill a kitten, and for all the same reasons. What can change, with the cultural context, is the type of stupidity that people find easiest to sustain.

When morality and stupidity are in conflict, stupidity will win, every time – not just for a day or a decade, but for a century. When being good is the stupidest thing to do, the dominant majority will be "morally good" by that standard. Who creates those standards? In Afghanistan, it's the Taliban. In China, it's the Communist Party. In the democracies of the decadent west? You and I: anyone who dares. It's our culture: ours to change, ours to create, ours to destroy.

Veganism as a majoritarian movement was doomed to fail, because it began with a standard of moral and intellectual excellence, inviting the masses to join in (and thus "live up to" that standard).

Our challenge, instead, is to use the creative arts to make the right thing to do stupid enough that people would question why you'd want to do anything else instead. Do you suppose the way to make hunting despicable, for the masses, is by inviting them all to read philosophy? I might as well say, "inviting them all to read non-fiction" to make the same point, as a pathetically small percentage of the population engages in research of any kind. Oh, but do you suppose Walt Disney had no effect on the public perception of hunters at all, when he made Bambi? Walt Disney could never have arisen in Afghanistan, and Bob Marley could never have arisen in Communist China, but they arose here, amongst ourselves, in the decadent west, and they transformed our societies (for better and worse) without any army marching behind them. They transformed the stupidity of our society through the stupidest method of all: entertainment.

I am not demanding that vegans become something new and different, I am urging them to realize what they already are: an elite that only destroys itself by pretending to be capable of majoritarian politics. As certainly as an aristocracy would destroy itself by inviting the masses to join their social class, veganism destroys itself in attempting to become a mass movement. We are worse than an aristocracy: we are not distinguished from the masses by a special title, nor by a special education, but by a kind of desire –and this is the most invidious and resented inequality of all. It is as foolish to pretend we can share our talent with others as it would be for a professional basketball player or a great musician: it is the desire that exists before the talent is developed that we have and they lack. They can buy the instrument, they can buy the education, they can buy the books, they can buy the credentials, and they may even be able to buy an aristocratic title, but not the desire that distinguishes us as vegans. If they are compelled to be vegan (under a doctor's orders, in prison conditions, or by the more subtle sort of influence a wife has upon her husband, etc.) they can have all the health benefits of the diet, but they still won't have the desire: the moon cannot replace the sun.

Doing the best you can is ethically simple, whereas winning is complicated by the fact that someone else must lose. Deserving to win is more odious still, because it does not merely entail that you are strong, but that someone else is weak, or at least that nobody else stronger than yourself was present to deprive you of this status of deserving the victory –which is quite a different thing from the victory itself. Veganism is not a matter of doing the best you can: it is a matter of winning, while others lose.

We have not invented the lightbulb: it is not the case that every new lightbulb sold is reducing the number of candles, so that everyone, eventually, will share in our new light. The reality is, instead, that our light is someone else's darkness: they will despise us, forever, because hatred for someone better than yourself (someone who wins and deserves to win) is easier than accepting that you are someone who deserves to lose. The point of being an aristocrat is not to make everyone else into an aristocrat; the point of being an aristocrat is to rule. The point of being a vegan is not to make everyone else into a vegan; given that we will forever be a minority, and an intensely despised minority at that, please ask yourself, do you want to be a powerless minority, or a powerful one?

Some of you will have figured this out before me because, for example, you had a fat sister, who "tried" to be vegan, following your example, and who told you, tearfully, that she had wanted the diet to work for her (perhaps she even admitted that she envies you because the diet has worked so well, in your case) but she has resigned herself to the fact that she's just not capable of living with this level of selfdiscipline –whereas, apparently, you are. Perhaps a fat sister, perhaps a gaunt grandfather: fat or thin, young or old, some of you have seen directly the resentment of people who "wished" they could be vegan, but now feel as if this were a wish some supernatural power failed to grant them. Some of you have seen your relatives respond to your insistence that "anyone can do it" by explaining (however incoherently) that they cannot do it themselves: they argue that it's only possible for a small minority of especially talented and virtuous people like you, even if they haven't figured out exactly what talent or virtue it is that they're lacking. Now you are in the position

to demonstrate the same "false humility" of the basketball player and the concert pianist explained before: "Oh, there's nothing special about me, I just care enough to put in the time and effort..." –as if this matter of "caring" were a trivial thing –as if it were a habit they could learn from you, by imitation.

If you still have some respect for your fat sister, you do not want to default to Occam's Razor, but the simplest explanation is: stupidity. She lacks your desire, yes, but she also lacks the intelligence to desire the same things you do, even when the advantages (and all the moral and ecological arguments) have been demonstrated to her.

You made it easy for her to understand: you didn't make it easy for her to desire. The basketball player could have shown his younger brother how to play basketball, but he can't show him how to want to learn, how to want to practice, how to want to win. The desire cannot be shared –and this is much more of a problem (not less) with intellectual competition than it is in the merely physical arena (where people can more easily accept that they "don't have what it takes", as their height is not a judgement on their morality, their intellect, and their soul). These situations are made more agonizing (and more instructive) when you realize that this other person tried to be vegan because of your influence, and they've quit because they've realized that they can never be your equal.

