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Hegemony, Animal Liberation, and Gramscian Praxis: An Interview with John Sanbonmatsu by Dinesh Wadiwel

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Abstract. Political theorist Dinesh Wadiwel interviews philosopher John Sanbonmatsu about the relevance of Antonio Gramsci's theories of capitalism and collective action for the contemporary animal advocacy movement. Wadiwel and Sanbonmatsu discuss Gramsci's key concepts, including hegemony, the distinction between 'organic' and traditional intellectuals, the capitalist crisis, and the necessity of 'moral and intellectual leadership' in praxis. Sanbonmatsu acknowledges the historical tensions between the political Left and animal rights, but makes the case for a theoretical and practical merging of the two. In this context, he suggests, Gramsci's phenomenological conception of praxis – i.e. as the engendering of a new political and social reality through the exercise of human will – offers important lessons for the animal movement. Sanbonmatsu suggests that as growing contradictions in the capitalist animal food economy open up fissures in the system of domination and consent, Gramscian analysis can help us to identify points of strategic weakness, ones we might collectively leverage to create radical social change.

Key Words: Antonio Gramsci, Marxism, animal rights, animal ethics, critical theory

Hegemonija, osvoboditev živali in Gramscijeva praksa: intervju Dinesha Wadiwela z Johnom Sanbonmatsujem

Povzetek. Politični teoretik Dinesh Wadiwel se s filozofom Johnom Sanbonmatsujem pogovarja o pomenu Gramscijevih teorij kapitalizma

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in kolektivnega delovanja za sodobno gibanje zagovorništva živali. Wadiwel in Sanbonmatsu razpravljata o Gramscijevih ključnih konceptih, vključno s hegemonijo, z razlikovanjem med »organskimi« in tradicionalnimi intelektualci, s kapitalistično krizo ter z nujnostjo »moralnega in intelektualnega vodstva« v praksi. Sanbonmatsu prepoznava zgodovinske napetosti med politično levico in pravicami živali, vendar se zavzema za teoretično in praktično združitev obeh. V tem kontekstu Gramscijevo fenomenološko pojmovanje prakse – tj. kot ustvarjanje nove politične in družbene realnosti z uporabo človekove volje – izpostavi kot pomembno lekcijo za gibanje za pravice živali. Sanbonmatsu predstavi razmišljanje, da nam, medtem ko vse večja protislovja v kapitalistični ekonomiji živalske hrane povzročajo razpoke v sistemu nadvlade in privolitve, Gramscijeva analiza lahko pomaga prepoznati točke strateške šibkosti, ki jih lahko skupaj izkoristimo za dosego radikalne družbene spremembe.

Ključne besede: Antonio Gramsci, marksizem, pravice živali, etika živali, kritična teorija

Dinesh Wadiwel (DW) *In 2011 you edited the collection,* Critical Theory and Animal Liberation *(Rowman and Littlefield). In some respects the book was unprecedented and remains unique in exploring connections between left theory and pro-animal politics. Your introduction to the book lays out some of the challenges before us, including a historic antagonism from many leftists towards the animal liberation project; and simultaneously, an urgent need for animal liberation analysis to engage a 'penetrating critique of, among other things, patriarchy and male violence, the links between racialization and animalization, [and] the capitalist state as such' (Sanbonmatsu 2011, 30). Could you explain a little about the impulses behind the collection?*

John Sanbonmatsu (JS) One of the few positive developments I see on the left regarding animals is Critical Animal Studies (CAS), a small, emerging academic field that seeks to bring radical social critique to animal liberationism, while bringing an animal liberationist perspective to radical critique. The point of my anthology was to provide a space for some of the emerging voices in CAS to map the totality of human domination. The original impetus for the volume came from the Marxist philosopher Renzo Llorente, in Spain, whose idea was to co-edit a book about capitalism and animals. When Renzo had to bow out of the project, however, the collection became broader in scope, exploring not only the linkages between speciesism and capitalism, but bringing in feminist critique, the Frankfurt School, ideology critique, etc.

Unfortunately, though there are now dozens if not hundreds of scholars working in this arena, CAS remains a very small domain. Meanwhile, the left as such remains indifferent to animal liberationist critique. In 1989, I wrote an article for *Z Magazine* (a leftist journal based in Boston) on why the left should take animal rights seriously, both as an idea and as an important social movement. When the article was published, I was a bit anxious, anticipating a backlash from the magazine's readers. In the event, I needn't have worried – because there was no reaction at all. Unfortunately, the left's attitude towards animals and to animal rights has not changed much in the intervening 30 years. There have been some exceptions. In the 1990s, for example, William Kunstler, the celebrated leftist attorney, publicly spoke out against human exploitation of animals in laboratories and farms, describing our treatment of other species as 'barbarism.' More recently, the leftist journalist Chris Hedges has drawn some attention to the suffering of animals in agriculture.[1] However, these are the exceptions that prove the rule, and animal liberationist thought remains marginal to leftism as a whole. *Jacobin* magazine has published one or two articles in an animal welfarist vein, but they've also published atrocious pieces attacking animal rights – including one that even defended factory farming.

Not only isn't the left interested in animal rights, but countless leftist journalists and critics have enthusiastically thrown their support to small-scale animal farming and aquaculture as 'forward-looking' developments in environmental sustainability. For example, George Monbiot, one of the few leftist writers to have criticized animal agriculture, published a repugnant article in *The Guardian* about how he hunted down and killed a deer, ostensibly as a way of demonstrating his commitment to a post-agricultural order.[2]

DW *In left discussions, one often finds the term 'hegemony' cropping up, a term most often associated with the work of Antonio Gramsci. Can you first explain what is meant by hegemony, and perhaps too the overall significance of Gramsci's politics for praxis?*

JS *Hegemony* is a complex term.[3] The word derives from the ancient Greek word *hegemon,* for a leading or dominant city state. Hegemony

[1] See e. g. Hedges (2015).

[2] See Monbiot (2020).

[3] See Perry Anderson's book length treatment of the subject, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (2017).

is often still used in this sense, as the power or influence of a ruling or dominant group or power. Leftists thus refer to the 'hegemony' of the World Bank, to the hegemony of capital, to racial hegemony, and so on. While these are valid uses of the term, what Gramsci meant by hegemony was rather more specific.[4] Broadly, *hegemony* encompasses the means through which a group or class establishes, and subsequently maintains, its rule. By 'rule,' however, I don't mean only or even primarily its control of the state or political institutions. Rather, I mean its authority and influence over society as such. It's one thing to rule over others solely using force – the police or military, etc. But it's another to gain the consent of the populace to a form of authority and a mode of life by redefining the common sense of society itself. The contest for power plays out in all spheres of society, not only at the ballot box, but in the workplace, in academia, in popular culture, and therefore too in language and the realm of ideas. A dominant group maintains its power not only or chiefly through control of the state, but through the propagation of values and beliefs, norms of behaviour, structures of practice. As Benedetto Fontana observes, for Gramsci a 'group or class can be said to assume a hegemonic role to the extent that it articulates and proliferates throughout society cultural and ideological belief systems whose teachings are accepted as universally valid by the general population' (Fontana 1993, 140). If we think of society as a consensual reality shared by those dwelling within it, then politics is the art of defining that reality. Those who exercise hegemony are thus able to define the meaning and purposes of human life.

It was one of Gramsci's most important insights, however, to recognize that hegemony is simply built into the nature of political life. It is therefore in vain to suppose that an oppressed class or group has only to *overthrow* a hegemonic group or system in order to succeed. It must instead institute its own form of rule, its own form of hegemony. A *counter*-hegemonic movement therefore seeks to crystallize a new form of popular consent.

