

CHANGE SOCIETY FOR THE ANIMALS

Becoming a social movement

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FOR THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, FOR THE ABOLITION OF VEGANISM*

***About the necessary
paradigm shift needed
in the animal rights
movement.**

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I. Introduction

a. Nonhuman animals are slaves

Ever since Darwin we have clearly known that human beings are not the only animals to have interests and to feel emotions. Nevertheless, nonhuman individuals are legally a property in our speciesist society. Considered as a resource, they are exploited for their milk and eggs ; are murdered for their skin and flesh; are used as a “biological material” for experiments, etc.

b. 99.8% of animal slavery = food

The number of terrestrial animals killed for food is numbered at roughly 60 billion individuals every year. Aquatic animals are counted in tons, about 150 million tons every year, which makes at least 1000 billion victims. Overall that makes about 1060 billion individuals killed every year for food. In comparison, the fur industry kills 60 million individuals (→ 0.0057% of food victims) and animal experimentation about 300 million victims (→ 0.028% of food victims).

II. What strategies must be used to abolish slavery?

First, we will analyse the strategy used by social movements to bring about change and secondly we shall compare this to the strategy used by animal rights activists until now.

a. Strategy used by social movements

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aa. Claim-making machines.

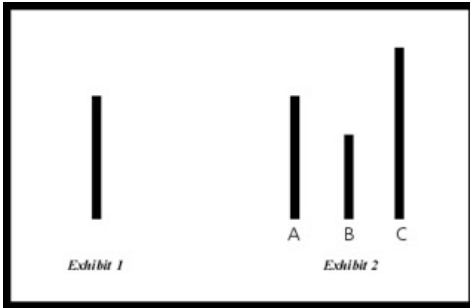
Social movements are **claim-making machines**.

- 1) They express a claim: → “Abolition of apartheid!”, “We demand women’s right to vote!”, “Software should be free!”
- 2) Then, they make the claim more visible in the society (demos, petitions, letters, TV debates, etc...)
- 3) This claim-making creates a debate in society, causing the issue to be put on the agenda and hence to become a public problem.

It is important to notice that it is **always a minority who starts making a claim**. And during the public debate (that can last for decades) **the more the claim is discussed, the bigger the minority becomes**, even eventually becoming a majority.

Once the unanimity concerning a situation/practice is broken because some people begin to make claims for a change, it becomes easier for others to question the practice → the psychological study of Asch.

bb. Psychological study of Professor Asch



“Which of the bars on the right is the same length as the one on the left?” It depends...

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In this experiment, Professor Asch showed ten people a line drawn on a paper. These participants were asked to say which of the bars next to it was the same length. In reality, however, only one of the participants was the real subject of the study, as the other nine were this psychologist’s accomplices and were instructed to give an incorrect answer. When the nine accomplices gave a wrong answer, the subject complied with the majority. And he even thought that this majority was right. But when there was at least one person who broke unanimity by giving the correct answer, it became easier for the subject to question what the majority said and he was more likely to respond correctly.

If the social pressure generated by unanimity is so strong for those questions for which the solution can be found just by looking, we can easily imagine that it is even greater for justice issues that require some reflection.

Once a claim demanding the abolition of a practice is heard in society, the consensus on the legitimacy of that situation is broken. It begins to be perceived as problematic, making it easier for others to refuse to comply with the majority and to also support the abolition of the practice.

Therefore, one can understand that by expressing and making visible the claims that create a public debate in the society, social movements take full advantage of the beneficial effect caused by the act of breaking the unanimity on a situation.

b. Strategy used by animal rights activists: conversion strategy

We have seen that animal **exploitation for food represents about 99.8% of the exploitation.** Nevertheless, concerning this issue animal rights activists have used the conversion strategy.

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Conversion strategy consists of converting people to vegetarianism/veganism without creating a public debate nor making any claims (like for example: “Slaughterhouses must be closed now!”).

The belief behind the conversion strategy is this: *“we are just a minority, so we have to first convert a lot of people to veganism and only then will we create a public debate.”*

1) But all social movements were a small minority when they started to make claims, even the movement for the abolition of human slavery.

2) And the conversion to veganism is much more complicated if there is no debate in society concerning this issue, because it is extremely difficult to question a unanimously accepted practice (Asch study).

Social movements have never used this kind of tactics alone. If boycott is used, it is used with claim-making. Examples: Martin Luther King called for a boycott of Montgomery buses **and** claimed that racial discrimination had to be abolished. Gandhi called for a boycott of British textiles **and** claimed that India had to be independent. Moreover, what is also problematic is that veganism isn't even perceived by the public as a political boycott, but as a personal choice (see later).

The conversion strategy is not used in social movements but in **religious movements**.

But the success of this tactic is very limited: After 2,000 years of this strategy being used by Christianity, the majority of humans are still not Christian, and Christianity has even used plenty of very violent conversion tactics. How many thousands of years will we have to wait to abolish animal slavery if we use this strategy?

III. Consequences of the conversion strategy

a. Inefficiency

aa. Historical look

Throughout, history no change for more justice was obtained with the conversion strategy. However, the strategy of social movements has been shown to succeed many times (human slavery abolitionist movement, civil rights movement, women's liberation movement, LGBT movements etc.). So we can see, that it is very strange for the animal rights movement to use a strategy that has never brought about any change for more justice instead of using the one that already been proven to work many times.

bb. Proportion dominance

Studies have found that courses of action that completely (or almost completely) eradicate some problem are preferred over courses of action that provide incomplete eradication. For example, in a recent study published in 2006, Professor Bartels found that an intervention saving 102 lives out of 115 at risk was judged more valuable than one saving 105 lives out of 700 at risk, even if the number of lives saved was higher in the second intervention! This psychological effect is called “proportion dominance” and Bartels showed that its impact was even more important in the context of saving natural resources or animal lives. An intervention preventing 245 of 350 fish deaths due to pollution from Factory A was judged much more important than one preventing 251 of 980 fish deaths due to pollution from Factory B.

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Let’s imagine that being vegan saves the lives of 100 animals each year. Since the total number of animals killed every year is 1060 billion, the saving of those 100 animals is considered as totally insignificant by our human mind because of this “proportion dominance” effect. This is the reason why many people refuse to change their diet, knowing as they do that their tiny individual actions will not even slightly change the enormous number of animals killed for humans each year.