I didn't have this advantage: I didn't have a fat sister or an ailing grandfather who struggled to be vegan but failed. Perhaps if I had witnessed that process of "conversion" and "deconversion" up close, I could have figured out the riddle of vegan politics several years sooner (i.e., that the most basic premise of veganism as a majoritarian movement is both strategically and morally wrong). For many years, I wanted to believe that veganism was something that stupid and lazy people could do: I wanted to believe it could be dumbed down to become something appreciated and implemented by the most shallow and insipid among us, in a way that no other philosophy ever could be (in a way that Buddhist philosophy, for example, never could be). I wanted to believe that veganism didn't require any special talent or desire on our part, so that it could stand a chance of "winning", in the aeons-long popularity contest that defines and redefines cultures. I didn't allow myself to believe that it required extraordinary intelligence or effort because I knew that an ethical principle the vast majority of people were incapable of practicing would be doomed to failure –especially if it were being presented as "the moral baseline" (or minimum standard) for civilized life in the century to come.

For many years, my perception of the problem was skewed by the contrasting experience of the movements I'd been involved with immediately before: the politics of the Cree and Ojibwe, for example, are exclusive and elitist in obvious ways that veganism is not. I remember a traditional dancer complaining that the winners in the Cree dance competitions were selected on the basis of their blood, and not on the quality or artistry of their performances: he had traveled coast to coast, and had seen the judges questioning the contestants to establish how many chiefs they were related to, who their uncles and grandparents were, then assigning the victory to the dancer who best represented the "lineage" of the particular dance –reflecting an untranslatable sense of what "tradition" is supposed to mean, and of what it was, exactly, that these festivals were supposed to preserve. His complaint was that the quality of the dance and music would inevitably deteriorate, as a sort of aristocracy was created by those who were born to win, simultaneously discouraging those who were born to lose. Very few people are born Cree, and very few people who are not born Cree will ever be accepted by a Cree community to an extent that would allow them to be involved in their politics –although very few ever try.

The Cree are not forbidding or difficult to cooperate with, but they are tired of the promises offered by Christian missionaries and anthropologists alike. They suffer from a kind of "humanitarian fatigue" that was already familiar to me from my years in Laos when I first arrived in Saskatchewan: too many charities representing too many political ideologies had already drowned them in grandiose claims about a better future that never did materialize. Cree politics may seem to be more closed to outsiders than vegan politics, but the reverse is true. The Cree remain open to helping others and being helped in a way that vegans are not: they do not expect you to become one of them in order to help them, and they are not separated from you by the (invidious) notion that they are your moral superiors, nor, vice versa, that you are theirs. Anyone can learn the Cree and Ojibwe languages, and, having learned either language, anyone can get positively involved with Cree and Ojibwe charities at any level, with political entanglements ensuing soon thereafter (whether you want to be entangled or not). It is difficult to exaggerate how much more successful I would have been if I'd remained involved in Cree politics for

the last ten years, instead of cutting it off entirely and starting again with vegan politics –but, I admit, this is presuming a definition of success that is entirely meaningless to me. Although those who can help despair that the Cree need more than they can provide, they do not realize how precious it is that they can help at all –and that they are aware that they can. By contrast, incredibly few people can contribute positively to the vegan movement, and, sadly, the few who can don't know who they are.

It certainly seemed that I had escaped from a series of elitist and exclusive movements (indigenous studies, Buddhist studies, humanitarian work in Cambodia, etc.) to enter into something far more populist and participatory when I turned my attention toward veganism. I was wrong.

There is a difference between those who want to win and those who want to deserve to win, quite independent from the variables that determine the winning. In business, for example, would you rather do all of the work necessary so that you can say that you deserve to be successful, or would you prefer to actually be successful, even if you didn't deserve it? In the context of any given contest, would you be more interested in being able to say that you deserved to win than in actually winning, even if someone else deserved the victory more than yourself? I can say that "I want you to be vegan", but the truth is that I want you to have the intelligence and the self-discipline to be vegan for the right reasons. I want those reasons to be your own, not mine. I don't want you to imitate me, to be compelled by me, etc., I want you to be intelligent enough to really understand what it is that I desire, and to then desire it on your own, reasoning it through according to your own philosophy or anti-philosophy. I want people to come to their own conclusions on the basis of their own reasoning, and I nevertheless hope they will end up being correct by my own standards, without submitting to my authority: I neither want their submission out of blind faith, nor out of cynical deference (and so I shall be disappointed, more than nine times out of ten!). Do you want the vegan movement to win, or do you want it to deserve to win? Are you willing to be part of a movement dominated by people who happen to be vegan, but who (in this sense) don't deserve to be vegan? Are you willing to take orders from people who are vegan for the wrong reasons, who are vegan because they're blindly following another person's reasons, or who have no reasons at all?