[4] Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was an Italian political theorist and revolutionary who wrote most of his major works while languishing in a fascist prison, having been sent there under the direction of Benito Mussolini in 1926. Gramsci's essays (smuggled out of prison and published long after his death as *The Prison Notebooks*), ranged widely over a great many cultural, literary, historical, and political topics. For an introduction to Gramsci's life, see Giuseppe Fiori's *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* (1995). Among the best treatments of Gramsci's conception of politics as dialectic between leaders and led, and as the creative shaping of human social reality, is Benedetto Fontana's, *Hegemony and Power: On the Relation Between Gramsci and Machiavelli* (1993).

This, in turn, requires 'moral and intellectual leadership.' In the specific case of the animal advocacy movement, an effective counter-hegemonic praxis would transform the prevalent 'common sense' view of nonhuman animals as our natural inferiors and slaves. What animal advocates seek isn't merely the 'liberation' of animals, but a *new form of civilization,* a civilization based on quite different social, ecological, economic and ethical principles than the ones that constitute the present basis of society. In this connection, the problem of speciesism cannot be solved in the courts. Only through gaining mastery over the terms of debate and thought can the animal rights movement thereby transform the total ensemble of existing social relations. Legal reforms will follow only when the movement has achieved a certain level of social consent.

Counter-hegemonic praxis must therefore be differentiated from the liberal view of social change. The latter takes a static view of society, taking the existing social forces and social beliefs at face value, more or less as immutable 'givens.' The liberal view also believes that meaningful social change can be achieved through formal democratic processes, and hence through a compromise between different political blocs.[5] By contrast, the oppositional movement sees the forces in society as dynamic and therefore contestable. Moreover, the counter-hegemonic movement seeks to impose a new system of values on the old, thus changing the epistemological 'ground' of daily life. The work of the activist intellectual is to prepare this ground. White Americans today no longer give any thought to how they stand on the 'question' of slavery, because that 'choice' was taken off the table by abolitionists (and civil war). Though *de facto* slavery still persists throughout the world, it is no longer acceptable or legal to buy and sell human beings outright as commodities, based on their race. Similarly, though women are still treated as subordinates by men, no one in our society asks whether women should have the right to vote. Suffrage – an idea once considered radical and controversial – is now accepted by nearly all (though women still face numerous obstacles to full political representation). Feminists imposed this idea on society through a panoply of tactics, including marches, civil disobedience, letter-writing campaigns, and arson attacks.

[5] Nonviolent direct action is one potent form – as potentially 'coercive' a mechanism as violence. See Barbara Deming's instructive critique of Frantz Fanon's defense of revolutionary violence in 'On Revolution and Equilibrium,' *We Are All Part of One Another* (1984).

DW *Gramsci had a particular view about the role of leaders within movements. Can you say more about this?*

JS I would first emphasize again that social movements must conceive of *themselves* as leaders – the leaders of society itself. It is not enough simply to oppose an existing order – one must convince at least a significant minority of society that one has the better alternative. In order to do that, however, leadership must also be exercised within the oppositional movement. Though movements and revolts often arise spontaneously, they are unlikely to last or to achieve concrete objectives without leadership of some kind.

Some on the left understandably bridle at any mention of 'leadership,' fearing that it implies hierarchy or even a self-appointed elite. Vladimir Lenin's conception of the 'vanguard party,' said to embody the will of the proletariat and to provide 'correct' political direction for the working class, offers the paradigmatic case. Though Gramsci is sometimes described as a Leninist, however, his conception of leadership was considerably more democratic. Why, though, have leadership at all? Because not everyone starts out from the basis of knowledge. It is not in the interests of those who wield power for subordinated subjects to have a complex understanding of the nature of the system that oppresses them. Elites maintain their hegemony, thus, by mystifying the true origins, and machinations, of the dominant social authority. Critical consciousness therefore doesn't arise spontaneously, but must be educated. If workers, say, already had a sufficient understanding of their situation, and of how to change it, then presumably they would have already liberated themselves by now. However, while the lived experiences of workers is the proper basis of any socialist praxis, those experiences might easily be channelled instead into a right-wing politics. Hence Bebel's famous remark that 'anti-Semitism is the socialism of fools.' And hence the groundswell of populist authoritarian movements throughout the world today. The far right is proving more adept than the Left in turning alienation, class oppression, and ontological insecurity into a potent political project.

For this reason, Gramsci felt it important to distinguish between 'those who know' (*chi sa*) and 'those who do not know' (*chi non sa*). Whereas the capitalist class seeks to maintain this distinction, however, by keeping *chi non sa* in a state of ignorance, the socialist movement seeks to dissolve it. The goal of oppositional praxis is therefore to democratize knowledge by providing ordinary people with the epistemic tools they need to make

sense of social reality – i.e. to grasp the true nature of the existing order. Once given an unobstructed view of the system, those in the movement can share this knowledge with others, and contribute their own insights to collective oppositional understanding. In this way, the circle of critical understanding, of knowledge, propagates outwards, until it coincides at last with the whole of society itself.

In grasping the totality of social relations, the working class achieves self-consciousness, becoming the 'subject-object' of history – that is, it becomes both the product of social forces and the new agents capable of leading society beyond the capitalism and its alienating mode of life. This may all sound like a subtle paternalism – the all-knowing party leadership telling the masses 'what is to be done.'[6] On the contrary, however, the whole point of Gramscian praxis is to diminish the ranks of those 'who do not know,' so that the leaders become the led, and those who are now being led themselves become the leaders. Mediating this exchange are the 'organic' intellectuals, individuals from the subaltern classes who are able to unite theory with practice, drawing on their own understandings and social experiences. The oppositional movement grows 'organically' and dialectically out of, and in conversation with, the perspectives, experiences, and needs of ordinary people.

DW *You mentioned Gramsci's idea of the 'organic intellectual.' Gramsci is understanding 'intellectual' here in a specific way – and he is not necessarily referring to university professors. Can you say more?*

JS Clearly, if hegemony is engendered, and maintained, through 'moral and intellectual leadership,' then presumably intellectuals must play some role in the matter. Everyone, in a sense, is a 'philosopher' or 'intellectual,' because we all have opinions about the world, and we all bring intelligence and creativity to our work, no matter how simple that work may be. At the same time, not everyone specializes in intellectual labour. As Gramsci notes, while 'everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or

[6] As the Black narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* bitterly concludes after spending months with 'the Brotherhood' (the Communist Party), organizing the African-American community in Harlem: 'What did they know of us, except that we numbered so many, worked on certain jobs, offered so many votes, and provided so many marchers for some protest parade of theirs? […] For all they were concerned, we were so many names scribbled on fake ballots, to be used at their convenience and when not need to be filed away.' (Ellison 1972, 496–497).

a tailor' (Gramsci 1971, 9). In the same way, everyone is a 'philosopher' in some sense, but not everyone has intellectual expertise. Properly speaking, then, we can identify intellectuals by their social function as intellectual labourers. The latter are involved in the production and circulation of the *ideas* and beliefs of society. Thus defined, there are technical intellectuals (scientists or engineers, or state bureaucrats), artistic or literary intellectuals (novelists, poets, or journalists), legal intellectuals (law professors and jurists), clerical intellectuals (priests, imams, rabbis), and academic intellectuals (philosophers, theologians, and so on). All such intellectuals exert a cultural influence over civil society at the level of ideas and beliefs. In other words, Gramsci writes, their 'function [...] is directive and organizational, i.e. educative [and therefore] intellectual' (Gramsci 1971, 16).