However, if the act of refusing to eat animal products was presented as part of a global boycott from an international movement seeking to eliminate the entire 1060 billion killings every year, we can assume that people would think much more seriously about the issue. All this without even taking into account that just the expression of the claim “Killing animals for food has to be abolished!” will create a debate in society, and therefore make a substantial amount of people think about the problem.

cc. Misuse of time and energy

The animal rights movement doesn't have an astronomic number of activists and our resources are limited. Nevertheless, we are using our time and energy to convert 6 billion non-vegans one by one, all without even knowing if our strategy will succeed one day. Instead we could be creating a debate among our society as a whole on the legitimacy of killing animals for food, therefore making every citizen think about the issue. Because our goal is to change the situation for the animals, we should spend our time using the most effective strategy that allows us to achieve the abolition of animal exploitation as quickly as possible, otherwise billions of animals will suffer and die for nothing.

So, if we want our ideas to be heard more clearly by society, hence encouraging more people to boycott animal products and ultimately causing animal exploitation to one day be abolished; we need to generate a societal debate, and this latter will be created by public claims and not by the strategy of conversion.

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b. Question of personal choice

The advocacy of veganism creates the **impression amongst the public that it is a question of personal choice and not a question of justice.** *“Just like some people are Muslim, some people are vegans, everyone has the right to do what s/he wants.”*

Of course the decision of killing and eating another individual isn't a **question of personal choice but a question of justice towards the exploited animals.** However, people will not realise this if there are no people who claim that the killing of animals for food has to be abolished.

Because of the use of the “veganism” construction, this is what remains to the public mind: “*They don’t eat animal products because they are vegans*” is very similar to “*This guy doesn’t eat pork because he is Muslim*”. It comes down to personal choice again. **If we use political claims it will change to:** “they boycott animal products because they demand the closure of slaughterhouses / they want animal exploitation to be abolished / they want a legal right to life for animals.”

Defining ourselves as vegans/vegetarians transforms the refusal of a practice into a simple lifestyle. If we don’t want this issue to be perceived as a question of personal choice, when someone asks us why we don’t eat animal products, instead of saying “I am vegan” we should say: “I boycott animal products because I am for the closing of slaughterhouses” or “I am for the abolition of animal exploitation”.

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c. Psychological reinforcement of speciesism

The goal of the conversion strategy is to convert people to veganism; the means are not important, which is why many arguments are used that have nothing to do with the oppression of nonhuman animals. Example: **health or environmental arguments** are nearly always on the flyers that we distribute. **And sometimes there is not a word about speciesism.**

If we were in a society where some people ate children, would we criticise the practice by saying that this can be bad for the health of the cannibals? No, we would criticise it only by saying that children have an interest in living their lives. **Also Talking about the health of cannibals sends the unconscious message that the interests of the children are not so important.**

Imagine there was a demo against the **genocide in Rwanda** in which people would have said: *“This has to be stopped because there is too much blood produced by the killings and this pollutes the groundwater.”* It is immoral to use this kind of argument (health or environment) when humans are murdered. And it is also immoral to use this kind of argument when sentient beings from another species are murdered.

The conversion strategy drives us to use every argument that we have in order to convert people to veganism, but when we use the health and environmental arguments instead of the victims murdered every day we implicitly send the unconscious speciesist message that the lives of nonhuman animals are not so important.

IV. What to do to abolish the slavery of nonhuman animals?

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a. Example of human slavery abolition

Let’s take the example of human slavery abolitionists in the 19th century. Did they try to convert people to *“hooganism”* (a way of living that excludes all products of human slavery)?

No! They made claims that human slavery has to be abolished and created a debate in the society on the question. Animal rights activists should do the same.

b. Morally unacceptable strategy

If there were **concentration camps** in our country in which human slaves produced all kind of products, would we **just tell people to stop buying these products or would we claim that these concentration camps have to be closed down?** I think we would clearly express that they have to be closed down and it would be totally immoral from our part just to ask people to boycott these products.

Thus, not only is the strategy of conversion inefficient, creates the impression that killing animals is a matter of personal choice and unconsciously reinforces speciesism, but moreover is not a morally acceptable position.

c. Social movement strategy

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If we want to abolish animal exploitation, we must express a claim asking for its abolition and make it resound more and more in the society, creating a public debate on this issue.

For example when we write flyers, press releases, when we are interviewed, when we organise demos, instead of the individualist sentence: “go vegan!” we must make clear claims for a change in society: “Killing animals for food must be abolished.”

To illustrate and fully understand the difference between the two strategies, compare the following examples.

Conversion strategy:

“Go vegan!”

“Veganism is good for the planet.”

“Veganism is good for your health.”

Vegans have better sex.”

“Going vegan is a rational choice.”

“Vegan food is great!”

Social movement strategy:

“We demand the abolition of the property status of the animals.”

“Slaughterhouses must be closed now.”

“Killing animals for food should be abolished.”

“Animals should have a legal right to life.”

“Farming, fishing and hunting, as well as selling and eating animal products, must be abolished.”

“Society should condemn and fight speciesism just as it fights racism and sexism.”

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(taken from the resolution of the global movement for the abolition of meat: <http://www.meat-abolition.org/en/presentation>)

Conclusion

When we take part in activism or just speak in defence of non-humans, we need to be sure that our message is understood as a **request for change that concerns the whole of society**. Instead of being afraid of the public, we must **have the courage to speak for the animals** involved and begin to **express what we really want**: “We demand the abolition of animal slavery!”

**MOBILISING
FOR ANIMAL
LIBERATION:
APPEAL TO
VIRTUE VS.
DEMAND FOR
JUSTICE**



**Pierre
Sigler**

1. Moral mobilisation

1.1. Demand for justice and appeal to virtue.

The field of ethical philosophy is composed of several branches. Meta-ethics is the analysis of fundamental ethical concepts, normative ethics determines what is right or wrong, applied ethics examines concrete situations... One field however has remained largely unexplored: moral mobilisation. When faced with a wrong, how do you mobilise moral agents to remedy it?

