

# The Political Left and the Overlooked Power of Veganism: Toward a Marxist–Animal Liberationist Framework for Ecological Revolution

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## Abstract

This paper critically examines the marginalisation of veganism within leftist or progressive political discourse, particularly through the lens of Marxist theory, in the context of the Anthropocene. While Marxism has provided incisive critiques of capitalism's exploitation of labour and nature, it has largely overlooked the ecological and ethical implications of animal agriculture, which is a glaring omission given its central role in driving environmental degradation and climate change. Drawing on Marx's concepts of metabolic rift, alienation and value, the paper argues veganism is essential to any comprehensive critique of capitalism's destructive relationship with both human and non-human life. It explores the parallels between the exploitation of humans and animals under capitalist systems and critiques the left's inconsistent treatment of animal liberation as a peripheral concern, despite its deep entanglement with environmental justice, labour struggles, and anti-capitalist movements. By integrating veganism into Marxist ecological thought, the paper calls for a reimagining of leftist or progressive political frameworks to address the interconnected crises of food production, animal exploitation, and climate catastrophe. The Anthropocene demands an expanded vision of solidarity that transcends species boundaries,

recognising veganism as a vital building block in the struggle for a more just, sustainable, and equitable world. A version of this paper was first presented at the *Marx in the Anthropocene* conference at Università Iuav di Venezia (Iuav University of Venice), Italy, in March 2025.

## Keywords

Veganism, Marx, Engels, Marxism, Anthropocene, metabolic rift, alienation, value, animal liberation, environmental justice, anti-capitalism, solidarity, speciesism, climate change, animal agriculture, leftist discourse

## I. Introduction

One of the great disappointments for many leftist or progressive vegans is encountering hostility from other leftists about veganism. Discussions of anti-oppression and solidarity turn into their antithesis as soon as veganism is mentioned. Express solidarity with oppressed people? You get a heartening discussion. Express solidarity with oppressed animals? Your interlocutor turns into a reactionary or a ‘sausage socialist’, an endearing term I learned from Troy Vettese (‘Vegans Should be Socialist’). Our comrades are people who understand the causes and effects of exploitation by the capitalist machine. They understand the injustice of it. And just as we have, we expect they would extend their understanding to the eighty-three billion land animals slaughtered each year (Rosado). At a minimum, we expect they too would be keen to discuss the role animal agriculture plays in the Anthropocene. In practice, the responses, dismissals, and resistance are no different than those from any other non-vegan. It is our disappointment with the left which smarts more.

Veganism is a critical yet overlooked component of leftist or progressive critiques of capitalism’s exploitation of human and animal life. Veganism has a place at the table of progressive and Marxist theory, which can – and in my view, should be – expanded to include its practice.

### *Veganism Defined*

The Vegan Society’s definition of veganism is a comprehensive working definition, despite the variety of applications one comes across, from health vegan or environment vegan and other variants. The variations reflect popular misunderstandings or incomplete understanding of the term and practice, sharing ‘structural similarities with postfeminism’s depoliticisation of feminism as a collective mode of politics’ (Giraud 15).

In 1944, the Society adopted the following definition:

*Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practicable – all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.*

(Vegan Society)

Often, the discussion around veganism solely focuses on food. There are a variety of reasons for that, including consumerism. More importantly, the principal manner in which humans manifest our relationship to other animals is through the food we consume. But veganism as a philosophy ‘encompasses any relationship with animals where they are used for the primary benefit of humans’ (Giraud 4) and the benefits of the philosophy and practice have always been holistic: for animals, humans, and the environment. Although the definition includes an ostensibly consumerist angle, its intent is not consumerist *qua* consumerism. It is not an exhortation to capital accumulation, but a call to productive labour benefiting not only animals but humans and the environment.

And in 1950, Leslie Cross, a founder of the Vegan Society, was clear when he wrote veganism is a liberatory movement for both animals and humans (Cross 2-3), and that it aims to abolish exploitation and restore humanity’s relationship with nature, which also echoes Marx’s metabolic rift examined later. While Cross’ analogies and views reflect those of his time, the core message, one of liberation and reimagining equitable relationships, remains vital, emphasising true progress lies in ending domination and fostering equality. I believe the practice of veganism is inextricable from other praxes of social justice and it is one component in dismantling oppression and creating a new society. Conversely, it is incomplete to eschew animal use and then ignore or participate in human oppression and exploitation.