Gramsci draws a further distinction between so-called 'traditional' intellectuals and 'organic' ones. Broadly, 'traditional' intellectuals are aligned with the humanist tradition and with the existing social order. In the idealized version, the traditional intellectual's function is to reflect on truth, ethical life, and the nature of society or the human condition. Ostensibly, the traditional intellectual is an independent mind, beholden to no particular class identity or formation. In reality, however, the traditional intellectual is closely attached to the dominant class. The discourses of such intellectuals thus tend to correspond to, or reinforce, the worldview, forms of life, and interests of the dominant class. In Gramsci's era, the most important 'traditional' intellectual in Italy was the philosopher Benedetto Croce, whose classical humanism had the function of organizing society in defence of the status quo. An equivalent today would be someone like Steven Pinker, in the US context, or like the philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy, in France. In theory, Lévy is an independent and courageous 'free thinker.' In reality, he is wholly a creature of the French establishment and its elitist educational system, and his work serves to conserve a particular traditionalist, racist, and patriarchal conception of French national identity.

'Organic' intellectuals, by contrast, are individuals connected to a specific realm of economic activity – out of professions or work environments where they exercise a chiefly intellectual function. The influence of organic intellectuals, however, often transcends their specialized labour activity. Such individuals thus exert a 'directing' influence, either in civil society (the realm of *consent:* discourse, persuasion, and argument), or the state (the realm of *coercion:* the judiciary, diplomatic statecraft, war

colleges, etc.).[7] Journalists and editors in the mainstream corporate press might loosely be described as organic intellectuals, insofar as they are drawn predominantly from the upper-middle and upper classes, and thus express the views of a sector of the capitalist class. Hence the open conspiracy in the press to undermine Sen. Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign in 2016.

However, Gramsci rejected the view that only an elite few, those from the upper classes, are 'naturally' suited to engage in intellectual activity or theoretical reflection, while 'the many' are best equipped for 'thoughtless' manual labour. On the contrary, Gramsci was intent to show the importance of a new type of organic intellectual. The capitalist division of labour had given rise to specialized intellectual labour not only at the erstwhile 'higher' levels of production – white collar work, science, diplomacy, law, etc. – but, too, in the 'lower' sphere of production, on the factory floor. Just as the landed gentry of earlier centuries had given rise to the country priest or parson who exerted moral, spiritual, and political influence over his parish, the emergence of the proletariat had engendered a new kind of intellectual – e.g., the shop steward, union leader, party representative – who exerted a 'moral' leadership and influence in the workplace and outside it. The organic intellectual is enmeshed in the communal needs, experiences, and perspectives of their class: such an individual doesn't pretend to hover 'above' the fray, as the traditional intellectual does, as a mere 'theorizer' of revolution or societal change. Rather, the organic intellectual, arising out of the working class itself, participates actively 'in practical life, as constructor, organizer, "permanent persuader"' (Gramsci 1971, 10). They assume responsibility not only for educating and organizing others in their working class, but in exerting leadership over society, as such. That is, by virtue of their activity, they are engaged not merely in the 'technical' work of organizing union meetings, but also in the work of articulating a new *philosophy of life,* a new ethics, a new *culture.* The choice between philosophical ideas, on the one hand, and the practical activity of labour, on the other, is thus a false one – an artefact of the division of labour and, hence, of class oppression.

DW *Is there some way that Gramsci's conception of 'organic' intellectuals might be helpful to us in thinking through leadership and the role of intellectuals within the animal rights movement today?*

[7] For a discussion of Gramsci's distinction between organic and traditional intellectuals, see King (1978).

JS The animal rights movement cannot be said to have 'organic' intellectuals in Gramsci's specific sense, since activists necessarily operate at an 'ontological' remove from the historical subjects/beings whose interests they defend (i.e. nonhuman animals). Nonetheless, Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals has important implications for contemporary animal advocacy. First, intellectuals continue to play a crucial role in reinforcing human supremacy and the ideological system that legitimates our exploitation and killing of other beings. It is therefore vital that we do our best to place our own intellectuals, ones committed to an anti-speciesist politics and system of values, in positions where they/we can disrupt the circulation of speciesist knowledges – in the media and culture industry, in journalism, in academia. We need to think of ourselves as producers of culture. It is a mistake to see animal rights as a 'protest' movement; as I have said, it represents an attempt to lead our species in a new civilizational direction.

Second, we need to grapple with the fact that the animal rights movement right now seems more 'organically' tied to the middle class than to the working class. There are some advantages to this, insofar as the middle and upper classes are privileged with higher levels of education, and hence are better prepared to make inroads into the culture industry – into journalism, law, politics, and so on. However, the movement's 'organic' connection to more advantaged classes also comes at a cost. For one thing, we see animal rights being blurred into a voluntarist and often liberal politics (or *anti*-politics) of white, middle-class, vegan consumerism. We can partly thank the corporate 'welfarist' wing of the movement, and its Effective Altruism backers, for that. The class, race, and gender of the welfarist wing – upper middle-class, male, and white – has stifled grassroots animal advocacy, compromised the movement's ethical vision, and silenced many women in the movement.[8] We are therefore losing out on opportunities to build cross-class alliances organized around an intersectional politics. And that is an important deficit if we are truly to exert 'moral and intellectual leadership' over society as such.

The continuing public perception of animal rights as a 'bourgie' and white, middle-class concern (the Whole Foods syndrome) limits our ability to connect the working class majority of our fellow humans. Convincing trade union leaders or shop stewards to introduce workers to animal rights issues would help advance animal interests; and an animal rights

[8] See Adams, Crary, and Gruen (2023).

perspective would in turn deepen the meaning of the socialist project, ethically and ecologically. However, the labour movement is still very weak today. Furthermore, meat-eating, fishing, and hunting have long been associated with working class masculinity. It therefore remains unclear whether there is any one social class or group around which we might organize an animal liberationist movement. What we need is a broad-based socialist project in the Gramscian sense, i.e. one that would draw upon numerous social strata to form an effective oppositional bloc. It is clear that animal liberationism is the only truly universal liberationism, hence the only true socialism. But it remains unclear how we are to convince our fellow leftists of that fact.

DW *Gramsci's work is often focused on analysis and strategy within a particular political terrain, with clear goals in mind about structural change. Would you describe Gramsci then as a 'pragmatic' political philosopher?*

JS Gramsci was a *practical* philosopher, but I wouldn't describe him as 'pragmatic.' On the contrary, Gramsci distinguished between a liberal or pragmatic conception of politics and a radical one. So-called pragmatists conceive of society in static terms, as a fixed system of 'facts.' They consequently think of politics as consisting of calculated, instrumental manipulation of existing people and institutions in order to achieve 'realistic' objectives. The trouble is, if we set out believing that the world *already is what it is,* rather than believing that it can become *other than it is, and ought to be,* then we have in a sense ended the 'game' of social change before it's properly begun. The pragmatist looks at the way things 'really are,' then adjusts his or her expectations and goals to suit the existing reality. He or she looks out upon a world whose underlying elements seem immutable.