I see two possible methods: *demand for justice* and *appeal to virtue*. A demand for justice is of a fundamentally political nature: it is a request for legal, institutional or social changes. An appeal to virtue is apolitical: it asks people to act more virtuously, to modify their individual behaviour. In fighting poverty, a demand for justice could mean a call for the introduction of a welfare state, the setting of a minimum wage, establishing trade unions, a generous redistribution of wealth (or, for the more radical, a complete transformation of the social and economic system). An appeal to virtue means extolling charity, petitioning local authorities for soup kitchens, asking bosses to make efforts that benefit their employees. It means encouraging the poor to form a united front. It means advising them to be more thrifty, to work harder if they can, or to free themselves from material desires.

A demand for justice operates on a collective scale. It addresses the citizenry. An appeal to virtue relies on individuals. It addresses private persons: consumers, donors, believers, disciples...

In accordance with its apolitical nature, appealing to virtue can be done under an authoritarian regime, whereas a demand for justice requires democracy (if incarceration is to be avoided).

1.2. Causes of evil

These two approaches draw on different (though not irreconcilable) analyses of the *avoidable* causes of evil. Proponents of the demand for justice approach hold the main avoidable causes of evil to be found in social structures (typically laws). Addressing them means changing the law, creating, modifying or dismantling this or that institution, offering enticements (financial or else) to change people's behaviour (a carbon tax, for instance). Proponents of the appeal to virtue approach see moral agents' failings as the main avoidable causes of evil. Lack of compassion, greed, overly violent passions, want of a moral education; in a word, vice. The remedy, then, consists in preaching morality to individuals, stimulating their compassion (by showing documentaries with explicit content, for instance), helping them calm the violence of their passions (through prayer, meditation, or the reading of yet another book about ancient wisdom), informing them; in short, stimulating their virtue.

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Proponents of the demand for justice approach do not deny the importance of individual patterns of behaviour, but they believe they can be modified more efficiently by political measures than by preaching morality one person at a time. For them, it is easier to act on these patterns of behaviour's sociological roots than on their psychological roots.

1.3. A strategy heavy with implications

When mobilising moral agents, limiting oneself to an appeal to virtue carries some adverse implications: that the case for mobilisation rests upon an ethics of virtue, that what is proposed goes beyond our moral duties or is not even achievable; and that to do otherwise is legitimate.

1.3.1. An ethics of virtue

The ethics of virtue is a branch of normative ethics that aims to improve moral agents' fibre and to develop their virtues: goodness, generosity, restraint, courage... The ethics of virtue is a private morality, whose target is self-development and the good life. It is opposed to universalist ethics, according to which what is right or wrong is right or wrong anywhere in the world, irrespective of the agent's opinions¹.

The ethics of virtue has always exhibited a touch of elitism. Aristotle reserved it to citizens. A more recent instance of this tendency is called perfectionism. As the name indicates, the purpose of this school is to perfect the self. Its critics see it as an inegalitarian doctrine, according to which exceptional individuals ought to be favoured. Nietzsche is a textbook example of perfectionism².

An appeal to virtue does not always derive from an ethics of virtue. For example, an NGO may appeal to their donors' virtue yet base that appeal on universalist ethics (human rights, for instance). When one operates on the basis of an ethics of virtue, however, one may mobilise moral agents **only** by appealing to virtue. Virtue can come only from an inner impulse, not from coercion. Trying to forbid meanness or decree courage would be absurd. Ultimately, it is easier to be virtuous in a rotten world than in an idyllic one: a vegan must demonstrate more virtue (moral strength) in a speciesist world than in a non-speciesist one.

A school of thought whose only strategy was appealing to virtue would thus give the impression of proceeding from an ethics of virtue, and therefore of proposing a personal ethos. All the more so if the behaviour it seeks to encourage is publicly viewed as asceticism and takes the shape of a list of prohibitions, or if this group defines itself by its members' behaviour rather than their ideology.

1.3.2. Supererogatory actions

By definition, a demand for justice formulates necessary demands (“excision must be outlawed”, “we must put an end to discriminations against foreigners”). Whereas in general the actions encouraged by an appeal to virtue are supererogatory, i.e. they exceed our moral obligations. Giving to a charity is considered a good thing, but not a moral obligation. Buying organic or fair-trade products is considered morally good, but buying conventionally-grown or -traded products is not perceived as immoral.

It’s logical: if an action is really offensive, we must wish to forbid it. If we only give recommendations, it must be that we don’t feel it would be legitimate to outlaw it. Or that we believe the ban to be unachievable.

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1.3.3. An unattainable utopia

Those appealing to virtue often deny themselves the right to demand a social change when they feel that that change is impossible, that what they propose is feasible only for a small, highly motivated minority, but out of mere mortals’ reach.

The underlying line of reasoning is:

- either that all reform is impossible. The only remaining option is the promotion of a personal ethos in order to live better.

This shift was observed in ancient Greece. To put their ethical principles into practice, the philosophers of classical Athens used a political approach: they imagined ideal cities, new constitutions, political and economic reforms. But during the hellenistic period (which followed Alexander’s conquests),

the direct democracies of Greece were replaced by kingdoms, then by the (Roman) Empire. As political change became impossible, personal ethics and wisdoms came to the fore: Cynicism, Epicureanism, Stoicism...

- or that human nature is bad and unredeemable. The only remaining option is to fold back onto an ethics of aristocratic virtue.

Religions often adopt this point of view. Christian charity aims to alleviate suffering and poverty, not so much to fight their roots. Suffering is due to original sin, therefore it is inherent to human nature (or even deserved). Moreover, in traditional Christian morality, consequences are a secondary preoccupation (they are left to God); ethics aims for the redemption of one's sins through leading a virtuous life.

Hindu non-violence, too, is an unattainable ideal. It insists on the agent's benevolence and compassion, the aim being the improvement of their karma through virtue. Suffering is deserved (one suffers in accordance with one's karma, i.e. because one has not been virtuous in a past life). Therefore there is no cause to abolish castes, to improve the condition of the Untouchables, to reduce social inequality, etc.

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1.3.4. Other opinions are legitimate

Resorting exclusively to an appeal to virtue also implies that the things we criticise are legitimate, though we make it clear that we find them immoral, since all immoral things are not illegitimate. For instance, one may be in complete disagreement with a political current and consider that, when in power, its representatives implement odious policies, and yet consider that that current has its place in a democracy, that banning it would

be wrong and instating a single party would be disastrous, however good its ideas may be.

One may also give up demands for justice out of moral relativism³, that is, identifying with one particular moral theory while believing all other “systems of values” to be equally legitimate.