## II. Veganism and progressive political praxis

There is not so much an *absence* of veganism and concern for animals in leftist or progressive political discourse, as an antipathy or marginalisation of the practice. I believe this type of reactionary stance is no different from similar stances in non-leftist spaces to which vegans of all political persuasions are very accustomed (for an overview of the classic questions, see Colb). There has been a long tradition of scholars interested in the question of animals in capitalism. They have been undeterred by either dismissal or marginalisation of the animal concern, or for some, that dismissal itself was a source of inspiration to begin to ask questions. There is exceptional and deep scholarship in the field from Adams to Wischermann as one may readily see from the bibliographic compilation in *Against Animal Capitalism*.

Despite this, there are a variety of dismissals of veganism from the left, ranging from Marx and Engels' scepticism about early animal welfare movements (Gunderson 2011), to British socialist and animal experimenter Stephen Rose (author of the essay 'Proud to be a Speciesist') who rejected the notion of animal rights and defended a hierarchy of species in socialist publications (1992), to writers in contemporary Left publications who reject any explicit overlap between Left politics and animals' interests' (D'Amato and Grey, cited in Dickstein 5). In fact, Vettese reveals that Verso, 'the left's leading publisher,' churns 'out an endless stream of similar-sounding books on climate change ... but have published nothing on the biodiversity crisis and just a smattering on animal rights. (Revealingly, the recent book *On Extinction* focuses only on human extinction)' (Vettese 61). Vettese goes further, stating, 'most Marxists seem unable to perceive the horror latent in their vision of communism, of humanity liberated from capital only to enslave the countless co-inhabitants of our planet' (Vettese 65). Whether the perception is that the practice is moralistic and bourgeois or lifestyle rather than a systemic critique ('Man and Nature' 2011), or that there is no room in Marxism for anyone but humans (Stache 403), these concepts serve as easy ways for leftists to simply not engage with the challenges posed by our use of animals.

***Veganism as a Moralistic, Consumerist Lifestyle or Building Block?***

Veganism is generalised as moralistic or simply a consumerist lifestyle. I argue veganism is a political building block, whether in challenging capitalist norms or in imagining new relationships with nature, animals, and people. Veganism gets dismissed through stereotypes, such as vegans being ostentatious, overly meticulous, or narrow-minded ('Man and Nature'), but these critiques fail to address the validity of the practice and are often used to silence discourse. Like other non-normative political beliefs such as socialism or feminism, veganism disrupts societal norms, challenging entrenched systems of oppression, which can provoke discomfort. And what's wrong with that? Discomfort is necessary for progress, as questioning relationships and norms is essential to advancing alternatives to the status quo.

While vegans, like any group, exhibit diverse behaviours, their consistency in rejecting animal exploitation mirrors the principled stances of socialists or feminists – however annoying we might be to others. The disruption of 'others' happiness through their political beliefs' projects the socialist, feminist or vegan 'as the problem' rather than the oppression to which the individual is objecting (Giraud 56-57). Critiques of veganism often stem from a lack of understanding and a reluctance to engage with its ethical and systemic implications, whatever the political leanings. The left's failure to understand how capitalism exploits animals shows an anthropocentric deficiency. Despite the existence of analytic tools to analyse human oppression, the left fails to apply those consistently to animals (Wadiwel 26). To foster productive dialogue, it is crucial to contextualize veganism within historical, geographical, and institutional frameworks, moving beyond superficial judgments to address the deeper issues it raises (Giraud 104).

Veganism has been commodified like all movements under capitalism and this does not diminish its political significance. And an important note with respect to foods: many plant-based foods, such as soy milk, seitan, tempeh, and tofu, have long been staples in Asian diets, predating the recent surge in the 'plant-based' market by a few thousand years. The

real issue is capitalism commodifies everything, obscuring deeper political and philosophical meanings. We see this with Cross's words which are relegated to obscurity because veganism's foundation in liberation and equality is terribly inconvenient to capitalism.