My background as a scholar of Buddhism is more salient here than you could possibly know: there are Buddhists who joined the religion for the wrong reasons, because they were blindly following another person's reasons, or for no reason at all. I was charismatic enough to bend such people to my own will, convincing them to see the truth in my own way of thinking, but my charisma could not compel them to exercise their own will, and sort out their own truth, through their own way of thinking. It is one thing to convince someone that you should be allowed to do all the thinking on their behalf, and it is quite another to convince them that they should do their own research, and develop their own informed opinion. The mentality of the cult follower was totally alien to me when I got involved with Buddhism, but it was sickeningly familiar to me by the time I'd quit Buddhism, and got involved with the vegan movement. I didn't quit because something was wrong with Buddhism, but because everything was wrong with the Buddhists, as people, and I have had to quit veganism in the same way, repeatedly, complaining that there is nobody within the movement capable of thinking for themselves. I could relate this back, again, to the allegory of the fat sister: imagine that you had a sister who tried to imitate your research into Buddhist philosophy, history and politics, but who ended up furious with herself for her own weakness. All your attempts to reassure her that she can do the same things you've done yourself ("it's easy!") will be received with embarrassment and exasperation: you're demonstrating the same false humility as the concert pianist and the basketball champion, even if you (in your religious fervor) think of yourself as being entirely sincere. So long as we think that ignorance is involuntary (that it is due to "lack of access" to institutions, etc.) it seems that people will be able to learn as soon as they're provided with the instruments necessary to do so; but once we've admitted to ourselves that their ignorance is voluntary, we realize that the desire to learn is everything, and the instruments are nothing. I say again: you can make it easy for her to understand, but not easy for her to want to understand. This may be just as true of one sister, or one

grandparent, as it is of ten thousand members of a cult, or ten million members of a culture.

Many, many of you, holding this book, know how hard it is to accept that your brother, your sister, your husband, your wife, or your best friend from primary school, will never be intelligent enough to understand what it is you desire, and then desire it themselves, for their own reasons (coming to their own conclusions, not merely mimicking yours). How many housewives are there in the world today wishing that their husbands would develop their own (autogenous) interest in the yoga lessons they attend together, rather than just (grudgingly) coming along for the sake of the marriage? You could replace the word "yoga" in that sentence with the names of innumerable religions, political movements and ideologies (not just hobbies or sports) and come up with a similar sort of answer. At some point, the initiative has to come from him: she can compel his compliance, nothing more. Probably 50% of the students in every yoga class are not sincerely interested in learning yoga, and in every classroom I've ever been in, far more than 50% of the students did not want to be there (learning French, Chinese, Latinoan, Cree, etc.). Under compulsion, they learn without sincerity, because they learn without the requisite desire, if they learn anything at all. What percentage of the people who think of themselves as vegan are, in fact, not sincerely vegan at all?

If these same people that you love and respect were incapable of sobriety, you could indeed say that it's not a problem of sheer intelligence, but a matter of desire: they aren't necessarily stupid, they simply don't want to be sober. You can keep on telling yourself that, but having the intelligence to know what to desire is inextricable from the problem: if your sister is too stupid to want to quit drinking (or if she's too stupid to want to quit gambling, etc.) she'll never understand what it is that more intelligent people desire about a life of sobriety and self-discipline. Never. Many of you, reading this book, know the bitterness of looking at your own boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife, and feeling fully the disappointment of this "never": admitting to yourself that it is not "some day", not "eventually", that they will understand, but truly never. And any semblance of understanding you can elicit from them will, in fact, be a matter of compulsion and compliance: it will be a kind of submission to your will, not a demonstration of a will of their own.

An elite that is "open to all" is nevertheless closed to everyone incapable of joining it. An elitist organization that proclaims itself morally superior to everyone incapable of joining it will inevitably be hated. In this paradoxical position, would you prefer to be hated and feared, or not to be feared but merely hated? Oh, yes, perhaps you'd prefer to be influential because you're respected and admired, rather than feared, but that isn't the choice I'm offering you. If you were a member of such an ethically-defined minority, how exactly would you expect to become influential? By pretending that there is nothing special about you at all, and that anyone could be your equal, with just a few "easy" steps? This is what the vegans of the last twenty years have considered to be a winning strategy: pandering to the lowest common denominator, insisting with false humility that we do not deserve to be seen as superior, while, at the same time, proclaiming the moral superiority of veganism and trying to tempt the masses to join us with the promise that they could feel as morally superior as we do ourselves, if only they'd be willing to switch sides. And after twenty years of this strategy, is it any surprise that we're hated? This kind of elitism: would it be better with or without fear? It would be safer to be feared, wouldn't it?

Christianity entered its decadent phase when "the imitation of Christ" replaced the worship of Christ as something incomprehensible, transcendental and superhuman: the distinctive idiocy of American Protestantism (in our century) is that these people imagine they can (and should) live like Jesus (wearing bracelets with the slogan, "what would Jesus do?", and so on). Who in their right mind would read the Gospels and imagine that the point of the fable (and of all the intricate allegories therein) is that we should live our own lives in the same manner as the symbolic character in the center of the tale? When you read that Jesus killed 2,000 pigs in a mystical demon-killing ritual on the banks of the Sea of Galilee, do you think the intended moral of the story was that his devotees should follow his example, and set up slaughterhouses for the sake of the same mode of "spiritual warfare" today? I notice that we do not have any similar delusions about Moses in modern Judaism: nobody wants to write their own law, nor lead their own slave rebellion, nor be exiled in the desert, whereas the Christians want to walk in

Christ's shoes, rather than worshipping him from afar. On a very elementary level, the significance of Jesus and Moses alike is that you can never aspire to be them: the significance of prophecy is not for everyone to live like a prophet. The life of an intellectual is not a Christ-like sacrifice so that everyone will be inspired to become an intellectual "in imitation of" that Christ two thousand years later. The life of a vegan is not a Moses-like slave rebellion, so that everyone will follow our laws (our stone tablets!) two thousand years later. The life of a vegan intellectual is neither half-Jesus nor half-Moses, neither half-sacrifice nor half-rebellion.