1.4. Activating our “virtue ethics” intuitions

One doesn't need to be explicitly aware of virtue ethics in order to think within that frame. Our moral sense relies largely on intuition (Haidt, 2001). Some of this intuition, which was shaped by our evolutionary history, belongs to virtue ethics. Before we enter into cooperation with someone, it is essential to assess their reliability. To this end we examine their past behaviour in order to get a picture of the kind of person they are (their strengths and weaknesses, their vices and virtues). In so doing, we may rely on the concepts, lines of reasoning and categories of virtue ethics without realising it. Because of this, an appeal to virtue activates, sometimes without our being aware of it, the “virtue ethics” part of our moral sense.

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2. The current vegetarianist strategy

Here I will be talking about strategy, and not about being vegetarian or vegan, which in itself is a very good thing. A “vegetarianist strategy” as I define it is a strategy based on the following ideas:

- vegan consumption is essentially the extent of what can be done for the animals;
- the best way of weakening the meat industry is to increase the number of vegetarians and vegans;
- convincing others to go vegetarian, or better still vegan, is the most efficient method of increasing vegetarians’ and vegans’ numbers.

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2.1. A strategy based on an appeal to virtue

One cannot but see that the promotion of vegetarianism and veganism relies upon an appeal to virtue. Besides, by definition, education (concerning veganism or anything else) doesn’t attempt to change the public sphere (laws, the government’s nutritional recommendations, medical school programmes...) but the private sphere (people).

Of course most of those who favour this approach are, for the most part, inspired by universalist ethics, and wish for a change of society (as demonstrated by the very fact of their militancy). But their means are inconsistent with their views.

This is why *the public perceives vegetarianism as a personal ethics* (of the “virtue ethics” type, then), as being supererogatory or utopian, and meat consumption as being nonetheless legitimate.

Some of the objections we regularly hear bear witness to this:

- “*Nobody’s perfect!*”

This objection would be literally meaningless in response to a demand for justice. It only makes sense when talking of supererogatory actions in the frame of virtue ethics: to each their own way of doing the right thing for those around them: some write a cheque to charity, others volunteer for the Salvation Army, others still are vegetarian.

This is how the founder of the media outlet Néoplanète explains her vegetarianism:

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“I cannot stand suffering. Vegetarianism is my way of saying: “no!” We are what we eat. And spirituality, within or without a religious frame, begins on the plate. My husband, my children, my friends eat meat, and I have never attempted to convince them not to, because it is a personal decision, a self-sacrifice not everyone is able to accept⁴.”

- “*I’m a good person too!*” (or in the same self-pitying vein: “*Anyway, I don’t eat that meat all that often*”).

L’Elfe, a French blogger, describes this objection:

“How many people have made my ears bleed with how good, how gentle, how non-evil they are, how they love animals or how responsibly they act... without ever realising to what stratospheric extent I don’t give a damn. All their demonstrations achieve is to make me sorry they feel judged by my behaviour, which is light years away from my intent⁵.”

Though that may not be the intent, this is how people interpret the “go vegan” rhetoric. Again, such objections would be devoid of meaning in response to a demand for justice.

- “*Vegetarianism is a kind of religion*”,
“*Vegetarians form a cult*”

And indeed, religious morals are a type of virtue ethics, and to the layman an appeal to virtue, especially of the vegan variety, seems to consist of a list of food prohibitions (not to say taboos).

Here is how a doctor involved in the promotion of veganism presents it:

“Being vegan means not only consuming no animal flesh, therefore no red meat, no white meat, and no fish; but also no product derived from animals. Vegans do not eat milk, eggs, nor any product derived from milk or eggs. Consequently, vegans do not eat cheese. In sum, vegetarians eat no animal flesh, vegans no animal products.”

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The similarity with religious prohibitions is transparent (the quote is mine):

A practicing Jew does not consume any product that is not kosher, that is to say, any product that has not been officially approved by religious authorities. Being Jewish means to consume only those mammals which have cloven hooves (therefore no pork or ham, no rabbit, no camel etc). Birds are permitted with the exception of the 24 impure species (Lv 11:13-19 and Dt 14:12-18). Of the aquatic animals, only those with scales and fins are permitted; thus a Jew does not eat crustaceans, shellfish and other seafood. Other animals are forbidden. Products of the earth are permitted save for fruits of a tree under 3 years old. The milk of pure animals is permitted, but a Jew does not mix dairy and meat in the course of one meal. And so on and so forth.

A few more regular reactions:

- *“Vegans think themselves superior to meat-eaters!”*
- *“Vegetarians look cheerless”* (translation: not such a great personal development programme after all)
 - *“Everyone is entitled to their opinion. You’re free to be a vegetarian, so let me eat meat.”*

In the same spirit, vegetarianists themselves describe vegetarianism as a “lifestyle”. A lifestyle is not dictated by a demand for justice, nor even by universalist morals; it is a matter of personality. For the more morally or philosophically-inclined, it follows from virtue ethics, and for most people it is simply a matter of convention, personal habit or family or social tradition. Besides, vegetarianist literature is teeming with phrases typical of virtue ethics: “cruelty-free lifestyle”, “choosing without cruelty”, “compassionate lifestyle”, “veganism: the compassionate way” ...

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2.2. Presuppositions of this strategy

Here we are interested with what this strategy presupposes when deployed by persons motivated by universalist ethics. When a vegetarian grounds their vegetarianism in virtue ethics, it is perfectly logical that they should appeal to virtue.

2.2.1. On any given issue, people have convictions and act in accordance with their convictions

Proponents of vegan education believe it is necessary to act on the deep-rooted beliefs of each person. An instance:

“Veganism is a collective movement, but adopting such a lifestyle is up to each individual as a result of reflexions that they must develop for themselves⁶.”

The theme of personal reflexion appears frequently in vegetarianist texts⁷. Typically they don't end with a prescription, be it a demand for justice (“meat must be abolished!”, “We demand that slaughterhouses be closed down!”) or a clear appeal to virtue (“you must stop eating animals!”). Arguments are given and the conclusion left open, the reader being free to reach the same conclusion as you (or not). Here is how the French Vegetarian Association (AVF) website's *ethics* section ends:

“Even if animal suffering were reduced to a single second (which is unthinkable in intensive farming), is taking the life of an animal when there is no need to (see our health page) a rightful action? It is a question to which there exist as many answers as persons on Earth (*sic*).”