Liberalism's atomistic worldview limits discussions of animal liberation within the confines of existing societal structures (Maurizi 16). While veganism alone cannot dismantle inequality or redefine societal organisation (Maurizi 82), it fundamentally challenges the notion that human flourishing requires animal exploitation. More than just a dietary choice, it serves as a radical praxis questioning dominant power structures and enabling individuals to disengage from one of capitalism's most exploitative industries, offering a concrete step toward envisioning a more just world.

Regardless of critiques, there is no justification for dismissing the rejection of animal products today. Whether as a systemic critique, a rejection of capitalism's exploitation of animals, or a collective boycott, veganism belongs in leftist or progressive discourse. While it extends beyond diet, food remains the primary way humans interact with animals, making daily dietary choices both personal and political. As a form of boycott, veganism aligns with historic leftist social justice struggles, serving as both a material and symbolic act against oppressive economic and political systems (Dickstein 3). Without both critique and praxis, veganism can be hollow, but that does not make its *fundamental* value hollow. It fosters solidarity with the oppressed, challenges all forms of supremacy, and provides a radical shift in worldview that can be a catalyst for broader political transformations.

### ***Is Marxism Inherently Anthropocentric?***

I believe we can, and should, return to Marx to place veganism within leftist praxis. The claim Marxism is inherently anthropocentric, based on, among other things, Marx and Engels' scepticism toward early animal welfare movements (Gunderson), is a rigid interpretation ignoring the evolution of Marxist thought. While Marx focused on human liberation, his framework allows for expansion, and as our understanding of non-human

animals has grown, many scholars have integrated animal concerns into Marxist critique. Marx and his views about animals were products of that time. It is immaterial whether Marx was ‘simply wrong about animals’ (Benton 42). Since Marx’s time, knowledge about animal sentience and environmental science has expanded. For example, the New York Declaration on Animal Consciousness is a helpful summary of where we are in this understanding:

First, there is strong scientific support for attributions of conscious experience to other mammals and to birds.

Second, the empirical evidence indicates at least a realistic possibility of conscious experience in all vertebrates (including reptiles, amphibians, and fishes) and many invertebrates (including, at minimum, cephalopod molluscs, decapod crustaceans, and insects).

Third, when there is a realistic possibility of conscious experience in an animal, it is irresponsible to ignore that possibility in decisions affecting that animal. We should consider welfare risks and use the evidence to inform our responses to these risks.  
(Andrews)

So maybe it is not Marx or Marxism that is anthropocentric, but *us* right now.

Contemporary Marxist scholars have reinterpreted and extended Marx’s theories to include animals in discussions of exploitation and alienation. In fact, some argue, Marxist critiques of oppressive structures can and should address animal suffering, leading to the question whether it is even ‘possible to be a socialist without being an animal liberationist’ (Peterson 24). While Marx’s original work may not have included animal liberation, contemporary Marxism must address it because both socialism and animal liberation challenge capitalist structures (Peterson 22). Under capitalism there is a ‘despotic relationship of super-exploitation’ integrating animals and nature into capitalism and

showing how both workers and animals are exploited in one capitalist continuum (Stache 402). This super-exploitation becomes self-evident when one considers the whole of food animals' lives are 'subsumed within production so that all labour time is equivalent to the fact of living' (Wadiwel 119).

While any critique of animals as property may not fully address broader social structures, the reality that all animals, whether farmed, domesticated, or free-living, are legally owned (Peterson 22) is a fact which many overlook. Recognising this can spark deeper conversations about exploitation and systemic oppression, with veganism serving as a practical tool to challenge dominant power structures. Finally, Marxist theory can accommodate animal liberation by breaking the cycle of domination and recognising the simple materialist notion that humans are animals (Maurizi 37).

### ***Environmental Context***

This brings us to the environmental context in which these discussions are taking place. It is much different from that in which Marx and Engels lived. The contemporary existential crisis facing all of humanity has to push all of us, especially the left, to have much broader conversations. One such conversation must be radically to address our collective consumption of animal products and the catastrophic impact of this practice. Perhaps 'different' is not the right word because Marx foresaw capitalism would have negative effects on the earth as well as on humans. In *Capital Vol. 1*, he writes, '[c]apitalist production thus advances the technological means of social production processes and combines those processes more and more only by damaging the very founts of all wealth: the earth and the worker' (Marx 461). The extent and gravity of the damage and its consequences which we now face is hard enough for us to grasp fully, and we have the help of scientific knowledge. It is unthinkable that Marx would react passively or dismissively to our current situation.