The influence of this kind of Christianity extends far beyond the remit of the religion, in part because of the power of American television: like the redneck reading of Jesus, people assume that the hero's role is to set an example for others to follow (even if it is just by being tried and crucified!) with the redemptive moral to the story implicitly assumed to be, "You can be just like me!" Of course, this is idiocy, even if it is just evaluated as an interpretation of the Bible: the point of the fable was not that millions of people should get themselves crucified (nor that even one other person should live their lives like Moses, lead their own slave rebellion, and then write their own laws). Nevertheless, we live with a deep, unexamined assumption that the hero exists as a cookie cutter, and the people presented with the hero's story are just so much cookie dough: it does not occur to us that we should appreciate a hero (natural or supernatural, man or demigod) precisely for the ways in which he is alien to us. His strangeness makes him special, not his similarity to our own struggles in life; it is precisely because he did something we could never do that we're supposed to worship him as a god, not because we find him "relatable". There is a grotesque sense of egalitarianism at the root of the problem, and it should be Christians rather than atheists who complain about this tendency: there is a resistance to "looking up to" the hero, if he is actually supposed to be superior to ourselves. We must be reassured that under the hero's mask, or under his crown of thorns, he is as mortal and flawed as the members of the braying crowd, as if to say, "If he is not one of us, and if we cannot be like him, why should we accept him as our god?" In their egocentrism, American Christians come ever closer to nihilism, even in the act of professing their faith: if we cannot become Jesus ourselves, we will not worship him.

Vegans practice a form of piety that is both defiant and despotic, both rebellious and repressive, reviling the other 99% of the population for failing to live up to our selected standards of piety. We feel that we are persecuted by the majority, and express our total incomprehension as to why they feel persecuted by us, rather like muslim fundamentalists living in the suburbs of Paris who cannot imagine why the Christian majority fears them, behaving as if it were a model of peaceful coexistence for two populations to regard each other with the conviction, "I'm right, you're wrong, and when you die, you'll go to hell". In the same way that each Muslim sect reviles the others as heterodox, and may often enough find heretics amongst themselves, we, as vegans, revile the meat eaters less than we revile the majority of people who pretend to be members of our own movement (but who have brought the wrong motivations to it, etc.). Our piety makes us despicable to the majority of non-vegans, and yet (without ever seeing the irony) the majority of vegans each despise the majority of all other vegans in just the same way. The vegans who believe in meditation only accept other vegans who believe in meditation, whereas the vegans who believe in rescuing rats (and raising them as household pets) hate all the vegans who are willing to call an exterminator, so on and so forth, through ten thousand tiny fragments, each of which believes there is only one sect that is truly right, and "will enter through the gates of heaven" on judgement day. They are interested in being right, and that is their fundamental mistake: they are neither interested in winning, nor in deserving to win. The future belongs to those who are willing to be wrong: with or without us, the greatest of artists, and the greatest of politicians, will lead a march through the gates of hell.

It is absurd to pretend that veganism will ever be popular, and even more absurd to think that we can make it popular by "facilitating" it: you can facilitate literacy, but not the desire to learn, in the same sense that you can facilitate the study of the French language, but this facilitation will never create the demand to actually learn it. The Canadian government can continue to pour billions of dollars into facilitating the learning of French, but this is as badly misplaced as the same government's efforts to

facilitate sobriety (and, I note, these are often indistinguishable from attempts to facilitate getting high: safe injection sites, free needle distribution, etc.). In the same sense that literacy is differentiable from the desire to actually learn from books, I will create the words "soberacy" and "veganacy" to indicate the mere ability to be these things, as something separate from the desire to be them (the coinage of "Francophonacy" might also be useful, in Canada). We have achieved universal literacy and universal "soberacy", but, alas, we remain a nation of drunken clods who read a pitiful number of non-fiction books per annum (we have achieved universal "Francophonacy", too, inasmuch as all the anglophones have the opportunity to learn the language, and are nevertheless incapable of speaking French). The promotion of "veganacy" will produce a similar sort of smokescreen: it will only make it harder for us to identify who, within the movement, is actually vegan –as opposed to the people who have been "facilitated" into one sort of fake veganism or another. Facilitation is a losing strategy:

mystification would be better, at this point.

Every so often, there is a Buddhist monk famous and revered enough that millions of people would like to ask him a question (perhaps about doctrine, perhaps about history or philosophy, but perhaps about something far more petty and personal). How do you suppose they "facilitate" these questions? Do they set up a lemonade stand on the sidewalk, and accept anyone who casually strolls up to ask? I remember an elderly Buddhist monk describing a temple to me where the senior monk would only receive questions from people devoted enough to climb up an indescribable number of stairs, stopping to bow to a series of statues (a hundred times each) along the way. He knew the precise number of stairs and bows entailed by the process, and he described to me, approvingly, how one old woman who weighed over 300 pounds fulfilled all the same requirements as those younger and thinner than herself, before having her audience with the esteemed monk. This is mystification, rather than facilitation: I have no delusion that the quality of the monk's answers will be improved by this rigmarole, but I do indeed have the delusion that the barriers-to-entry will change the quality and quantity of the questioners. They make the questions difficult to ask, and therefore only deal with questions that are difficult to answer: the obstacles increase the seriousness of the questions petitioners dare to waste the monk's time in asking. Or do you suppose these Buddhist monks should do the same thing we do, as vegans, and install an escalator next to the staircase? Do you think they should "facilitate" any imbecile who has even the most casual interest in our religion, but who hasn't made any commitment to supporting it, "as a movement" yet? Do you suppose we should waste our time with questioning, cross examination and debate from people who haven't even thought through the most basic premise of the thing being debated?