For example, seeing the enormous power of the animal industry, and realizing the low-level of public consciousness around animal rights, the pragmatist cautions more radical activists against 'alienating' the public by exposing them to disturbing videos or descriptions of animal slaughter. The pragmatist may also sponsor legislation to end the use of gestation crates, say, rather than seek an end to the reproduction of pigs for slaughter. But what the pragmatist fails to grasp is that what we can *know* depends upon the exertion of our *will,* and therefore too upon our dynamic and creative *actions.* 'Only the man who wills something strongly,' Gramsci wrote, 'can identify the elements which are necessary to the realization of his will' (Gramsci 1971, 171). The division of reality into 'what

is' versus 'what ought to be' (a just world) is therefore false. What exists is certainly real; but reality is itself an open field of possibilities to the activist or politician or movement who wishes to change it.

Imagine for a moment that you're standing at the end of a corridor that you know leads to three rooms, each of which you've visited before. Your choices therefore appear to be limited to three. Suppose, however, that a fire breaks out in the building. The way you came in is blocked behind you, and you realize that none of the three rooms has a window or an exit. So, what do you do? Now that your safety is at stake, you look for another option. So you run to the far end of the corridor, past the three rooms, and discover a second corridor – and a stairwell. Gramsci is saying that the only way we can *know* what is possible, and what isn't, is by exercising our will. That is because what we call reality is merely 'a product of the application of human will to the society of things' (Gramsci 1971, 171). Knowledge of reality and of the 'possible' cannot be arrived at independently of action and will, Gramsci wrote, because 'strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and make intuition more penetrating' (p. 171).

Human social reality contains hidden pathways, junctures, and possibilities that we discover only when we have a kind of 'faith' that these things might really exist. In seeking an alternative, in a practical rather than merely 'theoretical' way, new historical possibilities are revealed to us. This is by no means to say that all things are possible, or at all times. But it is to say that reality is not something we passively 'receive.' It is only through our passions and through our will that reality assumes form or shape. This point is not merely epistemological, but phenomenological and *ontological.* Just as the exact position of an electron is fixed only at the moment when an external subject actively *observes* it, the myriad possible worlds we might live in only become 'fixed' into channels of possibility at the moment we strive to realize them. The function of leadership is to investigate the conditions necessary for the realization of our collective will. Gramsci's insight, which he takes as much from Machiavelli as from Marx, is that reality is not given to us in advance, but is something we must invent. What we call 'facts' can buckle and be overcome or be transformed through the exertion of conscious will and collective action.

One of the limitations faced by both the animal rights movement and the broader Left today, in this connection, is the absence of a properly strategic orientation to social change – the ability to analyse the totality of social relations through time – the terrain of culture, ideas, economic

forces, and so on – in order to identify moments of strategic advantage to our movements.

DW *So this is why, at least historically, moments of social or economic crisis can appear as opportunities for many leftists?*

JS Yes. To return to my metaphor of the fire in the building, the revolutionary subject conjures the stairwell or exit in the very process of actively seeking to 'find' it. Moments of social crisis offer sudden glimpses of the precarious nature of the existing system, opening up new opportunities for praxis. While every act of politics is an act of creation, one cannot create *ex nihilo*[9] – one must work within the objective framework that one has been given by history, taking into close account the complex interplay of institutions, cultural norms, values, political parties, economic forces, social classes, and so on. Reality emerges from the dialectic of the objective and the subjective. Or as Marx famously put it, people 'make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.' (Marx and Engels 1978, 595).

DW *In Stuart Hall's* The Hard Road to Renewal, *his Gramscian analysis of the rise of Thatcherism in Britain, Hall suggests that the political right at times seems to grasp this point better than the left does. Do you agree?*

JS Alas, yes, the right often does seem to have a better grasp of this insight, that politics is 'about' the creation of a new social reality. As Stuart Hall showed in the British case, the right was able to displace the Labour Party by establishing a new form of social consent. Thatcher adroitly turned the working class against itself, through myths of national greatness, foreign war (the Malvinas/Falklands conflict with Argentina), racist demagoguery, cultural appeals to individual self-reliance, etc. What's key is that both she and President Ronald Reagan went well beyond defending an existing status quo and accepting the citizenry 'where they were.' Instead, they transformed society and reshaped the human personality, rolling back the social welfare state, destroying unions, privatizing public goods, weakening civil rights and environmental protections, and so on, while interpolating a new kind of white subject, one that would correspond to the needs of neoliberal capital.

[9] 'Political man is a creator […] but he does not create out of nothing' (Gramsci 1975, in Fontana 1993, 78).

The Thatcher-Reagan approach stands in stark contrast to the approach of the liberal who sets out from the world of supposed 'facts,' which he or she reifies or treats as self-evident 'givens.' During the aforementioned 2016 presidential campaign in the US, liberals said that while Bernie Sanders had good 'ideas,' they were 'unrealistic,' because Sanders' proposals, like Medicaid for all, free college tuition for all, and so on, were at odds with political 'realities.' However, what liberals failed to grasp is that a skilful politician backed by a dynamic social movement potentially has the power to change the *nature* of existing political realities. Establishment Democrats and Republicans alike failed to grasp this fact, which is why they failed to grasp the threat Donald Trump posed until it was too late. Even today, when we find the institutions of liberal representative democracy unravelling everywhere, technocratic elites continue to treat politics as a cynical game of manipulating the electorate. For the corporate mandarins who run the Democratic Party in the US, politics is a form of *Realpolitik* in which only winning and maintaining the corporate status quo matters – never the creation of a new form of shared political life, a new society or economy. But one cannot treat individuals in society merely as static elements, as pawns on a chess board to be pushed around. The Left must instead change the wider context, and hence the rules of the game themselves. And the only way to do that is to understand ordinary people's experiences and beliefs and to address them in a language they understand.

Another way to put this is to say that human purpose, human will, must be organized. 'Human beings, for Gramsci, are not "givens" whose nature is immutable and fixed,' observes Benedetto Fontana. Instead, 'they are a "becoming,"' i.e. they are agents 'who posit themselves and create themselves in and through historical action' (Fontana 1993, 1). What the political right does is give the people the *illusion* of political control, while in reality maintaining them in their ignorance – their bad faith and irrationality. The Left's task is harder: it is to give ordinary people the tools they need to educate themselves and to lead society in a new direction.

DW *So, if the right can transform societies, the way they think and the way they operate (neoliberalism and Trumpism being examples), what is stopping the left from similarly taking forward a vision for a transformation of societies?*

JS For the left, the work of organizing new forms of consent is more difficult, I think, because it is always easier to defend an existing order than

to engender a new one. The Right enjoys the advantages and prerogatives of power (including vastly superior resources), and it also has no moral scruples whatsoever. The tools employed by the Right – the casual lie, propaganda, xenophobia and race hatred, cynical national myths, appeals to patriarchal authority, and so on – are powerful, but they aren't ones that we can use or want to use.

DW *In the 'Introduction' to* Critical Theory and Animal Liberation *you refer to speciesism as an 'ideology.' The concept 'ideology' has a long tradition of debate and theorization within the left project. However 'ideology' is rarely spoken about within animal liberation theory. Could I start by asking, what is 'ideology'?*

JS I have described speciesism or human domination as a mode of production, a way of producing the material and cultural substrate of all human life. And *ideology* is central to the legitimation and reproduction of this system. But what is ideology? Typically, we think of ideology as a more or less closed system of self-confirming beliefs, a kind of orthodoxy. In this view, an 'ideologue' is someone immune to any proposition or counter-factual case that might contradict his or her system of beliefs or arguments. However, that is just one definition of ideology. Of the 16 usages of the term identified by Terry Eagleton (1991, 1–2), three are particularly germane here:

- the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life;
- a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class;
- ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power.