Animal agriculture is a major driver of environmental degradation:

- It contributes between 18-51% of global greenhouse gas emissions ('Livestock's Long Shadow'; Carrington; Goodland and Anhang; Neslen) and 54% of agricultural emissions (OECD-FAO 165)
- Shifting to plant-based diets could reduce food-related emissions by 49% (Leese 153)
- Beyond emissions, animal agriculture causes deforestation, displaces Indigenous communities, pollutes water, depletes resources, and accelerates biodiversity loss (Leese 153-154)
- Animal farming occupies 37% of Earth's land – more than Asia and Europe combined (Foley) – yet provides only 17% of global calories and 38% of protein (Leese 153)
- A global shift to plant-based diets could reduce farmland use by 76%, offering a critical pathway to addressing the climate crisis (Leese 153)

Without tackling animal agriculture, environmental sustainability remains unattainable.

### **III. Veganism and Marxian political analysis: Metabolic Rift, Alienation & Value**

#### ***Metabolic Rift***

Metabolic rift is seminal to the development of an overall ecological view of Marxism. Marx uses the term metabolism in *Capital Vol. 1* to refer to the movement and conversion of commodities, where 'one commodity is exchanged for another – social labor is metabolized, and the process ends with that result' (Marx 80). He also uses it to address the relationship between humans and nature and the disruption by capitalism. Marx writes:

capitalist production... disrupts the metabolizing that goes on between human being and the earth. The natural elements that people consume as food and clothing can no longer return to the land: hence capitalist production undermines the eternal

natural condition of the earth's lasting fertility, thereby ruining the physical health of the urban worker and the intellectual life of the rural one. (Marx 460)

The two concepts of metabolism are mutual in terms of the morphing of commodities and the ongoing relationship between humans and nature/earth. The rift occurs in the relationship between the two when the relationship ceases to be mutual and becomes alienated, generating ecological crises (Clark). Animal agriculture exemplifies and exacerbates the metabolic rift.

### ***Alienation***

Marx did not include animals in the concept of alienation (Marx, *Manuscripts*), yet the analysis does not have to stop there. 'The concept of alienation ... relates to the problem that capitalism prevents humans from living up to their potentials' (Stache 416). These potentials may be to organise in a new society, perceive history or already possess the 'end result of the labor process... when the process begins... as an idea – as something the worker imagines' (Marx 154). That these potentials might not apply to animals does not invalidate the comparison, just as not all humans can fulfil or even be aware of such potentials. In 2025 and with all the ethological studies informing us of similarities between ourselves and animals and of many more to be discovered, we are not barred by some strict interpretation of the word from expanding the concept to include animals.

In *Capital Vol. 1*, Marx writes:

Even before he begins to work, his own labor has already been alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated into capital; thus his labor is constantly objectified during the production process in a product that belongs to someone else. (525)

The dairy industry exemplifies alienation, subjecting cows to relentless cycles of forced impregnation, birth, and mechanized lactation. Calves are taken away shortly after

birth, causing visible distress as mother cows mourn their loss. Both the mother's reproductive labour and her child are commodified before birth, illustrating the deep exploitation inherent in this system.

### **Value**

To fully grasp the systemic exploitation underpinning animal agriculture, my analysis deliberately draws on the framework of Dinesh Wadiwel, who argues the exploitation of animals under capitalism, particularly in 'food' production, is total. Wadiwel posits, '[f]ood animals hold a unique structural position under capitalism' (Wadiwel 193) to which the left has failed to apply existing analytical structures, particularly Marxian analysis, adequately to interrogate that position. Asking how animals are valuable to capitalism is the missing component in unmasking how value dictates and shapes animals' 'relation to capital' (Wadiwel 28).