I believe the stylistic figure (the hyperbole stating that there are billions of possible conclusions) is symptomatic of a conspicuous determination not to answer the question we've had the gall to spell out. It is a colourful way of saying: “everyone's entitled to their opinion”.

Another instance of vegan education:

“You mustn’t tell people to become vegan, but rather suggest the idea to them. Unless they ask you to, you mustn’t expose them to pictures of dead animals either, because whether you want it or not, it is an aggression and tends to make them feel guilty, and then sometimes they already do⁸.”

32 People should make up their own mind and act accordingly, we are told. However, when people are asked why they eat meat, most of them find the question surprising (we are not accustomed to have to justify a default choice). The most frequent answer is “because I’ve always eaten meat”, followed by “because it would be too complicated to be a vegetarian” (i.e. restaurants and shops have a limited vegetarian offer), “because I can’t be bothered” (i.e. I have meat-eating habits and it would cost me some effort to change), “because I like meat⁹”. No personal belief in these answers, no ideology, only the weight of habit and peer pressure¹⁰.

Consider the example of homophobia. Its decrease in the last few decades in the West didn’t come about because everyone did, in their heart and mind, understand the falsehood of naturalist sophisms, or the vacuity of the concept of victimless crime¹¹, but because homophobia decreased in society at large and homophobic talk had become socially fraught (even punishable in France since 2005).

This is because, on a given issue, most people do not have what we call a personal opinion. They do or think what their peers do and think. Besides one may hold a belief yet not apply it (Reus, 2010):

“Studies regularly report that a significant (and increasing) part of the population condemns harm done to animals, though they validate it by their mode of consumption. Here are 3 examples in the French context: According to a poll conducted in November 2009, 82% of respondents

said they would eat foie gras at their Christmas dinner. Another poll, conducted the same month, indicated that 63% considered that geese and ducks suffered from being force-fed, and 44% were in favour of outlawing force-feeding.

In January 2000, a poll was conducted on egg consumers with an aim to evaluate their perception of egg-laying hens in battery cages. An overwhelming majority (over 80%) declared themselves to be in agreement with sentences describing this type of rearing in a very negative light. To the question “in the future, would you support a ban on the rearing of egg-laying hens in battery cages, authorising only open-air rearing, considering that such a measure would lead to an increase in the price of eggs?” 86% of those polled responded “yes”. Finally, 70% declared “animal well-being” to be a “very important” factor when shopping for eggs. At the time of the poll, however, 90% of eggs sold in France came from battery-cage farms¹².

Similarly, among supporters of organic agriculture and fair trade, how many completely avoid conventional products?

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2.2.2. Postulate: people act on the basis of individual beliefs

In some cases, we do act on the basis of our beliefs (I think it is raining, therefore I take an umbrella); in other cases, we pick and choose our beliefs to suit our actions.

The case of meat-eating typically belongs to the second category. We eat meat first, and only later, possibly, we make up our mind on the topic.

We can even act without being motivated by particular beliefs, in a routine, automatic way. Such is the case, partly at least, for meat. People eat meat because everyone around them does, and they themselves always did. In other words, each individual does *x* because everyone else (as well as oneself) does *x*.

2.2.3. Corollary: most meat-eaters support slaughterhouses

The conversion strategy is founded on the hypothesis, which is a corollary of the previous one, that (almost) every meat-eater supports slaughterhouses, either because they are speciesists to the core, or because they refuse to get informed so as not to become disgusted with animal products. From that perspective, convincing the public is synonymous with turning the public vegetarian (or better still, vegan).

Dan Cudahy (2008) writes:

“As Professor Francione clearly and explicitly admits in *Rain Without Thunder*, the five criteria [that define the so-called abolitionist reform] narrow down acceptable industrial practice reforms to changes so devastating for the industry (e.g., ones that would result in the elimination of an essential aspect such as “killing animals for food”) that such changes would stand no chance of being adopted in today’s speciesist society. Only a society with a politically viable vegan population would accept such revolutionary changes.”

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What an odd argument. How is convincing the population to become vegan easier than convincing them that (for instance) meat must be abolished, or that boycotting the products of the rearing and slaughtering industries is morally right on principle? This is only sensible on the postulate that every meat-eater supports slaughterhouses (and that at the same time every one that opposes slaughterhouses is vegan).

Available studies demonstrate the inaccuracy of the above. See Reus and Dupont (2012a and 2012b) for a complete review. Here are two examples.

A study conducted by Cazes-Villette (2004) on the French consumer's relationship to meat revealed that:

- 14% of respondents disagreed with the statement: *“It is normal for humans to raise animals for their meat”*;
- 39% disapproved of *“animals being killed as a result of fishing practices”*;
- 58,8% disapproved of *“animals being killed as a result of hunting practices”*;

Yet only 1,2% of respondents were vegetarian.

A study conducted in the United States showed that in 2011, when respondents were confronted with the statement: *“If farm animals are treated decently and humanely, I have no problem with the consumption of meat, milk and eggs”*,

- 51% of Americans expressed a high level of agreement (level 8 to 10);
- 42% a moderate level (level 4 to 7);
- 7% a low level (level 0 to 3).

Those who strongly agreed made up 63% in 2007 and 54% of respondents in 2010.

2.2.4. Corollary: a certain number of people must be converted to vegetarianism before a public debate on meat abolition can be launched

This is logical indeed, if one thinks that people act in accordance with their beliefs, and that a majority of meat-eaters therefore support slaughterhouses and would change their mind only after a deep and personal reflection.

An illustration:

“You think it’s possible to abolish meat when 98% of the people still eat meat? Again, if 98% of the people smoked and thought it perfectly normal to asphyxiate those around them with their smoke, it would have been simply impossible to enact a law against smoking in public areas. You can’t just make laws without changing mentalities. It doesn’t mean that everyone must agree with a law before it can be passed. But believing that a vegetarian 2% could abolish meat is pure wishful thinking¹³.”

This comment also implies something else: that an appeal to virtue stands a better chance of turning someone vegetarian than a demand for justice would. I believe this to be wrong, considering the implications of an appeal to virtue (see part 1).