The first definition importantly conveys a sense of ideology's nature as a *total* system of beliefs, hence as forming the horizon of everyday life and experience. The second two definitions show that the ideology is bound up with *power* (Eagleton 1991, 5). Eagleton of course takes this point from Marx and Engels, who in *The German Ideology* (1998, 67) write:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the domi-

> nant material relations, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance.

The ideas that people have largely converge with the material interests of those who dominate economic life – and, hence, with those who dominate social, political, and cultural life. Ideology both reflects the structure of domination and reinforces it.

DW *I note that the term 'speciesism' originated in liberal and analytic philosophy – e.g. Richard Ryder and Peter Singer – as referring to a prejudice or mode of discrimination. It's clear that when you describe speciesism as an ideology you intend something different. Could you say more about this?*

JS Liberal theorists tend to reduce systems and structures of power or oppression to problems of individual belief – to individuals having 'prejudices,' and so on. However, the liberal view fundamentally misconstrues human ontology and sociality. Utilitarianism suffers from this problem. In *Animal Liberation,* Peter Singer (1975) in fact equivocates between a liberal and a more radical conception of speciesism: he begins by comparing speciesism to a form of 'prejudice,' a set of ideas, then in a later chapter identifies 'man's dominion' as the core of the problem. But I don't think he adequately explains the relationship between the two. Nor does he acknowledge the structural relationship between speciesism and capitalism, or between our domination of animals and male domination of women.

Animal welfarists have a weak understanding of ideology because they proceed from the liberal view of society as an 'aggregate' of isolated, monadic individuals. This mistaken social ontology in turn becomes the basis of campaigns geared toward changing the ideas and behaviour of 'consumers,' e.g. through prudential appeals to personal health and safety. The welfarist imagines that the worst excesses of the speciesist system can be overcome by reforming animal agriculture and by providing consumers with vegan food alternatives. By reducing the problem of speciesism to one of 'unnecessary suffering' (caused by 'factory farms'), welfarist discourse ends up legitimating smaller-scale and organic animal production. In fact, however, the problem of animal suffering is merely a consequence of the prior decision *to kill.* That is, it's because we treat other animals as disposable 'things,' rather than as 'someones' or persons, that they inevitably suffer in the animal gulag.

DW *Melanie Joy is perhaps one of the few animal advocates who discusses ideology through the concept of 'Carnism.' However, as far as I am aware, Joy does not explicitly situate the idea of carnism within the historical and theoretical developments of left theory. With this in mind, I would like us to unpack ideology further as a concept, and get to the bottom of how it might function with respect to animal liberation.*

JS Let me say first that I applaud Joy's work for introducing animal rights issues to a broader public, though I sometimes disagree with her approach. In her book, *Why We Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows* (2010), Joy deconstructs meat-eating as an ideology, exposing the irrationality latent in the stories we tell ourselves about the validity of eating animals. A popular dodge used by the meat-eater is to describe himself/herself/themself as a 'carnivore' – an ideological term that serves to naturalize what is really a normative, historical practice. So Joy introduces the neologism of 'carnism' – the inverse of veganism – to denote meat-eating as a cultural rather than natural practice (i.e. as a *choice* we make). Joy then goes on to make the case for an alternative way of relating to other beings, through compassion and empathy. The rhetorical strategy she uses is to compare farmed animals to companion animals, inviting her reader to imagine the horror of eating a dog, say, rather than a cow or pig.

Joy's approach has the virtue of building on Americans' affection for dogs and cats to challenge their perceptions of other kinds of animals. However, the approach she takes can only be described as liberal. In her description of feminism in *Why We Love Dogs* (2010), for example, she writes: 'Feminists have been successful in their attempts to challenge sexism not by arguing that everybody should become a feminist, but by highlighting the ideology of patriarchy – the ideology that enables sexism.' While patriarchy is certainly ideological, however, it is not itself an ideology – patriarchy is a system or mode of domination – i.e. a set of concrete social relations, including a sexual division of labour, institutions and norms bound up with capitalism and the state, and so on. Joy thus risks reducing patriarchy – and, I would argue, speciesism, as well – as a system of *power,* of domination, of violent exploitation – to a problem of mistaken *belief.* But ideology is the expression of relations of power, rather than power itself.

On Joy's telling, there is a 'gap' in our consciousness that constricts 'our freedom of choice' (Dr. McDougall Health and Medical Center 2012).

The key to overcoming carnism, then, is to get more and more people to 'choose' veganism. The trouble with this conception, however, is that it reduces complex social systems and modes of economic production to problems of 'belief' and 'relational dysfunction' (VeganLinked 2023) – the latter to be overcome through the choices of many individuals. Joy's conception of social change, however, is *idealist* – as can be seen in her deterministic contention, in Hegelian fashion, that 'the number of vegans is going to increase, the number of [and] availability of vegan products is going to increase, and it's going to be easier and easier for people everywhere to become vegan' – until suddenly 'those scales are going to tip [and] veganism becomes the dominant ideology' (Plant Based News 2017). Like many others in animal advocacy, thus, Joy ignores capitalism as a social structure and as the very system destroying the conditions of animal life on earth. The word 'consumer' appears 51 times in Joy's book, for example, but the word 'capitalism' doesn't appear once. In reality, however, the term 'consumer' is an ideological category. (Before there were 'consumers,' there were *citizens.* And 'citizen' is a far more politically robust term, denoting a political subject within a shared polity, rather than merely an isolated consuming unit.) When we emphasize animal issues as a problem of *consumption,* rather than as one of class relations and commodity fetishism, we thus obscure the fact that *production* is prior to consumption under capitalist relations. Commodities are not produced in order to satisfy the needs of consumers; they are produced because capital requires commodities and consumers. Nonetheless, there is a widespread perception that the 'consumer' is in control, and that their needs, preferences, and 'votes' are what 'cause' goods and services to magically appear. In reality, commodities aren't called into being by consumers; capital creates 'consumers' as well as their desires. To suggest that consumers are the ones calling the shots, therefore, is to mystify what is really going on.

We find a better treatment of ideology of meat, in this connection, in the work of Carol J. Adams. Adams situates human violence against animals in the material context of patriarchy, showing how the meat system functions semiotically, culturally, politically, and economically within the wider system of male domination. Though Adams does not write extensively about capitalism, her intersectionalist approach takes up capitalist production in its sweep – as in her analysis of the labour process of the 'disassembly line' of the modern slaughterhouse, which she places in the context of monopoly capital.[10] Stache and Bernhold also offer an excel-

[10] 'Ford dismembered the meaning of work, introducing productivity without the sense of

lent treatment of ideology – and from a Gramscian perspective, no less – in their article, 'The Bourgeois Meat Hegemony' (2021; see also Stache 2023). The authors show how the capitalist state colludes with monopoly capital to foster a 'politico-ideological' regime of meat consumption. By the way, here I would like to recommend your own pathbreaking new book, *Animals and Capital* (Wadiwel 2023), which provides a carefully drawn and comprehensive analysis of animals and labour from a Marxist perspective.