Wadiwel's analysis reveals animals are not peripheral to the capitalist system; they are a foundational pillar supporting capitalist economy and human supremacy. He demonstrates that '[f]ood animals sit at the meeting point of hierarchical anthropocentrism and capitalist value process' (Wadiwel 193). Wadiwel effectively illuminates this by dividing animals' lives under capital into three constitutive parts of value production:

One, they are 'raw materials and labour' when they are alive (Wadiwel 119).

Two, their whole lives, from conception, growth, reproduction and production of bodily secretions, represent 'labour time' (Wadiwel 119-120). Animals do not get time off like any other worker.

Three, they ultimately produce *value* as 'consumption items' when they are dead (Wadiwel 120). In their death, their value to others is actualised.

This framework is crucial for my argument because it allows us to see all the work animals provide in animal agriculture 'occurs in absolute conformity with the rationalities of

formal capitalist production' (Wadiwel 116), albeit they subject the wholeness of their lives and bodies to that production. Consequently, Wadiwel concludes that, 'understanding the distinct value of animal labour power allows us to see capitalism in a different light, recognising an animal labour force as a constitutive pillar of the economic system' (Wadiwel 194). Through this lens, we can see how capitalism subsumes the lives of animals in their entirety, a vital insight which the Left must integrate to build a truly comprehensive critique.

***Veganism as a Central Component of Anti-Capitalist Praxis:  
environmental justice & solidarity***

Addressing the ecological impact of animal agriculture is essential in tackling climate catastrophe, and this cannot be done without veganism. Meat production is projected to reach 374 million tonnes by 2030 growing faster than population rates, with chicken consumption as the main driver (OECD-FAO, 164). The food consumption aspect of veganism is a uniquely actionable and powerful tool. Dismissing this contradicts the left's stance on reducing fossil fuels (Malm) and environmental justice, since dietary changes – unlike shifts in infrastructure – are immediate and, arguably, accessible actions individuals can take daily to reduce ecological impact. This critique is not aimed at those with limited access to alternatives but at those who are able to make different choices and construct other dialogues. The left must move beyond dismissing or marginalising veganism and instead engage deeply with its ethical and systemic implications.

This individual capacity for resistance through food gains deeper political significance when understood as solidarity, which, when extended beyond human boundaries, fundamentally challenges capitalism's logic. Solidarity with animals redefines both leftist politics *and* what it means to be human under capitalism and becomes revolutionary when it rejects capitalism's commodification of life. Maurizi argues 'It is only by an *act of solidarity* that humans can decide what happens to them and their Other. In other

words, it is only in *praxis* that the question of what the human being ‘is’ can be decided’ (160). Veganism is an active political commitment shaping the relationship between humans, animals and the environment at large. Furthermore, what it means to be human is not just discovered through philosophy and science. As Marx writes, ‘[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it’ (Marx, *Feuerbach*). Therefore, our humanity is ultimately defined not by abstract principles, but by how we practice our ethics, including in our use of animals.

By expanding the left’s vision to include animal liberation we can more fully address the Anthropocene’s existential concerns and amplify resistance to capitalist commodification. Angela Davis identifies food as a crucial site of struggle, echoing the disappointment I mention at the outset about the left’s failure to critically examine their role in capitalist food systems (Davis). The left’s marginalisation of veganism weakens its political impact, as even Davis rarely highlights her own veganism – a fact often unknown even to her admirers. She now emphasises veganism is part of a revolutionary perspective, advocating for compassionate relations beyond humans and challenging the capitalist industrial food system, which commodifies both life and perception (Davis). Davis’s call to radicalize food politics exposes a paradox: the left’s historical reliance on human exceptionalism to fight dehumanisation may in fact undermine its own emancipatory goals.

This dynamic is precisely what Kymlicka outlines, noting ‘[t]he belief that human supremacism helps fight dehumanisation underpins many of the strategic choices of the left since World War II’ (Kymlicka). Far from being a sound strategy, evidence suggests this framework is counterproductive (Kymlicka). Evidence shows belief in human superiority over animals exacerbates dehumanisation, increasing prejudice against immigrants, women, and racial minorities (Kymlicka). Studies reveal a causal link: emphasising human-animal continuity fosters greater equality among human groups, while reinforcing species hierarchy deepens prejudice (see Dhont, discussed below). Reducing the divide between humans and animals strengthens solidarity and equality (Kymlicka). The foundations for reimagining solidarity already exist and must be nurtured for the collective good. Interspecies solidarity,

which we materialize by being vegan, is not sentimental and does not divert from leftist goals. Instead, it radicalizes them, exposing how capitalism's exploitation of animals structurally enables the dehumanisation of marginalized people. Veganism then becomes part of a broad approach to liberation. It is an extension and deepening of leftist, progressive or Marxian critique which is long in the making.