The advantage of placing your guru at the top of a mountain-high staircase is, simply, that you distinguish the people who have a tremendous desire to ask a question. If your objective is to answer the greatest number of questions from the greatest number of people, most of whom will receive their answer with complete indifference, that's quite a different strategy. And if you're actually trying to teach people something as simple as the French language, what then? Do you want to work with students who are motivated to learn, or the greatest number of students, the vast majority of whom will be indifferent (or even resentful) toward the lessons? I have been in the position of speaking directly to the most senior monk in a highly esteemed monastery, without any appointment, on account of the quality of the books I was carrying in my hands, and the scraps of my own handwriting (in the ancient language, Pali) that demonstrated the seriousness of my own research interests. This, too, is a kind of mountain- high staircase: I had put in the hundreds of hours of study (instead of thousands of bows to hundreds of statues) but the principle of the thing is the same. There is elitism within Buddhism, just as there is elitism within veganism; we cannot make progress without admitting this to ourselves, and thinking seriously about the ways in which that elitism is requisite to (not an obstacle to) our own future progress.

You can popularize the law, but you cannot popularize justice. For twenty years, vegans thought that by increasing awareness of injustice they would increase the popularity of their peculiar notion of justice to counteract it. Nobody in the movement has dealt with the ramifications of the failure of

this paradigm –and they are profound. A law may be popular or unpopular, a constitution may be celebrated or resented, but “doing justice” remains the interest of the few in every society that has ever existed, and in every society that ever shall.

It was absurd to think that the sight of cruelty toward animals (in slaughterhouses, in laboratories, etc.) would mobilize the masses to become vegan activists, and it is just as absurd to imagine that the sight of an injustice between two people would result in a larger and larger percentage of the population becoming police officers, private investigators, anti-establishment barristers, or outright revolutionaries. The sight of water pollution never motivated any significant percentage of the population to become ecologists, and it is indeed easier to produce videotaped evidence of that sort of thing than police brutality. The conviction of the vast majority (in relation to ecology, to animal cruelty, to police brutality and the incompetence of the courts, etc.) is that the unseen bureaucracy of our government will solve the problem on our behalf, and, therefore, all we have to do is wait, or, possibly, complain. Protesting on the sidewalk (with a cardboard sign, etc.) is not “the doing of justice”, it is complaining that someone else should do justice on your behalf (with that “someone else” being a government bureaucrat, etc.). Chanting a slogan in unison is not ecology: it is neither the science of ecology nor the action, and the fact that “activism” has become (in this way) indistinguishable from total inactivity is itself a damning indictment of our level of political education. What people call radicalism today consists of complaining on the sidewalk with the hope that a journalist will make a news story out of it, and then that politicians and bureaucrats will hear (directly or indirectly) about your complaint, as it is represented or misrepresented in the mainstream press. It is more radical to sit down with a sheaf of paper and write a science fiction novel than to stand on the sidewalk complaining that someone else should solve your problems for you –and, of course, it is more radical still to solve your problems for yourself. Think about the influence the novel *Dune* has had in the last hundred years, and how much influence it will have in the next hundred years, compared to all the nonsense that vegans have gotten themselves put in prison for. *Dune* was rejected by 23 publishers before it was finally distributed by a company that only produced technical manuals for the car industry, trade journals for the gemstone industry, and so on (i.e., the professional editors at literary and science fiction presses thought it had neither artistic merit nor commercial potential). If you think *Dune* is not radical enough an example, as its author certainly had no radical pretensions, consider how it might read when translated into Arabic, Hebrew, Farsi and Chinese. The book takes more than 12 hours to read: even if its “radicalizing effect” on the reader is minor, contrast the depth and profundity of that 12 hour experience to the few minutes (or few seconds) of a stranger walking past a vegan protest on a sidewalk. Art changes the world because it changes people: vegans wanted to change the world simply by opposing justice to injustice, without admitting to themselves that justice is a specialized trade –rather than a universal concern, or universal trait of the human species. Tell me, what sounds more absurd to you, “universal literacy”, or “universal justice”? Yes, imagine if a hundred percent of the population were trained, armed and deputized police officers: is that the universal and egalitarian ideal we embrace? What if a hundred percent of us were educated and licensed lawyers, what then? If everyone took it upon themselves to sort out justice on their own terms, do you imagine that would be a new Eden, or one of the outer rings of hell? Of the people who think they can “do justice”, what percentage of them actually have the talent for it? What percentage of us would make terrible police officers, terrible lawyers, and so on? What percentage of us think we want justice, but really want revenge? What percentage of us leap to the conclusion that we know what justice and injustice are with the most shallow assessment of a few seconds of videotape, never cultivating the detached, intellectual character that the doing of justice actually requires?

Veganism, imagined as a “social justice movement”, is the worst kind of paradox: egalitarian elitism, claiming that anyone and everyone should see the injustice before their eyes, and join in the embittered mob seeking out revenge. I’ve heard Wayne Hsiung speak of the importance of remaining angry (remaining embittered, frankly) and refusing to accept that living in a society where the majority of people eat meat “is normal”: the saintly revolutionary must cultivate an attitude of perpetual astonishment and outrage. Outrage against injustice isn’t the basis for a political movement of any kind: it is the basis

for a nightly news story and a short-term fundraising campaign. It should be no surprise that Wayne Hsiung made millions of dollars by getting his fundraising campaigns mentioned in the nightly news.