Though it is difficult to extrapolate from an example, India, where over a third of the population is vegetarian, doesn’t seem to support the idea that a large vegetarian population automatically favours or engenders a public debate on the legitimacy of meat.

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2.2.5. An individualistic sociological conception

Since an increase in the number of vegetarian individuals produces a decrease in the demand for animal products and as a result, a decrease in their supply, increasing the number of vegetarians is seen as the most efficient means of weakening the meat industry.

“The almost limitless political and economic power that the meat and husbandry industry has over animals is driven entirely by consumers, individually or collectively, who condone, solicit and fund these industries, and are ultimately responsible for its existence and unfettered might.”

In my opinion, this notion follows from reductive sociological preconceptions.

All individuals are socially equal. This is blatantly not the case. Some persons clearly hold more power than others in this or that field. The president of the government's dietary advisory board, the executive in charge of Wal-Mart's supply policy, and journalists all have much more swaying power than the man in the street.

Demand determines supply. Certainly, but the reverse is no less true. I am not only referring to advertising. Many studies in behaviour economics show that the ready availability of products largely shapes consumers' desires. The mere display of dishes on a buffet alters patrons' choices¹⁴. People eat meat because it is the default option, because it is found everywhere.

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The example of Australia's firearm legislation illustrates the influence supply can exert on demand. The firearm pressure group claims that gunshot murders are not caused by firearms but by some individuals' will to kill others. Those whose urge to kill is strong enough for them to act it out would have no trouble finding guns on the black market or using different weapons. Therefore, laws limiting ownership of firearms not only wouldn't hinder murder, but would also deprive potential assault victims of a means to deter their assailants or defend themselves in case of assault, and thus would cause an increase in homicide rates. But in fact, after the 1996 reform (setting drastic restrictions on gun sales and instating a buy-back programme for weapons in circulation), mass shootings stopped. Firearm homicides decreased at twice the pre-reform rate. In a mere 10 years, firearm homicides dropped by 60%, while firearm suicides dropped by 65%. The overall suicide rate dropped from 23.6 to 14.9 per 100,000 inhabitants¹⁵;

the overall homicide rate, from 1.9 to 1.3¹⁶. There was no statistically detectable substitution effect (to bladed weapons, for instance). It thus appears that the availability of firearms really does increase the desire to use them.

The end-buyer determines overall demand. Things are far from being that simple. It is also true that people buy what they find on the shelves. According to the data discussed above, in France 4 out of 5 respondents claim to oppose battery-cage farming; yet 4 out of 5 buy eggs produced in that type of farm, either because they shop without paying attention, because they give in to the temptation of lower prices, or because there are no more “free-range” eggs on the shelves. Besides, almost half the eggs are consumed indirectly as ingredients in TV-dinners, pastries, biscuits, in restaurants, hotels, cafeterias...

38 *Those sensitive to the cause of animal rights who still eat animals do so because of psychological blocks.* Oddly, that idea may coexist with the idea that speciesism is ubiquitous. This is notably so among Francionians: they claim that 99% of the population supports exploitation, is speciesist to the core, and yet simultaneously that a large percentage are nonetheless uneasy with exploitation. This is why Francione repeats to anyone willing to listen “if you agree with the statement ‘making animals suffer uselessly is wrong’, give me 15 minutes and I’ll make you a vegan¹⁷”.

Consequently the solution is to get around these blocks by various methods: water down the message, use indirect arguments first, approach the problem from a marketing and psychological point of view. We now turn to these methods.

3. Consequences of the strategy of demand reduction by consumer education

These presuppositions entail several consequences for the activists' behaviour and thinking.

3.1. The "Jehovah's Witness" method

This method consists in approaching one person at a time to convert them little by little. The basic idea that people eat meat out of personal conviction takes no account of the social determinations of meat consumption.

The "Jehovah's Witness" method has a curious consequence: in response to the average person's "block", vegetarianists¹⁸ water down their message by various means: they use indirect arguments, don't call a spade a spade (i.e., don't say that to kill animals is immoral, refrain from talking about murder...). The trouble is that by insisting on making the message acceptable to the ears of people who wouldn't go vegetarian on their own, or might only become weekend flexitarians, you alienate those sensitive to the animal cause. And indeed surely within the frame of an appeal to virtue, the next cohorts of vegetarians will not come out of the ranks of hunting aficionados or butchers, but from the 14% of the population who are uneasy with animal murder. If you are going to promote vegetarianism, wouldn't it make more sense to target them and tune out the jeers and sneers of the other 86%¹⁹?

3.2. The place of marketing

3.2.1. Flesh is weak

Virtue ethicists and those universalists who had the unfortunate idea of grounding their message on an appeal to virtue are forced to conclude with bitterness that humans do not live up to the morals they designed for them. Viz., people are not massively going vegan.

This is when they start to invoke some egoistic enticements. Religions promise salvation (or getting reincarnated as a brahmin), proponents of organic agriculture protection against cancer, and vegetarianists firm erections and clean arteries.

In this spirit, PETA launched several campaigns under the motto: “Vegetarians have better sex”. It featured video ads associating scantily-clad women and green vegetables, or street actions centred on (again, scantily-clad) couples kissing each other²⁰.

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3.2.2. Indirect arguments

Sexual prowess is only one of several indirect arguments being used. “Indirect arguments” are those other than ethical arguments. The idea being that, since the goal is to increase the number of vegetarian consumers, any argument goes. But indirect arguments have a major shortcoming: they are not obligatory, that is, they do not imply completely giving up meat, much less animal products, and still less closing up slaughterhouses and dismantling the meat industry. For surely a plate of free range chicken and a slice of organic ham a week will not make anyone sick²¹ or wreck the planet²², nor will a bit of parmesan in the spaghetti or a salmon steak now and then. And besides, good health and spiritual progress fall under personal choice, not moral obligation.

When presented on the same level as ethical arguments, indirect arguments therefore compound the misconception that vegetarianism is supererogatory.

As a result, vegetarians who hope to sound more consensual by putting forth indirect arguments paradoxically come across as extremists since, while their arguments show it to be a good thing to reduce one's consumption of animal flesh, they get rid of it altogether. Some of these hardliners even go vegan.

Third, indirect arguments somewhat blur the general message, as an AVF leader notes:

“Now it may be that faced with such a conjunction of reflexions – of reasons, really, some people feel a little lost, and don't know which way to go, which arguments to accept and which ones they should set aside to maybe pick up a bit later²³.”