#### **IV. Arguments for Veganism Against Standard Progressive Objections**

Alongside the criticism of vegans as annoying, many on the left and, to be fair, from a variety of other political persuasions, point to so-called barriers to veganism. In particular, those barriers are broadly understood along cultural, racial and economic lines. Discussions of cultural barriers to veganism often oversimplify, referencing tribes, extreme climates, or assumptions about traditional diets, without addressing the role of cultural hegemony or power structures in a Gramscian sense. While all cultures use animals and plants, food practices are shaped by colonisation, classism, and economic shifts, making 'culture' a dynamic and not a static concept.

Veganism, and recall the definition's 'as far as possible and practicable' qualifier, does not demand self-sacrifice in regions where animal products are essential for survival. However, many who cite cultural barriers overlook examples like Alaska, where plant-based diets thrive (Caldwell) and consumption of traditional foods is only 1% or less of total food intake (Redwood), or indigenous vegans who link animal oppression to colonial exploitation (Brueck, *Veganism of Color* 78).

In Africa, vegan grassroots organisations in Uganda (Uganda Vegan Society; Podrska Foundation; Uganda Vegan Village) and the Masai Mara (Muelrath) demonstrate veganism can align with local needs, offering sustainable alternatives. While some communities rely on animal-based foods due to environmental or economic constraints, this does not negate veganism's relevance elsewhere. Instead, it highlights the need to address systemic issues

like climate change and resource scarcity, which threaten livelihoods and ecosystems. Veganism, when contextualized, can be a tool for liberation and environmental resilience, not a cultural imposition.

Western Black vegans actively reclaim veganism from its perceived whiteness. They communicate about veganism without relying on ‘white talking points,’ rejecting the false choice between racial justice and animal liberation. Adewale writes, ‘I don’t have to ignore the grief of factory-farmed animals … to strive for Black self-determination’ (Adewale 41). Through initiatives like a Black Vegfest, they create spaces for ‘unapologetically Black conversations’ about food sovereignty and collective liberation (Adewale 38).

This entangled praxis extends to cultural work. Take Bob Vylan, the London-based punk-rap-hardcore-grime duo who pair radical politics, from Palestinian solidarity to anti-racism, with veganism. Their music promotes ‘positive self-image, hope and self-worth’ while modelling plant-based living as fuel for resistance: ‘[I]f we’re going to use our existence to rally against injustice, we probably need to be quite healthy to do that’ (Okundaye).

For Black vegans, solidarity is indivisible. They leverage their ‘own marginalisation as guides for how … to liberate other people,’ a category intentionally including animals, because ‘suffering is suffering’ regardless of resemblance (Adewale 54).

This framing becomes an anti-racist tool for Ko and Ko:

we, as minoritized people, should include the violence that nonhuman animals receive… because it’s a more complex way of understanding the systems that are impacting us as people of color… we have been encouraged to create borders around our own racial oppression without realizing that white supremacy provides us with those border walls to ensure that we never fully see how complex our oppression really is… since we can’t see the massive landscape of white supremacy beyond this barrier, we don’t realize just how expansive its territory is. (9)