Everything he theorized as the basis for a long term political movement works, instead, as the basis for a short term publicity stunt.

The professed egalitarianism of the movement does very little to conceal who the elite among us truly are, and in this respect the vegans of the last twenty years resemble a very different (and complementary) aspect of American Christianity than the one I mentioned before. Wayne Hsiung boasted that he'd created a "fully horizontal" organization without leaders or followers, a network of equals organized into autonomous chapters, but the reality is that one man controls the bank account, with millions of dollars in it, one man controls the youtube account, with its millions of followers, and so on; nobody can question why he is in charge, so long as they want to participate in the organization "as a greater whole". I said before that American Christians implicitly profane (and humanize) Christ, asking themselves how they can be more like Jesus themselves, and thus miss the point of the fable; reciprocally, the god they look up to is not Christ, but the "greater whole" of the church itself. Their equality with god incarnate is juxtaposed to an equally absurd inequality with "the community".

When vegans behold themselves not as an elitist movement but as very much "the same as everyone else", they simultaneously raise up the notion of "the community" as something better than themselves, that they are beholden to (and that they serve, with or without placing their trust in any particular leader). The followers of Wayne Hsiung (or Paul Bashir, etc.) know that he is "human, all too human"; they neither think of him as a Hercules nor as a Christ, but the organization, the movement and the community becomes, for them, a kind of god. They give their money to it and obey it

unquestioningly, although, like so many other gods, its commands are largely silent: it is a matter of inference for the followers, who must meditate, reflect and pray, never quite knowing what the will of god might be –or else finding out afterward, when they are punished for a mistake (and just a single wrong word, on social media, will indeed be punished by the all-seeing "community"). They change their lives in myriad ways so that they will not be ostracized because, in their conformity to it, they imagine they've discovered something "greater than themselves" – even though they know that their particular leaders (Wayne Hsiung, Baul Bashir, etc.) are not better than themselves in any way –and they insist that they, individually, as vegans, are no better than anyone else. They insist that they are no better than their own fat sister, their own spindly grandfather, etc., who tried to be vegan but failed. They insist that the leaders are no better than the followers, and that vegans are no better than nonvegans, just to have this egalitarian veneer painted over their ongoing slavery.

Doesn't it seem magnanimous to take the very thing that makes you extraordinary and then pretend that it isn't extraordinary at all? Isn't it very kind and generous for you to sit at the dinner table and watch your own parents eating meat, pretending that you're all equals? It isn't magnanimous in the least: it is the embittered mutual hatred of a Muslim minority living amongst Christians (or vice versa) thinking to themselves, every day, "We're right, you're wrong, and in the end you're the ones going to hell!"

There's nothing magnanimous about this kind of phony equality: it is, really, just an abdication of responsibility. If you're right and your parents are wrong, there's an onus upon you to help them; the odds are that they know it, they feel it, and that's why they can never reciprocate your phony magnanimity. Whether or not they develop heart disease, stomach cancer, etc., as a result of their diet is a matter of probability, but there's a one hundred percent chance that every piece of meat they've eaten comes from a slaughtered animal: the moral and ecological significance of what they're doing is absolutely certain.

They don't care because they're not smart enough to care, and even if they're compelled to become vegan by a doctor's orders (as is common enough nowadays) they still won't be vegan for the right reasons, and so the inequality between you will remain. Yes, of course, I can understand very well the emotional impulse (present in most of us from early childhood) to regard your parents not merely as your equals, but as your superiors, both intellectually and morally; that impulse can be extended to

all authority figures in your society, or to all of your friends and colleagues, just out of a yearning for a sense of brotherhood. I am not asking you to make yourself into something special, I am asking you to realize how special you already are; I am not asking the vegan movement to transform itself, but to realize what it already is, and to work with the talent it already has, in the only way that's possible. Even if the only difference between you and your parents is what you desire, and that you were smart enough to figure out why you desire it, you must stop trivializing and dismissing this difference: it is more profound than the difference between the abolitionists and their parents who (often enough) wanted to continue owning slaves.

We are embarrassed to admit how extraordinary we are, in part because this reveals that our political cause is utterly doomed, inasmuch as we conceive of it as a popular, majoritarian cause, and not as an elitist conspiracy. What would you suggest for an atheist in Saudi Arabia or Iran? How would you recommend they transform the society they've been born into? Suppose a friend of yours were both an atheist and a homosexual, raised in Saudi Arabia: would you encourage him to hold up a cardboard sign and chant slogans? Would you encourage him to interrupt strangers while they're eating dinner in restaurants, as vegan "radicals" do in California? Would you encourage him to engage in debates with complete strangers, answering questions at a table set up on a sidewalk like a lemonade stand? No: the only way forward, for him, is conspiracy. What kind of conspiracy? A conspiracy to change the culture that he lives in while continuing to live in it himself; a conspiracy of dissident intellectuals, with each participant being half-politician and half-artist, seeking to destroy the mythology that underpins the old society by creating something new. It must be a conspiracy that is more creative than destructive, because the nature of the victory we're discussing here cannot come about by sabotage, intimidation, terrorism, etc., but only by transforming the culture, and so transforming the motivations and assumptions most readily (most effortlessly) available to the laziest and stupidest of people.