3.2.3. Only proposing

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An activist who managed to counter the adverse implications of the appeal to virtue, i.e. made people understand that his appeal to virtue is neither supererogatory nor utopian, and that the alternative (to eat animals) is not legitimate but criminal, would be perceived as fundamentally aggressive. Since appealing to virtue is based on the belief that evil stems from the heart of people, such an appeal would imply that people are bastardsvillains. A demand for justice, on the other hand, makes demands on society, not particular individuals.

To avoid this pitfall, vegetarianists take great pains to avoid seeming to “impose” anything, to avoid appearing as though they are pressuring anyone into doing anything (see section 2.1.1). They claim all they do is propose a lifestyle. I'm not forcing you, only showing you that it can be done, and the rest is up to you.

An already-quoted example:

“You mustn’t tell people to become vegan, but rather suggest them the idea to them. Unless they ask you to, yYou mustn’t expose them to pictures of dead animals either, without their consent because, whether you want it or not, it is an aggression and tends to make them feel guilty, when and then sometimes they already do.”

“You mustn’t tell people to become vegan but rather suggest them the idea. You mustn’t expose them to pictures of dead animals without their consent because, whether you want it or not, it is an aggression and tends to make them feel guilty, when they already do.”

This only reinforces, to my mind, the supererogatory aspect of vegetarianism and veganism in the eyes of the public.

3.2.4. Being a representative

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Vegetarianist literature tells activists that they publicly represent vegetarians. As a consequence, they should make people want to become one. They are advised, as much as possible, to be young, attractive, healthy, athletic, to smile, have white teeth, to appear friendly. Part of this is common-sense, while the rest is good for PR reps, not activists.

In the same vein, anyone who cares to listen will be told that vegetarians’ IQ is higher than that of the average population and that their ranks include a certain number of glamorous celebrities (hence the poster: “They are famous [photos of singers], they are beautiful [photos of top fashion models], they are intelligent [pictures of da Vinci, Tolstoi and Einstein], they are athletic [photos of athletes], they are vegan.”)

At the same time, it is understood that such controversial personalities – regardless of why they may be considered controversial – as Peter Singer or Brigitte Bardot²⁴ are to be

disavowed, as their presence in the animal rights movement is considered unbecoming.

In this way, vegetarian groups resemble service clubs more than political movements or NGOs...

3.3. An emphasis on psychological causes

As vegetarianists work on the individual scale, they tend to focus on the psychological roots of meat consumption. Why does this person, who is standing in front of me, refuse to go vegetarian? How can I reassure her, convince her, address her concerns? How can I do it so she doesn't feel attacked? How can I prove that vegetarian food is delicious? Hence the food tastings, the cooking workshops and other such friendly events²⁵.

Focusing on psychological causes results in neglecting the social causes determining the consumption of meat (and other animal products). Notable among there are: legislation²⁶, farm subsidies, the availability of food products on the market²⁷, restaurant menus, dishes served in school canteens, vegephobia, intense propaganda from pressure groups funded by husbandry and fishing industries, family pressure, pressure from health-service professionals, institutional diffusion of speciesism to children – from animal books in day-care, through biology classes in middle school, to philosophy classes in high school.

A parallel is often drawn between patriarchy and carnism. It is in fact remarkable that, for thinkers and militants working with these concepts, patriarchy belongs to sociology while carnism belongs to psychology.

Patriarchy: “A form of social and legal organisation resting on men’s possession of authority.” (Bonte, 1991)

Carnism: “Carnism is the invisible belief system, or ideology, that conditions people to eat certain animals²⁸.”

Similarly, although the animal liberation movement has existed for about forty years, the concept of vegophobia – a social barrier to vegetarianism – was only recently developed.

Many vegetarians insist that being vegetarian is easy, and that meat-eaters simply don’t realise just how easy it is (given a period of adjustment and the acquisition of dietary and culinary know-how). I believe, on the contrary, that meat-eaters are very much aware of the social difficulties that vegetarianism entails, and that these difficulties deter them. Most people turn pale at the very idea of arguing in public, of having to face the opposition or hostility of an entire group of people. Many people are inconsistent and are not able to resist the temptation of meat, which is ubiquitous in our society. Many don’t know any vegetarian in their social circle and are afraid of isolation. In the words of Martin Balluch, humans are social rather than rational animals.

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3.4. The emphasis on behaviour

Another perverse effect of the veganist strategy is that the media describes those opposing animal exploitation as vegans (rather than as antispeciesists, sentientists, animal rights activists, equalitarians, opponents of such and such a practice, and so on). The emphasis is laid on their behaviour rather than their ideas. A tedious list of prohibitions, up to and including the weirdest, usually follows – in lieu of moral arguments.

In 2003, the French daily *Libération* wrote a piece about the third Veggie Pride. About 70% of the article is dedicated to the difficulties of the vegan lifestyle (which is described as an obsessive ordeal) and to endless lists of authorised and prohibited articles, down to the minutest latex condom additive.

The ambiguity surrounding mother's milk is an illustration of how the public views veganism primarily as a list of prohibitions rather than a moral position. Some wonder whether vegans oppose breastfeeding²⁹. The idea is completely preposterous, but it shows that some persons have registered “vegans do not drink milk” or “vegans do not consume any animal product”, rather than “vegans are against calf murder and industrial cow milking methods, including their slaughter when their productivity decreases”.

3.5. Reduction to homo economicus

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This reduction leads to the perception of a human being solely as a consumer, and not as a citizen. Media coverage of the animal rights question is often approached entirely through the vegetarianist prism.

A recent French radio show purported to talk about “the abolition of meat” (“Le choix de la rédaction”, *France Culture*, May 20, 2013). As it turned out, over the show's five minutes, very little was said about this political demand (it was limited to the abolition of factory farming) and the moral arguments behind it (they were reduced to “industrial farming is bad for the environment and cruel to animals”). The bulk of the show was concerned with: a typology of activists *based on their consumer habits*, from the more moderate (semi-vegetarians and vegetarians³⁰) to the more radical (vegans); the opening in Paris of a vegan restaurant, whose chef plays up health and environmental

issues; a patron of this restaurant talking about her parents' reaction to her vegetarian coming-out, and her friends' teasing her about her diet; the scant offer of meatless products and meals in France; the evolution of mentalities. Conclusion: "People's mentality is still far from the acceptance of such dietary regimes".