DW *So we need a more complete perspective where we take into account production under capitalism as a driving force for the proliferation of commodities, including animal-based foods. However, does this mean that veganism has no place within movements towards change for animals?*

JS Just to be clear, I am not saying that vegan consumerism doesn't have some role to play in antispeciesist praxis. Clearly, we do need palatable alternatives to meat, eggs, and dairy, to help wean people off of animal products. However, using phrases like 'consumer choice' inevitably reinforces the logic of the commodity system. So, yes, we should promote veganism. But changing people's diets isn't enough. We need a more political conception.[11]

DW *Okay, with this background in place, can we try to unpack how speciesism might operate as an 'ideology,' particularly in relation to capitalism?*

JS Consider Eagleton's first definition of ideology, as a 'process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life.' That aptly captures the ideological nature of speciesism. Our culture – our institutions, sciences, modes of thought and experience, aesthetics, and so on – is so closely bound up with our domination of other beings that we might describe speciesism as the bedrock of our identity as human beings. Speciesism is an existential project, a way of defining ourselves as beings, of giving meaning and purpose to our existence and identity, as well as a form of 'bad faith,' in the Sartrean sense (Sorenson 2014, 29–44). In

being productive. Fragmentation of the human body in late capitalism allows the dismembered part to represent the whole. Because the slaughterhouse model is not evident to assembly line workers, they do not realize that as whole beings they too have experienced the impact of the structure of the absent referent in a patriarchal culture' (Adams 1990, 80–81). Adams draws here on Harry Braverman's critique of monopoly capitalism. See also 'The Sexual Politics of Meat with Carol Adams' (Bloomsbury 2020).

[11] See Jones (2016).

the same way that men under patriarchy constitute their identity on the basis of the negation of women and the feminine – or the way the West has constituted itself through its negation of the 'other' of the East, in Orientalism – our self-understanding as 'human' is built on the negation of the concept of 'the animal' (Derrida 2004, 113–126). However, speciesism as ideology reflects speciesism as a mode of material production. Marx and Engels describe the relationship between base and superstructure – i.e. the realm of material economic production and the 'superstructural' realm of ideas, culture, politics, and so on – as dialectical. While the substructure or base has primacy over the superstructure, the two condition one another. Thus, while speciesism is a mode of producing human material life (base), it has erected around itself an elaborate system of beliefs, norms, and practices (superstructure). Because speciesism is intertwined with capitalist production, its specific articulations are mediated by capital; and, as capitalism is a dynamic historical process, rooted in continuous upheaval, we find that cultural norms and beliefs about animals are changing all the time, too, corresponding to changes in the forces and relation of production.

While the reduction of animals to the status of property, hence for accumulation and exchange, has been a fact of human life for many thousands of years, the advent of capitalist relations in early modern Europe further diminished the status of animals by enmeshing them within a system of production based on endless accumulation. In the sixteenth century, Thomas Müntzer wrote that it was 'intolerable' that 'all creatures have been made into property, the fish in the water, the birds in the air, the plants on the earth – all living things must also become free.' In other words, all animals – even 'wild' ones – were being turned into commodities (Müntzer 1524, in Marx 1992, 239). (To be clear, Müntzer was not suggesting that animals should be free of human domination, but rather that their exploitation should be 'organic,' direct, and communal.)

As the new relations of production took hold, new ideological justifications sprang up to justify them. European conceptions of nature and of nonhuman animals began to shift from an 'organicist' or holistic metaphysics that portrayed Nature as alive with meaning and purpose to a 'mechanicist' one that reduced nature to the status of mere 'stuff' to be controlled (Merchant 1989). As Marx observes: 'Descartes with his definition of animals as mere machines saw with the eyes of the manufacturing period, while in the Middle Ages, animals were man's assistants' (Marx 1887, 333). Cartesianism to this day remains the dominant onto-

logical paradigm of the modern sciences, with nonhuman animals still treated as machines. At the same time, changes in the composition of capital have led to the development of new forces of production or technologies that have in turn changed the way animals are viewed. Owing to the importance of the biotechnology sector as a catchment for surplus capital, we now thus find scientists and entrepreneurs viewing nonhuman animals as 'factories' for the bioengineering of new commodities – as fungible sequences of DNA or RNA to be edited at will by computer (Weisberg 2015, 39–54). Animals now take on the abstract and protean appearance of finance capital.

Human beings everywhere view animals today as private property – either as commodities in production – chickens and pigs raised for slaughter, mice bred and sold as laboratory subjects, companion animals purchased at the store and viewed under law as the private property of the 'owner,' etc. – or as commodities *in potentia* or 'in waiting': raw 'stock' sitting in reserve for capitalist appropriation – the fishes in the sea, macaques 'awaiting' capture for export from Asia to European research laboratories, etc. So pervasive is this way of viewing other natural beings that even the leading environmental protection organizations conceive of nature and animals in quantitative terms. According to the authors of the 2018 *Living Planet Report,* by the World Wildlife Fund and London Zoological Society, the *reason* the living earth is worth preserving is because it provides 'services' to the world economy that are worth up to '$125 trillion a year.' The deaths of billions of honeybees from Bee Colony Collapse Syndrome matter, the authors write, because 'pollination increases the global value of crop production by $235–577 billion per year' – and that in turn 'keeps prices down for consumers by ensuring stable supplies' (World Wildlife Fund 2018, 47). And so on. What remains outside the bounds of permissible environmentalist thought is the notion that other animals have value in themselves, rather than as backstops to the global economy or cogs in the machinery of ecosystems.

All of this suggests that mapping the ideology of speciesism – its ways of legitimating human dominion, aestheticizing human violence, etc. – requires a 'mapping' of the terrain of the capitalist superstructure and of the myriad ways it mediates our relations with animals. Powerful economic interests drive the meat economy – corporations like Tyson Foods, WH Group, and Maruha Nichiro (the world's largest seafood company). However, because commodity fetishism obscures the social *origins and conditions* of production, the public remains largely unaware of the true nature

of the animal economy as a system of extreme suffering, violence, and ecocide. Companies selling animal products manipulate language and imagery to obscure the violence endemic to their enterprises. Flesh, ova, milk, leather, and so on, are meanwhile depicted as 'natural' commodities and associated with status and health. As Carol Adams, Josephine Donovan, and other ecofeminists have pointed out, the consumption of flesh is meanwhile associated with masculinity and the control of men over women – and 'feminine' nature. These cultural mediations are not incidental to the reproduction of 'bourgeois meat hegemony,' but a core component of that system.

DW *Here you seem to be explicitly treating speciesism, or perhaps anthropocentrism, as a structural problem that to some degree can be distinguished from capitalism. This differs from at least some left theory, particularly some variants of green Marxism, which have tended to suggest that addressing capitalism alone is enough to reform our relations with animals or mend the 'rift' between humans and nature that was created through capitalist agriculture. Are you suggesting that we need to take account of both capitalism and speciesism as separate structuring relations?*

JS Yes. There is no question that capitalism mediates all of our relations with other animals today. However, capitalism isn't the only problem. Ecological Marxists who reduce the problems of animal agriculture and other forms of animal exploitation to capitalism alone are missing the bigger picture. Speciesism is a mode of production in its own right, and indeed the more 'primordial' and deeply rooted of the systems. Today, capitalism and speciesism are so deeply woven together that it's virtually impossible to disentangle them, even in theory. However, though the two overlap they do not coincide. If they did, then overthrowing capitalism would of course also overthrow human supremacy. But human supremacy antedates capitalism by thousands of years. Like patriarchy (its ancient, co-constitutive system), speciesism is a universal and protean feature of the human condition. It is humans *qua* humans who have subordinated all life on earth to a planetary regime of cruelty and extermination. The ideologies of speciesism thus cannot be reduced to the mediations of capital alone: human supremacy is a system of signs and practices in its own right.