The stupidity and passivity of the majority will not change: you can neither invite them to become philosophers nor to become activists in pursuit of justice, as I've already explained. You cannot raise their level of education, nor quantitatively reduce their level of ignorance: you can qualitatively transform their ignorance, by changing their culture. It is not that the masses will ever become philosophers, nor that they will ever become sincere atheists or sincere vegans; but a small number of philosophers can transform our culture through the creative arts, as Voltaire did before –and as the authors of the Christian Gospel did, when they put pen to paper just like Voltaire, creating a fiction that would change the world.

As vegans, we are, in our way, just as alienated from our society as the atheists and homosexuals in Saudi Arabia are alienated from theirs. In a sense, our disadvantage has been that we were unaware of our alienation, and so we've pursued the illusion of a false future (that we imagined to be attainable through a change in technological paradigm, etc., as explained in chapter four, and that we wanted to be attainable through the insincere "conversion" of the masses, and even our own family members, etc., as explained in chapter five) instead of organizing conspiracies of small numbers of talented people, working toward cultural change. Peasant rebellions come and go, urban insurrections are innumerable, most often nameless and directionless: it is the salon that is the engine of social change. A half dozen dissident intellectuals organized into a salon count for more than ten thousand starving peasants with pitchforks: knowing how to starve doesn't mean that you know how to reorganize society so that everybody can eat. If Voltaire didn't have his salon, if Holbach and Helvetius didn't have theirs, just as many rebellions (peasant and urban) would have arisen and fallen in the span of a century, like the waves of the ocean. The work of the dissident intellectual is not rebellion, but to make rebellion meaningful: on the scale of a society of millions (unlike the autobiography of an individual) the creation of new meanings is the necessary precondition for the destruction of the old. For just one woman or man, destruction and disillusionment may come first, before the individual seeks out or creates some new meaning, but social change on a massive scale requires the dissident intellectuals to do their work first: to make the transformation meaningful before it has occurred.

In ten thousand tiny newspaper articles, Benjamin Franklin's salon created the meaning for the American Revolution that would ensue: there would have been a rebellion against the British Empire anyway (and it might not have been the first or the last) but it was in the salons of a few intellectuals that the meaning and direction for the revolution was created, just in a few decades before it happened. Conversely, what was the model for a new and better society in Libya, when the moment of their revolution came? They have the army of Khalifa Haftar, but there is no model for a better society that can be called Haftarism –not even to the same extent that we could speak of Voltairism or Franklinism. In Iraq, there was the body of a revolution without a soul: the American army displaced Saddam Hussein, but among the Iraqi people there had been no Voltaire to create a new philosophy (and a new model for a better society to be aspired to) counterposed to Husseinism. Syria is the saddest example of all, because the only philosophy they had to challenge the old establishment was the one offered by ISIS: the Muslim radicals devoured the secular, modernizing opposition to Bashar Al-Assad. For individuals, the disillusionment with our old dreams comes first, and then our awakening; on the scale of a society of millions, artists must produce the new dream that will replace the old one, before the masses can be awoken. That is our role, now, as vegans: not to invite others to join us in our disillusionment, but to create new illusions.

For an extraordinary individual it may be enough to see that circumcision is evil, that Islam is a mere fable, and to then "awaken" to a new and better life, but it would be the utmost idiocy for that man or woman to then expect (as vegans did, over the last 20 years) that they can turn around and awaken their whole society (on a scale of millions) with the same "simple" formula that they found so easy to understand and implement for themselves. Yes, it was easy for you, because you're extraordinary, and you don't want to admit to yourself how extraordinary you are because it entails that your political cause is doomed: you'll be forever alienated from the majority of your own society, even the majority of your own work colleagues and classmates. You do not want to admit to yourself that your own parents, your own sister, etc., are incapable of doing this thing that you've found so easy to do: it is emotionally intolerable for you to admit that they're too stupid, too lazy, or too evil to ever reason through the same "simple" logic as yourself, and have the courage to act on their conclusions. How can you save the souls of a nation of millions if you can't even convert your own parents to atheism? For vegans, it is a parallel question (as we cannot convert our parents to veganism) leading to a parallel answer.

New myths must come first: there must be new fables before society (as a whole) can be disillusioned with the old ones. For you, as an individual, there was nothing new that you needed to believe in when overturning your prior assumption that meat and dairy were nutritionally necessary, nor when overturning the assumption that an omniscient god was perpetually looking down your chimney, but it is "a fallacy of composition" to treat yourself (in isolation) as the model for social change (merely "scaled up").

Ten million people will not reason these things through in the same way that you did: you must create a work of art that demonstrates your realization in a manner that doesn't require the masses to reason it through at all. Democracy doesn't work by involving only the tiny minority who understand it: democracy harnesses the positive participation of the vast majority who have no comprehension of what it is they're participating in. Even if the masses are equally as ignorant of politics in a democracy as they are in a dictatorship, a democracy benefits from their ignorance in a way that the dictatorship will not: their participation is worth more than their mere compliance, even if they do not understand what it is they contribute (by taking on a portion of the worrying and wondering of political leadership) themselves. Wherever we have democracy, the stupidity of the majority does not entail stasis but, instead, perpetual change: there is a real openness to new ideas, so long as they are not presented as new ideas, but are transformed into art (entertainment, fiction, comedy, music, etc.). Under a tyranny, there are new ideas in the tyrant's court and nowhere else (as in Saudi Arabia today, etc.) but democracy makes tyrants of us all: our society is an