By exposing how animal exploitation and racial oppression share systemic roots, Black vegan thought dismantles the very boundaries white supremacy relies on. This is not only a philosophical contention. Studies have shown ‘[p]eople with higher scores on the SDO-scale [Social Dominance Orientation] support systemic discriminatory social policies and practices against ‘low-status groups’ of people by rationalising ideologies which ‘provide moral or intellectual justification for these discriminatory social policies’ (Dhont 508). The more one group desires to dominate, the more it will seek ways to ensure its dominance. This is also true with respect to human-animal relations. Those with higher SDO scores ‘perceive a greater hierarchical divide between humans and animals’, ‘hold greater human supremacy beliefs over animals’, and the scores ‘predict higher speciesism’, and ‘greater personal use and consumption of animals’ (Dhont 508). Therefore, extrapolating Ko and Ko’s thoughts and Dhont’s study, it stands to reason one cannot fully examine, critique or dismantle systems of oppression by excluding groups, whether people or animals. A caution: solidarity must not become a weapon. While some individuals may face barriers to veganism due to circumstance, Brueck warns we must resist the tendency to use solidarity with marginalized groups as justification for rejecting veganism outright (Brueck, *Veganism in an Oppressive World* 22). True social justice does not and cannot depend on universal conformity; it demands systemic change while recognising ethical commitments should not be abandoned simply because they are not yet accessible to all.

None of this reasoning dismisses very real constraints, but it challenges the assumption that solidarity requires suspending moral consistency. Just as anti-racism does not wait for every white person’s participation, animal liberation cannot hinge on universal vegan feasibility under capitalism or any other socio-political or economic system. Humans adapt to their circumstances, and even where barriers exist, sharing alternative perspectives on liberation and justice can be a valuable cultural exchange. The real issue is the capitalist system profiting from animal exploitation and benefiting capital accumulation instead of society. This hegemonic cultural norm, particularly in the West, promotes the consumption

of animal products (Leese 72), and it is disappointing when leftists or progressives marginalize veganism as an important critique of that power structure.

Veganism persists even in war zones. In Gaza, vegans continue to support themselves and others amidst oppression, genocide and starvation ('Plant the Land'; 'Vegan in Palestine'). In Ukraine, a free vegan soup kitchen operated throughout the war until mid-2024 and they have pivoted to sending vegan food parcels to a variety of people, including those on the front (Starostinetskaya; Ostrovska). If Palestinians and Ukrainians can continue to manifest solidarity through veganism, at the very least leftists should take veganism seriously and everyone should take their existential struggle seriously. Marginalising veganism due to (possibly chauvinistic or reactionary) perceived 'cultural' barriers reflects a failure to engage with those actively working to make that a reality. The Anthropocene and the struggle for change demand greater imagination and openness.

The common economic argument against veganism is plant-based foods are more expensive, but this is increasingly untrue as the price gap narrows (Leese 137-143 and 228-231). A more significant issue is lack of access to basic necessities, which stems from systemic problems, not from veganism itself. Poverty makes all food expensive. Capitalism, through subsidies and marketing, limits access to diverse foods, creating 'food apartheid' (Washington in Brones) where cheap, unhealthy options like McDonald's are easier to access than plant-based alternatives (Briones). Food apartheid is a cultural issue shaped by capitalism, not veganism. Veganism should be part of the solution to food inequality, helping push for an end to food apartheid. Marginalising veganism strengthens the capitalist forces exploiting the vulnerable.

### *The Case for Integration and a Vision for the Anthropocene*

Veganism can and should be integrated into leftist, progressive or Marxist ecological critique as both an anti-capitalist response and a practical act of solidarity. Incorporating veganism into leftist frameworks has transformative potential. Veganism is in itself transformative.

We start out understanding our relationship with what is and is not food, and then we realise our clothing, our homes, and everything we use have a component of animal exploitation. We then connect that to the human exploitation involved in animal agriculture (and other forms of production); subsequently, we learn how everything is entangled. When progressives exclude animals from this understanding, then that understanding is itself incomplete. The reverse is also true. If vegans exclude human entanglements, that is similarly incomplete.

As La Berge observes, postcapitalism is not imagined but materialized through collective action, and as our imagination evolves, new relationships become possible (La Berge 337). This vision of interspecies Communism, though unknown, is fundamentally opposed to a world of factory farms, climate change, and suffering (La Berge 337). Veganism is an indispensable part of anti-capitalist, leftist or progressive praxis, crucial for tackling the environmental crisis, labour exploitation, and the commodification of life. The left must move beyond dismissing veganism and embrace its potential to build a just, sustainable world. By integrating veganism into its political frameworks and fostering dialogue on animal liberation, environmental justice, and anti-capitalism, the left can drive systemic change. Bold action is needed, and veganism must be central to this transformative vision.

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