DW *Can you say more about this? Does this have implications for our understanding both of ideology and of hegemony?*

JS Given the primacy of speciesism not merely as a way of producing human existence, but as a *political* relation, a relation of *domination* by one group of subjects over others, our ideas about other animals reflect the interests or perceived interests of our *own* species, the dominant 'class' of beings of the earth. Human supremacy is a fact; and so too is the *idea* of human supremacy – i.e. the notion that only human life has inestimable value, and correspondingly that nonhuman life is worthless in itself (i.e. apart from its utility for human beings, as food, as fodder for scientific experimentation, aesthetic appreciation, as necessary components of a thriving ecosystem, etc.). We know from ethnozoology that different cultures at different times and in different places have entertained quite different conceptions of the roles and 'being' of nonhuman animals. Aboriginal cosmogenesis stories of animals, for example, bear little if any resemblance to the view of animals taken by contemporary wildlife management authorities (as 'resources' to be 'managed,' etc.). Nonetheless, certainly in the modern epoch, our ideas about animals have come to form a coherent ideological *system*. This system is complexly mediated through other structures of oppression and domination – e.g. patriarchy and race hierarchy – and hence through a panoply of cultural/semiotic systems.[12]

This is not to say that *Homo sapiens* is 'ontologically' prone to violence against other beings. It is to say, though, that much of our sense of who we are as a species has gotten bound up with a universal contempt for other life forms. As Wilhelm Reich observed in *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1993, 334):

> Man is fundamentally an animal. [...] [Yet] man developed the peculiar idea that he was not an animal; *he* was a 'man,' and he had long since divested himself of the 'vicious' and the 'brutal.' Man takes great pains to disassociate himself from the vicious animal and to prove that he 'is better' by pointing to his culture and his civilization, which distinguish him from the animal. His entire attitude, his 'theories of value,' moral philosophies, his 'monkey trials,' all bear witness to the fact that he does not want to be reminded that he is fundamentally an animal, that he has incomparably more in common with 'the animal' than he has with that which he thinks and dreams himself to be. [...] His viciousness, his inability to live peacefully with his own kind, his wars, bear witness to the fact that man

[12] See, for example, Ko and Ko (2017), and Kim (2015).

> is distinguished from the other animals only by a boundless sadism and the mechanical trinity of an authoritarian view of life, mechanistic science, and the machine. If one looks back over long stretches of the results of human civilization, one finds that man's claims are not only false, but are peculiarly contrived to make him forget that he is an animal.

Having 'developed the peculiar idea that he was not an animal,' Reich wrote, the human being took 'great pains to disassociate himself from the vicious animal and to prove that he 'is better' by pointing to his culture and his civilization, which distinguish him from the animal' (Reich 1993, 334). The irony of this, Reich continued, is that in contrast to *Homo sapiens,* 'animals are not mechanical or sadistic; and their societies [...] are incomparably more peaceful than man's societies' (p. 334).[13]

As Reich suggests, speciesism is not reducible to class relations, and it isn't merely a system of economic exchange. It is a mode of existence characterized by irrationality, death fetishism, and paranoia. Even now, with the planet's ecology in free-fall and the worse zoonotic pandemic upon us in a century, at a time when we therefore have every possible incentive to cease killing other beings, the vast majority of people view the prospect of a plant-based diet as objectionable and even outrageous – as literally *unthinkable.* Reich's account is also spot on in noting an 'inverse' relation between animality and technology. It is no coincidence that at the very moment when our species, through capitalist development and explosive population growth, is engaged in the total biological extermination of other life forms (the so-called 'extinction crisis' is in reality a crisis of *extermination*), we find people in advanced capitalist culture in thrall to virtual reality and the internet, and developing relations of cathexis with their digital devices. High-technology is political, rooted in masculine paranoia and aggression, in imperialism and the military industrial complex. The mania in popular culture for 'intelligent' machines – a 'superstructural,' isomorphic expression of corporate and military in-

[13] Reich was almost certainly moved to this insight by a similar observation made by Freud in 'A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis' (1917): 'In the course of his development towards culture man acquired a dominating position over his fellow-creatures in the animal kingdom. Not content with this supremacy, however, he began to place a gulf between his nature and theirs. He denied the possession of reason to them, and to himself he attributed an immortal soul, and made claims to a divine descent which permitted him to annihilate the bond of community between him and the animal kingdom' (Freud 1955, in Patterson 2002, 2).

vestments in robotization and artificial intelligence – is but the logical, 'psychic' complement to shrinking biodiversity. Wherever we now turn, we see only ever ourselves. Love of the machine is the flipside of our hatred of 'the animal.'

I'm suggesting, along with Reich, that there is a deep irrationality built into human dominion, and that this cannot be reduced to the machinations of capital alone. This irrationality is closely tied to the gender system. As the radical feminist Nancy Hartsock observes, death fetishism is simply built in to the dynamics of patriarchy. The myth is that relations between men and women are based on 'sexual reciprocity.' In reality, however, we find 'not only relations of domination and submission, but also dynamics of hostility, revenge, and fascination with death.' What the cult of masculinity seeks is 'the death of the other as a separate being, the denial of one's own body in order to deny one's mortality, and the recasting of even reproduction as death' (Hartsock 1983, 176–177). Since speciesism is in part an expression of the gendered division of labour, we find these same dynamics (a pathological and violent relation to 'the other') operating in the way we relate to other animals. We have in fact organized the totality of human material and psychic life, around violence against other species.

DW *So from this standpoint, we need to develop not only a critique of capitalism, but something of an ideological critique of the hegemony associated with the human domination of animals?*

JS Yes, our praxis seeks to *disocclude* the structures of human domination. As a movement of counter-hegemony, animal liberationism exercises an 'educative' function, providing the people with insight into the nature of power. I see one of our main responsibilities as engaged intellectuals, thus, to be ideology critique. We need to explode the myth that we can exploit and kill other sensitive beings in an 'ethical' way. The challenge, of course, is that speciesism, like capitalism, is a 'total' way of life, one that implicates all of us. As Marco Maurizi shows in his recent book, *Beyond Nature: Animal Liberation, Marxism and Critical Theory* (2021), capitalist domination and human domination are intertwined in ways that can only be solved through a new kind of socialist praxis, one that includes critique of animal exploitation at its core. Drawing on the insights of the early Frankfurt School, Maurizi provides a useful roadmap to the structural and ideological complexities of this new system. As Max Horkheimer wrote in 1934, in a passage cited by Maurizi (2021, 132):

> Below the spaces where the coolies of the earth perish by the millions, the indescribable, unimaginable suffering of the animals, the animal hell in society, would have to be depicted, the sweat, blood, despair of the animals. [...] The basement of that house is a slaughterhouse, its roof is a cathedral, but from the windows of the upper floors, it affords a really beautiful view of the starry heavens.

DW *What, finally, can the animal liberation movement learn from Gramsci's philosophy of praxis? And how could animal liberationism fit in with a wider left-socialist project?*

JS First, we need to understand just what it is we as a movement are trying to do, and to make that objective known to the rest of society. Speciesism is a hegemonic cultural, semiotic, economic and 'spiritual' system that undergirds and conditions all aspects of human existence. *Contra* the claim of animal welfarists, the true goal of animal liberation isn't to 'reduce animal suffering' but to establish a new form of human civilization. Capitalist civilization is based on the brutal exploitation of billions of humans and the brutal exploitation and killing of other animals. So, we are seeking the negation not only of speciesism, but of capitalism, of patriarchy, of racism, and so on. And this negation is at the same time a bid for a new form of society.

In my experience, however, the public really has no understanding of either the extent or the brutality of the speciesist system, nor of the relationship between our quotidian extermination of animals for food and the destruction of free ('wild') animals across the earth – the 'war' on animals you describe in your own important book.[14] The public does not see animal liberationism as a *political movement,* and consequently they haven't been exposed to the breadth of our critique. As with other structures of power and inequality, the public has only a fragmented and reified view of society. That too is a function of capitalism – occlusion of the whole. Our job, as I see it, is to illuminate this totality and to make the case for a post-speciesist world.