uncomprehending synergy of millions, guided by the half-forgotten myths created by characters as eccentric as Voltaire (and, on the other side, as eccentric as the authors of the Gospels) and those millions

are constantly hungry for new mythology, as they stumble away from the old. In a tyranny, cultural innovation is the domain of the tyrant alone; in an aristocracy, it becomes the responsibility of the aristocrats; but in a democracy it is nobody's responsibility in particular, entailing the advantage that anyone can attempt to instigate and inspire cultural change, but also the disadvantage that most of us will fail. Einstein failed to transform society because he never produced folklore; the scientific discoveries of Benjamin Franklin were trivial, by comparison, but he made an epochal change in practically every society on earth, because he was willing to write fables.

In this way, what you perceive as a rational conclusion must become a kind of irrational sentiment for millions of others; adapting one into the other is both the art of politics and political art. You cannot imagine what your own sister would need to believe to make veganism thinkable, and the eating of meat unthinkable. For her, it would not be a rational conclusion, as it was for you. For her, it would be an accretion of cultural assumptions, made up out of myths and stories and songs. In one culture, people think it is a noble and virtuous thing to join the military (and they associate it with upward mobility, political leadership, or even with aristocratic pretensions among those who volunteer for it as a career) whereas in another culture it is associated with poverty, unemployment, desperation, etc., and it is unthinkable that anyone with a university education would enlist. These attitudes are neither beliefs that can be debunked nor rational conclusions that can be debated: they are cultural accretions, influential precisely because their origin and purpose passes unquestioned. The morality (or immorality) of slavery is not something that every generation has to reason through for themselves, starting again with a blank chalkboard: for the vast majority of people, the excuses for slavery are now unthinkable, whereas the inconveniences created by labor laws (that ultimately prevent slavery) seem entirely acceptable, without anyone being able to name a particular song, story, movie or myth that convinced them to think this way. If our labor laws were overturned on a technicality, and slavery became legal again, due to a court decision, nobody could imagine that we'd return to the brutality of the past, simply because of the accretion of cultural change. In a Buddhist society, hunters are despised, whereas in a Muslim society, they are regarded as heroic, while the vast majority of people remain equally ignorant, stupid and lazy in either cultural context.

The true radicals are neither the protesters nor the debunkers of old mythology, but those who create a new myth, entailing a new way of thinking, a new way of feeling, and a new way of life. In China, right now, protesting against Communism is nothing: creating something better than it, that even an imbecile can believe in, is everything. That is not an academic exercise in refutation on a chalkboard, nor a challenge for researchers to establish the precise history of Communism's atrocities and failures; it is a creative challenge to be fulfilled through the arts.

You cannot imagine what your parents would need to believe to become atheists, but it would be something different from both atheism and religion entirely: it would be a myth that made the old religions seem unthinkable, and made life without them seem obvious. You cannot imagine what your parents would need to believe to become vegans, but it would be something different from veganism as we now know it: it would be a kind of mythology (a cultural accretion of innumerable stories and songs) that made meat eating seem unthinkable, and made life without it seem obvious. Inasmuch as veganism is the exclusive domain of intellectuals, it is doomed, but, nevertheless, the intellectuals among us are the only hope for the future of veganism. Inasmuch as atheism is the exclusive domain of intellectuals, it is doomed. A society of atheists is only possible inasmuch as atheism becomes indistinguishable from stupidity. A society of vegans is only possible inasmuch as veganism becomes indistinguishable from stupidity. When being good is the stupidest thing to do, the dominant majority will be good by that (ineluctably stupid) standard. In the struggle for cultural change, we are trying to change that standard: we are fighting for the future of stupidity.

This is the book that resulted from eight years of discussions on Youtube, where Eisel Mazard was the voice of a-bas-le-ciel, criticizing veganism from within, eventually reaching six million views with his jarring portrayal of the vegan movement as a deeply corrupt and dishonest failure.

Published at a time when most of the leaders of the movement were celebrating its seeming success, "Veganism: the Future of an Illusion" offers an analysis of the psychological and philosophical reasons for its ongoing failure, contrasted to a positive model for the life of a dissident intellectual pursuing unpopular political change.

Daydreams of a vegan majority future have distracted leaders and followers alike from taking the action necessary to make a positive difference in the world while continuing to lead a meaningful life –a life that is not ruined by activism itself.

The new strategy reflects an honest admission that vegans will remain a despised and internally divided minority for the century ahead, rather than pretending that we will imminently witness the esoteric ethical assumptions contested within the movement becoming the dominant cultural norm.

Being right or wrong is irrelevant to the personal and political struggle ahead: atheists have been right for a thousand years and nevertheless remain a powerless minority today, although not nearly so powerless as vegans. The preoccupation with "being right" is itself a losing strategy: we need to learn to win within the context of a culture that will always regard us as wrong, no matter how many scientific studies (under the headings of health, ecology, or the social sciences) may prove us right. Science will not transform society: we will. Veganism will not transform society: we will. We need to understand our own powerlessness in attempting that transformation in order to find new roads to power, discarding the phony populism of political leaders who pander to the fantasy that veganism will eventually become powerful simply because it's right. The future belongs to those who are willing to be wrong and, therefore, the future of veganism is an illusion.

The Library of Unconventional Lives

Eisel Mazard
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