In short, this is a show that falls under "consumer trends", not "social issues". This isn't a problem in itself (consumption trends are a legitimate and interesting topic, of course) but it is a problem inasmuch as the show was supposed to talk about the abolition of meat. This demand appears to be perceived as a mere appeal to vegetarianism.

And this is only one example. French animal rights group L214 recently launched a campaign to press Monoprix to pull caged-hen eggs off its shelves. The object of this campaign is political: on the one hand it declares it abnormal that such products should be sold in supermarkets, on the other it attempts to force a distributor to change its practices, and thus to achieve a victory that will pave the way to future victories against other distributors or other products. Sadly, many vegans understood this as an awareness campaign directed at the consumer, and in particular that of Monoprix. A typical criticism was: "While we're at it, why not encourage them to give up eggs altogether, rather than implicitly enticing them to buy open-air eggs³¹".

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4. Conclusion

Appealing to virtue is probably effective in convincing a given person – a family member, a friend, a neighbour – to go vegetarian. On the scale of the whole population it is not. It is as if, because a mop is the best device for cleaning up a puddle, one attempted to empty a swimming pool with it.

One of the aims of the vegetarianist strategy is to fight the idea that meat and dairy products are indispensable to one's dietary balance, and at the same time to inform the population about the possibility of vegetarianism and veganism. The French Vegetarian Association has existed for 150 years and it has been using the health argument for a long time now. With about zero efficiency.

Is the ecological argument any more efficient? People have been educated about ecology for 40 years, and this has had no notable effect on their lifestyle. Only political and economic changes have had a visible impact (to mention only examples in the field of transportation: fuel prices, availability of public transportation, prohibition of leaded gasoline, compulsory catalytic converters, and so on).

More fundamentally, has any moral problem ever been resolved by appeal to virtue only? The very existence of laws proves that appealing to virtue alone is incapable of deeply affecting the behaviour of humans.

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1. Whereas in virtue ethics, intentions are primordial
 2. See John Rawls, "*A Theory of Justice*", paragraph 50.
 3. Moral relativism should not be confused with moral nihilism, which denies moral propositions any truth value, and denies even the very existence of moral propositions.
 4. <http://www.greenetvert.fr/2011/09/30/etre-vegetarien-en-france/34449>
 5. <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/le-mythe-de-la-purete-et-lidentite-vegane/>
 6. <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/la-purete-la-coherence-et-la-biere/>

7. This is not only a consequence of the idea that individual behaviour must derive from personal thought. The point is also to avoid appearing aggressive or extremist; for more information, see below.
8. <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/pourquoi-je-ne-participerai-plus-aux-actions-reformistes/>
9. This excuse for meat-eating as a matter of preference conceals mere childhood habits and the weight of carnist temptations in our society. Indeed, most people do not eat 100% of the things that they like (unless they like very few things!) For instance, many continentals like creole cuisine, but only have it once in a blue moon. They don't miss it the rest of the time, because other dishes, and just as tasty, are available.
10. Even the more ideological responses (man being on top of the food chain, and so on) still rest more on prejudices than elaborate thinking.
11. A "victimless crime" is a socially condemned behaviour that does no harm to anybody. As such, their condemnation is illegitimate in the consequentialist view (which evaluates an action's moral character based solely on its consequences).
12. The third example is the Cazes-Villette study which we mention below.
13. <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/pour-en-finir-avec-le-mythe-de-la-purete/#comment-326>
14. For an introduction to behavioural economics, see Ariely (2008).
15. S Chapman, P Alpers, K Agho, M Jones, "Australia's 1996 gun law reforms : faster falls in firearm deaths, firearm suicides, and a decade without mass shootings", *Injury Prevention* 12:365-372, 2006.
16. <http://www.aic.gov.au/statistics/homicide.html>
17. I'm astonished that it could be thought relatively easy to convince someone to go vegan in a carnist world, but that that same person will laugh at you if you talk about meat abolition or the closedown of slaughterhouses...

18. This is less true of veganists.
19. We believe this is a consequence of many vegetarians' habit of talking to walls, either for reasons beyond their control (discussions with their entourage, their colleagues, and other family) or because of their activist practices (street leafletting).
20. What is wrong with this campaign is its conclusion. Instead of something like "we are healthy" or something similar, it goes: "become vegetarian." The observation that vegetarians are healthy doesn't lead to the conclusion that animal exploitation is useless needless or harmful, or that prejudices against vegetarians are unfounded (if this was the case, it would be a good campaign), but that it is in our interest to eat less animals ("less" because a moderately meaty diet does not cause sudden asthenia or erectile dysfunctions).
21. And indeed, a moderately animal-based diet, such as the omnivorous Mediterranean diet, has no proven adverse effects, contrary to what some deceptive health arguments imply.
22. And indeed, pollution or waste are only environmentally problematic beyond a certain threshold. Besides, within certain limits, animal husbandry has no negative effect on the environment whatsoever, since the animals merely eat the plants humans cannot consume (they graze in undergrowths and on untillable terrain, eat cereal bran and vegetable peelings, etc.). We should add that it isn't only animal farming that pollutes more than is necessary to keep humans alive. Whoever refuses the slightest bit of bacon on environmental grounds should also consistently refuse any non-organic, non-local vegetable; and more generally all goods or services that were not produced by ecologically optimal processes.
23. André Méry on « Terre à terre », on *France Culture*, Feb. 20, 2010.
24. French former actress and famous animal rights activist, also known for her socially conservative and racist positions.
25. While such manifestations are obviously not bad in themselves, relying on them to change the world seems absurd to me.

26. A straightforward example: people buy battery eggs because their sale is allowed.
27. Meat is easier to find than vegetarian products.
28. <http://www.carnism.org/what-is-carnism>
29. <http://www.liberation.fr/week-end/0101443374-les-vegetaliens-des-animaux-comme-les-autres>
30. As someone asked in the debate following a story on “The new vegetarians” (broadcast on the French channel *Arte* in April 2012).
31. See debates on the blog *Les Questions composent* (in French): <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/pourquoi-je-ne-participerai-plus-aux-actions-reformistes/> and: <http://lesquestionscomposent.fr/debat-faut-il-reformer-lindustrie/>



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