Gramsci described politics as a struggle over meaning, and hence, effectively, over what Hannah Arendt called 'the space of appearances' (Arendt 1990, 33). Social movements, therefore, must assume a determinate phenomenal *form* if they are to be 'seen' within this space. Unfortunately, most people today associate animal rights either with PETA

[14] See Wadiwel (2015).

– the most visible 'shape' of animal advocacy in the public sphere – or with 'lifestyle' veganism.[15] What we need are visible organizations and institutions committed to building coalitions with other movements and campaigns. Animal liberationism must come to be viewed as a coherent philosophy of life – not merely as a set of single-issue campaigns. We have to universalize our conception of the world. At the moment, however, we are more positioned as a disorganized 'sect' than as a 'church' – i.e. as an inward-oriented community of like-minded believers, rather than as an outward-oriented movement seeking to broaden the scope of its ambitions. Gramsci compared socialism to a second Reformation. We likewise should see ourselves as the nucleus of a new society – the germ of a future civilizational order, a new way of being human.

Unfortunately, however, animal advocates are forced to contend with the near-universal acceptance of speciesist beliefs and practices in human culture. The difficulty for an animal liberationist praxis is that, in contrast to past social movements, we need to appeal to members of the oppressor class themselves to relinquish their dominion. And that's a challenge without precedent in the history of social struggle. A related challenge is that existing models of praxis, including Marx's, rest on conceptions of agency and collective action that don't necessarily apply to our relations with nonhuman beings. Socialism, feminism, the LGBTQ movement, and others, conform to a Hegelian politics of recognition – i.e. they affirm the ability of an oppressed subject to achieve self-consciousness, and hence freedom, through collective struggle. Gramsci's conception of counter-hegemony, too, derives from Hegel, requiring class solidarity and the coalescence of diverse groups in society around a shared moral and social vision. Nonhuman animals, however, cannot achieve revolutionary transformation of human society on their own, and they cannot even be the *main* agents of their own liberation. Though individual animals, and even, at times, small groups of animals, do resist human oppression, they are unable to strategize or to coordinate their actions through time. Draft horses can't call a general strike across New England, hammerheads and Bluefin Tuna can't take the fishing industry to the International Criminal Court. Nor can chickens call upon free species of birds to attack human cities and towns in solidarity with their cause – as occurs in Alfred Hitchcock's film, *The Birds* (1963).

[15] For a discussion of why establishing a phenomenal or apprehensible *form* is so important for counter-hegemonic movements, see Sanbonmatsu (2004, 160–179).

As important as it is to overturn class hierarchy and dismantle the system of commodity fetishism, it is not true, as many Marxists believe, that overturning capitalism will end our estrangement from Nature and from other animals. The trouble is that human beings *as such* constitute an oppressive class, with the mass killing of animals treated throughout the world as a normal, immutable, and benignant feature of the human condition. Animal liberation therefore cuts against the interests (or at least the perceived interests) of the very historical subjects who are supposed to effect change. The daunting challenge we face is to somehow convince the majority of our fellow humans to eliminate their own prerogatives and privileges – sport fishing and eating chicken wings, taking children to the zoo, animal experimentation, and so on.

Unfortunately, it is hard to think of a case in which an oppressive class decided on its own initiative to overturn its own mode of life. It is impossible to imagine a feminist movement led by men, or an anti-racist struggle initiated by and directed by whites, or capitalists leading the charge for socialism. Nonetheless, we need to envision modes of praxis to bring humanity to a consensus on the need to dismantle the speciesist system.

DW *So, where then does all of this leave our movement, particularly in the context of Gramsci's conception of moral and intellectual leadership?*

JS Marx held that the working class contained within itself the kernel of a new society. As it is human labour that produces society, and therefore social reality as such, the working class is in the unique position of being able to usher in a universal form of civilizational development, one based on genuinely free activity. Could we say something similar about animals? That their oppression too contains the 'germ' of a new civilization? The oppression of nonhumans by humans is the most fundamental condition of our existence; to challenge that condition, therefore, is to assert the possibility of a new form of life. However, the analogy is inexact. If workers tomorrow woke up and decided to declare a general strike, refusing to labour, the capitalist system could be overthrown in an hour, because the reproduction of capital depends entirely upon the value added to the commodity by the labourer. Furthermore, workers constitute 99 percent of the human population. So, for the working class to accept the legitimacy of socialism would be but one short step away from overthrowing capitalist relations and initiating a new mode of existence. In contrast to the situation of the working class, however, other species lack the capacity of self-realization in the political and universal sense. Nonhuman

animals form a 'strategic' collective subject in the sense that human economy, culture, identity, psychology, etc., *are* dependent upon animals – on animal bodies, animal labour, animal habitats, etc. In the same way that capitalism cannot function without the exploitation of workers, human society in its current form cannot function without the exploitation of nonhumans. But while animals represent a 'universal' class of subjects whose liberation could also liberate humanity, we lack a 'material' basis for building a social movement powerful enough to impose its own values on the rest of society. Unlike the working class, the animal rights movement has no social base to speak of. Animal advocates represent a very small minority of the human population, and, unlike workers, they don't collectively play a strategic role in the reproduction of daily life. It appears, then, that we lack a plausible account of how animal liberation is to be achieved.

However, the situation is not hopeless. The contradictions of speciesism are producing new avenues for strategic praxis by undermining the bioecological conditions of life, including human life. And here Gramsci's thought is useful in helping us to identify more or less promising lines of action within the present 'organic' and conjunctural crises of society. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider ecological crisis offer us favourable terrain for action. Since animal agriculture and fishing are the driving forces of our planet's ecological collapse, we can use that to argue for the abolition of the animal economy. At the same time, however, 'moral and intellectual leadership' is more than egoism or prudentialism. We therefore mustn't shy away from the ethical and existential dimensions of the crisis. Specifically, we need to develop a movement organized around defence of (1) the principle of life itself, and (2) of the collective and individual right to life, not only for human beings but for all animals. We need to conceive of animal liberation as a philosophy of existence. Furthermore, our politics needs to be grounded in an explicit philosophy of love and compassion. One of the problems with utilitarian framing of the problem of dominion is that it slights empathy and can offer no defence of the 'spiritual' goods we gain in relating to other species out of friendship and respect.

The problem with animal welfarism, in this connection, is that it's fundamentally incompatible with the long-term goal of animal liberation. We cannot advance the cause of animal rights through incremental improvements in animals' conditions of enslavement or extermination. The notion that we can exploit and enact violence against other beings 'ethi-

cally,' in a way that 'respects' them, has been one of the chief ideological conceits of human dominion for thousands of years. Insofar, then, as animal welfarists advocate only reforms of the existing system, they remain within its ideological terms. The notion that it is more 'pragmatic' to seek reforms rather than to seek the overthrow of speciesism as such rests on a profound misapprehension of the nature of political life. If we allow our horizons to be bound to the *existing* reality, the world 'as it is,' then we embrace our own defeat. Gramsci, Benedetto Fontana reminds us, held that while the liberal reformer seeks 'the preservation within certain juridical boundaries of the existing structure of power,' the true political agent 'acts upon the existing reality in order to transcend it and establish a new structure' (Fontana 1993, 88). Challenging specific injustices to animals isn't enough; our goal must be to constitute a new social order, one based in socioeconomic equality and compassion for all sentient beings – human and nonhuman alike.

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